

ENERGY PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
Subcommittee Discussion of Roundtable Ideas

Goal: To bring together a group of diverse stakeholders to identify key issues concerning energy planning in New Hampshire and discuss next steps using the groundwork reflected in the 2002 NH Energy Plan.

Impetus: Energy costs have risen dramatically in the past year as a result of increased global demand, supply disruptions from adverse weather conditions and other exogenous factors, creating serious economic pressure on NH residents and businesses.

Externalities: The Legislature has a number of standing committees, including the Legislative Oversight Committee on Electric Restructuring (RSA 374-F:5) [HB 1376 proposes expanding oversight to regional transmission issues], the Gas Utility Restructuring Oversight Committee (RSA 374:60), and the Low Income Electric Assistance Program Review Committee (SB 228, 2005), and it is considering others, including, the Energy Task Force proposed in HB 175, a study committee to review Renewable Portfolio Standards in HB 1146, a study committee regarding the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative in HB 1531, a committee to study siting of wind farms in HB 1568, and a study of energy efficiency programs is proposed in SB 389.

Objective: Integrate the activities of the Energy Planning Advisory Board, which was established by the Legislature to “monitor and assist in the implementation of the New Hampshire Energy Plan” and “develop strategic planning for the state’s energy policies,” with the numerous Legislative study efforts or a more centralized Legislative effort.

Recommendation: In addition to monitoring the existing Energy Plan, the Energy Planning Advisory Board was charged by the Legislature to take prospective steps concerning energy policy and that charge is highlighted by current high energy costs. In light of the many existing and proposed study committees, however, it is clear that some action should be taken to coordinate the various efforts in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. In that regard, one approach would involve centralizing the various study efforts under a single umbrella, which could be accomplished by transforming the Legislative Oversight Committee on Electric Restructuring into, for instance, a “Legislative Oversight Committee on Energy Policy.”

This approach would address the existing lack of formal coordination among the various efforts but it does not address an important timing issue in that Legislative action to implement such an approach, if it were determined appropriate, would likely occur in April at the earliest. Inasmuch as the issues are too important to put on hold for that period of time, the Energy Policy Board could convene an informal meeting of key stakeholders to begin the process with the intention of coordinating the effort more explicitly with a centralized oversight committee, to the extent such a committee is created, at an appropriate juncture. As a consequence, a significant head start could be gained in identifying key issues for Legislative or Executive action.

Action Items: 1.) Identify roundtable participants, and 2.) Set schedule.

Proposal: Bringing together a group of diverse stakeholders to identify key issues in the public forum of the Energy Policy Advisory Board creates challenges with respect to balancing the desire for sufficient diversity and representativeness with the desire for timely outputs. One method for achieving that balance within a manageable context would be to establish a handful of relevant categories of stakeholders, e.g., local electric delivery companies, transmission companies, competitive suppliers, natural gas local distribution companies, business interests and public interest organizations, and within those categories contact the various parties with the goal of having them select a representative(s) that would appear before the Board at a Stakeholder Forum to share the energy policy priorities held by the respective stakeholder groups. A variation on this approach would be to set a time limit for presentation by each category and let the parties allocate the time among them as they choose.

This first step would essentially constitute an inventory. For administrative efficiency, it could be useful to require each representative to list its top three energy policy priorities and to cast each priority in a substantive recommendation for Legislative or Executive action. Perhaps more important, each presenter should also be advised in advance to read the 2002 State Energy Plan so that everyone is working from a common baseline.

It would also be instructive to schedule a second forum for individual public comment. To the extent possible, the individual public comment section should be structured similarly to the organizational stakeholder phase in that commenters should be encouraged to review the 2002 State Energy Plan and asked to identify priorities and cast them in terms of recommendations for action.

The inventory phase could then be followed up by a facilitated discussion or structured brainstorming, with an eye to producing concrete proposals. This step would depend for its effectiveness on selecting the right person to facilitate the discussion. At that point, the EPAB could then be in a position to make strategic planning recommendations for energy policy.