

# WEC Announces Rate Increase in 2019 at Community Meeting

*Declining market value of WEC's renewable energy credits behind increase of 5.49 percent. Rate redesign, Button Up, Coventry expansion also discussed at Groton meeting*



Angela Manning of Orange seldom misses a Community Meeting. "It's important to support the people who try to support us," she said.

**A**t WEC's annual Community Meeting, WEC Board President Barry Bernstein and General Manager Patty Richards announced that the Co-op is forced to apply for a rate increase in 2019, largely due to the dropping cost of renewable energy credits, or RECs.

The October 25 meeting in Groton was attended by about a dozen and a half members. After dinner, the proposed increase was first on Bernstein and Richards' agenda. The Co-op's last rate increase went into effect July 2018.

Because WEC's portfolio is 100 percent renewable, it is able to sell renewable energy credits on the market to other utilities looking to make their own portfolios greener. RECs have different quality levels, like maple syrup. In order to make the economics work, WEC has traditionally sold a portion of its highest quality credits and bought back credits that are lower quality, though still green. It allows the

*It's a classic supply and demand situation. What's happened in the Massachusetts market is the demand [for RECs] has dried up.*

— Patty Richards

Co-op to sell its renewable product on the market and make electricity cheaper for its members. And unlike carbon credits, with which they're often confused, RECs aren't a way for other utilities to buy a clean image while still using dirty power. Instead, all RECs

represent displacement of fossil fuel or otherwise unsustainable power sources, since the grid can only transmit as much power as is needed at any given time.

However, more and more renewables have come online in recent years. That's a good thing, but it means the market for RECs is flooded. "It's a classic supply and demand situation," Richards explained. "What's happened in the Massachusetts market is the demand has dried up."

None of this takes WEC's leadership by surprise. "That money from RECs has been a good cushion

*continued on page 4*

# Two Major Snow Storms Hit Vermont In November

*Heavy snow causes repeat outages. Tens of thousands affected statewide; 5,500 WEC outages at peak*

**I**n their President and General Manager's discussion on page 3, Barry Bernstein and Patty Richards discuss the mid-November snowstorm. Then, right as we were wrapping up this issue, another storm of heavy, wet snow hit Vermont on November 26-28: Winter Storm Bruce. Crews are working into December to repair lines and restore power.

It's yet another major, multi-day storm event. Heavy snow and cold temperatures mean sagging lines and tree limbs – a recipe for repeat outages. Some forecasters are already calling this storm one of the worst in recent years.

"This walloped us," said General Manager Richards. "We have snow

weighing down our lines and blowing fuses, we have trees bending and breaking under the snow weight. Heavy snow falls and weighs down the trees and lines, causing outages. As the weather changes and trees and lines offload their snow, we have repeat outages. And then it snows again."

WEC's crews are working around the clock and will be repairing lines and restoring power for several days. Several other municipal and cooperative utilities sent mutual aid. Stowe Electric and Burlington Electric sent two and four lineworkers, respectively; municipal utilities from Littleton, Middleton, and Wakefield,

*continued on page 7*

**Washington Electric Cooperative**  
 East Montpelier, VT 05651

**Inside**

**Considering running for WEC's Board of Directors?** Start planning now: deadlines are in February. P. 5.

**WEC is turning 80!** We're looking for your stories and holding a photo contest to celebrate and commemorate. Details p. 7 and 8.

**Holidays are about community.** So is WEC. Learn more about WEC's caring efforts on p. 8.

*Space heaters may keep you (and your furry friend) toasty, but in our climate, it can come at a steep cost. Pennies per day to operate? Not exactly. Learn more - and how WEC can help your family stay warm - on p. 2.*

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# Space Heaters: Low Maintenance, High Cost

Say you live in one of Vermont's old farmhouses. When the mercury plunges this time of year, you notice all those drafts and cold spots. It can be tempting to plug in a space heater or two – sometimes necessary, to keep pipes from freezing. After all, many of them advertise they operate for mere pennies per day.

The trouble is, the manufacturer might make that claim based on testing the device in Florida, not in January in Vermont. It's fudgy advertising Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden has heard before. Here, that space heater can double or triple your daily kWh load. With a space heater plugged in, "it's nothing for your use to



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go up to 40-60 kWh per day, and the Vermont state average kWh per day is 22. That's a huge jump," observed Golden.

That leads to cold-weather related spikes in member bills. A standard 1500 watt space heater left to run 24 hours a day adds about eight and a half dollars a day to your monthly bill. That could add 250 dollars to your

monthly bill, and that is a lot of money. "It takes people by surprise because they've heard it costs pennies per day. Well, not in Vermont," said Golden.

Which is why, if your WEC bill leaps during the cold months and you call the Member Services team for assistance, they'll probably ask you first whether you've been doing anything differently - such as using a space heater.

## Diagnosing the source

The problem is simple: we need to stay warm when it's cold. Golden is no different from other WEC members in that regard. Last year, during the deep freeze, she was forced to use space heaters to keep pipes from freezing in her sheep barn. Her next bill was eight times her average bill. The only difference is, she wasn't surprised by the high cost.

The Member Services team tries to keep consumer-members from being surprised, too. They send out high bill notices when a household or business is showing use 20 percent or more above average. When the member calls to inquire, the team does some diagnostic work to determine why the member's energy use is rising.

Often, the next step is a call to Products & Services Director Bill Powell, known throughout WEC country as the Energy Coach. Powell

counsels members that while space heaters are easy to use, there's a real tradeoff. "The convenience of a space heater can be outweighed by the cost to operate it," he said. "There are no good units. There are bad units, meaning some are less effective than others."

Members skeptical about what is drawing power – that "pennies per day" claim is awfully hard to shake – can use a digital kWh meter to determine the cause. WEC has a number of small meters Powell regularly loans out to members. Calling it the "do-it-yourself" option, he said, "When a member has a question about load, I send them in the mail. The member plugs it into the face of the meter. Then you have evidence" to determine which device is causing the increase in load. Powell is quick to caution that the device only addresses 120 volt devices and appliances – not 240 volt appliances, like electric dryers or water pumps.

## Economic catch-22

Golden pointed out that a lot of space heater use comes from an economic catch-22. That is, other sources of home heating, like oil, propane, or wood, require pre-payment. You need to purchase the fuel before you can heat your space with it. Electric heat, on the other hand, is paid for only after it is used.

*continued on page 6*

## Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, at 224-2332.

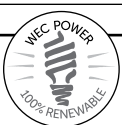
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Plant Accountant Sy Daubenspeck and General Manager Patty Richards fill their shopping carts during the Stuff-A-Truck food drive. Every year WEC's Community Fund donates 1,000 dollars worth of food to the drive, which benefits the Central Vermont Salvation Army Emergency Food Shelf.

## Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop) or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.





**President's and General Manager's Message**

# Crash in REC Market Leads Co-op to File for 5.49 Percent Rate Increase

*Also: November storms and outages; new rate design will help reduce impact of future rate increases; facing down the emerald ash borer; taking care of each other this holiday season*

**Rate increase**

**Patty:** We filed with the Public Utility Commission (PUC) on November 15 for rates to go into effect January 1, 2019. It's an increase of 5.49 percent. This is driven predominantly by the REC market collapsing. It's really like a single cost line issue.

The REC price was in the mid-20 dollar range six months ago. It plummeted and we're down to four dollars now for RECs sold in 2018. Think of it like this: we collected 2.5 million dollars in REC revenue last year, and this year we're down to 1.6 million.

**Barry:** We had to go in for this rate increase in such a short time as a result of a collapse in the REC market over a period of only a few months.

**Patty:** Our labor costs are in check, our expenses are in check, we're keeping pace on all the other expenses. It's just this one thing. We're laser focused on expenses and there's no way we could avoid an increase.

**Barry:** As a cooperative we just have to cover our expenses. We're not concerned with profits.

**How new rate design softens future rate increases**

**Barry:** The board and management have begun a vision process for the next decade or 15 years. One thing that came up, Roy [Folsom, board member from Cabot] pointed out: "We haven't stopped wanting to conserve energy – we're just broadening the definition of the energy we want to conserve." Our legislative mandate is to expand



*Until we get the rate redesign in place, we're going to continue to have rate increase pressures. The rate redesign won't eliminate the pressure, but it will help reduce the size of the increases, because every month we collect more in the fixed cost piece in the monthly bill.*

– Patty Richards

the energy we want to conserve into fossil fuels.

People are going to make appliance, heating, and vehicle changes over the next decade or two as a normal course of replacement as things wear out.

**Patty:** As we talk rate design, we're also talking about all fuels: electric, heating, and gasoline. If you electrify, yes, your electric bill will increase, but your total energy costs and your carbon footprint will decrease.

We've got these rate increases going on while we're doing a rate redesign. Until we get the rate redesign in place, we're going to continue to have these rate increase pressures. The rate redesign won't eliminate the pressure, but it will help reduce the size of the increases, because

every month we collect more in the fixed cost piece in the monthly bill. We're still going to have rate increases,

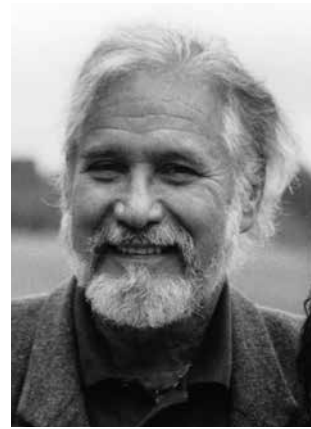
but the redesign will lessen the percentage.

**Barry:** It will lessen the impact on the percentage of rate increases.

**Impacts from unavoidable costs**

**Patty:** We had a nasty mid-November wet snowstorm. The weekend before the wet snow came in, we had between Friday, November 9, and Sunday, November 11 a series of outages affecting anywhere from 500-800 members. Then the wet snow came in on Tuesday on the heels of the weekend mess, and we got hit with heavy, wet snow loading on the lines and tree branches. We had over 90 different places we had to go to fix something, like a fuse opening up.

**Barry:** The amazing thing about this storm – at one time we had 2,500 people out, and the largest we had in any one spot was



*The amazing thing about this [mid-November] storm – at one time we had 2,500 people out, and the largest we had in any one spot was 100. In some cases we had just 5 or 10 people out. You can imagine how that spreads us thin over 1,300 miles of distribution line.*

– Barry Bernstein

100. In some cases we had just 5 or 10 people out. You can imagine how that spreads us thin with employees needing to fix every break over 1,300 miles of distribution line.

**Patty:** We had a lot of onesie-twosies. They were sprinkled all along the ends of the lines.

This was not just a WEC issue – all Vermont utilities had outages. GMP, VEC, and it hit south as well. We got help from Stowe and BED on November 14 and cleared everything up by about 3 pm.

**Barry:** I have heard comments from members about our outages during these kinds of events. I want to remind people we have eight members per mile which is in some of the most rural and forested

land in the United States. It's where we live. If you live in Manhattan, you don't have these issues.

**Patty:** We always want people to have a plan. Know what your issues are: if you have medication that needs to be refrigerated, if you have a backup person you can contact to stay with. Think about that in advance because you never know when we're going to get hit with a multi-day storm.

I want to thank all the employees for all the work that they do. All the work, all the dedication, getting here early, staying late. I can't thank our employees enough for all the work they do.

*Editorial note:* Just before this issue went to press, Winter Storm Bruce caused multi-day outages in WEC territory and throughout the state. See more on the front page and in the box at left.

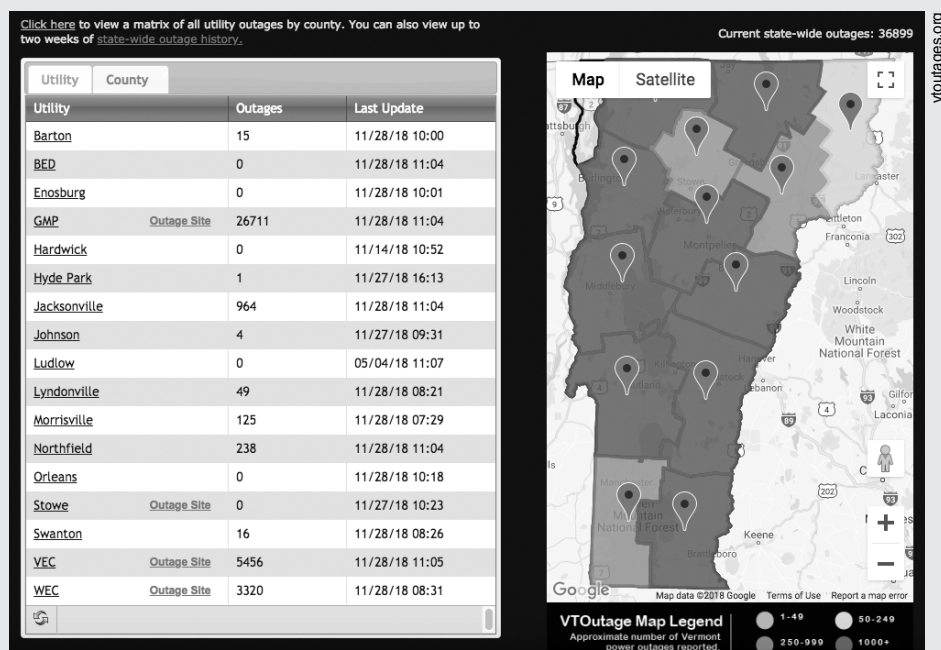
**Emerald ash borer**

**Patty:** A new rate pressure on our near term horizon is from a nasty bug: we need to address issues caused by the emerald ash borer beetle, which is attacking trees all across Vermont. The issue with the ash tree is it's three to ten times more expensive to take down a dead tree than a live tree. The

**Outages from Winter Storm Bruce**

Utilities throughout Vermont saw thousands of outages between November 26-28. Some of these are projected to last for days – possibly after this issue goes to press. Some forecasters are already calling this storm one of the worst in recent years. WEC's crews, with help from mutual aid crews from Vermont, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, will be working through the weekend to repair lines and restore power.

The nature of the storm caused repeat outages around the state. At peak, WEC saw up to 5,500 outages. VEC also had around 5,500 out at peak. GMP peaked at about 35,000, and announced they had about 90,000 customers lose power total. See more on p. 1.



**Did You Know?**

**WEC's Community Fund** is funded entirely by members who donate their capital credit refunds. Last year, the Fund gave nearly 38,500 dollars to small nonprofits supporting causes in our service area, including the Stuff-A-Truck benefit for the Central Vermont Salvation Army Emergency Food Shelf. See p. 8 for more.

*continued on page 6*





## Community Meeting

continued from page 1

for us,” said Bernstein. And, he said, “we’re not going to get hit by the full impact of the drop,” thanks to Richards’ careful work diversifying the Co-op’s market portfolio to hedge against exposure to fluctuation.

Gary Eggleston of East Barre said he’d thought more wind and solar coming online would make prices drop. Not when those renewables are competing with WEC on the REC market, explained Bernstein. But renewable generation collectively owned by WEC, such as the Coventry plant, does help members’ wallets, he pointed out, because the Co-op is locked into those rates.

### Rate redesign

The other reason behind rising rates is the Co-op’s declining kilowatt hour sales - as members conserve more or install net metering, they buy less electricity. Declining sales are also a factor in the rate redesign that WEC’s board is working to implement. To better manage uncertainty in kWh sales while continuing to emphasize conservation and to help members minimize fossil fuel emissions, WEC is changing its rate design. “What we’re looking at is changing the formula. We’re collecting the same amount of money. Our plan is to stabilize the revenue portion,” explained Richards. Part of that is a greater monthly fee - of 25 dollars up from 13 dollars - that supports the Co-op’s infrastructure costs. WEC has high infrastructure costs because it has so few members along each mile of line, and because so much of its line is located in rugged terrain offroad.

The Co-op is committed to combating climate change. The



Groton Recreation Committee members Lisa Hart (left) and Carrie Peters (right), along with Linda Nunn, Janet Page, Anne Hatch, and Torie Peters, provided dinner for WEC’s Community Meeting at the Groton Town Center. The Groton Rec Committee’s mission is to provide free recreation activities for everyone. It’ll receive a contribution from WEC for hosting.

state also mandates that electric utilities help move members who use fossil-fuel burning home heating and transportation over to using cleaner (or in WEC’s case, entirely clean) electric energy. So to incentivize this clean energy use, WEC is dropping the kWh price. “We’re going to drop from ten to eight cents [per kWh],” said Richards, “but [the low use block] is going to go from 200 kWh to 100 kWh.”

“I’ve been working really hard to stay under 200 kWh,” said one member.

Richards nodded sympathetically. “You’re in the bracket that’s going to go up,” she told him. Board member Annie Reed, whose use is also 200 kWh or less, chimed in to say the average increase in their bracket will

be about 13 dollars. That’s about even with the increase in the monthly fee. The shortening of the low use block is somewhat offset by lowering kWh rates.

Bernstein, whose use is also low, told the group, “I’ve had to change my thinking about this.” Over time, he’s said, he’s weatherized and insulated his home to make it as efficient as he can. “Our footprint has gotten as small as it can get. But in order to get people off fossil fuels, you can’t do it at 24 cents per kWh.” As cars or furnaces need replacing, he said, he hopes the Co-op’s incentives will help members choose efficient electric options, like electric vehicles and cold-climate heat pumps, over traditional combustion models.

Board member Roy Folsom pointed out another dimension in redesigning rates to make them more fair. “The cost of a transformer is 700 dollars,” he said. “If you have a 50 dollar electric bill, it takes a lot longer for us to pay for that transformer, because the equipment costs are the same.”

A member recalled that Northeast Telephone used to have a local rate close to its Barre headquarters, and outside a certain radius, a mileage fee would kick in. She asked if this model might work for the Co-op.

It’s just not a match with the mission or model of a rural electric cooperative, responded Bernstein, citing as an example the project to bring greater reliability to members along a spur line in Northfield (“Reliability is About to Get a Whole Lot Better in Northfield,” September 2018). “Our goal is to make sure people have reliability, and to share” the costs - and benefits - of accomplishing that, he said.

Angela Manning of Orange wondered how people on fixed incomes would do with the rate redesign. Bernstein responded that some folks on fixed incomes are high users, so they would see their bills go down. And indeed, he said, the board is looking at creative ways to support low-income members. In other parts of the country, he suggested, some utilities use prepaid meters. The whole conversation has been a tough one, he admitted. “I told the board I thought [rate redesign] was going to be the hardest decision we’ll ever make,” he said.

### Other items on the table

Michael Raboin of Orange thanked Bill Powell, WEC’s Products & Services Director, for helping him improve his home efficiency and save in the process. “We went through Button Up.

## A Co-op Family Welcome from Groton

Each year, the Co-op hosts a Community Meeting in one of the 41 towns that make up its service area. WEC works with a local organization to host the dinner and meeting, and in return makes a contribution to their cause.

This year, the Groton Rec Committee - rec for recreation, that is, not renewable energy credits - hosted at the town center. Groton, on the southern border of Caledonia County, is a rural town with a good chunk of its landmass taken up by state forest and an old-Vermont feel. With just over 1,000 residents, it describes itself on a roadside sign as a place “where a small town is like a large family.”

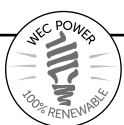
That civic pride and hospitality were in full display as members of the committee, including town clerk Linda Nunn, Janet Page, Lisa Hart, Anne Hatch, and Carrie and Torie Peters, cooked and served a spaghetti supper with salad, rolls, and for dessert, brownie sundaes. General Manager Patty Richards loved the home-cooked vegetarian sauce option so much she was sent home with an extra container of it.

Groton Rec Committee member Lisa Hart said their mission is to provide free recreation opportunities for everyone. That includes yoga and zumba, floor hockey and Latin dance. People come from miles around to participate in activities that are healthy, social, and fun as well as being free, Hart said. She’s not yet sure what WEC’s contribution will fund: “There’s a lot of stuff that needs upkeep,” she said, like the town ball field’s bleachers and dugout.

Board members in attendance, including Barry Bernstein of East Calais, Don Douglas of Orange, Roy Folsom of Cabot, and Annie Reed of Marshfield, extended warm appreciation to their host town. “Groton says they’re a small town that feels like a big family. Which is perfect, because we’re the small co-op that feels like a big family,” said Douglas.



Peter Lyon of Groton at the 2018 Community Meeting. As the president of Groton’s Community Club, a regular beneficiary of WEC’s Community Fund, he says General Manager Richards and the Community Fund are “always there to help.”





We spent well over 7,000 dollars in efficiency improvement, and WEC and Efficiency Vermont paid a third of that," he said. Powell acknowledged Raboin's proactivity in seeking him out. "It starts with you," he reminded the audience.

Gary Eggleston wondered where WEC leadership stood on the question of a Vermont carbon tax. Bernstein said he thought it would happen eventually, but that Vermont would first watch larger areas, like Washington State, implement theirs to see how it might work. "We'll see a lot of local governments looking for a way to address climate change. The question is how," he predicted.

Richards said WEC territory is feeling the effects of climate change now – "Three FEMA-recoverable storms in a five year period," she said, pointing to Winter Storm Damon of 2014 and the late October windstorm of 2017.

Angela Manning said that during the windstorm, a WEC truck, parked on Orange Heights during the outage, had a very responsive crew member answering all the questions of members without power. "It made people feel better because there was someone there to answer questions," she said.

Eggleston, concerned about wild ladyslippers growing near a transmission line near his property, asked about WEC's herbicide policy in its rights of way. It turned out that the transmission line was a VELCO line not owned by WEC, but Bernstein and Richards assured him that WEC does not use any herbicides on its rights of way. "We use chainsaws and hand clearing," said Richards. "We've held strong against using herbicides," added Bernstein. WEC is in fact the only utility in the state that categorically refuses to use herbicides in its rights of way.

Peter Lyon of Groton wondered if the Co-op is participating in the Coventry landfill expansion. "We have not taken a position, because this is the landfill's issue," said Richards. "That said, we have an investment in it," since two-thirds of the Co-op's energy comes from methane gas produced by the landfill. "[Landfill owner Casella Waste Systems] has been very responsive about managing waste in a responsible fashion."

Bernstein said, "[Casella's] responsibility is to respond to the state through Act 250," and added "I respect them for approaching us," to use the methane instead of just flaring the greenhouse gas into the atmosphere.

From there, Richards and Bernstein checked off a few timely reminders and thanked members to close the meeting. On the near-anniversary of the 2017 windstorm, Bernstein asked community members willing to pitch in with storm meals to contact the Co-op. When a bad storm causes crews to work around the clock on repair and restoration, the Co-op feeds them at the Old Brick Church next door to WEC headquarters in East Montpelier, and volunteer cooks and servers are welcomed. "It means a lot to our staff to see board members and the community feeding them," said Bernstein.

In November, Richards said, one of



Gary Eggleston of East Barre listens to General Manager Patty Richards and Board President Barry Bernstein's presentation at WEC's Community Meeting in Groton on October 25. WEC is facing a 5.49 percent rate increase as a result of the crashing market for renewable energy credits (RECs).


the key benefits of Co-op membership takes effect: capital credit refunds. This year "the board essentially doubled what it is giving back in capital credits: 750,000 dollars," she said. Members in good standing will see refunds as a

credit on their November bills.

She also put in a plug for WEC's Community Fund. Entirely funded by donations of capital credit refunds and requiring zero overhead costs, the Community Fund supports

causes within WEC's service area. "We give out small grants to small local nonprofits. It's really the basic stuff. Helping people so they don't fall through the cracks," she explained. Over the last few years, she said, the generosity of members donating their capital credits, once or in perpetuity, has grown the fund from 20,000 to 50,000 dollars in annual donations. Members can sign up to donate credits through [wec.coop](http://wec.coop) or by calling 802-223-5245 or 800-932-5245.

Peter Lyon is president of the Groton Community Club, a regular beneficiary of WEC's Community Fund. After the meeting ended, he said his main event, the annual chicken pie supper and Fall Foliage Festival, is a 63-year tradition. "The money I get for advertising is a really big help," he said. "Patty is always there to help." The Groton Community Club sponsors town activities and provides scholarships to members of Groton's graduating high school class.

Angela Manning has lived on Co-op lines for 30 years. She said after the meeting she tries to attend the Co-op's Community Meeting every year, if she can. "I think they were very informative. They did their homework," she said. "I think it's important to support the people who try to support us." 

## Board Candidate and Bylaws Petition Deadline Announcement

**Washington Electric Co-op turns 80 in 2019!**

The Co-op will host its 80th Annual Membership Meeting on Thursday, May 2, at WEC's Operations Center in East Montpelier.

Considering running for a seat on WEC's board of directors? It's time to start planning. Every year, elections are held for three of WEC's nine board seats. In 2019, incumbents Barry Bernstein, Roy Folsom, and Annie Reed are all expected to seek reelection. Any member of the Co-op is eligible to run.

Contact WEC Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 to request a candidate's packet that contains the materials necessary to run for a seat on the board. The deadline to submit all

materials, including a petition signed by a minimum of 25 WEC members, is Sunday, March 3.

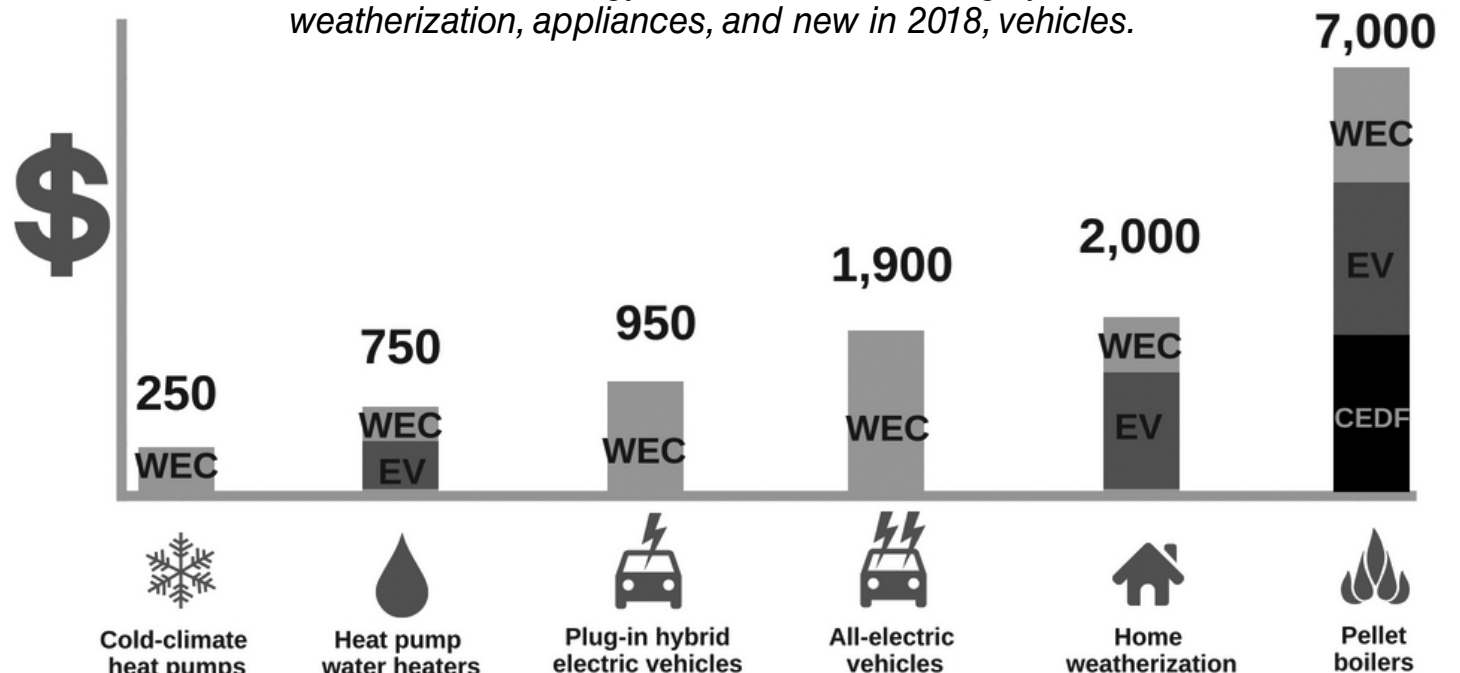
In March, *Co-op Currents* begins Board election coverage, with candidate introductions, areas of interest and expertise, and policy priorities.

Members of the Co-op have the right to petition for changes to the Co-op's bylaws. The bylaws are available on [washingtonelectric.coop](http://washingtonelectric.coop), or you may contact WEC for a hard copy. To petition for a change, you are required to collect signatures in support from a minimum of 50 WEC members. Petitions to bylaws changes are due February 10.

Look for more information about board elections and bylaws in the January 2019 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

## What's My Incentive to Button Up in 2018?

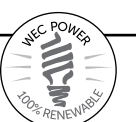
*WEC's Button Up home energy efficiency incentive program helps members afford energy-efficient home heating systems, weatherization, appliances, and new in 2018, vehicles.*



EV = Efficiency Vermont; CEDF = Clean Energy Development Fund. Plug-in hybrid and all-electric vehicle incentives are available only to members who qualify as low- or moderate-income. Additional incentives may be available. Before you buy any new appliance or vehicle, contact Energy Coach Bill Powell to learn how much you can save.

802-224-2329

[energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop)





## Manager's and President's Report

continued from page 3

only solution is to cut them when they are healthy. So it's a new expense for our tree trimming budget we're going to have to address, because if we don't address it, it will be three to ten times more expensive to deal with it later.

**Barry:** We're estimating it could be more than 1.5 million dollars over the next 10 years to deal with this issue. Add to that: most of WEC's territory is forest.

## Taking good care


**Patty:** Snow and ice aside, I love the holiday season. This is the time of year it's important to remember others around you. Not everybody has family – this can be stressful. It's important to remember we are part of a community. Our neighbors need us, too. So whether that means taking some time this season for volunteering, working at soup kitchens, while we celebrate with our families it's important to think about our neighbors, too.

This is core to WEC's mission as a cooperative. In the "A Co-op Family Welcome" sidebar on p. 4, Don

[Douglas] says the reason it's so great Groton hosted this year's Community Meeting is because that community prides itself on feeling like a family – just the same way we feel here at the Co-op. We take care of each other.

We have boxes here at the office and warehouse collecting new toys for Toys for Tots. Stuff-A-Truck is a food collection for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and that's funded by the Community Fund. The Adopt-A-Family is one the employees really get behind – it's a military family in need. This effort is funded by employees, board,

and vendors. There's more on these programs on p. 8. It's so important we make the extra effort to take good care of each other this time of year.

**Barry:** Talking about the holidays makes me so appreciative of my road. There are a few people on my road who have had health issues, including myself. Everyone on my road went out of their way to check in on folks when they needed it. It's not limited to a particular time of year, but right now I'm very aware of it and very thankful for my neighbors. 

## Space Heaters

continued from page 2

"It's tough," she said. "When people are in a bind, space heaters are what they turn to." It's a short term solution with long term implications. Not usually meant to heat more than a small, closed area, those space heaters then drive up bills that can become a real burden for people already on very tight budgets.

Adding to the stress, Golden said, is that there's a misconception that electric service can't be cut off for nonpayment during the winter months. It's a last resort, and the Co-op really hates to do it, she said, but "it's not impossible to get disconnected over the winter – there are rules about it, but it can still happen."


## Solutions

Nobody wants it to go that far. The Member Services team and Energy Coach are available to help.

Golden and Powell both say to start by diagnosing the problem. MSRs can look at your SmartHub readings and Powell's digital kWh meters can help identify which devices contribute an outside amount to your power load – humidifiers and dehumidifiers are also frequent culprits, Golden added.

For members with enough of a financial cushion to get ahead of the issue, Powell's advice is to get a thermal audit. "If you're not comfortable in part of your building, that's a red flag," he advised. "The first order of business is to look at how much you're using in heating fuels." A thermal audit, he said, will identify why those cold spots are there, and what you can do to shore up your home against them.

Members with less choice – renters, those with limited incomes – can call Member Services to arrange a budget that evens out electric costs over the course of a year. "We base it on the previous 12 months' average," Golden explained. It means generally higher bills during the summer – but it's also the relief of consistency, with no surprises in the hundreds of dollars during the winter.

Members having trouble paying for fuel can also call 211. That's the state's support line: it's free, confidential, and connects Vermonters with agencies and nonprofits that offer the resources and services they need. 

## Did You Know?

WEC is the only utility in the state that does not use herbicides in its Rights of Way.

## Important Annual Notice Regarding Herbicide Use in the Maintenance of Electric Utility Rights-of-Way

The Vermont Public Utility Commission has set forth rules under PUC 3.600 pertaining to the use of herbicides in the maintenance of electric utility rights-of-way. Each spring, herbicide applications may begin on or after April 1st. These rules afford you important rights and duties. Vermont electric utilities maintain electric line rights-of-way with several methods, including the selective use of herbicides on trees and brush. They also encourage low-growing shrubs and trees which will crowd tall-growing species and, thus, minimize the use of herbicides. Methods of herbicide applications may include stump, stem injection, basal, soil, and foliar. Only electric utility rights-of-way that have tall-growing tree species with the potential of threatening the electric utility system are treated.

If you reside on or own property in Vermont within 1000 feet of an electric utility right-of-way:

1. Sign up to receive written notification from your local electric utility of plans to apply herbicide on any ROW within 1000 feet of your property or the property where you reside. Check nearby poles for tags identifying the utility and/or pole number, complete the form below and submit it to your local electric utility by mail before February 15th, 2019 to be added to the notification list. If determined to be qualified, you will receive notification from the utility at least 30 days prior to scheduled herbicide application.
2. You are responsible to make your local electric utility aware of the location of any potentially affected water supply, and of any other environmentally sensitive area where herbicide application ought to be avoided.
3. Watch and listen for public service announcements in newspapers and radio ads noting upcoming herbicide applications.
4. Check with your local electric utility regarding the vegetation management cycle near your particular line.
5. You have the right to request, in writing, that the utility refrain from applying herbicides in the process of clearing the right-of-way, and the utility may offer alternatives such as herbicide stump treatment or herbicide stem injections.
6. You have the right to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever at no cost to you if the type of lines in the right-of-way are distribution lines, bringing electric service directly to individual customers.
7. You have the right to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever by paying a \$30 administration fee if the type of lines in the right-of-way are transmission lines or sub-transmission lines, bringing electricity to or between substations.

WEC is required to post this notice per the Public Utilities Commission. However, WEC does not use herbicides in Rights of Way. Please contact WEC with questions: 802-223-5245 or 800-932-5245.

## WEC Can Help You Take Control of Winter Bill Spikes

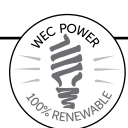
Whether you never use a space heater again, or can't imagine living without one, Energy Coach Bill Powell and Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden recommend being proactive instead of reactive when it comes to staying warm. The answer is different for each case:

- **Not sure what's causing bill spikes?** Diagnose the problem. Member Services Representatives and the Energy Coach can look at your SmartHub readings and send you a digital kWh meter to identify which devices are using the most power.
- **Can you afford to get ahead of the problem?** Get a thermal audit. The Energy Coach recommends a comprehensive approach: thermal audit, and weatherize accordingly. "You're paying for it now or later. Might as well do it right," he said.
- **Is your bill reasonable in summer, but hard to pay in the winter?** Call to set up a budget. Member Services can create an annual budget for you by averaging your use over the previous 12 months. "You have winter and summer use both in there, so it makes it more consistent," said Golden, with the advantage of no surprises.
- **Need help paying for fuel?** Call 211. "211 is designed to help people through all kinds of situations. They can let people know what kinds of options are available," said Golden.

## ENERGY COACH

### Tip: Check Out a Digital Meter from the Energy Coach's Library

WEC has digital kWh meters it loans out to members. If you're using more energy than usual and want to know which device is using that power, call or email the Energy Coach and he'll send you one. Digital meters measure 120 volt devices only. 802-224-2329 / energycoach@wec.coop







The power – and danger – of heavy snow. In Worcester, Tim Newcomb captured a snowy tree limb dangling over a power line – in the very area Right of Way crews trimmed after the October 2017 windstorm. Sometimes heavy snow bends a tree outside the ROW so far over it becomes an unexpected hazard to the lines. At right, crews at work repairing an outage caused by a broken limb on Minister Brook Road in Worcester.

**Snowstorms**

continued from page 1

Massachusetts sent seven; and Adams Co-op in Pennsylvania sent six later in the week.

“Even though we’re gaining ground, we’ve been losing ground. The last

time we brought on this many mutual aid crews was Winter Storm Damon in 2014,” said Bernstein, WEC’s Board President.

By Thursday morning, WEC crews were still chasing down 189 different outages. WEC’s rural terrain means crews are out walking lines in

snowshoes in dense, deep, unpacked snow. “Brent [Lilley, Operations & Construction Services Manager] said the guys are really tired. They not only have to go out in snowshoes to find the outage, they then have to climb the pole,” said Bernstein.

At peak, WEC saw about 5,500

members lose power in this storm. Elsewhere in the state, Green Mountain Power said a total of 90-100,000 or more of their customers lost power, with about 35,000 out at one time.

Expect to read more in the January issue of *Co-op Currents*.

**80 Years of WEC: Moments in Cooperative Electricity History**

**2019 marks WEC’s 80th anniversary!**

To celebrate, all year we’ll spotlight important events and people throughout WEC’s history.

Got a story? Remember when? Let us know!

Send a message to [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop), drop by the office, or send to Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: *Co-op Currents*.



**NOTICE TO WASHINGTON ELECTRIC CO-OP MEMBERS**

**Notice of Proposed Tariff Changes**

On November 15, 2018, Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. filed a request with the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) for an increase in retail rates of 5.49%. The main driver of this increase in rates are declining revenues from renewable energy credits.

This change will take effect with power sold on and after January 1, 2019, and will be reflected on bills received in January. If the PUC opens a formal investigation of this matter, this increase will be shown as a separate surcharge on bills until the PUC finishes its investigation.

To determine the impact on your individual bill, use the present and proposed rates column and your average monthly consumption. For example, a residential member using an average of 500 kWh a month would calculate his or her bill as follows:

	Present Rates	Proposed Rates
Customer Charge	\$13.45	\$14.19
First 200 kWh	200 x \$.10759	200 x \$.11350
Usage over 200 kWh	300 x \$.24022	300 x \$.25341
	\$107.04	\$112.91

Any interested person may examine the rate increase filing via ePUC at: <https://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/87>. The filing is also available at the Vermont Public Utility Commission and the Washington Electric Cooperative office during normal business hours. Comments regarding the rate filing may be submitted to the Public Utility Commission by December 17, 2018 via mail at 112 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05620-2701, via email at [puc.clerk@vermont.gov](mailto:puc.clerk@vermont.gov), or through the e-PUC at <https://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/32>.

	Present Rates	Proposed Rates
<b>RESIDENTIAL</b>		
Customer Charge	\$13.45	\$14.19
0-200 kWh/month	0.10759	0.11350
Over 200 kWh/month	0.24022	0.25341
<b>SMALL COMMERCIAL</b>		
Customer Charge	\$13.40	\$14.14
Per kWh/month	0.19667	0.20747
<b>LARGE POWER</b>		
Customer Charge	\$22.87	\$24.13
Per kWh/month	0.10441	0.11014
Per kW/month	14.79	15.60
<b>TIME OF DAY</b>		
Customer Charge	\$13.45	\$14.19
0-60 kWh/month - Peak	0.10759	0.11350
Over 60 kWh/month - Peak	0.26591	0.28051
0-140 kWh/month – Off Peak	0.10759	0.11350
Over 140 kWh/month – Off Peak	0.22613	0.23854
<b>SECURITY LIGHT</b>		
Per 100 Watt Light/month	\$20.93	\$22.08
Per 400 Watt Light/month	41.85	44.15
Per 50-60 Watt – LED	20.91	22.06
Per 91 Watt – LED	20.08	21.18
Per 87 Watt – LED	19.72	20.80





# WEC Brings Comfort and Joy to Central Vermont Neighbors Through Holiday Programs

*Members invited to support toy drive in 2018*

“Every person who wants to celebrate the holidays deserves a Thanksgiving dinner, and a Christmas morning of cheer and magic,” said General Manager Patty Richards. “So WEC is here to help. The holidays can be really stressful for people and it’s important for those of us who can to care for our neighbors. That’s the purpose of holidays, and it’s the purpose of a cooperative.”

*It’s important for those of us who can to care for our neighbors. That’s the purpose of holidays, and it’s the purpose of a cooperative.*

– Patty Richards

closest to the 250 dollar mark in the checkout line. The exercise is lighthearted, but also serious. “It reminds you how hard it is to shop on a budget,” observed Richards.

Douglas, WEC’s treasurer, cheerfully acknowledged he must have been feeling generous, as the value

of items in his cart was close to 300 dollars. Gonier won the bet with 214.86 dollars worth of goods in her cart.

WEC’s Community Fund’s coffers are filled by members who donate their capital credit refunds. In 2017, the fund awarded more than 38,500 dollars to Central Vermont causes. To learn how to donate capital credits, visit [wec.coop](http://wec.coop) or call 802-223-5245 or 800-932-5245.

## Join WEC in Toys for Tots toy drive

Though Adopt-A-Family is employee-driven, and Stuff-A-Truck is a recipient of the Community Fund, members are invited to participate in the Co-op’s toy drive. WEC is excited to participate in Toys for Tots again this year.

Toys for Tots works to make sure children in need receive toys for the holidays. The campaign accepts new, unwrapped toys for children from birth to age 15 years. It’s coordinated by Daniel Duffy from the Marine Corps Reserve.

For the past four years, WEC’s



*Elaine Gonier and Don Douglas share a laugh filling their shopping carts during the Stuff-A-Truck food drive. Every year, WEC’s Community Fund donates 1,000 dollars worth of food to the drive, and WEC teams compete to see whose cart is closest to 250 dollars. Gonier won the 2018 cart contest.*

WEC staff and board participate in several holiday programs annually. For eight years, the electric cooperative has sponsored the Christmas list of a veteran family in need through Adopt-A-Family. This year, individual staff, board, and vendors will again contribute to help bring the spirit of the season to a Central Vermont veteran family.

On November 15, WEC participated in the Stuff-A-Truck food drive to benefit the Central Vermont Salvation Army Emergency Food Shelf. The WEC Community Fund donates 1,000 dollars to purchase food for the drive; WEC employees donate their time to shop for and deliver the goods. This year, Richards, Member Services Representative Elaine Gonier, and Plant Accountant Sy Daubenspeck were joined by Board Treasurer Don Douglas on a trip to fill shopping carts and bring purchased items to fill the Stuff-A-Truck tractor trailer in Berlin.

Every year, WEC’s shoppers compete to see whose cart comes

friends generously filled boxes located at WEC’s office, 40 Church St, and at WEC’s Operations Center, 230 Fasset Road, East Montpelier, VT. Please stop by either location before December 15 to participate. Thank you!

“One of our purposes is to be of value to the community beyond just being an electric cooperative,” said Richards. “There are many ways

we can bring comfort and joy to our neighbors, as part of a cooperative and part of a community. My sincerest thanks to the members who contribute to our Community Fund and support our community year round, and to our employees, board, vendors, members, and friends who contribute to our various holiday causes.”

## Support WARMTH to Help Neighbors Heat their Homes

Every year, many Vermonters struggle to pay for home heating fuel. And as we see in the cautionary tale on p. 2, when people can’t afford to buy fuel, they sometimes rely on space heaters and other sources that are costlier in the long run.

WEC wants to help members and neighbors stay warm this winter without causing additional stress on already stretched pocketbooks. WARMTH can help. It’s Vermont’s home heating assistance program, funded by contributions from electric utility customers throughout the state, and operated locally by the Central Vermont Community Action Council.

There are a couple of ways WEC members can support WARMTH:

- Operation Round-Up is a monthly program that rounds your electric bill up to the next dollar.
- You can also authorize WEC to send slightly more – an extra dollar or five a month. This is a way to contribute a little bit at a time.
- You can contribute a one-time donation.
- Or you can do both: contribute a little bit each month and make a larger gift now.

To sign up, look for the Operation Round-Up box on your electric bill and initial it. If you’d like to add more, you can indicate that on the form. And you can always call Member Service Representatives at 802-223-5245 or 800-932-5245.

Thank you! It takes all of us to keep each other warm and our community strong.

## Annual Meeting Call for Photos and Contest

To celebrate WEC’s 80th anniversary, your Co-op is putting out a call for photos to display at this year’s Annual Meeting. The contest will have two categories: Historic WEC and WEC Today.

Historic WEC photos can include anything that had to do with life on WEC’s lines between 1919 and the present day.

To submit to the Historic WEC category, please send high quality scans to [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop) or mail hard copies to the WEC office: Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents / Historic WEC. Please include the photographer’s name, a description, and your contact information. If you would like your photos returned, please include a self-addressed envelope.

The WEC Today category is for digital images taken within WEC’s service area over the past few years. Any current member is eligible to enter.

To submit to the WEC Today category, please send high resolution digital images to [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop). Please include your name and contact information, a description, and identify the picture’s location. If you are submitting on behalf of another WEC member, please indicate you have permission to do so. Maximum three photos per photographer, and no previously published photos, please.

Winning photos will be displayed at the Annual Meeting and in *Co-op Currents*. Judges and prizes to be announced!

