



Board Asks Membership to Support Broadband Rollout and Grid Improvements

Proposed \$36.5 million low-interest federal loan to be paid for by CUD fiber leases, keeping access affordable

By the WEC Board of Directors

WEC's Board of Directors asks for our members' support to take out a low-interest \$36.5 million federal loan from the USDA's Rural Utility Service (RUS) program, our primary lender, to build a fiber communication network throughout our service territory. The purpose of this project is to expedite access to high speed broadband service for WEC members, to improve our electric service, and to prepare our grid for the future.

To achieve this vision, these updates must happen, either now or in a few years. This window of opportunity, negotiated with our partners, is certain to be the least expensive for our members and for broadband subscribers.

The opportunity before us today is much like that presented by the Rural Electrification Act in the 1930s that led to the founding of our Co-op. The availability of a low-interest federal loan, plus our partnerships with Communications

This is a once-in-a-generation chance to invest in our grid and to help connect the 72 percent of our members who lack high speed internet with affordable broadband providers.

Union Districts (CUDs) with access to grant funding, gives us a once-in-a-generation chance to invest in our grid and to help connect the 72 percent of our members who lack high speed internet with affordable broadband providers.

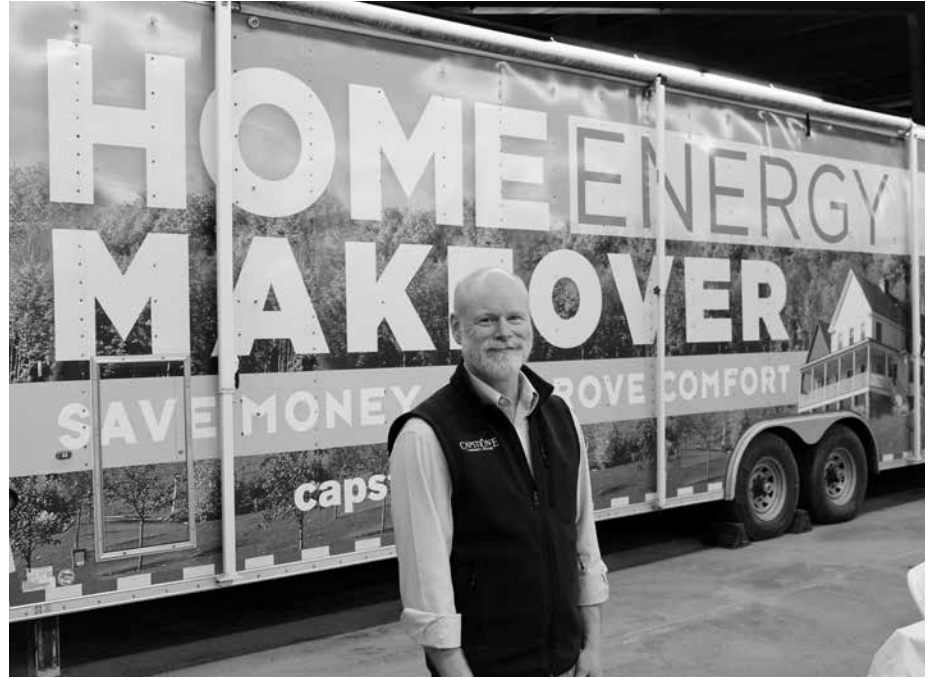
We ask for your support, and we also ask that you inform yourself

before pledging your support in the vote or poll to come. The topic is complex. If you have further questions after reading, please contact any member of WEC's Board of Directors: names and contact information are on page two.

Why is WEC asking for this?

As a co-op, WEC is attentive to our members' quality of life. High speed internet is now an essential service; yet most of our membership has inadequate service, or none at all. A 2019 study commissioned by Vermont's Department of Public Service found that 72 percent of WEC's members are unserved or

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Paul Zabriskie, Director of Weatherization and Climate Impact at Capstone, at WEC's 2019 Annual Meeting. New ARPA funding means for those who are income-eligible, Capstone offers weatherization audits and enhanced weatherization services for free.

Capstone Uses ARPA Funds to Weatherize Income-Eligible Households for Free

Recently, Vermont announced the arrival of \$7.9 million in American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds earmarked for weatherization assistance programs. "What that means, in the near term," said Paul Zabriskie, Director of Weatherization and Climate Impact at Capstone, "is we're able to really step up the pace of weatherization."

Capstone is the community action agency serving much of Central Vermont. Weatherization is one of its signature programs, which it pitches as a way to "save money and the planet." In other words, when it's 10

below and you live in a drafty home, your budget forces you to choose between buying food and staying warm, and when the fuel you burn goes straight out through leaky doors and roofs—weatherization can effectively reduce your bills, reduce emissions, and create a more comfortable, healthier home environment for you and your family.

But if actually getting the work done sounds like a series of obstacles, it doesn't have to be. Capstone provides wraparound services to income-eligible

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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Strategic thinking: Louis and Steve talk strategy, broadband, and more in Louis's first dialogue as GM. P. 2

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Ways to help: The seventh Cooperative Value is Concern for Community. Learn how WEC is helping—and how you can help, too, during the season of giving. P. 5.

Run for the Board: Participate in democracy. Call for your candidate packet today! P. 8.



Season of giving: WEC's Community Fund distributes thousands of dollars to small nonprofits in our service area. Donate your capital credit refunds to make a big difference. Pictured: Twin Valley Senior Center Executive Director Rita Copeland and board member Fred Wilber, featured in July's issue.

President's and General Manager's Message

Strategic Steps Forward

Louis Porter begins GM journey with WEC-wide strategic planning, assessing risk before broadband project goes before membership and regulators, storm preparedness, call for Board candidates, and the season of giving

Strategic start

Steve: The General Manager sets the process for operating the utility, bringing new skills and a new outlook in carrying out the WEC mission as determined and regularly reaffirmed by the Board of Directors. We're looking forward to Louis bringing his experience to our Co-op. At the same time, we thank Patty Richards for her contributions over the previous eight years.

Louis started at WEC on November 1. In early October, WEC held a future-oriented strategic training exercise, and it was great that Louis was able to fully participate in that. It's fortunate to have a new General Manager starting at the same time we are undertaking strategic planning for the next decade. The Board

is optimistic to be working together with Louis and WEC employees to update our long-term plan.

Louis: It was tremendously helpful and fun for me to be part of that conversation and learn about the Co-op, both the community and the organization itself, and to meet a lot of the people who work in the Co-op and alongside us, like those who joined us from the Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC). I can't think of a better way to get on the learning curve than to get some perspective this way. I found it extremely helpful, and the timing was great. It was really my introduction and my first engagement with the people here. I'm grateful for that.

Steve: This strategic process was an opportunity for everyone at the Co-op to let their hair down a bit and hear everybody's individual perspectives. And it was great to have professionals from the outside give perspective on what might be called standard operating practices at cooperatives around the country, so we can benefit from their experience and adapt it to our own WEC culture.

Louis: One of the things that struck me most about that process is sharing that this is a lived ideal: that part of the mission of a cooperative is to share knowledge and information and approaches with other co-ops. That was very apparent from the CFC folks: that they take very seriously, as WEC does, helping other co-ops in similar circumstances facing similar questions, even though the individual culture and the people within their co-ops are very different.

It was interesting and encouraging to me that that sharing of knowledge is available. It makes the task of learning what I need to learn a little less daunting and more approachable.

Steve: Louis, you picked up on general feelings of where we find consensus about what needs to be done in the future, and what we generally feel like we need to do as a cooperative. All those things were discussed in more than just a superficial way. Over the next several months we look forward to distilling some of these ideas, continuing to discuss them, and putting the best and most achievable ideas into action plans.

Louis: There seemed to be a lot of consensus on at least the broad categories of objectives and strategic goals of the Co-op, both from the staff and also from the management and Board. I guess I'm not surprised, but I was glad to see a lot of commonality there.

Steve: That's why these activities are so important. We may come to it from different directions, but we all recognize the same challenges and issues that lie before us. To talk about it together over a period of several days, reaffirming who we are and what our values are, is important to do as we get

caught up in the day to day challenges of running our member-owned Co-op.

Louis: In my first week here, the understanding among the staff of what it means to be a co-op, and the objectives and philosophy of the Co-op, are apparent in every aspect of the work and every conversation I've had. It's something the staff and Patty internalized, and that's great to see.

Broadband loan risks/benefits

Steve: We have weekly meetings of the WEC broadband team. I expect Louis will come to lead the group's efforts on this project as he gets up to speed on the complexities of broadband. The project itself is in an interesting spot. The last major hurdle, in my opinion, is that WEC has to have a reasonable level of financial security in going out for a 36.5 million dollar loan, which is a rather large amount for WEC. Most of the payments of the loan will be covered by lease payments from our partnering Communication Union Districts (CUDs) who will be generating revenue from broadband service using WEC's fiber. WEC is now seeking financial surety so that in the event that things don't go according to plan, our member ratepayers won't face undue risk. WEC's team is pursuing this with our regulators, CUD partners, and discussions with legislators. The member vote to support broadband expansion via a USDA loan will follow when we can present the benefits and risks to our members with more clarity. The member vote to support WEC's participation in broadband expansion will follow when we can present it to our members with clarity.

Louis: There are a huge number of entities that all need to be on

Federal infrastructure funds will support WEC focus areas

The recently passed bill will send \$2.2 billion to Vermont for infrastructure repair and improvements. State investments will include:

- \$100+ million for broadband
- \$21 million to expand Vermont's EV charging network

Co-op Currents

Co-op Currents (Publication No. USPS 711 -210 and ISSN No. 0746-8784) is published monthly except February, May, August and November by Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., 40 Church Street, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, Vermont 05651. The cost of this publication is \$.52, which is included in the basic monthly charge to each member. Periodical postage rates paid at East Montpelier and at additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Co-op Currents*, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, Vermont 05651.



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 Rosie Casciero, at 224-2322, or visit wec.coop/board-of-directors.

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Got something to say?

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



board and have their concerns and their interests represented in this project. That includes first and foremost the WEC membership, but there are also regulatory entities, lenders, government agencies, CUD partners; there are a lot of entities that need to have knowledge and understanding and be supportive of the project. Each of these groups has their own interests to protect and represent in the project. It's like multiple parallel lanes of traffic figuring out the answers to these questions. To be candid, having a new GM at the same time adds a layer of complexity to each of those lanes.

We're moving forward and making good progress: what I've seen is every time a challenge gets raised, the people who need to get together do so, figure out an answer, and we move forward. We'll have a member vote when we have reasonably complete information and when we know that info won't change in a substantial way. We need to figure out the right timing for that.

Steve: It's one of the more complex negotiations and educational experiences I've been involved in as a Board member. As we get closer and closer to going before our regulators, we're trying to negotiate the issue of financial risk and financial surety to make sure our members are not facing — how would you put it, Louis?

Louis: I'd say not facing unnecessary or unreasonable risks. No project can ever have no risk; everything we do has some amount of risk to it. What we're working to do is make sure the risks are appropriate to the portion of the membership and to the entities that benefit from the upside of that risk. We're trying to allocate the risk to the beneficiaries, to those receiving internet coverage, and limiting the risk to the electrical ratepayers



In my first week here, the understanding among the staff of what it means to be a co-op, and the objectives and philosophy of the Co-op, are apparent in every aspect of the work and every conversation I've had.

— Louis Porter

to an extent that is appropriate to the benefits for those ratepayers. It's a complicated thing to do because there's a very strong ratepayer case for the expansion of fiber and internet coverage within WEC territory as well as the communications goal.

Steve: Like any good stewards of the Co-op, we need to be careful and thoughtful about what we're doing on the member-owners' behalf.

Be prepared for storms

Steve: It's the season for outages. Storms seem to be more damaging to utility infrastructure, so please, get yourself prepared for winter. Make sure you have backup sources for heat, light, food preparation. Being prepared for outages really reduces the stress of being in an outage.

Louis: WEC and its members have obviously done a lot, and continue to do a lot, with climate change mitigation, as a 100 percent renewably powered utility. But we also need to prepare for those effects that are here and are going to continue even as we work to prevent them as much as we can. That means both staff at the Co-op preparing, and also members in our service area recognizing that storms are going to be more severe and preparing for that in the ways Steve mentioned.

Steve: Climate change is one of the greatest challenges the next generations will deal with, and that requires adapting to it locally as well as addressing mitigation strategies as part of global action. More generally, I'd like to reiterate WEC's longstanding position that anybody should try to weatherize their house better if they can to improve one's quality of life with reduced need of energy for heating or cooling.

Run for the Board of Directors

Steve: There are nine of us on WEC's Board of Directors, and we are each elected to serve a three-year term. So there are three seats up for election every year. The next election will be held in May 2022, and candidates must complete their statements of candidacy in February.

I want to strongly encourage fellow WEC members to consider running for the Board for a couple of terms or so. It is an excellent opportunity to learn how your Co-op operates within the energy and regulatory landscape of Vermont, and as one gets a little experience, an effective Board member learns how to make the choices, largely formulated by WEC staff, that guide WEC's future for the benefit of its members. The incoming

Board member needs no experience other than being a member of WEC. While candidates with backgrounds in areas such as accounting, business, legislation, regulation, social and public organizations, and the like could of course find their experience to be useful on the Board, the only "requirement" I've found to be universal is the willingness to act in good faith and with financial prudence on behalf of all fellow WEC members according to cooperative principles.

Louis: This is really Steve's purview, but I would add this: people don't always take into account that Board membership does not require a specialized knowledge of any kind. The Co-op staff and incumbent Board members can provide what you need in those terms.

Second, Board service is an extraordinary way to learn about an organization and an area of the world that is of great interest and of great value to the community. I recognize the competing demands and interests people have, but for members who are thinking about it and just need a nudge to file the paperwork: in my experience, people are surprised by the rewards of this kind of service, how much they enjoy it and how much they learn, and they are happy they did it.

Steve: I think that frames it very well. We are a Board that consists of members. I'm an average member who felt this is a good way to spend some



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— Steve Knowlton

of my time serving my community. And based on what we just discussed, utilities are operating in a time of change: not only technical changes, but also large scale social changes in the world's energy landscape. It's a fascinating time to be part of maintaining WEC's continuing role as a 100 percent renewable energy cooperative in our society, providing power with minimal environmental impact.


WEC is not an investor-owned utility. We act on behalf of our members; we have no other shareholders. We have a distinct mission. To me, that's what makes it worthwhile to spend my time doing this. When I step down, I expect other people will step up. That's what participation in public institutions calls for if they're worth maintaining.

Season of helping

Steve: With the approach of winter, I'm glad I have a warm house. Other people don't. How can I help change that? Capstone has a weatherization program, so I donate to it when I can.

WEC also participates in a program called Round Up, where you just let the Co-op know to round up your bill to the next dollar. That little amount of money goes directly into the state's WARMTH program.

Members can also opt to have their annual capital credit refund go directly to the Community Fund. Those are straightforward ways WEC members can easily and affordably help our community members, during the winter months and year long.

Louis: Unlike a for-profit utility that hands profits to shareholders, the Co-op gives excess revenue back to its members as a bill credit. For those members who can afford to donate them, WEC's Community Fund pools those credit donations to support nonprofits in our community. It's one of the most appealing things about the organization as far as I'm concerned, that if members so choose, they're part of a united effort to improve the conditions and lives of people in our communities. That's very much in keeping with the spirit of the Co-op. The reason WEC was founded was to pool shared resources for shared benefit. 

Visit wec.coop/broadband

- *Is pole inventory happening in my town?*
- *Which CUD will bring broadband access to my neighborhood?*
- *How can I stay up to date on this process?*

Visit wec.coop/broadband to learn where pole inventory and other broadband rollout work is happening, who is doing the work, and how to connect with the Communication Union District (CUD) in your service area.

You can also visit these CUD websites:

CVFiber: cvfiber.net

ECFiber: ecfiber.net

NEK Community Broadband:

nekbbroadband.org



What's your internet story?

As WEC works to make high speed internet available to all members, *Co-op Currents* is looking for stories from members about the role broadband—or the lack of it—plays in their lives. Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop.

WEC Overcomes Tree Crew Labor Shortage, Works to Catch Up on Right-of-Way Clearing Before Winter

Over 2021, WEC's operations department felt pinches in the supply chain and labor market just like most other industries. But in an essential industry—distributing electric power—in a rural service area, with storm season upon us, those pinches can have real effects. WEC contracts with several tree crews to help manage vegetation growth in its rights of way. One of those contracts fell through earlier this year, when the company lacked enough workers to fill a crew.

And while preventing winter outages requires vigilant trimming, WEC and community partners are gearing up for broadband rollout, which requires Right-of-Way (ROW) maintenance as well.

In other words, Right-of-Way Management Coordinator Larry Gilbert has had a lot of work to do, with fewer workers to do it. "We had limited resources throughout the first eight months of the year," he said. "Now we're trying to play catch up with winter coming. It's been a very busy year."

But what about the member who calls in a dying white pine dangling



over their power lines? The good news is Gilbert hired new tree crews through Asplundh: if you see their orange trucks in WEC's service area, they're likely working for your Co-op.

That new contract allowed him to dedicate one tree crew to attend to trees members call in. These calls are usually about what's known as "danger trees." That is, dead, dying, or leaning trees that are likely to fall on WEC power lines. This type of project

management is both art and science, and in the interest of efficiency and keeping costs and fuel use down, Gilbert and crews are not always able

Right-of-Way Management Coordinator takes a rare break. Tree crews are working hard to catch up before the snow flies.

to give property owners much advance notice as to when they'll be on their property.

"Say a member calls in a danger tree in Tunbridge," Gilbert explained. "Moving a crew down there isn't cost effective until I have a planned job or a call for, say, another tree in Chelsea." So when the call is made, crews need to act fast.

From a member perspective, that could look like this: you call WEC to report that dying white pine. Several days later, you hear back from Gilbert,

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Be Prepared for Winter Storms

Winter storm season is here and WEC asks all members to prepare themselves for wild weather and the potential for outages. Preparedness is taking responsibility for the safety and comfort of yourself and those around you. That means staying informed, having the supplies you need, and making wise choices.

Be aware:

- Pay attention to local weather reports
- Sign up for school closings, road alerts, and weather alerts on electronic devices
- Follow travel precautions
- Address potential storm hazards on your property, like a chimney that needs cleaning or a dead tree limb hanging over the driveway

Check your supplies:

- 3-5 days of nonperishable food for each family member, including pets
- Extra medication, oxygen, or other health essentials
- Water
- Portable radio
- Flashlights
- Spare batteries
- Candles
- Matches or lighter
- Wind up or battery alarm clock
- Safety pins
- Zip-top plastic bags
- Moist towelettes or baby wipes
- Frozen ice packs
- Large cooler or ice chest
- Sleeping bags or blankets

- Warm, dry clothing
- Duct tape
- First Aid kit
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Diapers and other baby supplies
- Manual can opener
- Disposable plates, cups, and eating utensils
- A fire extinguisher
- Charged phone and car charger
- Charged EV or full tank in gas car
- Shovels and/or tuned up snowblower
- Masks or face coverings and hand sanitizer
- Whatever else you may need! Wood supply, camp stove, etc.

Have a plan:

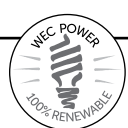
- Do you have backup heat that does not rely on electricity?
- If you have special health needs, do you have ice packs to keep medication cold, backup oxygen, or a generator?
- Do you have someone you can call if you need assistance?
- Do you have neighbors who may need special assistance? If you can assume responsibility to check on them, do their family members have your contact info?
- Does your town have an emergency action plan?
- Do you have a place you can go if you need to leave town for a few days?

More preparedness tips and strategies are at wec.coop/energy-services-safety/what-to-do-if-the-power-goes-out.



Larry Gilbert

Winter storms are coming. WEC's crews work hard to prevent outages—but in the event they occur, please be prepared.



Ways WEC Lights the Darkness

For many folks, 2021 has been as tough a year as 2020 was. It's apparent to WEC just through the record number of accounts that are in arrears—even after a second round of state grants to help Vermonters pay utility bills.

“The pandemic has been tremendously difficult in terms of the challenges it brought to bear on people,” said General Manager Louis Porter. Even though he hopes the acute phase of the pandemic is winding down, he said, “those impacts on people remain, and federal assistance, while helpful, doesn't undo that. I just ask our members to consider those impacts on people whose lives, school, work have been upended, and recognize those impacts will continue on for quite a while.”

There are things we can do, every day, as community members: Practice courtesy. Appreciate essential workers. Shop locally.

And there are practical ways WEC demonstrates concern for community:

- Member Services Representatives work with members with past-due accounts to create long-term budgets that keep the lights on
- Board members oversee Community Fund grantmaking
- Members donate their capital credit refunds to the Community Fund or round up their bills to benefit the WARMTH program
- Staff partner with organizations and agencies to make weatherization

and other resources affordable and accessible

- Staff and vendors donate to support holiday programs

Veteran Families

Every year, the Co-op sponsors the holidays for a local military family. This program is not supported through the Community Fund, but is a beloved tradition in the WEC office. Staff, Board, and vendors contribute to bring food, gifts, and more to one family. In addition, WEC's team assembles holiday food boxes for ten or more families.

To learn more, visit veteransinc.org.

WARMTH

WARMTH is Vermont's emergency home heating assistance program. It's funded mainly through voluntary contributions from electric utility customers, and operated through local community action agencies. In WEC territory, that's Capstone and Northeast Kingdom Community Action, or NEKCA.

To donate, initial the Operation Round-Up box on your electric bill to round up each bill to the next dollar and send the change to WARMTH. If you'd like to contribute more each month, write in the amount. If you bill through SmartHub or would rather talk to a friendly Member Services Representative, contact Member Services to arrange your donation: 802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245.

WEC's Community Fund

The money in WEC's Community Fund comes from members who donate their capital credit refunds. The fund has grown steadily and each year contributes more than \$50,000 in grants to small nonprofits in WEC's service area.

To donate your capital credits to the Community Fund, call Member Services: 802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245.

How you can help

If you are interested in local charitable giving this holiday season, WEC's list of Community Fund grantees is a good resource. Each one makes a difference right here in central Vermont. The full list of 2020 recipients

is in the July 2021 issue of *Co-op Currents*, available online at wec.coop.

If you need help

- Call 211 to find any emergency resource you need: food, mental health, fuel, shelter, or anything else
- If you need help paying your WEC bill, call Member Services: 802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245
- If you are in danger of running out of fuel, call the toll-free Emergency Fuel Assistance number: 1-800-479-6151
- For food, housing, weatherization, and other services, contact your local Community Action Agency: either Capstone (capstonevt.org) or Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA, nekca.org)

Right-of-Way

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and then a few weeks later, the tree is removed. But then, you talk with your neighbor, who called in a danger tree weeks after you did, and had it removed quickly. What gives? Well, perhaps your neighbor's call made it cost effective for a crew to come remove both trees on the same trip.

Here's what Gilbert wants WEC members to know:

- **He's listening.** He gets your phone calls. But his job requires him to be out in the field for most of each day, often out of cell service. So give him a week or so to call or email you back.
- **Your call is in the queue.** But when crews can address the issue is affected by multiple factors, including proximity.

Having one crew dedicated to member calls will help reduce some of the backlog, Gilbert hopes. Other crews are working on scheduled ROW cuts, access cuts for new construction, and preparing for broadband rollout. “Broadband has restructured the way we've been cutting,” Gilbert noted. The contractors hired by Communication

Union Districts (CUDs) for what's called “make ready” work—preparing poles for new fiber infrastructure—need ROW teams to go through first. These needs vary; some areas are in good shape; in others, poles need to be replaced or installed to shorten spans.

No matter what, ROW work is necessary to prevent outages, improve reliability, and keep members safe. Members can help support this work by:

- Allowing equipment access to offroad rights of way through privately owned fields and yards. For example, WEC's forestry head mulcher can clear a lot of brush quickly; but if a property owner denies access, crews must do the work, which takes longer and costs more.
 - Understanding the nature of danger removal may appear sporadic, but is efficient
 - Keeping rights of way clear: not planting tall trees, stacking wood, or storing equipment under power lines
- To learn where scheduled ROW crews are working, look for the “Where's WEC” column in most issues of *Co-op Currents*, or visit wec.coop.



In 2019, Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden, Board Secretary Annie Reed, and Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist Rick Stergas shopped for groceries for the Stuff-A-Truck fundraiser to benefit the Salvation Army Emergency Food Shelf. Through various programs, WEC's members, staff, Board, and vendors contribute to make the season easier on community members in need of support.

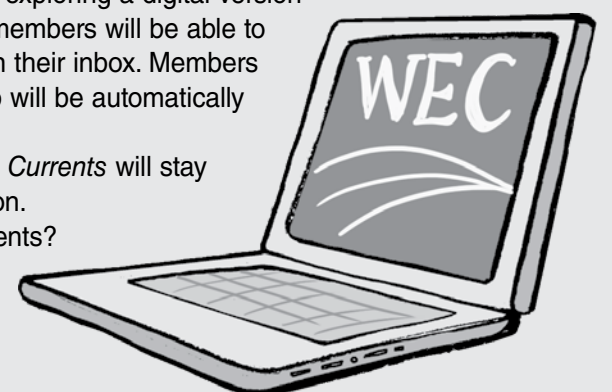
Coming soon: Co-op Currents and WEC news by email

To get important news to members quickly and to make WEC updates more accessible, WEC is exploring a digital version of our newsletter. Soon, members will be able to receive *Co-op Currents* in their inbox. Members signed up with SmartHub will be automatically enrolled.

But don't worry: *Co-op Currents* will stay primarily a print publication.

Suggestions or comments?

Send them to currents@wec.coop.



Before You Buy Your New EV: An Energy Coach Checklist

As prices are climbing again, and waves of new electric vehicles on the market are finding more new drivers than ever—attracted by better tech, a variety of pricing incentives, and growing awareness that they cost less to operate than the gas and diesel varieties.

Soon, EVs will replace gas-powered cars. It's a great time to make the switch. But the process—and cost—may not be quite as simple as buying your new EV, driving it home, and plugging it in. Before you buy, said Products & Services Director Bill Powell, do a small amount of electrical homework. “It can quantify as big dollars, or as no problem. Before buying an EV, members need to do a little poking around,” he said.

Powell, known throughout WEC service territory as The Energy Coach, points out that most EV drivers charge at home, and that charging a vehicle draws a lot of energy for a long period of time. While it's still overall cheaper to charge an EV than to keep filling a gas tank, Powell explained that EV purchasers need to make sure that their



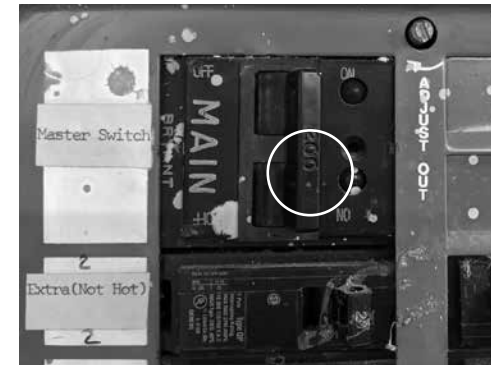
Shopping for a new vehicle? An EV is a great choice. But before you buy, call WEC to see if you need to update your circuit breaker box, wire, or transformer.

equipment is prepared for the change in load, and if it isn't, that they're prepared to update it. In nontechnical terms: if you have ten pounds of sausage, a five pound casing won't cut it.

“What's the most significant unexpected cost? Unique to member location, it may be an inadequate

service entrance, an inadequate service wire, and/or an inadequate transformer. It's site specific,” explained Powell.

The first place to look is the service entrance, or circuit breaker box. Most circuit breaker boxes are 100 or 200 amps. An EV charger requires a 50 amp load—an enormous



Before you buy your EV, send a photo of your circuit breaker box to the Energy Coach. Here's one in closeup. The “master switch” indicates it's a 200 amp circuit breaker box.

load compared to almost any other household appliance. In a 100 amp circuit breaker box, that's half the total load. For some households, that may still work; for many, an upgrade may be necessary. Powell added that the additional loads represented on the circuit breaker slots tell an important part of the story: are all the slots filled in? Then you may need a new circuit

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Broadband

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underserved by modern broadband standards. That is the highest proportion of any electric utility service area in the state, and the ongoing COVID pandemic has only exacerbated the need.

The reason for this poor service is the same reason our forebears lacked access to electricity and founded our Co-op: our region's low population density. For-profit internet service providers have little profit motive to serve rural areas like ours, and nonprofits have found it historically difficult to roll out affordable broadband without significant grant funding.

Furthermore, WEC needs to modernize our grid within the next decade to improve resiliency to increasing weather-related outages. Per state mandate, our collective energy use must move away from fossil fuels. WEC must adapt with rates and electives that incentivize and reward shifting to our 100 percent renewable electricity.

A WEC-owned fiber network would address both needs for WEC members: first, by providing the fiber communication backbone for affordable high-speed internet service managed by not-for-profit public entities; second, by providing for fast communication among equipment along WEC's 1,300 miles of line. Better tech communication is likely to improve reliability and reduce outage durations, and potentially reduce costs. In addition, fiber communication

could enable customized rate incentives: for example, time of day rates or electric vehicle rates.

Our partnership with CUDs

Over the past three years, WEC leadership negotiated a partnership with three Communications Union Districts (CUDs): not-for-profit organizations set up by Vermont statute for the purpose of providing broadband service at communication speeds of 100 megabits per second or greater for downloading and uploading. Our partner CUDs are ECFiber, CVFiber, and NEK Broadband, whose service areas include the 41 towns that WEC serves.

CUDs are eligible for state grants to construct broadband infrastructure (WEC is not). Currently, state funding via federal infrastructure grants is projected to cover about half of the needs to supply universal rural broadband in Vermont. The success of the partnership lies in the CUDs' access to state grants and WEC's access to a low-interest federal loan that, combined, allow us to more affordably build out a fiber communication network that supports the people we jointly serve.

The business details

The basic model of the partnership is that CUDs will lease WEC's fiber network at cost. The portion of the loan specifically targeted to constructing WEC's fiber network is \$35.5 million; CUD lease rates will be set to cover WEC's debt payments on this loan with the intent to hold

Board Benefit/Cost Summary of Supporting Broadband Rollout

Benefits:

- The Co-op addresses present and future needs of its members
- Broadband service access to WEC members within a few years
- Path to upgrade meters and electric infrastructure over next decade
- Sharing cost of construction with CUD partners
- Lower cost broadband service to members served by CUDs

Costs:

- The Co-op takes on new debt of \$36.5M
- New personnel resources required
- Expands the Co-op's historic scope of mission and service


electric ratepayers harmless. The additional million dollars is allocated to a pilot project for smart grid applications, to be followed up with full implementation.

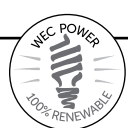
WEC is presently developing a joint business and engineering plan with our partners. WEC's Board of Directors has not committed to spending money for construction at this time. To date, the Board of Directors has supported this model.

It is expected that the cost of repaying and servicing the loan will be covered by revenues from the CUDs. There is of course some risk inherent to taking on any loan. WEC's staff and Board are working to put assurances to mitigate that risk. It is important to keep in mind that WEC will continue to assess this risk before the loan will be undertaken by WEC on behalf of its members.

On the other hand, were the membership to reject the Co-op's

bid to borrow \$36.5 million, the likely scenario is that CUDs would source more expensive private loans at higher interest rates to build out fiber on their own. This would increase the cost of broadband for subscribers, and WEC would then have the expense of leasing fiber from CUDs in order to improve our grid communication. We would also need to determine how to connect our members' meters to fiber we do not own. The overall and ongoing cost to broadband subscribers and to the Co-op would likely be greater.

The Board will ask our members to consider and approve this plan to borrow \$36.5 million for fiber build-out and initial smart grid improvements, with the understanding that contractual issues remain to be resolved, and assurance of WEC's loan payment must be identified prior to final approval by the Board. 



Before You Buy an EV

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breaker. Take a picture of the panel, he advised.

Once you're acquainted with your circuit breaker box, "it's time to call your friendly local cooperative," said Powell, and ask about your transformer and peak historic demand. Your transformer is on your pole: the can-shaped device that connects distribution electricity to your house. If your peak historic demand—the maximum amount of electricity you use—plus a 50 amp EV charger is greater than what your transformer and wiring can handle, you'll need to upgrade your transformer, and possibly your wire. Many homes in WEC's service area have one transformer to one meter, but other members have joint use transformers,

where one transformer feeds to not only their meter, but their neighbors' as well. In that case, adding an EV load directly affects the amount of electricity available to your neighbors.

This call is actually required under state law. "If you add more electric load,

it's your responsibility to let your utility know, and it's the utility's job to update the transformer and charge you for it," explained Powell. The cost to the member is the increment between the previous transformer and the one that meets demand, plus the capital costs

to install it. The utility makes upgrades up to the point of interconnection, which is where the utility's responsibility ends and the homeowner's begins.

"I prefer that our engineers always assess the member's service first," added Dave Kresock, Director of Engineering & Operations. "It's important that any member notify us when they are planning to install additional loads in their residence, and it is very important that the member always consults with a qualified electrician for any upgrades required beyond the point of interconnection."

Powell can tell you what happens if a member plugs in a new EV when everything else in the home is running, and the equipment is inadequate to the added demand. A fuse blows. And not just the circuit breaker, but the actual fuse on the transformer, up at the top of the pole, which requires a WEC crew to come and fix it.

Bottom line, said Powell: Do your homework about which EV is right for you. Then, look at your breaker box, and take a picture if it helps. Call The Energy Coach to ask about your historic peak load and ask for a service assessment. "We can tell you about your specifics," he explained. You may have plenty of capacity for that new EV, or you may need a little—or a lot—of updates. Either way, it won't be a surprise.



ASK THE ENERGY COACH

The Energy Coach's checklist:

1. Look at your circuit breaker box. Is it a 100 or 200 amp box? How many remaining slots are there? Take a photo.
2. Call the Energy Coach to inquire about adding an EV to your peak load. What's your historic peak load? If you email, attach the photo.
3. WEC's teams will assess your service. You'll learn what, if any, work needs to be done to prepare your home electrically for EV load, about how long it will take, and how much it will cost. Any work you may require from a qualified electrician is not part of this equation.
4. The Energy Coach also knows about available EV incentives. It never hurts to ask.

Contact the Energy Coach today: 802-224-2329 or energycoach@wec.coop.



Button Up 2021 Incentives for WEC Members

Thermal Incentives

Weatherization



WEC

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

Efficiency Vermont

- Receive 50% of project costs back, up to \$1,000.
- WEC member households may be eligible for 50% of project costs, up to \$3,000; see eligibility, here: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star>

Heat Pump Incentives

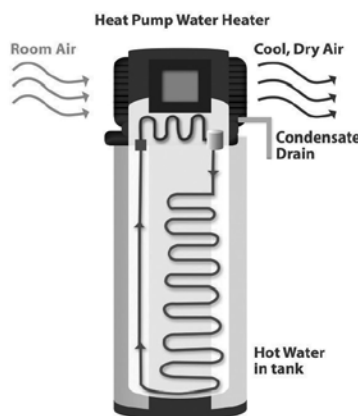
WEC & EVT 2021 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives¹

A qualifying house meets or exceeds minimum thermal standards (VT Residential Energy Code)

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ^{3,4}
Ductless - ≤2 tons	\$350	\$250
Ductless - >2 tons	\$450	\$250
Ducted - ≤2 tons	\$1,000	\$250
Ducted - >2-<4 tons	\$1,500	\$250
Ducted - ≥4 tons	\$2,000	\$250

Air to water (A2W) heat pump \$1,000/ton

Ground source heat pump Coming in 2021



- 1 Qualified by Efficiency Vermont
- 2 Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont
- 3 HP installed in building meeting/exceeding thermal standards (VT residential energy code)
- 4 Contact WEC for eligibility for bonus incentive

Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives¹

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ⁴
Replacing conventional electric hot water	Up to \$600	-
Replacing fossil-fired hot water system	Up to \$600	\$250

WEC encourages members considering purchase of HPWH to select unit with CTA-2045 communication port, to enable future participation in a Co-op load management program

Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers Incentives



WEC

- \$250 for either a qualifying pellet stove or a wood stove. Stoves must be installed by qualified installer.
- Pellet furnace: \$1,000
- Pellet boiler: \$1,000

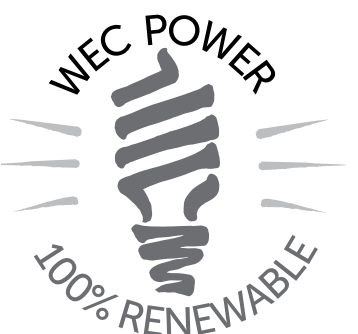
Efficiency Vermont*

- Pellet stove: \$200 when installed by qualified contractor
- Pellet furnace or boiler: up to \$6,000

Note: Incentives of over \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. See <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/energy-coach-home/>

*Offers subject to change. See [EfficiencyVermont.com](https://www.efficiencyvermont.com) for current details.

802.224.2329 • energycoach@wec.coop



Capstone

continued from page 1

Vermonters, including the home audit, labor, and materials. It's professional work done for free. Renters with receptive landlords may also take advantage of Capstone's weatherization offerings.

"We're well equipped with the tools that allow this to be a relatively fast process. The average job takes two to three days," said Zabriskie. While those two to three days are somewhat invasive, he says, the work is generally done in places residents don't usually go, like crawl spaces, attics, and knee walls. The result is, Zabriskie said, that weatherization clients "don't see the change: they feel the change, whether they feel it in their wallet or by not having their feet freeze when standing at the kitchen sink."

For Capstone, this marks a deepening commitment to building resilience and advancing economic and environmental justice. For approximately 15 years, Zabriskie said, Capstone has been in both grant-funded and fee-for-construction marketplaces: whether those receiving weatherization work pay out of pocket or have their costs covered by grants has

The first step of a weatherization home audit is a blower door test to identify where the drafts are. For income-eligible members, Capstone provides an audit and seals up those drafts for free.



Are you income-eligible?

Number of persons in your household and maximum household income:

1: \$47,110.00	5: 72,684.00
2: \$53,840.00	6: \$78,068.00
3: \$60,570.00	7: \$83,452.00
4: \$67,300.00	8: \$88,836.00


depended on their income eligibility. Now, Capstone is using the influx of federal funding to hone in on its mission, Zabriskie said, and put resources toward free weatherization. Vermonters whose income places them above the qualifying threshold for Capstone's program should contact Efficiency Vermont. "There are ARPA resources that are directed to all of the marketplaces. Capstone is implementing funding targeted to income-eligible Vermonters. Efficiency Vermont is managing the resources that are available to everyone else," Zabriskie explained.

There is an urgency to Capstone's

weatherization work: to help Vermont families, to reduce heating emissions—home heating is one of our state's greatest greenhouse gas producers, after transportation—and to spend down time-sensitive ARPA funds. Besides the sheer quantity, ARPA funds have some flexibility built in. "They allow us to take on some additional challenges when we run into them. There's a piece where we can help with home repairs. We can help share the cost of vermiculite removal, or we can use them to, say, potentially install a heat pump, or pellet stoves, or upgrade woodstoves to clean, twenty-first century woodstoves," explained Zabriskie.

When it comes to replacing

devices, WEC offers many incentives to members through its Button Up program. Stacked with opportunities available with ARPA weatherization funds, eligible members can replace essential home appliances at considerable savings—or for free.

As speedy as the Capstone professionals are, eligible members who call now will still go on a waiting list. Capstone prioritizes greatest need first, and while they work on weatherization year-round, what Zabriskie calls a "seasonal awareness" to the work means there's an influx of calls when it gets chilly. But don't let that deter you. Call today to take advantage of new funding, and enjoy greater comfort and lower bills all year. 

2022 Annual Meeting Scheduled for May 5

Board Candidacy and Bylaws Petition Deadlines Coming Up

The 2022 Annual Meeting will be held on **Thursday, May 5**. Every year, the Annual Meeting marks the election of three members to WEC's Board of Directors. Any member of the Co-op is eligible to run for election.

Considering running for a seat on WEC's Board? Contact Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero at 802-224-2322 or rosalena.casciero@wec.coop to request a candidate packet.

In March and April, *Co-op Currents* prints candidate biographies and responses to policy questions.

The deadline to submit biographical materials and policy responses for inclusion in *Co-op Currents* is **Friday, February 4**.

The deadline to submit all candidacy materials, including a petition signed by a minimum of 25 WEC members, is **Friday, March 4**. All details are included in the candidate packet.

Members of the Co-op have the right to petition for changes to the Co-op's bylaws. The bylaws are available on wec.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 for bylaws changes are due **Friday, February 10**.



The 2018 Annual Meeting in WEC's Operations Center. It is to be determined whether the 2021 Annual Meeting will be in person, virtual, or hybrid—but no matter what, WEC hopes to see you there.

What are the benefits of weatherizing?

"The opportunity for Co-op members is to get work done that produces real pocketbook savings in terms of reducing the amount of energy they need," said Paul Zabriskie of Capstone.

Energy includes fuel—and it also includes labor. Members who heat with wood might need a cord less after weatherizing. That saves a lot of stacking time.

Weatherizing leads to:

- Lower fuel costs
- Healthier air quality
- Greater indoor comfort
- Reduced stratification (the top floor extremely hot in summer/cold in winter)
- Reduced drafts
- Moisture control, which affects durability
- Lower carbon emissions

"It depends, how you value any one of these benefits," said Zabriskie, "but you win on all of them."

To reach Capstone: capstonevt.org/weatherization / 802-479-1053 / 1-800-639-1053

For WEC incentives: call the Energy Coach at 802-224-2329, view the incentives on p. 7, or visit wec.coop.

For income eligibility guidelines, view the chart above or visit capstonevt.org.

Energy Tips

You can use motion sensors on lamps to save money on your electric bill. Sensors turn lights on automatically when someone enters a room, and turn them off after the person leaves.

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