

**VLITE Board of Directors Meeting**  
**DRM Conference Room and on Zoom, 52 State St., Montpelier, VT**  
**Minutes of September 23, 2024**  
**Approved on December 12, 2024**

Meeting called to order at 1:10 PM

**In attendance:**

Board members: Tony Klein, Peter Walke, Larry Lackey, Sarah Hofmann, Paul Dragon, Jean Hamilton, Amy Shollenberger

Others Attending: Gabrielle Malina, TJ Poor, Kelly Lucci, Tom Dunn

**Comprehensive Energy Plan Presentation**

TJ Poor, Director of the Regulated Utility Planning Division for the Public Service Department, and primary author of the Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) provided a summary of the Plan to the VLITE board, as one of its foundational documents.

Poor pointed to two key themes of the 2022 CEP: equity and grid evolution. The CEP recognizes that the current energy system is marked by systemic inequities. The transition required to meet our energy goals presents opportunity to root out and redress those existing inequalities. In 2022 the Environmental Justice bill, Act 154, also passed, requiring meaningful participation from stakeholders to inform state policy.

Grid evolution is how we plan for electrification in the thermal and transportation sectors. What does “resiliency” really mean? Vermont currently has significant penetration of renewables, especially distributed Energy Resources (DER) – 604 MW of operational DERs including 54 MW of battery storage. Total renewable capacity is 948MW and 604 is behind the meter.

The CEP provides Pathways for thermal and transportation sectors. The two tracks for the thermal sector include reducing energy demand such as through Weatherization and increasing low carbon tech and fuel choices such as considering the Clean Heat Standard as a mechanism and specific incentives for those technologies. Weatherization at scale used to be hampered primarily by lack of funds and is now increasingly hampered by lack of workforce. Transportation sector Pathways call for GHG reductions that are proportional to those called for in the Global Warming Solutions Act. CEP calls for vehicle electrification, cleaner vehicles and fuels, system efficiency in land use planning and interagency alignment and cooperation, and increasing transportation choices such as public transit. As of July 2024, Vermont has 8,813 all-electric vehicles and 6,331 plug-in hybrids. Utilities are required by Vermont law to offer EV rates for all customer classes.

Poor reviewed federal funding that has flowed and continues to flow to the state to be used for energy programs and in support of the CEP including ARPA, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure

Law. Inflation Reduction Act funds are expected to flow beginning in 2025, including Solar for All with \$62 million.

## **Energy Burden Report Presentation**

Kelly Lucci, Director of Strategy and Efficiency for Efficiency Vermont and primary author of the Energy Burden Report (EBR) presented a summary of the 2023 report.

The concept of energy burden is understanding the percentage of household income compared to energy spending. Average percentages of energy spending by sector are: 45% for transportation, 35% for thermal, and 20% for electricity. Energy burden differs geographically: it is lower in Chittenden County and higher in the Northeast Kingdom. Lucci provided slides depicting energy burden and annual spending per household and by town for each of the electricity, thermal and transportation sectors. The federal Department of Energy defines energy burden as 6% whereas Vermont exceeds that just for its spending on thermal energy costs. Lucci noted that thermal energy burden is particularly difficult to model because the spending data does not account for significant offsets by the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

The EBR provides strategies for alleviating energy burden such as switching to an EV, installing a multi-zone or single-zone heat pump, and weatherizing. Lucci provided context on electrification: electrification does not always reduce energy burden. Electricity is not always the lowest cost option for every customer. It is important to look at specifics and support customers in making informed choices.

## **VELCO Update**

Tom Dunn, CEO of VELCO provided a VELCO update via Zoom. VELCO's core business is going well. VELCO has been safe and reliability has been good. The company's credit rating is strong. Dunn said VELCO has a very active Capital Plan - \$700 million over the next 5 years. Refurbishing substations; they received a Certificate of Public Good from the PUC for a 17-mile line extension known as the Franklin County Line Upgrade.

EPRI (Electric Power Research Institute) and VELCO received \$18 million from the federal DOE for a grid-enhancing technology, flow-control device that opens more capacity from the transmissions we already have. This will increase the effective transmission capacity and operational transfer capacity between the New York–Vermont border.

Succession planning – 30 percent of VELCO's workforce is going to retire in the next 5 years. They had 40 new hires in 2023.

Top concern: Physical cybersecurity risk. Other transmission observations: There is a 500MW difference between a sunny day and a rainy day. Regionally the retirement of traditional power

plants affects the grid and is a consequence of state policy changes. The growth of data centers affects transmission needs. Texas has 60 Gigawatts of need from data centers.

The planning paradigm in New England is changing. FERC Order 1920 requires ISO-New England to include the energy goals of all six New England states in its long term transmission planning.

VELCO Long Range Transmission Plan – for almost ten years the 20-year load forecast was flat. That has changed recently and the [2024 VELCO Long Range Transmission Plan](#) identifies potential transmission needs to address forecasted load growth over the next two decades. The earliest reliability need is anticipated by 2029.

Larry Lackey asked about VLITE’s revenues. VLITE income is not growing and has not since inception. Could VLITE be part of public benefit when transmission projects, especially merchant projects are being proposed? Dunn replied, possibly. But the time frames for transmission projects are very long, e.g. planning for New England Clean Power Link and community conversations took place ten years ago.

### **Board Conversation on Direction of VLITE and Reflections on Presentations**

Larry Lackey said we should better align grant categories (responding to Gabrielle’s Program Summary categories) perhaps explicitly tying them to the CEP.

Action item – Gabrielle and Larry will look at the CEP and think about how the CEP could/should be referenced in VLITE grant applications.

Amy Shollenberger reflected on the Energy Burden Report presentation broken out by geography. Amy asked if there is a way VLITE could target specific geographic areas or specific demographics/groups of people correlating with one of the “red areas”, and perhaps work with those areas that have a strong energy committee.

Other comments:

- Jean – asset mapping and likes idea of working with energy-burdened areas.
- Sarah Hoffman – likes the idea of trying to influence high energy-burden town.
- Peter will take this idea back to Efficiency VT and return back to VLITE with ideas to pursue this. Who are potential partners/grantees? Regional planning commissions? EVT? Local energy committees? Other navigator-type groups?
- Board members acknowledged that this might be a five-year project for VLITE with some money allocated for several years in a row.

Peter Walke asked, “What is our actual measure of effectiveness?” It costs more to reduce GHG emissions in LMI homes but state policy does not necessarily acknowledge that difference.

Jean Hamilton commented that regarding energy storage, the state is not advancing it quickly enough. Is there anything we can do in that space? Some board members responded that technology for energy storage has to expand first before a VLITE-sized grant would have utility.

Paul Dragon wants to explore working with refugee communities – perhaps in Brattleboro – e.g. with translation and interpretation.

Tony Klein commented that Vermont as a whole is burdened by structurally inefficient governance units compared to our size and population and laid out his thinking below.

- Population of 635,000. 251 towns and governments. No real regional government or services. 18 regulated utilities. 15 hospitals, 100-plus school districts i.e. governing units for schools, hundreds of Police, Fire and Sheriffs Departments.

Klein said his philosophy of VLITE funds is that they do no good sitting in our bank account. He is willing to take risks on projects.

Gabrielle Malina noted that mobile home parks have a lot of subpar electrical service – less than 100-amp. Some funding sources for upgrades assume consumers are already at 100-amp and need to get to 200. Liz Curry, project manager for Milton Mobile Home Coop electric service upgrade VLITE grant is working with the Cooperative Development Institute to potentially get a complete survey of mobile home park electrical service needs.

The board identified the following action items:

1. Peter will recon with Kelly Lucci and other EVT people about a possible VLITE grant that focuses on Energy Burdened towns/areas or specific groups of people as identified in the Energy Burden Report. This would likely be approached as a multi-year effort. Peter will circle back with Gabrielle and the VLITE board.
2. Paul will follow up with Vermont refugee-serving organizations about a VLITE grant focused on refugee communities.
3. Gabrielle will follow up with Liz Curry and the Cooperative Development Institute on the survey of electrical service at mobile home parks and what they know about costs for upgrades. Paul Dragon may touch base with CVOEO’s Mobile Home Division for ideas.
4. Larry and Gabrielle will flesh out possible connection points between VLITE grant applications and Comprehensive Energy Plan goals.
5. Board members and Executive Director will review VLITE’s current bylaws to see if amendments are advised to allow VLITE room for advocacy, or other purposes. Members should also review the conflicts of interest section to see if it needs to be amended to strengthen it.

### **Treasurers Report**

Sarah Hofmann reviewed the bank account balances for the board. As of the end of August, VLITE held \$1,354,377 in cash assets. Total grants payable at that same point in time total \$1,017,068.

**Capstone VERT Question**

Capstone seeks to clarify whether the remaining VERT work can include flood recovery work in homes of flood-affected families regardless of whether or not they were involved in the original list of those working with utilities. The board agreed that the intent is to use the remaining funds to serve all eligible flood-affected homes.

**Approve Minutes of June 13, 2024**

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2024 Annual Meeting

- 1<sup>st</sup> – Peter Walke, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Larry Lackey
  - All voted in favor

**The meeting adjourned at 4:10pm.**

Respectfully submitted by Gabrielle Malina, November 2024

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