

## **Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council Meeting Summary**

**Date:** May 11, 2026

**Location:** In person at Maine Department of Energy Resources with Teams option

**Duration:** 1 hour, 19 minutes

**Attendees:** Andrea Steward, Victoria Forkus, Katy Childs, Mark Morissette, Lisa Henaghan, Sharon Klein, Eloise Vitelli, John Bliss. Heather Sanborn, Kiera Reardon, Phil Bartlett, Ian Burnes. Elizabeth Deprey, Kris Winther, Sylvia Most, Deirdre Schneider, Derek Davidson, Kathy Largay, Celina Cunningham, Ethan Tremblay.

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### **Working Group Reports**

#### **Focus Group Initiative**

Sharon reported on the recent meeting of the Focus Group Initiative working group. The group continues reviewing existing studies and reports related to energy affordability and participation in assistance programs among low- and moderate-income households. The working group's charge remains focused on:

- Understanding challenges residents face managing electricity costs
- Identifying gaps in current assistance programs
- Exploring policy changes that could improve affordability and participation

The group reviewed several existing studies, including UMaine's 2024 work for the Maine Climate Council and information related to the ALICE framework. Members discussed difficulties synthesizing the large amount of existing information and concluded that outside assistance would likely be necessary.

The working group therefore plans to develop an RFP seeking a contractor to:

- Conduct a comprehensive literature and policy review
- Identify what is already known and where information gaps remain
- Review legislation and existing program reports
- Potentially provide a briefing or presentation to ERAC

Discussion included:

- The importance of understanding why eligible customers do not participate in programs
- The challenge of studying non-participants

- Concerns that customer perceptions of electricity prices may increasingly affect participation in electrification programs such as heat pumps and EVs
- A shared goal of avoiding duplication of prior research

Sylvia will prepare an initial contract draft before the group's next meeting, expected in late May. Please let Sylvia know if you would like to be included.

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## **Winter Disconnect Working Group**

Lisa reported on behalf of the Winter Disconnect Working Group. The group met on May 8 and focused on developing a framework for collecting more useful arrearage and payment-behavior data.

Rather than pursuing changes through Chapter 815 reporting requirements, the group discussed requesting targeted data directly from utilities through the Commission or the Office of the Public Advocate.

The proposed data framework would:

- Categorize residential customers by arrearage bands
- Identify customers enrolled in LIAP or AMP
- Track customers receiving winter warning letters or summer disconnection notices
- Examine payment behavior during and after the winter disconnect period
- Include geographic analysis by ZIP code or address area
- Potentially track arrearage age (e.g., greater than 90 days overdue)

The group emphasized that:

- Categories would overlap and are not mutually exclusive
- The goal is actionable data rather than data collection for its own sake
- The analysis may help distinguish customers facing genuine affordability challenges from customers strategically delaying payments
- The information could help evaluate the effectiveness of current affordability and arrearage management programs

Members discussed:

- Whether to include AMP participation and eligibility

- The effects of COVID-era collection moratoria on historical data
- The need to avoid drawing misleading conclusions from overlapping datasets
- The possibility of including data from consumer-owned utilities where feasible

The working group plans to refine the proposal and test data feasibility with utility IT teams before the next ERAC meeting. The next meeting of this working group is June 4 at 10AM. Please let Sylvia know if you would like a meeting link.

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## **Department of Energy Resources Presentation: State Energy Plan**

Acting Commissioner Celina Cunningham and Ethan Tremblay of the Maine Department of Energy Resources (DOER), presented an overview of the ongoing development of Maine's next State Energy Plan.

### **Overview of DOER**

DOER's organizational structure includes four divisions focused on:

- Planning and policy
- Energy supply and security
- Energy efficiency and transportation
- Innovation and workforce development

The next State Energy Plan is currently under development and will build upon the prior plan while incorporating feedback received through a recent Request for Information (RFI).

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## **Discussion of Energy Affordability and Metrics**

Ethan reviewed several data trends and metrics intended to inform the energy plan, including:

- Personal income growth versus inflation
- Residential energy costs over time
- Electricity price trends in Maine and New England
- Household energy burden data

Key observations included:

- Maine generally remains among the lower-cost electricity states in New England, though New England overall remains a high-cost region nationally
- Inflation-adjusted residential energy prices have remained relatively stable over long periods, aside from major spikes
- Energy burden remains significantly higher for low-income households

The discussion focused heavily on how affordability should be measured and communicated.

## **Major Themes Raised During Discussion**

### **Rate of Change vs. Long-Term Trends**

Several members emphasized that consumers experience affordability through recent price increases rather than long-term inflation-adjusted trends. Members noted that:

- The period since COVID has shaped public perception of affordability
- Rapid changes in electricity costs may influence customer decisions more than historical averages
- Perception of electricity price volatility may be slowing adoption of heat pumps and electrification measures

### **Complexity of Energy Costs**

Participants discussed the importance of disaggregating costs into:

- Supply
- Transmission
- Distribution
- Public policy costs

Members stressed that different cost drivers may require different policy responses.

### **Tradeoffs**

Discussion highlighted the need to better communicate tradeoffs between:

- Reliability
- Affordability
- Infrastructure investment
- Electrification goals

Participants noted that improving reliability increasingly comes with significant cost implications.

### **Energy Burden Metrics**

Members discussed the usefulness of energy burden thresholds in shaping affordability policy, including:

- LIAP funding levels
- Discount rate design
- Eligibility thresholds

Discussion also noted that previously published energy burden figures may not fully reflect the effects of recent expansions to affordability assistance programs.

### **Household Profiles**

DOER discussed the possibility of creating “energy wallet” or household profile analyses showing how different types of Maine households experience energy costs based on:

- Geography
- Heating source
- Household size
- Transportation choices
- Rate design participation

Participants generally supported this concept and encouraged DOER to coordinate with Efficiency Maine and researchers already conducting related baseline studies.