



Minutes – Friday, September 26, 2025
Video Conference
9 am to 11 am

Attending: Bob Howarth, Marie McRae, Sheila Out, Brian Eden, Tom Hirasuna, Dawn Montanye, Gerrie Wiley, Andrew Yale, bethany ojaehto mays, Aimee Dailey, Dan Lamb, Jennifer Tavares, Jeremy Sauer, Karim Beers, Leon Porter, Margaret McCasland, Paul Moore, Scott Doyle, Stephan Edel, Susan Riley, Michaela Bieren, Roxanne Marino, Marc Weiss, Hailley Delisle, Margaret Johnson, Rebecca Evans, Michael Hernandez, Monique, Pete Wirth, Terry Carroll, Anna Kelles, Nick Goldsmith, Peter Bardaglio

What Happened to the CLCPA and the Scoping Plan? – Dr. Bob Howarth
Bob Howarth is the David R. Atkinson Professor of Ecology and Environmental Biology at Cornell and he served on the NYS Climate Action Council, where he played a leading role in developing the Scoping Plan. Professor Howarth will talk about the 2018 Climate Law and the gap between the Scoping Plan and what has happened since, and what we can do to close the gap.

Overview

Bob Howarth from Cornell discussed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) and the New York Energy Plan, highlighting the gap between the 2030 40% reduction goal and current progress. He emphasized the importance of accurate greenhouse gas accounting, particularly for methane emissions, and criticized the governor's attempts to revert to outdated methods. Howarth also addressed the need for better energy efficiency in homes, the potential of ground source heat pumps, and the importance of demand management. In addition, he criticized the governor's push for nuclear power and called for increased funding for the Empower Plus Program, which supports low-income households with energy efficiency upgrades.

The CLCPA and Scoping Plan

- NY Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) passed in 2019 – NY Energy Law, passed in 1976, requires state to periodically update a plan for energy use
- State Energy Board is currently working on an update for period 2025 to 2040 – by law, energy plan updates should comply with CLCPA
- Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act (2019) mandated:
 - New greenhouse gas accounting for methane
 - 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030
 - 85% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050
 - 70% renewable electricity by 2030
 - 100% C-free electricity by 2040
 - At least 40% benefits to go to historically disadvantaged

- How to reach these mandates? Climate law set up commission (“Climate Action Council”) to develop blueprint (“Scoping Plan”) by December 2022
- State agencies and authorities then required to implement the law, following Scoping Plan
- Bob Howarth highlighted differences between old and new greenhouse gas accounting methods, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the new methods for measuring methane emissions
- He discussed governor's attempts to change greenhouse gas accounting method and pushback from environmental advocates and experts

Challenges to GHG Accounting

- Bob detailed governor's efforts to change greenhouse gas accounting method, including budget negotiations in 2023
- He pointed to support from experts and environmental advocates, including a letter from Cornell, Stanford, and MIT supporting the accounting method outlined in Scoping Plan
- Bob explained differences in greenhouse gas accounting, showing how Scoping Plan method sets global warming potential (GWP) of methane at 85 and includes out-of-state methane emissions
- Draft Energy Plan, however, suggests reverting to old accounting method, using GWP of 25 and including only emissions within state

Debate over Methane Accounting and Nuclear Power

- Bob reviewed an op-ed in a Buffalo newspaper, where Doreen Harris and Rory Christian defend state's progress and criticize new greenhouse gas accounting
- He and Steve Englebright responded in op-ed, emphasizing importance of new accounting method and governor's backtracking
- Bob discussed governor's push for nuclear power and lack of necessity for it, citing Scoping Plan's preference for renewable energy
- He highlighted the issues with small modular reactors, including their high costs and increased nuclear waste

Differences Between Scoping Plan and Draft Energy Plan

- Central parts of Scoping Plan but not yet considered or implemented by NYS:
 - Reducing use of fossil fuel use in existing homes & commercial businesses
 - Orderly downsizing of gas delivery infrastructure
 - Cap & invest
- Use of energy in buildings (particularly for heating) is single largest source of GHG emissions in NYS (using CLCPA accounting)
- 6 million homes heat with fossil fuels, 1.5 million with propane or fuel oil, and 4.5 million with natural gas
- Scoping Plan called for retrofitting 250,000 homes per year with heat pumps while Draft Energy Plan largely assumes status quo use of fossil fuels into future
- Draft Energy Plan predicts very little decrease in use of natural gas between now and 2040
- Bob underscored need for retrofitting homes with heat pumps and highlighted need for state to plan for downsizing of gas pipeline system to avoid economic disparities.

Cap and Invest and Legal Challenges

- Bob explained cap and invest mechanism called for in Scoping Plan but not implemented so far by state
- Central to funding progress in Scoping Plan – was supposed to be implemented by DEC by end of 2023
- Hochul & DEC have been backing away from Cap & Invest steadily for years
- Draft Energy Plan only briefly mentions Cap & Invest, saying state should continue to evaluate it
- Bob described legal challenges and ongoing court case against state for not implementing cap and invest
- He pointed to judge's skepticism about state's delay and potential for ruling in favor of plaintiffs
- Judge unlikely to force compliance until appeals process plays out, which may well be after next election for governor in Nov. 2026, perhaps into 2027

Nuclear Power and Renewable Energy

- Bob criticized governor's push for nuclear power, citing its high costs, slow deployment, and interference with renewable energy integration
- He referenced new paper that highlights high costs and increased nuclear waste of small modular reactors
- Bob emphasized Scoping Plan's preference for solar, wind, and hydro over nuclear power and discussed need for investigation of costs and benefits of nuclear power before any further investment

Impact of Increased Electric Demand and Data Centers

- Bob then addressed increase in electric demand, particularly from artificial intelligence data centers
- We should change our energy policy so that household consumers are not ones paying for data center electric demand – state energy policy should give preference to commercial users based on job creation
- Jigah Shah: Key to affordability for electricity is to minimize need for physical upgrades for transmission and distribution – instead, manage load to reduce peak electric demand
- Utilities generally do not like this approach, as their profit greater when they build more infrastructure

Ground Source Heat Pumps and Community Networks

- Scoping Plan called for study about benefits and costs of ground-source vs air-source heat pumps (and network systems) – so far, state has not pursued such a study, and this is not mentioned in Draft Energy Plan
- Context: air-source heat pumps are effective in cold climates, and are less expensive for a homeowner to install, but they require up to 5-times more electricity to operate on coldest winter days.
- This requires a large increase in grid electricity production and/or moderate-term storage, and in middle of winter when solar is least effective.
- From perspective of society, ground-source heat pumps might actually be less expensive – this may be particularly true when paired with some in-house thermal storage, and management of heat pump to only run at non-peak times

- Bob discussed potential for community networks of ground source heat pumps to be cost-effective and reduce peak demand
- He referenced small town in Iowa that successfully implemented a ground source heat pump network – very cost effective
- State should explore and support these community networks for energy efficiency and cost savings

Public Comment and Next Steps

- Bob encouraged public comments on Draft Energy Plan, noting upcoming virtual hearing and the importance of public input
- He stressed need for creative thinking and policy changes to meet CLCPA goals and address energy challenges
- Need to push rapidly on ways to incentivize use of electricity at non-peak times
- Should explore developing policies to allow home owners to aggregate their use of energy storage and smart technologies, to even out the playing field with large commercial entities and get leverage with utilities

The Attack on the Empower+ Program – Michael Hernandez

Michael Hernandez is the New York policy director for Rewiring America. Michael's work focuses on state policy initiatives to accelerate the transition to demand-side electrification. He will discuss the effort in Albany to scale back the EmPower+ program which provides energy efficiency and electrification incentives to Low-and-Moderate (LMI) income households.

Overview

The meeting discussed the Empower Plus program, emphasizing its importance for low- and moderate-income households and the clean energy workforce. Key points included the need for \$850 million in unallocated RGGI funds to support the program, the aging building stock in New York, and the legal mandate to reinvest 35% of funding into disadvantaged communities. Concerns were raised about the lack of a pathway for workforce development trainees to become certified contractors. The new Green Small Buildings Program was noted, but the focus remained on fully funding Empower Plus. The meeting concluded with a call to action for public advocacy and legislative support.

What is Empower+ Program?

- Implemented through NYSEERDA – it's focused on low and moderate income households and providing them with incentives to be able to do energy efficiency and, electrification work on their households
- Can be significant help for these low and moderate income households to bring down their energy costs
- Not energy bill assistance program where you're helping to pay the bill – this is creating savings, lowering demand on the grid, and potentially converting people away from fossil fuel combustion systems to clean green heating for their homes, which helps with health impacts and makes these homes more affordable and more comfortable
- Created in 2023 and legislature allocated \$200 million to program to move forward with these conversions
- Program also receives funding from Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), where polluters put in money into fund in order to support climate action

- It also receives money from Sustainable Future Fund, which is administered through Public Service Commission (PSC) and is paid for by ratepayers
- So you have several pots of money coming into Empower+: PSC money, RGGI money, Sustainable Future Fund
- Empower+ a nationally acclaimed program and demand for program is huge – scaled up 30% year after year
- Contractors who are doing this building performance work have been building capacity – they've been hiring new people, training them
- Our clean energy sector has been growing, we're reducing demand on the grid, and increasing economic development – it's a win-win-win program
- So we were shocked to hear that Hochul administration was scaling back program
- NYSERDA has stopped accepting applications from building performance contractors – a huge problem because it's contractors that help LMI customers to navigate application process
- Seems like an intentional action by administration to slow down this program because they want to invest money elsewhere, so we're very concerned
- NYSERDA had stakeholder event recently to get feedback from public on what they were doing with program
- We had contractors there, clients there, LMI households that benefited from program, and people who worked at Energy Hubs
- Everybody was expressing support for Empower+ and urging administration to not cut program. But unfortunately, it seems as though the governor is moving forward with scaling back the program
- One of big decisions to be made by governor was how much from the \$1 billion Sustainable Future Fund would go to Empower+
- General Assembly, in its one house budget proposal, said \$330 million of \$1 billion go to Empower+
- Governor said let's do \$50 million for Empower+ – I can give up to \$300 million through Sustainable Future Fund, and I'll make that decision later on in fall
- So we we've been waiting to see how much of \$1 billion in Sustainable Future Fund would go to Empower+
- Unfortunately, Governor announced the spending plan for Sustainable Future Fund and Empower+ will only get \$50 million
- At same time, Hochul announced creation of new program for small green buildings, which would receive \$150 million for building decarbonization work – would be implemented through Housing and Community Development Agency, not NYSERDA
- Details of this new program are very vague and not clear it will focus on LMI customers – seems strange this new program would get \$150 million but Empower would only get \$50 million when it's already a proven successful program
- The other thing that's unusual is governor only appropriated \$900 million out of the \$1 billion so we're saying give that unallocated \$100 million to Empower
- So our hope is governor will increase appropriation for Empower+ from Sustainable Future Fund, and if it doesn't come from the Sustainable Future Fund, then it should come from RGGI
- At end of fiscal year, NYSERDA had only spent \$100 million of \$850 million in RGGI account

- We should not be scaling back this program so we are going to next NYSERDA board meeting on October 22
- Michael emphasized importance of attending board meeting on October 22 in Albany – event includes networking event sponsored by Alliance for Clean Energy, free workshop on grid of the future, free dinner, and free drinks

Challenges and Opportunities in the Clean Energy Workforce

- Unfortunate that trained workers might be laid off due to funding cuts, reducing clean energy workforce
- NYSERDA's report indicates that up to 30% of workers in building electrification and energy efficiency come from disadvantaged communities.
- Michael highlighted need for public comments emphasizing importance of Empower+ and legal mandate to reinvest in disadvantaged communities

Energy Affordability and Funding Sources

- Michael pointed out significant reduction in funding from RGGI and increased burden on ratepayers
- Decrease in RGGI funding shifts burden from polluters to low-income ratepayers
- Michael reiterated that RGGI funds could be used to support Empower+
- Clearly a need for political will and commitment from governor to allocate funds to successful programs

Strategies for Advocacy and Legislative Action

- Michael stressed importance of writing letters to governor, Assembly members, and state senators to express support for Empower+ and need to meet climate mandates
- He highlighted importance of advocating during budget process leading to start of new legislative session in January
- He suggested that statewide associations should draft letters and urge their members to write to legislators

Workforce Development and Program Flexibility

- Rebecca Evans raised concerns about lack of a pathway for workforce development trainees to become certified contractors
- Clearly a need for transitional work programs to bridge gap between training and full-time employment
- Michael acknowledged need for this kind of program and challenges posed by funding cuts

Comparison of Empower+ and New Programs

- Michael explained difference between Empower+ and newly created Green Small Buildings Program
- New program is a positive development, but it should not replace Empower+ – need to fund both programs adequately and avoid pitting them against each other
- Gap Fund bill, sponsored by Assemblymember Kelles, is aimed at addressing pre-electrification and hazard mitigation issues and is necessary addition to existing programs

Final Thoughts and Call to Action

- Michael emphasized importance of funding existing programs rather than creating new ones at their expense
- Session concluded with reminder of the importance of public engagement and opportunities available for making a difference.