


**Maine Climate Council  
Energy Working Group (EWG)  
Summary of Meeting on February 16, 2024**

**Welcome**

Dan Burgess and Ken Colburn, co-chairs of the EWG, welcomed Energy Working Group members and observers to the meeting. David Plumb, a facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), reviewed Zoom etiquette, and the agenda for the meeting.

### Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome, Meeting Objectives
2. Discussion: Addressing energy burden and issues of energy access as Maine advances beneficial electrification
3. Discussion: Building Recommendations from January Demand Management Workshop
4. Next Steps

February 16, 2024Energy Working Group Meeting

**Introduction**

EWG staff, Caroline Colan, outlined the goals of the meeting and provided some background information on energy burden, state programs and policies, and data sources which may be helpful for working group members to review on this topic.

The discussion around energy burden and energy access during the meeting focused on three primary areas:

- How the state evaluates energy burden, particularly in the context of beneficial electrification.
- Ways to increase access to and understanding of incentives/programs for energy/distributed energy resources, including community access to the benefits through resource ownership.
- Funding, financing, and rate reform in the context of energy burden & access (including perennial challenges of funding low-income assistance programs and financing of beneficial electrification/energy programs).

**Discussion: Addressing energy burden and issues of energy access as Maine advances beneficial electrification**

- Dan Burgess introduced the discussion around evaluation of energy burdens and invited Bill Harwood, the state’s Public Advocate to discuss his office’s upcoming work on an updated energy burden analysis.
- Ken Colburn introduced the discussion around energy literacy and the potential for community-led energy solutions to address energy burden and maximize benefits of distributed energy resources. Ken invited Johannah Blackman from A Climate to Thrive to present a few slides on this topic.
- Caroline Colan introduced the discussion around funding for energy assistance programs and financing options that can reduce barriers to clean energy sources for low-income households and communities.

Discussions on each of the three topics related to energy burden were significantly overlapping. The key themes of the discussion have been summarized below:

### **How might policies and programs address the needs of people who don't meet eligibility requirements of assistance or incentives programs, but still struggle?**

- Suggestion to look at alternative income guidelines such as ALICE, a criteria used by the United Way.
- Suggestion to consider a tiered approach to eligibility for assistance programs.
  - South Portland uses area medium income as a more geographically tailored eligibility metric.
- How do we connect the two types of programs that today don't connect: programs to invest in infrastructure (heat pumps, weatherization) with assistance to pay bills? (goal to lower energy usage to help reduce bill challenges)
- Are there opportunity to focus on Maine-specific challenges and burdens – particularly kerosene dependent households (typically mobile/manufactured homes)?

### **What energy burden are we measuring?**

- Does energy burden incorporate electricity, fuels, transportation, other?
- Discussion around target maximum percentage of income low-income households should be expected to spend on energy costs. Does that change overtime as more end uses electrify and less is spent on fuels?
- Let's not assume the future is more expensive overall. Assuming things get cheaper overall, how do we make sure most of the benefits go to those most burdened today?

### **What are the most appropriate funding sources for energy assistance programs? For clean energy goals?**

- Today, the LIAP program is funded by electricity ratepayers. Does this cause inter-fuel competition and/or price distortion?
- Should LIAP be funded by general funds or through other sources instead? What is most equitable?
- Often the costs of achieving state policy goals are born by electric ratepayers, not all Maine people. Is there a way to more equitable spread costs?

### **How could barriers to accessing state and federal incentive programs be removed? Are there federal standards that the state should align with around equity?**

The data suggests that energy burden in Maine is higher in more rural areas, so understanding how geography impacts access is important too (e.g., ability to enroll in programs in-person, awareness of programs, and access to contractors continues to be an issue in some places). How can federal dollars be leveraged for disadvantaged communities? How could state programs or procurements be designed to target development in areas that would benefit disadvantaged communities?

### **Improving energy literacy is important at public level and for policy makers.**

- Important to listen to what kinds of information communities and the public need. Then provide not just information, but guidance or capacity support for utilizing information or accessing programs. Navigator programs could be useful to address capacity challenges in increase access to funding opportunities. For instance, through the Community Resilience Partnership.
- How can we improve access to information about all types of clean energy?
- Next generation: Students are interested in taking action (solar panels, other projects) – but feel like energy policy is often not accessible and too technical.

### **Ownership structure of projects can result in different benefits and costs.**

- Two identical energy projects with different ownership structures can have very different equity impacts.

- How can we increase opportunities for ownership of resources?
- How can policies and programs be structured to support community-owned DERs?

*Following this conversation, a set of volunteers from the EWG will meet to begin drafting recommendations on this topic for review by all members of the working group at an upcoming meeting.*

#### Discussion: Addressing energy burden and issues of energy access as Maine advances beneficial electrification

At the end of the meeting, working group members briefly reflected on the January 19 Demand Management Workshop hosted jointly with the Transportation and Buildings working groups.

The agenda, slides, and a summary of the Demand Management Workshop can be found here:

<https://www.maine.gov/future/meetings/demand-management-workshop-energy-transportation-and-buildings-working-groups>.

*Following this conversation, a set of volunteers from the EWG will meet to begin drafting recommendations on this topic for review by all members of the working group at an upcoming meeting.*

#### Next Steps:

The next meeting of the EWG will be virtually on Zoom Friday, March 1 from 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM. This meeting will focus on discussions around “advancing policy to plan and build necessary clean energy infrastructure.”