

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

**CERTIFIED
ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT**

October 10, 2017 - 2:22 p.m.
Concord, New Hampshire

RE: DE 15-302 ELECTRIC UTILITIES:
RESIDENTIAL RENEWABLE ELECTRIC
GENERATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM.
(HEARING TO RECEIVE PUBLIC COMMENTS)

PRESENT:

Chairman Martin P. Honigberg, Presiding
Commissioner Kathryn M. Bailey
Commissioner Michael S. Giaimo
(via telephone)

Sandy Deno, Clerk

APPEARANCES:

Reptg. PUC STAFF:

David K. Wiesner, Esquire
Karen Crampton, Director,
Sustainable Energy Div.

COURT REPORTER: SUSAN J. ROBIDAS, N.H. LCR NO. 44

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Good afternoon.
3 We're here in Docket DE 15-302, which is the
4 Renewable Energy Initiatives Program for
5 Residential Solar and Wind. There's a somewhat
6 complicated series of memos and secretarial
7 letter that issued to set us up for this public
8 comment hearing. Rather than go through that
9 and read to you, which no one wants to hear me
10 do, Mr. Wiesner or Ms. Cramton, you want to set
11 the scene for us?

12 MR. WIESNER: Yes, Mr. Chairman.
13 Thank you. This Residential Rebate Program is
14 required to be administered by the Commission
15 pursuant to statute. The program has been
16 closed to new applications since July 1st of
17 this year as a result of funding constraints
18 and budgetary uncertainty. Staff is now
19 recommending that the program be reopened with
20 some modification to the program terms and the
21 rebate level, most significantly, a reduction
22 in the maximum incentive amount from \$2500 to
23 \$1500, which is 30 cents per watt, also subject
24 to the 30 cent of total installed system costs

1 limitation.

2 In addition to that decrease in the
3 rebate level, Staff also is recommending that
4 the application process be simplified to
5 increase the efficiency of program
6 administration and relieve some of the burden
7 on applicants; also recommending that the
8 rebate reservation period be decreased from
9 12 months to 9 months, which Staff believes
10 should be sufficient for installation of most
11 residential systems and also accommodate the
12 seasonality of the industry; and then finally
13 recommending that an orderly transition
14 process be adopted by the Commission with a
15 specified reopening date and a lottery to
16 determine cue position among various
17 applicants, unless it is clear that the
18 program will not be subscribed based on the
19 new applications coming in when it reopens.

20 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: I see on the
21 table up here what appears to be a corrected
22 table. It is marked Figure 1. But looking at
23 Staff's memo, I actually think it's Figure 2,
24 on Page 3 of Staff's memo. Am I correct?

1 MR. WIESNER: So, a corrected figure
2 needs further correction. But it is Figure 2.
3 And the difference here is it's supposed to
4 show cost per watt, and the memo as filed, the
5 numbers are cost per kilowatt. So this is
6 basically a version of that table, Figure 2,
7 which shows, instead of thousands of dollars,
8 shows, for example, \$5.02 at the far left and
9 \$3.60 at the far right.

10 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Just moved the
11 decimal point over a couple of spots.

12 MR. WIESNER: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Well, the
14 purpose of this hearing is to receive public
15 comment. We have three people who have signed
16 up to speak. I'll read all three names and
17 we'll take them in this order: Eric Shifflett,
18 Jack Ruderman and Patricia Martin.

19 So, Mr. Shifflett, if you're ready
20 to go, grab a microphone and make sure it's
21 on.

22 MR. SHIFFLETT: Great. Thank you,
23 Chairman. Appreciate the opportunity to
24 speak --

1 (Court Reporter interrupts.)

2 MR. SHIFFLETT: Okay. Thank you. My
3 name is Erik Shifflett. I'm one of the
4 partners at Granite State Solar in Bow, New
5 Hampshire, and I'm here to comment on the
6 proposal to reduce the residential rebate
7 maximum from 50 cents a watt, \$2500, down to 30
8 cents a watt, \$1500, that was the proposal.
9 And my comments are: I would prefer to see a
10 slightly lower rebate and a little bit more
11 program longevity. Being able to serve
12 50 percent more people by bringing the rebate
13 amount from \$1500 down to \$1,000 I think would
14 serve our best interests as a company and also
15 the best interests of more residents of New
16 Hampshire.

17 I think that \$1,000 is an adequate
18 figure to actually be still considered an
19 incentive to help drive a buying decision and
20 help defray a significant portion of solar
21 array costs. And those are -- that's the
22 intent of the program. But at \$1500, I'm
23 just concerned that with only 350 rebates
24 available, we'll be out of rebates within a

1 month or two max, because since the Renewable
2 Energy Fund has been closed, there have been
3 people in the wings waiting to submit
4 applications for when the program is opened
5 back up. And I expect that will go from
6 \$1500 to zero in no time. And it's a much
7 more precipitous drop-off for us to adapt as
8 an integrator, trying to find -- trying to
9 sort of reset expectations and find savings,
10 find cost savings, where module prices have
11 gone up recently. To make that transition
12 from \$1500 to zero is a larger jump, and I
13 think it would create a more precipitous drop
14 in leads that we receive, a precipitous drop
15 in interest. And it also will probably
16 create an artificial bubble, a rush like we
17 saw two years ago when we went from \$3750 to
18 \$2500; that was a drop of \$1200. And in the
19 two weeks prior to the transition from \$3750
20 to \$2500, it was a madhouse. We were
21 inundated with calls.

22 So I'm afraid if we're going from
23 \$1500 to zero, we're going to see that
24 inundation of calls, and it's going to be a

1 very short period of time before we just have
2 to say, I'm sorry, we're at zero. If we
3 modify that down to \$1,000, probably we won't
4 see quite as much of a bubble right before
5 the program is fully reserved, and we will
6 definitely be able to serve more people. And
7 then, when we have to say, I'm sorry, but
8 there's no more rebate, the consumer isn't
9 looking at going from \$1500 to zero; they're
10 looking at \$1,00 to zero, and I think that
11 might be a pill they could swallow. Maybe
12 they can still see a decent return on
13 investment. They don't have to reset
14 expectations quite as much.

15 So my comments will end there. I
16 would just like to see the PUC consider a
17 \$1,000 rebate instead of \$1500 and open up
18 the opportunity to more individuals. Thank
19 you.

20 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Thank you, Mr.
21 Shifflett. Mr. Ruderman.

22 MR. RUDERMAN: Thank you, Mr.
23 Chairman, fellow commissioners. Jack Ruderman.
24 I represent Revision Energy. We are a solar

1 design and installation firm with offices in
2 New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts. I just
3 want to say very briefly that this is obviously
4 a challenging situation for the industry and a
5 challenging situation for PUC Staff. And I
6 want to commend Staff here for putting together
7 what I think is a very well-thought-out and
8 reasonable response to the shortage of funds
9 that the program is facing. I agree that the
10 rebate amount needs to be reduced. I think our
11 company would be more comfortable taking it
12 down to either \$1500 as Staff recommends, or if
13 the Commission is inclined to try to stretch
14 those dollars a little further, I think we
15 could live with \$1250 as a new floor for the
16 rebate.

17 It's true that if you drop it to
18 \$1,000 you'll be able to serve more homes.
19 But at the same point, we want to make the
20 rebate significant enough that it is
21 attractive to customers who are looking at
22 systems that now, for the first time in
23 years, are beginning to rise in price, and
24 because of the situation with solar panels

1 and the potential tariff on imported solar
2 panels.

3 So we agree with all the other
4 recommendation of Staff. And again, we're
5 comfortable with \$1500, but we could
6 certainly adjust and be happy if the
7 Commission saw fit to reduce the rebate to
8 \$1250. Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Mr. Ruderman,
10 just to be clear, you used the word "floor,"
11 but I think you meant "cap"; right?

12 MR. RUDERMAN: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Okay. That's
14 what I thought. Ms. Martin.

15 MS. MARTIN: Thank you, Commissioner.
16 I just really wanted to go on record to
17 complain about the fact that the Renewable
18 Energy Fund has been depleted I believe to
19 please the utilities at the expense of the
20 people, and in particular, the sweeping of
21 solar renewable energy credits that reduce
22 their RPS obligations by 80 percent. I wish I
23 could calculate, and maybe I will eventually,
24 how much money that amounted to that did not go

1 into the Renewable Energy Fund. And also, I
2 want to complain about all the years from,
3 let's see, it looks like since 2012 that the
4 Class III RECs were in large part waived, and
5 no ACP payments went into the Renewable Energy
6 Fund for all those years.

7 So that's really why I came today.
8 And I just wanted to register that, that we
9 shouldn't be in this situation. And I have
10 asked for legislation to prevent, if it's
11 possible, the sweeping of renewable energy
12 credits in the future by the utilities.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Okay. There's
15 no one else signed up to speak. Is there
16 anyone else out there who would like to speak?

17 [No verbal response]

18 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: All right.
19 Seeing none, Commissioner Giaimo, it is
20 certainly allowed if you would like to ask
21 questions of any of the people who spoke. If
22 you do, I'm going to give you an opportunity to
23 let us know.

24 CMSR. GIAIMO: Sure. I guess I just

1 have one quick question of the first speaker.

2 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Mr. Shifflett.

3 CMSR. GIAIMO: Mr. Shifflett. So Mr.

4 Ruderman came in at a \$1250 number. Just

5 wanted to get your thoughts. Sounds like you

6 prefer \$1,000. But I wanted to hear what your

7 opinion was of the \$1250.

8 MR. SHIFFLETT: Well, it's halfway

9 better, but not quite as good. I appreciate

10 Jack's willingness to, you know, work with us

11 and compromise as well on our points of view.

12 But, you know, \$1,000 is a nice, clean, 20

13 cents per watt, capped at \$1,000, and it sticks

14 with the current schema, which is, well, what

15 we had at 50 cents a watt, if you had a

16 5,000-watt system, you'd get the full rebate of

17 \$2500. The PUC's proposal was well thought

18 out, and it also follows the same schema, which

19 is 30 cents a watt. If you have a 5,000-watt

20 system, you're capped out at \$1500. If we were

21 to drop to \$1,000, it's just clean; it's 20

22 cents a watt. If you have a 5,000-watt system,

23 you're capped out at \$1,000. So that's one of

24 the reasons I think that \$1,000 is preferred

1 over \$1250. But I'll let the PUC decide what's
2 best.

3 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Commissioner
4 Bailey.

5 CMSR. GIAIMO: As a follow-up --

6 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Go ahead,
7 Commissioner Giaimo. Yes.

8 CMSR. GIAIMO: -- do you have any
9 idea how many additional applicants would be
10 able to receive the funding for \$1,000 as
11 opposed to \$1250?

12 MR. SHIFFLETT: Yes. You would go
13 from 350 applicants to 525 applicants. So I
14 would say that's a 50-percent increase. That's
15 an 175 additional applicants.

16 CMSR. GIAIMO: Thank you.

17 MR. SHIFFLETT: You're welcome.

18 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Commissioner
19 Giaimo, the Staff memo dated October 5th, which
20 you probably don't have with you where you are,
21 has a graph on Page 2 that has that
22 information.

23 CMSR. GIAIMO: Thanks.

24 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: Commissioner

1 Bailey, you have a question?

2 CMSR. BAILEY: I do.

3 Mr. Ruderman, do you think that
4 customers would actually be less likely to
5 invest in a solar system if the rebate was
6 \$1,000 rather than \$1250?

7 MR. RUDERMAN: It's a tough call, I
8 will acknowledge. There may be a psychological
9 benefit of it being greater than \$1,000 than
10 just being \$1,000. I mean, you have to keep in
11 mind that some of these systems have a price
12 tag of \$20- or \$30,000 before the federal
13 incentives which reduce the cost by 30 percent.
14 But I think what we're facing -- what most
15 customers are facing as the rebate comes down
16 is that there will be a longer payback period.
17 So, even though it's not a huge difference,
18 \$250, every little bit I think would help.

19 CMSR. BAILEY: But then there's fewer
20 customers who get anything.

21 MR. RUDERMAN: That's absolutely
22 true. I can't argue against that.

23 CMSR. BAILEY: Okay. Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: I think the

1 argument against it, wouldn't it be, Mr.
2 Ruderman, is that if you get too low, you end
3 up actually with an undersubscribed program?
4 Are we in any danger of that?

5 MR. RUDERMAN: I don't think so. I
6 think demand for solar really reached a tipping
7 point a few years, and now we're seeing -- I
8 think the PUC is receiving over 1,000
9 residential solar rebate applications a year.
10 So I think that even if it were reduced to
11 \$1,000, you would still see a healthy demand.

12 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: All right. Is
13 there anything else?

14 [No verbal response]

15 CHAIRMAN HONIGBERG: All right.
16 Seeing none, we will adjourn. Thank you for
17 your comments.

18 Oh, before I do -- sorry. Written
19 comments are still -- the period for
20 submitting written comments is still open. I
21 should have said that up front. Under the
22 secretarial letter that's dated
23 September 20th, written comments may be
24 submitted up to October 20th, which is 10

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days from now.

So, with that I will close the hearing. Thank all for your comments.

(Whereupon the hearing was adjourned at 2:40 p.m..)

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