



Comments to: Energy Planning Advisory Board Stakeholder Forum

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I present these written comments as Assistant Director of UNH Cooperative Extension (“Extension”), the public outreach arm of the University of New Hampshire.

As a widely known and trusted organization whose only mission is education for informed problem-solving, Extension is in a unique position to raise public awareness of energy issues and to influence behavior on the demand side of the complex energy equation.

The federal Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Cooperative Extension system as a unique three-way partnership between and among federal, state, and county governments. Congress gave Extension the broad mission of extending the research and knowledge of the land grant university system to the general population, as well as organizing opportunities for people to share their wisdom and experience with each other.

For more than 90 years, Extension has engaged New Hampshire people with a wide variety of informal learning opportunities, grounded in research and organized around local needs. We work in the broad general areas of forestry and wildlife, land conservation, water and marine resources, agriculture and horticulture, parenting education, 4-H youth development, food safety, food security, nutrition and other forms of health promotion, and support for the leaders and involved citizen volunteers in New Hampshire communities.

Our outreach activities and programs reach diverse populations in every city and town in New Hampshire. From a fully staffed office in each of New Hampshire’s 10 counties, our field staff deliver programs through one-on-one consultations, workshops and seminars, TV and radio presentations, newsletters, fact sheets, and participation in local coalitions and partnerships. We maintain a large, continuously expanding Web site and a statewide toll-free Info Line that handles thousands of calls from New Hampshire residents on a great variety of topics. We also deliver programs via satellite downlinks and videoconferences. Many of our subject-matter specialists teach at the University or conduct applied research in areas of expressed local need. More than 4000 well-trained, well-supported volunteers extend the reach of Extension’s professional staff.

Over the decades, Extension has demonstrated a unique ability to respond to the rapid pace of social, economic, and political change. Because energy supply and energy costs directly affect all the populations we work with, we know we’ll be called upon to stay current with energy issues and their practical implications.

We don't have, and don't plan to hire, staff with expertise in energy matters. Rather, we turn to our long history of service as a neutral convener and facilitator of, bringing together diverse individuals, organizations, government agencies, business interests and other stakeholders to solve local problems collectively.

These collaborations help avoid duplication of effort and ensure representation of diverse perspectives on the issues that confront us. Extension serves as the educational outreach partner, allowing regulatory agencies, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and other partners to focus on their stated missions.

Realizing the depth of need for comprehensive educational resources on energy topics, we recently recruited a volunteer expert energy advisory team, to date comprised of representatives of the Office of Energy and Planning, the Department of Environmental Services, the Public Utilities Commission, the Jordan Institute, UNH faculty, UNH Office of Sustainability Programs, and the New Hampshire Sustainable Energy Association, as well as "green" builders and energy performance experts.

This team will hold its first meeting in late July. We will gradually expand the team to involve other advisors and their networks as the core team develops a scope of work and a timeline of activity.

With the help of these experts, we will develop and vigorously promote a comprehensive N.H. Web site that integrates practical why-and-how-to energy conservation information, events listings, formal and informal education opportunities, individual/institutional/community "success stories," energy product and service providers, and more. The site could expand to include features such as interactive discussion boards on energy policy and related topics, energy blogs, Ask-an-Energy-Expert advice columns, decision trees for homeowners, businesses and public officials, etc.

In addition to the many stakeholders this site could serve, we foresee use by our own professional staff in program planning and delivery.

I invite other energy stakeholders to contact me about joining our energy education initiative.

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