

WEC to File Request for Rate Increase

Multiple factors cause the Co-op to need to raise rates by more than 10 percent

By Louis Porter

WEC is planning to file a request for a significant rate increase with state regulators this month, due to a decline in production from the Coventry plant as work has taken place on the Casella landfill, very high and volatile electricity prices in New England, and the continued impacts of net metering on the Co-op's finances.

Exactly what the requested rate increase will be is not known yet, but it will likely be more than 10%.

As a member-owned cooperative, raising rates is not something that WEC contemplates lightly. However, in order to continue supplying 100% renewable energy to our territory, maintain financial health, and deal with cost increases in everything from transformers to wholesale power, the rate increase is necessary.

As Casella has expanded its Coventry landfill project over the last year, the gas flow from the existing portions of the landfill, from which WEC members get as much as 70% of our power in a given year, has been substantially disrupted. Production is expected to grow as the landfill accepts new garbage, but in the meantime WEC has had to buy energy and renewable energy certificates on the market.

And the New England Power

market is extremely volatile. With continued economic uncertainty coming out of the pandemic slowdown, further instability due to the war in Ukraine, and other factors, those prices are likely to be just as high and just as volatile this coming winter.

Meanwhile, WEC's lineworkers need to keep the power flowing to members in a rural territory. Prices for goods and services have climbed rapidly as well. While the cost of Co-op wages is predictable, under our union contract, the cost of everything else, from diesel for trucks to transformers, is not.

The WEC staff and Board of Directors are now evaluating exactly what the requested rate increase will be, and will then submit that proposal to the Vermont Public Utility Commission. The state's Department of Public Service will also evaluate and weigh in on the proposal.

However, the increase needed will likely be higher than recent rate adjustments WEC has requested and been approved for in the past.

It is also important to note that while corporations make profits that enrich shareholders, cooperatives return excess revenue to their members over time (see p. 4).

As the rate increase request is finalized and submitted to regulators, WEC will provide more information in *Co-op Currents* and on wec.coop.



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This is WEC's first theme issue on the topic of net metering. Inside: how the solar net metering industry began in Vermont, how it affects the Co-op's rates and ratepayers, and the position of your Co-op leadership.

Net Metering's Effects on Washington Electric Co-op

By the Board and General Manager of Washington Electric Co-op

The members of Washington Electric Cooperative have a long history of supporting renewable energy. The utility we own is one of three in Vermont to provide 100% renewable electricity around the clock from a varied portfolio of resources. A quarter-century ago when the solar industry was young and solar installation costs were relatively high, WEC became a leading host of members' solar electric production through Vermont's mandated net metering program.

As the most expensive form of renewable power in the state, net metering raises the cost of electricity to Vermonters who do not own such systems while it lowers the costs for those who do.

However, many WEC members may not be aware of the growing impact that net metering has on the member-owners of WEC as that program expands. As the most expensive form of renewable power in the state, net metering raises the cost of electricity to Vermonters who do not own such systems while it lowers the costs for

those who do. The resulting inequity is disturbing, and higher electricity rates are also likely to slow our members' adoption of technologies such as electric vehicles and electric heat pumps, which are important

continued on page 2


Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Capital credits coming: The Co-op is returning \$400,000 this year. P. 4

Know anyone on this list? WEC seeks former members owed capital credit refunds. P. 4-5

Net metering theme issue: Learn more about this complex issue starting on p. 6.



Members who net meter still rely on WEC's poles and wires. How is that infrastructure paid for? P. 7

Net Metering

continued from page 1

to Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan and the state's efforts to combat climate change.

Given these facts, the state should review the goals and outcomes of its existing net metering program to develop a solar energy program that is more effective in providing renewable energy at lower cost to all ratepayers. The Vermont Department of Public Services' Net Metering Report included in its 2021 Annual Energy Report sums it up this way:

Net metering has made important contributions to Vermont's energy supply mix; however, after more than 20 years and hundreds of MW of installed projects, it is past

time for an overhaul of the net metering compensation structure. The primary resource developed under net metering is solar generation, which is also being

developed through competitive solicitations at substantially lower costs. If Vermont is serious about reducing climate change, it is imperative that the state be willing to take an objective view of what programs are helping to achieve this purpose.

Most WEC members endorse the environmental mission of the Co-op, and support our proactive renewable

energy efforts, including construction of the Coventry landfill gas project that provides most of our power, and the purchase of electricity from hydro, wind, and other renewable sources.

The challenge that WEC and other utilities face is not residential solar generation. Solar power from photovoltaic (PV) panels, despite its intermittency, is clearly

one of the greatest sources of clean energy to be tapped to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, especially when it can be paired with battery storage.

The state should review the goals and outcomes of its existing net metering program to develop a solar energy program that is more effective in providing renewable energy at lower cost to all ratepayers.

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

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Cumulative WEC net-metered capacity

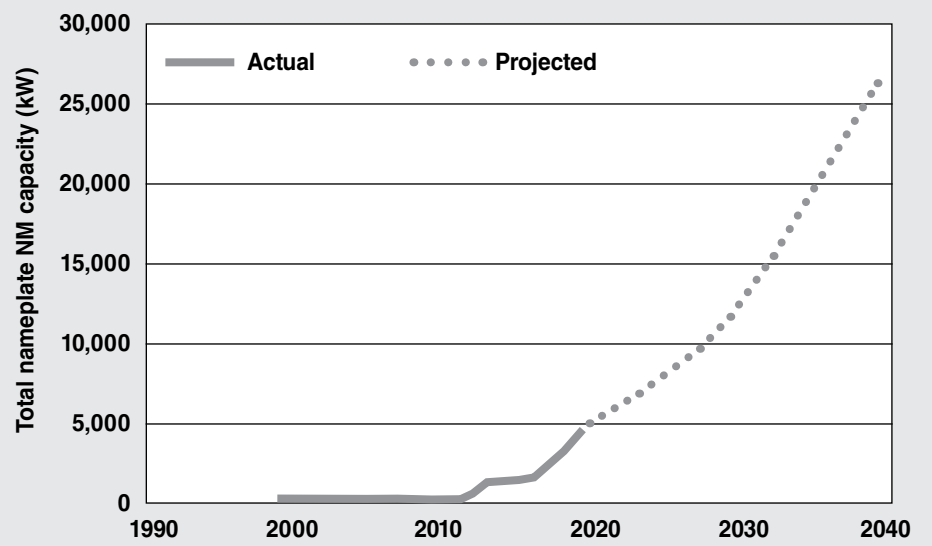


Figure 1. Total installed capacity of net metered PV arrays by WEC members versus year. Diamonds represent actual installed capacity; squares are the capacity projected by modeling performed by Energy Futures Group.

The problem is the state's net metering tariff requires utilities to overcompensate generators when excess solar power is exported to the grid, driving up the cost of electricity for everyone else. What was useful in nurturing a once-young solar industry is now becoming wasteful and divisive. After 25 years of net metering it is time for the state to encourage the mature solar industry to stand on its own alongside other equally valuable renewable resources.

Why does net metering lead to an increase of electric rates?

The state's net metering tariff enables net meterers to effectively sell their excess power to the utility at the retail price of electricity (\$0.21/kWh), while other renewable energy generators could charge something closer to the wholesale price (typically \$0.04 - 0.08/kWh). The issue here is not that solar array owners produce their own power, but that net metering rules allow the solar generator to export to the utility's grid the amount of excess electricity it produces but doesn't immediately use, and obligates the utility to generate and deliver that

same amount of power back to the net metering consumers for free when they need it later, e.g., in the late afternoon and evening or when it's raining or snowing. This is the "netting" of net metering.

Users of a solar array can, while the sun is out, immediately use the energy produced by their array for their own needs, and reduce their usage of power from the grid. If a solar user were to use all the power they produced, perhaps with the help of a battery-powered EV or other storage, no one should have a problem with that. In a similar manner, many customers also choose to reduce their usage from the utility grid by using more efficient appliances.

But net meterers do not operate this way. Instead, net metered solar projects produce power for several hours in the middle of the day and require constant use of the grid's power sources when their systems are not generating power sufficient to meet their needs. This is the challenge net metering poses to public utilities that are responsible for distributing electricity to the larger community – net metering requires the capabilities of the grid as much as any electric consumer, but state law allows them to pay comparatively little for them, thus unfairly shifting the burden to do so to other ratepayers.

This is not to blame net meterers, who are responding to an opportunity provided by the state. The state legislature devised the tariff structure, enforced by state regulatory bodies, that deliberately created a system that shifts costs incurred by net metering to other ratepayers.

What is the impact of net metering on WEC?

The evolution of net metering capacity hosted by WEC since Vermont's net metering program

Have your finances taken a hit?

Don't let your WEC bill go past due, or grow beyond what you can manage.

Help is available: A Member Services Representative will help you put together a budget that works for you. Plus, there are state programs that may help pay down your bill.

Call us today, and we'll help you put together a plan: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-WEC-5245.

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.



began in 1998 is shown in the accompanying figure. The power listed is the nameplate capacity of all the net metered installations registered to WEC members, or in other words, the maximum power they could possibly produce. The projected capacity in the future was obtained by modeling performed in 2019.

It is clearly a popular program. From 1998 to about 2016, the installed capacity of net metered solar increased rapidly, doubling about every two and a half years. Since then, the growth has been nearly steady, as is typical for a mature industry. The current rate at which new net metered solar arrays are installed in WEC territory is about 900 kW per year. By the end of this year, WEC expects a total of 7,100 kW of solar net metering capacity.

This represents a cumulative rate impact of 8.3% attributed to net metering; if your bill is \$100, over \$8 of what you pay is the present cost of supporting net metering. Stated another way, of all your twelve monthly bills you pay each year, one month's bill is devoted entirely to paying the cost of net metering to the membership. As evident from the trend in the figure, this amount will continue to grow rapidly over the coming years as non-net meterers are increasingly tasked with covering the cost of running the utility that serves all members.

Why is net metering so popular among WEC members?

WEC members already receive fully renewable power at all hours of the day. Net metering offsets renewable power members would get anyway, so net metering in WEC territory offers little additional environmental benefit. Without the capacity for energy storage, net metering does not substantially reduce the need for existing power sources in the region either since solar production is not available much of the day.

The reason for its popularity today is that net meterers can save money on their power bills from the utility. At its inception, Vermont's net metering policy was intended to foster the solar industry in Vermont and provide a means for residential solar PV owners who wished to produce renewable power to recoup some of their investment in small-scale arrays that were relatively expensive to purchase and install at that time. With net metering, one enjoys the convenience of reliable power from the

grid while still reducing one's power bill. As global events drive up the cost of energy, the value of such an investment probably increases. Indeed, recent national surveys of homeowners contemplating such a decision to invest

in net metered solar cite reducing their energy costs as their primary reason.

Furthermore, as the cost of installing solar arrays has plummeted over the last 20 years, and arrays of up to 500 kilowatts in capacity were made eligible for net metering in Vermont,

there exists a strong incentive of partnership with for-profit, market-scale generation in which net meterers are licensed to connect directly to the grid and compensated entirely at a rate comparable to statewide retail electric rates. In effect, they are generators feeding directly into the grid, and being compensated at near retail rates, with no netting taking place. While it's possible that small-scale hydro or other renewables may justify some level of subsidization, the expansion of net metering to other renewables at a commercial scale indicates that net metering is simply becoming a profit-making enterprise that has little to do with the original intent of net metering to foster small-scale solar.

The road to sustainability


In 2017, Vermont's Renewable Energy Standard took effect. This standard mandates the amount of renewable electrical energy utilities must provide and by what year it must be provided to meet the goals of the state's Comprehensive Energy Plan. In delegating to the public utilities the charge of renewability, the Renewable Energy Standard is sound policy because it lays out clear targets for the public utilities without being overly prescriptive of the means while maintaining the essential regulatory requirement to reliably and safely provide electricity at reasonable cost to the Vermont ratepayer. It is clear that today's electric utility will develop revised approaches in order to expertly manage intermittent sources of inexpensive renewable electricity.

The net metering tariff is not outdated because it is solar, but because the overly generous compensation for the excess power is unfair to the ratepayer, to other providers of renewable energy, and to those innovators who seek to revolutionize the usefulness of solar-generated electricity with battery storage. We expect that many residential and commercial

customers will continue to lower their consumption of grid-supplied electricity via conservation or by producing their own electric power. But the current scheme of net metering, while successfully nurturing a once-young solar industry, effectively rewards use of expensive electricity to benefit the few at the expense of the many, and is not a sustainable long-term model for decarbonizing everyone's use of energy.

We encourage stakeholder discussions to find more practical, forward-looking schemes for solar deployment that take advantage of the past 25 years of experience.

- We must find ways of lowering the artificially high cost of electricity from net metering if beneficial electrification is to be attractive for all of us.
- The value of solar plus storage to making the grid more renewable is much higher than solar by itself, and furthermore, a long-term push to pair solar generation with storage will really make solar a productive resource for all seasons and all applications compared to the stopgap approach of today.
- Finally, we must consider the electric grid to be a shared public resource. Until such time when the grid might be replaced with something else as effective and reliable for all consumers, we believe that its benefits and costs should be shared as equitably as possible.

With this positive outlook in mind, we believe that, having done its job, the state's net metering program should be reexamined for fairness and effectiveness in achieving the state's energy goals. Echoing Vermont's Department of Public Service, we urge our legislators to evaluate the consequences of net metering and consider if these are the outcomes they intended. We believe the law will soon need to be revised. We encourage Co-op members to contact their Board members with questions and comments. 

Emergency Resources

Fuel

Running out of fuel? No matter where in Vermont you live, if you are in danger of running out of fuel this winter, call the toll-free Emergency Fuel Assistance number: 1-800-479-6151

Mental health

Crisis lines:

Washington County:
802-229-0591

Northeast Kingdom Human

Services: (Derby)

802-334-6744;

(St. Johnsbury) 802-748-3181

If you are in crisis and prefer to text, text VT to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor quickly.

Food

Vermont Foodbank: 800-585-2265

Capstone Community Action:

capstonevt.org

Northeast Kingdom Community

Action: nekcavt.org

3SquaresVT: 855-855-6181,

vermontfoodhelp.com

211

Call 211 to find any emergency resource you need: food, mental health, fuel, shelter, and more.

Where's WEC?

Crews are busy working to keep rights-of-way clear. Right-of-way maintenance is necessary to keep your power safe and reliable.

Where are tree crews trimming WEC's roadside rights-of-way?

Worcester: McKenzie Road

Corinth: Fairground Road

For up to date information:

[wec.coop/wec-operations/
right-of-way-notice](http://wec.coop/wec-operations/right-of-way-notice)

Open House at Coventry Landfill

Join WEC and Casella Waste Systems for the first open house at the landfill since 2019! Tour WEC's generation plant and learn how landfill gas is captured to generate electricity. **Saturday, September 17**, 21 Landfill Lane, Coventry, VT. Details on wec.coop/events.



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Co-op Seeks Former Members for Capital Credit Refunds

WEC returns \$400,000 to membership in 2022

When for-profit utilities collect excess revenue, those profits enrich their shareholders. When cooperative utilities take in more revenue from their members than it costs to run the utility, they return that money to their members. Since 1998, WEC has returned approximately \$9.5 million in capital credit refunds to Co-op members.

This year, the Board will refund a total of \$400,000 to eligible members on the Co-op's lines in years 1997, 2013, and 2021. Individual refunds may be reduced by any uncollectable or delinquent amounts owed to the Co-op, and no early retirements will be made to the estates of deceased members. Current members will see refunds appear as a credit on their November 2022 bills.

Former members are entitled to receive refunds as well. In order to be eligible, former members must have a minimum \$50 capital credit distribution, and must submit an authorization form to the Co-op.

Earlier this summer WEC mailed out Capital Credit Patronage Refund

Authorizations to former members. Listed below are the names of people or accounts whose authorizations were returned as undeliverable. **If you know any person on this list or their rightful heirs, please have the former member or beneficiary contact Washington Electric Cooperative directly: 802-223-5245 or 800-WEC-5245.**

Co-op Community Fund

Approximately 14% of WEC members currently choose to donate their refunds to WEC's Community Fund. Any current or former member may direct their refund to the Community Fund as a one-time or ongoing gift.

The Community Fund supports small not-for-profits serving Central Vermont communities. The people served by these organizations are often WEC members. The full recipient list is in the July 2022 issue of *Co-op Currents*. A report on 2022 Community Fund activities will be published in *Co-op Currents* in 2023.

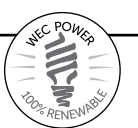
Steven Adams	Alden Belcher	Timothy Butler	Kara Coombs-Miller	Harry Downey	Joan Fiarkoski, Estate	Edward Gorchinski	Ralph Hatch
Earle Adams Sr	Edward Bell	Donna Butler	Jon Cooper	Virginia Doyle	Michael Filippone	Alexis Gordon	Elizabeth P Hatch Rev.
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Kenneth Aiken	Rebekah Bencanaan	Jean Button	Annette Corliss	John Doyle	Michael Fishbach	Michael Gordon II	Lynn Hathaway
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Scott Alexander	James Bernard	John Cady Jr	Mary Beth Costigan	L Leonard Drew	Judy Fitch	Robert Gove	Melville Hawley
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Walter Arndt, Jr	Richard Blair	Ashley Creighton	Rose Dukette	Rose Dukette	Of	Leo Greenberg	Robert Henning
William Ashe	Ralph Blakslee	Wenda Creps	Donnie Duling	Donnie Duling	James Foster, Sr	Glenn Gregoire	Fred Henrikson Rev.
Alison Ashe	Walter Blanchard	James Crisante	Pamela Dunbar	Pamela Dunbar	James Foster, Sr	David Gregory	Trust
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Douglas Barry	Robert Bronson	Andrew Delorenzo	& Paul Entriaken	& Paul Entriaken	Roland Gerhart	Winifred Hansen	June Holmes
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Geri Bartlett	Kristen Brosnahan	Caroline Depalo	Cody Erwin	Cody Erwin	Richard C Gilbert	Angela Hardy	Tim Holst
Robert Bartlett	Denise Brotherton	Mara Desosier	Brian Estes	Brian Estes	Richard Gilbert	Robert Harmon	Norris Holt
John Bash	James Brown	Sarah Desantis	Gregory Evans	Gregory Evans	Scott Giles	Mary Harney	Lynn Hood
Bess Bates	Margaret Brown	Mark Desmeules	Melissa Fair	Melissa Fair	Mae Gillander	Diane Harriman	Sylvia Hook
Robert Battles	David Brown	Judith D'este	John Fairbanks Jr	John Fairbanks Jr	Robert Gillespie	John Harrington	Curtis Hooper
Megan Baxter	Julia Brown	Michelle Deth	Lawrence Fairbrother	Lawrence Fairbrother	Kathleen Gilman	Dean Harrington	Marilyn Horton, Albert
Kenneth Bayley	Leticia Brown Jr	George Devlin	Eugene Farland	Eugene Farland	Michael Giroux	Claudette Harrington	& James Wehe
Kenneth Bean	Kendall Bruleigh	Donald Deyo Sr	Robert C Farnham	Robert C Farnham	Benjamin Glidden	Fredrick Harris	Sarah Hotchkiss
William Bean	Stephanie Buck	James Diebold	Slade Farnham	Slade Farnham	Kermit Glines	Susan Harris	Alex Hotchkiss
Charles Beane	John Buckley	William Dilts	Sonja Farnham	Sonja Farnham	Norman Goddard	Ivy Harris	Elliot C Houghton
John Beardsley	Thomas Buell	Dayton Dix	Arlington Farnham	Arlington Farnham	Marion Godfrey	John Hart	Estate
Rhonda Beardsworth	Jamey Burbo	Evelyn Dixon	Robert Fassett	Robert Fassett	Brian Godfrey	John Hart	Lorraine Houle
Florence Beck	Jerome Burdett	Albert Dodge	Joseph Fazio, Jr	Joseph Fazio, Jr	Brunhild Goettsche	John Hart	William Houston
Mandi Beck	Seila Burgieliwicz	Ernest Dodge	Jason Felch	Jason Felch	Kari Gokey	Lillian Hart	Eric Houston
Darrell Becker	Francis Burke	Kyle Dodson	Lou Feldvary	Lou Feldvary	Joseph Gonsalves	Mark Hart	Cindi Hovey
Minnie Beckler	Robert Burnell Sr	Gladys Dolan	Ernest Fenner	Ernest Fenner	Dean Gonyaw	Mary Hart	Mandeville Howe
John Bedell	Candis Burnett	Robert Donnelly	Sandra Fenner	Sandra Fenner	Jeff Gonyon	Leann Hart	Ralph Howe III
Julia Bedle	Ellen Burnham	George Doody	David Ferch	David Ferch	Peter Goodall	Peter Haskins	Gail Howell
Phillip Beede	James Burns	Michael Dorfman	Iseult Ferguson	Iseult Ferguson	Donna Goodrich	Elinor Hastings	Samantha Hoyt
Craig Behnke	Elise Burrington	Frank Dorr	Joseph Ferrara	Joseph Ferrara	Deanna Goodrich	Marguerite Hatch	Tammy Hoyt
Deborah Beier	Ralph Bushey	Michael Douglas	Lillie Ferris	Lillie Ferris	David Goodrich	Margaret Hatch	Jean Huard
Charles C. Belanger	Donald Buska	Christine Coolidge	Joseph Fetta	Joseph Fetta	Margaret Goodwin	Dale Hatch	Thomas Huestis



J Norman Hughes Dwight Hull, Sr Dana Hunt M Kelley Hunter David Huntington Judy Huntington Barbara Hutchins Tammy Hutchins Wendy Hutchins Shana Isaacson Jacqueline Isaak Christine Isham Anthony Izzo Robert Jackson Stanley Jackson Stuart Jackson Paul Jaeger Peter Jamele Melissa Janes Jeffery Jeannette Sandra Jenkins John Jenkins Amy Jenner Erik, Chris, & Malcom Jensvold Sarah Jerome Adelaid Jewell Marilyn Jewell Joanne Jewett Tina Jillie Lisa Johnson Vinnie Johnson Robin Johnson Jeffrey Johnson Gregory Johnson Pauline Johnson Walfred Johnson Harold Johnson John Johnson Brent Johnson & Heather Hinckley Kenneth Johnston Marie Jones Warren Jones Deborah Jones Allison Jones Corey Jones Todd Jones Dean Jones David Jones Laura Jorstad John Jose Bruce Joslyn Helene Jurkiewicz Marjorie Justice Peter Kaminski Daniel Kaminski John Katz Roy Kaufman Joshua Keels James Keene Gail Keith Meghan Keith-Hynes Leslie Kelley Amber Kelley Kevin Kelly Mary Ellen Kelton Douglas Kemis Marcia Kemp Marie Kenefick Lisa Kent F Ray Keyser, Jr James Kiefer Allen Kimball Christina Kimball Pamela Kinder William Kindestin Tammy King Pamela Kinney Scott Kirkpatrick Lee Kitchen Christine Kijer Christine Klaine Andrew Kline Leo Knapp Paul Knowles Deborah Knowlton Arlene Kohl Lawrence Kokoszka Mark & Dawn Koloski Donald Kramer John Krausem, Jr Estate Robert Krom Philip Krone, Estate Keith Kuegel Cindy Kurutza Joseph Labbie Gerard Laberge Sandra Labounty Hughes Labrie Robert Lacasse H John Lackey Jr Joan Laclair Normand Lacroix Sylvia Lacross J Everett Ladd Robert Lagerstedt Jr Russell Lahart Peter Lakatos Luciano Lalli Michael Lamp Roger Lamson Susan Lamson Mona Lancey Anita Landa Lorraine Landers Joshua Landis Jonathan Lange Wilfred Langevin David Langford Melissa Langmaid Robert Langone Kevin Lanphear Alan Laperle L Sandy Laperle	Tammy Laperle Margaret Lapiere Jessica Laporte Annie Larivee, Estate Glen Larkham Stephani Larocque Reginald Laundry Frank Lawrence Susan Lawrence Susan Lawrence Albert Lawrence Estate Tamera Lawson John Leahey Janice Lebron Ghislain Leclerc Lisa Lee Paula Leeper Kevin Lefevre John Leggett Jonathan Leibold Juliette Lemay William Lemieux Kathleen Lennon Deborah Leno Sterry Leno li Lilli Lenz Ellen Leonard Milford Leonard Lumina Leslie Robert Lessig Rosanna Lester Corinne Levarn Norton Lewis Wenbo Li Alona Litwack Julian Locke Norman Locke Eugene Long Paul Lonsdale Charles Lord Marian Lord Sandy Lord Michael Lori William Loring Ann Lovald Lisa Lovelette William Loving Carol Lowell Neil Lowell Paul Lowney James Lubas Patricia Lucas Charlotte Luce Donald Lumbra Robert Luongo Nelson Lyford Vincent Lyn Douglas Lynch Catherine Lyndes John Lynn Michael Macarilla Gloria Macaulay Ronald C Macaulay Estate Ronald Macie Roger Mack Diane Mackay Stephen Mackay Stephen Mackenzie Craig Maclellan Wallace Macnow Jerrol Magoon Lori Magoon Robert Magoon Edgar Magoon, Sr Michele Mahaney Patricia Mahon Alyson Mahony Amanda Males R Mallary III Carla Malnati Joseph Manavola Jessica Manchester Jim Mangene Albert Mangino Thomas Mangum June Manley Mildred Manning Kelly Manning Bryan Marble Marion Mark David Markwood William Marone Christine Marsh Douglas Marsh Jill Marshall Catherine Martin Robert Martin Herbert Martin Mary H Martin Estate Joseph Martineau David Mascoveta Ralph Mashburn Victor Masi Kelly Mason Carroll Mason Kenneth Mason William Massey Terry Maxfield David Maxwell Anita May Frances Mayer Christy Mayes Melanie Mazzarella & Christopher Wood James Mazzonna Ronald Mazzucca Mark McAllister Joseph McCarthy Gary McCarthy Jane McChristal Maurice McCracken Jr Kevin McCue Marilyn McCullough John McCullough	Larry McEnany Stephen McFarland Meghan McGeary Sheila McGovern John McGrath Nicole McGrath Frederick McGuire Sr Mary McIntosh Jean McIntosh Alec McIntosh Robert McKay Michael McKenna Robert McKenney Michael McLane Thomas McMahan Thomas McMahan Jr Choyne McPhee Charles Meeks C Padma Meier Travis Melkonian Robert Menard Katherine Menard Tara Mendes Melvyn Merchant Robert Merritt Barry Merritt Richard Messer Claude Metivier Debra Meyette Robin Miller Iva Miller Lawrence Miller Melanie Mills-Brown Richard Minard, Jr Robert Miner Austin Minor Richard Missner Lanny Molleur Rorraine Monmaney Shirley Montagne & Gene Welch Kenneth Monte Frank Montgomery David Moody Dwight Moody Erik Moon Eleanor Mooney Helen Moore Mavis Moore Pearl Moore Michael Moore Roger Morey David Morin Grace Moroch Anita Morreale, Estate of Antonia Morris Kenneth Morris Jr June Morrison David Morrison Larry Morrison Ceylan Morse Linda Morse Lucille Morse Barbara Mosenenthal Jessie Moses Richard E Moses, Sr (Estate) Jane Moz Barbara Mraz John Muentener Ramiz Mujkanovic Jeremiah Mullen Estate Patrick Mullikin Ellen Munger Harold Murphy James Murphy Marie Murphy David Murray Nancy Murray Robert Murray Philip Nadeau Madhavan Nair Rhoda Neader Carroll Nelson Karl Neubauer Virginia Nevins Grant Newton Joyce Newton Ginger Nichols Kevin Nielsen Karen Nightingale Etsuro Nishiyachi Gregory Noble Lorenzo Noel Jill Marshall Steve Nonemacker Shawn Norman Philip Norman Jack Northrup Catrina Noyes Martin Nunn-Hudson Michael Nutter Dorothea Nye Jason Nye Richard O'Brien David O'Brien Kimberly O'Brien Sandra O'Brien Maryellen O'Brien Peter O'Brien David O'Donnell Sheila Oliver Nelson Olmstead Kathy Olsen Kelly O'Meara Jennifer Omelianoff Franklin Ordway Estate (C/O Bruce Ordway, Sr) William Oren Deborah Ormsby Frank Orner David O'Rourke Ronald Ortolli	David Ostrom Richard Otten Arthur Ouellette Mario Ouellette Brenda Overstrom Wade Owens Edmund Pacetti Joseph Pacini John Rider Clifford Riggs Albert Riggs Francis Riley Thomas Riley Beverly Ripley Don Robar Susan Robbins Kelly Roberts Kathleen Roberts Ella Robertson Dale Robertson Walter Robertson Jr Michele Robie George Robinson Bonnie Robtoy Michael Rock Mary Rode Fay Ann Rogers Earl Rogers David & Audrey Rogers Linda Rogers John Roggensack Robert Rondelli Sr Arthur Ronner Arthur Ronner Harriet Ross Mark Rossi Douglas Rossi Kelley Rossier Boyd Rossignol Donna Rossier Alfred Rouelle Estate Norbert Rousse Robert Roux Nichole Roux Danielle Roy Jody Roy Kristy Roy Michael Ruetz & Kayley Griffin Tina Ruth Roy Rutledge Shirley Rutledge Erla Ryan Charles Ryerson Scott Sainsbury Ann Marie Saldi- Barrett Suzanne Sales Mary Sallerson Bunny Salls Steve & Marion Salls Edward Salomaa Gary Salter N Saltimbocca Beth Sanborn Carrie Sandin Paul Sanford Peter Sangermano Joseph Santamore Estate (c/o Jane Chateauvert) Jason Sarville Jennifer Sarazin Gaynor Sargent Estate Ronald Sarquiz Monica Saunders Evelyn Savidge Catherine Savioli Robert Savoy, Jr James Sawyer Edward Sawyer Estate Norman Schibuk Steve Schlipf Frank Schlosser Rodney Schneider Eleanor Schneider Esther Schumaker Esther L. Schumaker Eric Schwartz Lucille Schwarz J Kenneth Scott Betty Searles Lynn Sellyei Cecilia Setien Steve Severance John Severance	Estate Joseph Richardson Elizabeth Richardson Raymond Richer William Richmond Ryan Ricker William Ricker John Rider Clifford Riggs Albert Riggs Francis Riley Thomas Riley Beverly Ripley Don Robar Susan Robbins Kelly Roberts Kathleen Roberts Ella Robertson Dale Robertson Walter Robertson Jr Michele Robie George Robinson Bonnie Robtoy Michael Rock Mary Rode Fay Ann Rogers Earl Rogers David & Audrey Rogers Linda Rogers John Roggensack Robert Rondelli Sr Arthur Ronner Arthur Ronner Harriet Ross Mark Rossi Douglas Rossi Kelley Rossier Boyd Rossignol Donna Rossier Alfred Rouelle Estate Norbert Rousse Robert Roux Nichole Roux Danielle Roy Jody Roy Kristy Roy Michael Ruetz & Kayley Griffin Tina Ruth Roy Rutledge Shirley Rutledge Erla Ryan Charles Ryerson Scott Sainsbury Ann Marie Saldi- Barrett Suzanne Sales Mary Sallerson Bunny Salls Steve & Marion Salls Edward Salomaa Gary Salter N Saltimbocca Beth Sanborn Carrie Sandin Paul Sanford Peter Sangermano Joseph Santamore Estate (c/o Jane Chateauvert) Jason Sarville Jennifer Sarazin Gaynor Sargent Estate Ronald Sarquiz Monica Saunders Evelyn Savidge Catherine Savioli Robert Savoy, Jr James Sawyer Edward Sawyer Estate Norman Schibuk Steve Schlipf Frank Schlosser Rodney Schneider Eleanor Schneider Esther Schumaker Esther L. Schumaker Eric Schwartz Lucille Schwarz J Kenneth Scott Betty Searles Lynn Sellyei Cecilia Setien Steve Severance John Severance	Julie Severcool Diane Sevigny Gordon Shatney Lori Shatney Steven Shearer Patricia Shedd Connie Shepard Anne Sherman Violet Sherman Patricia Sherman Charles Sherman Anne Shields David Shipman Betty Shor John Shuttle Grace Sicely Randall Sicely Brent Sicely Elizabeth Silvester Jane Simard Rick Simmons Tausha Simmons Peter Sinclair Joanna Simon Christopher Slade Sylvia Sleeper Sherry Smecker David Smith William Smith Jonie Smith Stuart Smith Karl Smith Sandra Smith Philip Smith Barry Smith Kenneth Smith Trent Smith Barbara Smith George Smith Kenneth Smith Philip Smith Benjamin Smith Sarah Smith Trevor Smolen Marvin Snyder William Snyder Steven Somers Mary Sorensen Jose Sousa Robert Spaulding Neil Spear Fred Spencer Carolyn Spencer Michael Spinelli Steven Spitzer June Spooner Howard Spooner Sylvia Spooner Forrest Spooner Estate Terry Spoonire Ralph Spoor, Jr Jeffrey Squires Marcia St Cyr Victor St Germain David Staples Anita Stark William H Starr, Estate of Cynthia Steed Nancy Stein Gretchen Stein Angeline Stender Richard Stephens Alan Stephens Harvey Stetson Craig Stevens Mae Stevens Kenneth Stevens Candace Stewart Nicholas Stewart Lewis Stiles Ella Stillwell Speer Ronald Stoockel Harvey Stone Gayle Stone Timothy Stotz Carla Straight Robert Stratton Alvin Strayhorn Joseph Stridsberg Jon Stryker Donald Suarez William Sugarman C. Theresa Sullivan Robert Sullivan	William Sullivan Brett Swanson Ethel Sweeney Clyde Sweetser Maria Sweetser Mark Sweezy Randall Swift Helen Symons Alfred Szulc Thomas Tafuto Thomas Tafuto Hallie Tamez Michael Tanner Roger Taplin Shawn Tardif John Tassie Marilyn Taylor Adrienne Taylor Amy Terrien Aleene Tewksbury Perry Thayer Mary Thayer David Therrien Georgette Thibeault Timothy Thibodeau Roger Thivierge Trudy Thomas Kathleen Thomas John Thomas Judson Thomas Alison Thomas Paul Thompson Constance Thompson Richard Thompson Helen Thompson Robert Thompson Philip Thorne Michelle Thresher Andrew Thurston Diana Thurston Pamela Thurston Germaine Tibbetts David Tidhar Patricia Tierney Scott Tighe Shirley Tillotson Estate Timothy Randall Tim's Repair Rose Toffling Rose Toffling Marion Toohy Edith Tousignant Susan Towle Bruce Towle Elwin & Evelyn Towle Sr. (Attn: Victoria Lloyd) Charles Tracy Thomas Treece Tracie Trepanier Aldis Trombley Joanne Trombly Nichols Trust Clove Tsingle Dwayne Tucker James Tullar F Turcotte Lisa Turner Daniel Unverzagt Martin Upmal (Estate) Lisa Upson Charles Vaczy Edith Vail Michael Vandenburg Claire Vasquez Roberta Veech Perry Veillette Joanne Vermette Steven Veves Carole Victory Janine Vitkauskas Marion Vitti Frank Volpini Howard Wagner H Paul Wakefield Frances Walbridge Gerald Walbridge Jacqueline Walker George Walker Marlene Wallace Christopher Walsh Deborah Walsh & Arnold Martin, Jr., Lisa Martin, & Greg Martin	Clayton Ward Marion Ward Ronald Ward W Warsley Estate Randall Wasley Mona Wasow Mark Waters Wayne Watker Timothy Watkins Bryant Watson Barbara Watts Bruce Weatherell Jr Michael Webster Lori Webster Daniel Webster Jennifer Weed Deborah Weiss Stephen Weiss Daniel Weiss Michelle Welch Stanley Welch Patrick Welch Allison Welch Dwight Weller Bert Wendel Sr William Werner Kevin West Ronny Westcott Dean Westover Sr Daniel Wetmore James Wheeler Gerald Wheeler Richard Wheeler Helen Wheeler Estate Herbert Wheeler Jr Leona Wheeler, Estate Of Lawrence Whitcomb Frank White Sherry White Heidi White Thomas Whiteley Keith Whittemore Donald Wight David Wild Christopher Wilder Douglas Wiley Delene Willey Gwen Williams Steven Williams Kendall Willis Virginia Willis Kathy Wilcott Edward Wilson Thomas Wilson Richard Wilson Cindy Wilson Nicole Wilson Otto Winhold Heidi Winter Serena Wintle John Wires Janet Wiseley Warren Wiseman Peter Wishinski Hugh E Witham Estate Henry Witzenberger Joseph Wnukoski Guenther Wolf Gregory Wood Susan Wood Harriet Wood Stanley Woodard Gordon Woodbury David Woodbury Joanne Woodward Christine Wright Nancy Wright Florence Wright Dianne Wyeth Karen Wynkoop Steven Yates Bartlett Yates James York Marcia Young Jackie Young Patricia Young Wayne Young Roland Young Judy Young Thomas Zaremski Victor Zdon Mark Zedick Nikolajs Znamenskis
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Capital Credits = your money, refunded. A pocket guide

- For-profit businesses are designed to make more money than they need to break even. Those revenues are profits. When not-for-profit cooperatives have excess revenues, those are called margins.
- As a member of the Co-op, you are a part owner. That means that the Co-op's margins belong to you, proportional to how much electricity you purchased.
- The Board decides how much money it can afford to return to the membership every year. If you are a current member, that money shows up as a credit on your November bill.
- If you move off WEC's lines, keep your address and phone up to date. WEC will continue to send a refund authorization form for you to complete.
- Whether you're a current or former member, you can donate your refund to WEC's Community Fund: wec.coop/community-fund-donations.



The Birth of an Industry

How the renewable energy movement led to the creation of net metering

When Vermont's legislature created the state's net metering program in 1999, said former Board President Barry Bernstein, WEC was a strong supporter. "The intent of the net metering program was to support and encourage a fledgling industry so they could get their feet on the ground," he explained.

Vermont's history of net metering is also a story of the state's environmental leadership: for context, there was not then, and is not now, a federal net metering standard. In the late nineties, at WEC and elsewhere, environmental awareness around power use was starting to shift focus from a conservation mindset to recognizing how much oil, gas, coal, and other fossil fuels contribute to an impending climate catastrophe. Conserving energy was

important; even more important was to reduce fossil fuel sources of power. But in order to change the system effectively, that had to be done affordably.

Tony Klein is a WEC member and former Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. During the late 00s and 10s, Klein worked to shift Vermont's power grid to renewable energy. "Little by little, we passed legislation that mandated purchase of renewables," he explained. "The balancing act was price sensitivity."

But at the time, there were few renewable generation projects in the state. In-state renewable generation development launched with the creation of the Standard Offer program in 2009, which requires Vermont

It blossomed, which it was supposed to. It was a success.

— Tony Klein

distribution utilities to buy renewable power from eligible generation projects. Developers are guaranteed a specified price for a specified period of time, and costs are "distributed among Vermont utilities based on their pro-rata share of electric sales" per the Public Utility Commission.

While the Standard Offer program created both generation and market for renewable power at the wholesale level, Klein said, he was looking for more opportunities to add renewables to the state grid. In conversation with Mary Powell, the former CEO of Green Mountain Power (GMP), he learned that GMP is a summer-peaking utility – and solar panels generate more power during summer's long days. Powell told

Klein that individual GMP customers with solar were so valuable for shaving summer peak costs that GMP offered them a six-cent premium to purchase their onsite-generated power.

That was a "lightbulb moment," said Klein, and in 2014, the legislature passed Act 99, updating the state's net metering rules to require utilities to offer a premium for onsite net metering. "That was the birth of the growth of the solar industry in the state," said Klein. "It blossomed, which it was supposed to. It was a success."

And, he added, at the time, the profile of a typical net meterer was a customer "who didn't use a lot of electricity. That's what it was. That's what it still should be."

For more information: puc.vermont.gov

An Attractive Partnership

Under Vermont's net metering rules, large utility customers have a financial incentive to partner with solar developers

Since I left the legislature [in 2017], calculation rules have been drastically altered to create large commercial development of solar power," said Tony Klein. Those rules allow a developer to build net-metering arrangements of up to 500 kilowatts – the size of a merchant plant – and connect the project to a utility customer.

As is common in sales, utilities offer preferred rates to customers who use a great deal of their product. However, the net metering tariff – the amount the state requires utilities to pay a generator for their power in a net metering arrangement – is set at retail rates, and does not change regarding scale.

So for large utility customers throughout Vermont, partnering with solar developers is a highly attractive prospect: instead of buying all their power exclusively from their utility, their partnership allows them to participate in and benefit from the net metering tariff, while paying large customer rates for any additional power they may need to purchase from WEC.

Anyone who's run a business knows you can't sell your product for less than you pay for it.

— Barry Bernstein

In WEC territory, large customers pay about \$.11 cents per kilowatt hour they use. The state requires all utilities to pay about \$.165 cents for each kilowatt hour net metering customers generate. Barry Bernstein observed, "Anyone who's run a business knows you can't sell your

product for less than you pay for it."

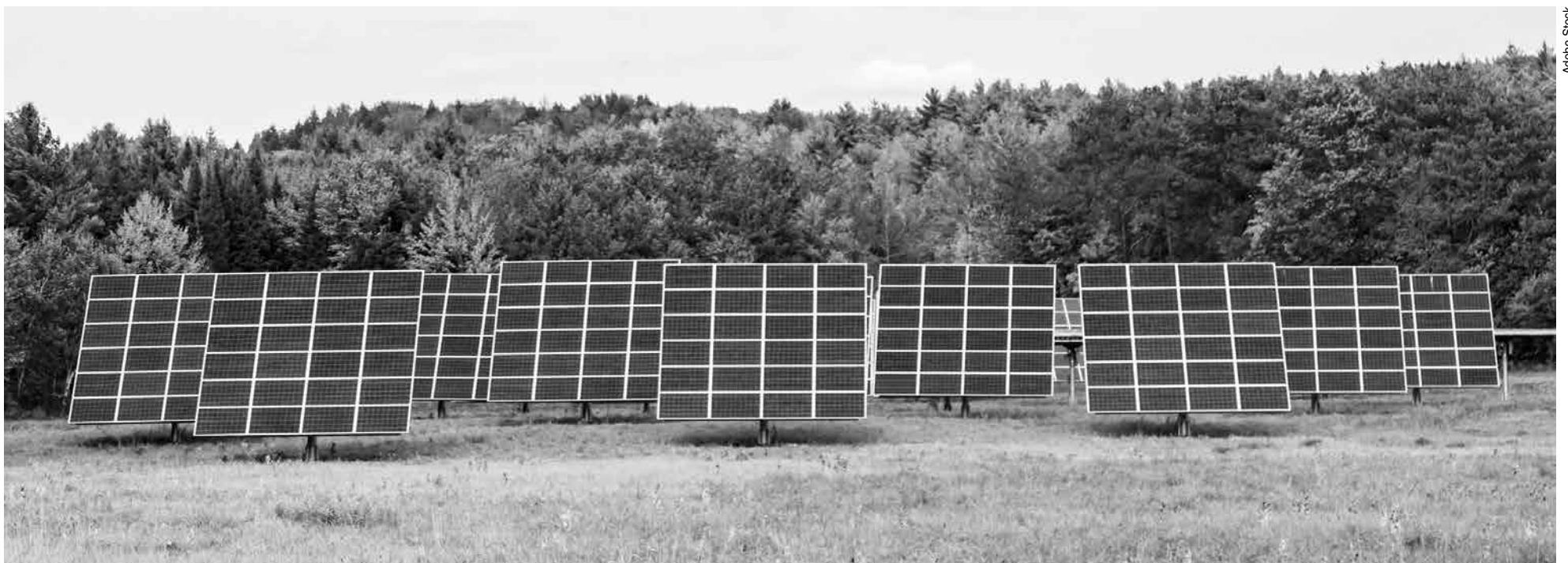
Harwood Unified Union School District is one of WEC's largest members. In 2018, the HUUSD Board of Education voted to enter a net metering partnership with Middlesex-based Kingsbury Energy on a 300 kilowatt solar development installed by Waitsfield-based developer (and WEC member) Aegis. At the time, the *Waterbury Record* reported, "For every kilowatt-hour produced by the system, the schools get a credit. Then, they reimburse Kingsbury Energy about 88 percent of that credit, meaning their savings total about 12 percent."

Christine Sullivan, a HUUSD school board member who was chair at the time, said in an email that there wasn't much to the decision. "We were presented with the proposal by the

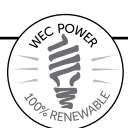
owner/representative and agreed to sign on. I believe that the economic upside is limited to a discount on our bills. We were a good fit for the owner because we're one of the few large users in the region on Washington Electric," she stated.

State statute terms, Klein explained, also prevent the utility from knowing the financial agreement between the solar developer and net metering customer. "WEC not only doesn't know, but is not allowed to know. But under current rules, WEC has to pay Kingsbury," he said. "It's a real stretch to see the connection between the power producer and the off-taker."

For more information: "Harwood schools to benefit from solar credits." *Waterbury Record*, Aug. 16, 2018"



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Who Pays the Cost of Poles and Wires

All members require infrastructure, but cost to maintain it is shifted to ratepayers

WEC's infrastructure costs have risen in recent years. The Co-op has prioritized improving reliability in the face of climate change-related storms and tree damage: that means replacing old poles, installing new poles to shorten long spans of wire, removing "danger trees" that could fall on the lines, including ash trees susceptible to emerald ash borer infestations, and otherwise keeping rights-of-way clear – without using herbicides to prevent vegetation regrowth, per Co-op policy. More recently, global supply chain tie-ups have raised equip-

ment costs, and rapidly changing data and security best practices will make grid improvements necessary.

In July of this year, WEC finished phasing in a new rate structure. Designed to help stabilize the Co-op's finances and make Co-op electricity a more economical power alternative to fossil fuel, the redesign lowered the Co-op's fee per kilowatt hour. WEC also increased the

There's a \$60-plus per month cost shift from those members who net meter to everybody else for those services they use but don't contribute to as much.

— Louis Porter

monthly member service charge from \$12.97 to \$26.49, phased in over three years as ordered by the Public Utility Commission.

In a listening group exercise in November 2017, a rate redesign member forum in

September 2018, and at other times, some members protested the Co-op more than doubling its monthly fee. But in the 2017 listening groups, former GM Patty Richards told

members that the member service charge had long been suppressed. *Co-op Currents* reported at the time that fixed costs balanced out closer to \$76 per member per month.

Today, the actual cost is closer to \$90. That means, said Board Treasurer Don Douglas, "if your electric bill is more than \$90, you're paying your full freight." And if your bill is less than \$90, he explained, other members' higher bills subsidize the actual cost of bringing electricity to your home.

On summer days, net metered solar panels contribute a great deal of electricity to WEC's grid: power that Vermont requires utilities to pay premium rates for. "I don't think there's a single other state that pays retail for excess solar production," said Douglas. "When I go to NRECA [National Rural Electric Co-op Association] meetings, people are astonished we pay 16 and a half cents per kilowatt hour for solar."

Solar is an intermittent source of generation, which means that it is not reliable 24/7/365. There is not yet sufficient battery technology to store it. However, Vermont requires utilities to pay net meterers for all the power they produce, whether it's needed or not, which means summer production can keep net meterers' bills low in winter, when they are pulling power from WEC sources. And unlike off-grid solar projects, net meterers are grid-connected, which means they are, like all WEC members, reliant on Co-op poles and wires.

So while net meterers require the same infrastructure that costs an average of \$90 per member account to maintain, for many months of the year, many pay only the \$26.49 monthly fee. As GM Louis Porter put it, "There's a \$60-plus per month cost shift from those members who net meter to everybody else for those services they use but don't contribute to as much."



All members rely on WEC's infrastructure – but only members whose bills are more than \$90 pay for the actual costs of upkeep.



Button Up 2022 Incentives for WEC Members

Thermal Incentives

Weatherization



WEC

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

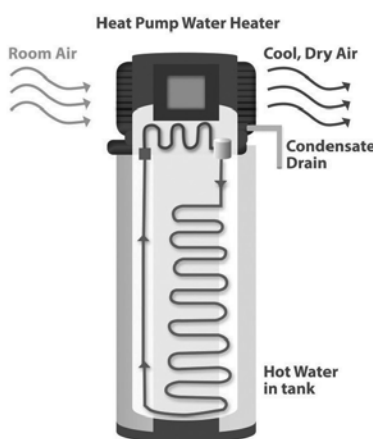
Efficiency Vermont

- Receive 50% of project cost back, up to \$1,000. Income-eligible for up to \$5,000. See efficiencyvermont.com/HP for details.

Heat Pump Incentives

WEC & EVT 2022 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives

	Point of purchase discount ¹	WEC bonus incentive
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	\$500
Ground source heat pump (GSHP)		
	EVT	WEC
Up to 10 tons:	\$2,100/ton	\$2,000
10-20 tons:	\$1,500/ton	\$1,000
20-50 tons	\$1,000/ton	\$ 500



¹ Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont

Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives¹

	Point of purchase discount ¹	WEC bonus incentive ¹
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

WEC

- \$250 for first time installation of wood or pellet stove; replacement unit for existing stove is not eligible for either Efficiency Vermont or WEC incentives.

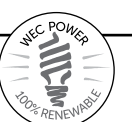
Efficiency Vermont*

- Central wood pellet furnaces and boilers: Work with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor to install a wood pellet boiler or furnace and get \$6,000 back (includes \$3,000 purchase rebate and \$3,000 installer incentive).

Note: WEC incentives of \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. Please return a completed and signed copy of the first page of your W9 form to WEC. Download the form here: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>.

*Offers subject to change. See EfficiencyVermont.com for current details.

802.224.2329 • energycoach@wec.coop



“It’s Counterproductive:” Displacing Green Energy And Causing Rate Pressure

As rates rise, members lose incentive to switch from fossil fuels to electric

As a cooperative electric utility with an environmental mission, WEC exists in a mixed landscape of not-for-profits, for-profits, and state goals and mandates, all working to change Vermonters’ behavior. While all are aiming to reduce emissions and fossil fuel use, “we’re running at cross purposes in getting to beneficial electrification,” said WEC’s former Board President Barry Bernstein. “You can’t shift people away from fossil fuels when electricity is expensive.”

One problem Bernstein has pointed to repeatedly over the years is that at a section of grid (the SHEI, or Sheffield-Highgate Export Interface) in the Northeast Kingdom, where renewable power is produced at WEC’s landfill gas plant at Coventry and at wind projects, there just isn’t enough transmission capacity to move the power from where it’s generated to where it’s needed. So when new net metering switches on in that region, it’s not a coal plant that switches off – it’s a windmill. Curtailing existing renewable generation also loses money for those projects’ investors, like WEC. “It’s counterproductive,” he said.

Another problem, Bernstein says, is that WEC power is already 100% renewable, long before Vermont’s Renewable Energy Standard required utilities to increase renewable power in their portfolios. But it’s still required to pay retail for power generated by

net metering arrays added to its grid. In addition to shifting infrastructure costs to ratepaying members, he said, the expense for redundant renewable power makes it hard to keep rates low, which makes electricity a harder commodity to sell.

So WEC must pay retail for redundant power it can not store, and the money to pay for it comes from members’ rates. WEC redesigned its rates in order to make electricity a more affordable alternative to fossil fuels, but those lowered rates are now rising. “Net metering is not the only driver to rate increases, but increasingly it is a major driver in rate increases,” observed WEC Board Treasurer Don Douglas.

In the Public Utility Commission’s (PUC) 2022 biennial update to Vermont’s net metering program, the commission reduced the compensation for new installations, in order to slow the pace of growth, and slightly increased the compensation for existing installations. The Commission acknowledged that net metering is “the costliest of the State’s renewable energy programs, and that the pace of net-metering installations far exceeds the pace of other less costly renewable energy projects.” Even though Standard Offer and utility-sourced solar were far less expensive, the update pointed to more than 28 megawatts of net metering connected in 2021 – almost


In 2017, WEC members participated in listening groups to offer feedback on the Co-op’s rate restructure. From *Co-op Currents*: “They also voiced catch-22s created by Vermont’s renewable goals. Yvan LeBlanc of Williamstown said, ‘I’m considered a high user. I’ve gone to LED lights. I burn wood. For someone to tell me I need to use more electricity, there’s only one thing that can make me do that: that’s if the cost of electricity is cheaper than buying oil.’ He suggested the state’s well-intended policies force Co-op members to subsidize the renewable industry at large, in the form of incentives to install net metering funded by the member-owned utility, and rate increases that apply only to members who must buy energy from the Co-op. The unintended consequence of this, he said, results in keeping oil cheaper than electricity for members who don’t or can’t install solar. ‘The logic is good, but the practice doesn’t make sense,’ he said.” (“Listening to Consensus,” January 2018)



triple the megawatts of the other two types of renewable projects.

“This trend toward many more net-metered projects ultimately increases rates for Vermonters who do not or are unable to participate in the net-metering

program,” read the update.

For more information: “Vermont Public Utility Commission Makes Adjustments to Renewable Energy Net-Metering Program.” *State of Vermont*, June 17, 2022 

Equity and Unintended Consequences

Today, WEC Treasurer Don Douglas said, net metering is “shifting the cost of running the Co-op from everybody to just the people who don’t have solar or some other form of net metering.” It’s a fundamental issue of fairness raised by regulators, WEC leaders, members, and others. When the PUC requested comments regarding net metering in 2019, *vtDigger.org* reported that WEC “estimated that net metering cost non-participants \$798,508 in 2019.” Co-op leaders today agree the number is closer to a million dollars cost-shifted this year, and that trend will continue.

At WEC’s listening group in 2017, member Mack Gardner-Morse of Calais spoke with *Co-op Currents* about his concerns regarding net metering. “For the people who can’t afford it, it’s going to increase their rates, and it’s the poor feeding the rich.” Not everyone can afford the capital costs of a solar

It’s the poor feeding the rich.
— Mack Gardner-Morse

installation, he said. “If you can afford it, it makes sense. There are all these policies and people who don’t realize the unintended secondary consequences,” he explained, in an interview that was not published at the time.

When the Department of Public Service (DPS) made its recommendation to the PUC to lower net-metering compensation in the Commission’s 2022 update, *vtDigger.org* reported that equity was a primary concern. The article pointed to a UVM study showing Vermonters of color were seven times less likely to report owning solar panels than white Vermonters, and that renters were three times less likely to report owning solar panels than homeowners.

“On the other hand, a lower net metering rate may hurt low- and middle-income Vermonters who want to install solar panels and gain the

energy independence that comes along with those systems,” wrote *vtDigger.org* reporter Emma Cotton.

WEC leaders contest the notion of energy independence, since net metered solar is, by design, not off-grid. “If you’re net metering, you’re not energy independent. Unless you have a big battery, you still rely on the grid to transmit and deliver your energy,” said Douglas.

But there’s a feedback loop, said GM Louis Porter, when those watching their electric costs rise see solar net metering as a way to control their bills. “As more members invest personally in net metering and divest from the cooperative model, in which we invest in green energy on behalf of all of us, only those who can’t afford to or are unable to buy solar are left to pay higher and higher prices for the product that keeps the infrastructure in place for everyone,” he said. “In our territory, with our cooperative model, compliance with the current tariff leads to circumstances that are energy-redundant, waste resources, and are anti-cooperative and unfair.”

Interestingly, in the UVM study, collective ownership emerged as a possible way to provide greater equity. The authors of the study wrote, “While public ownership would give

“no guarantees” of justice, these institutions could provide all rate-paying households—as partial owners—with official stake in energy decision-making. Public ownership could also remove the profit motive from electricity provision, creating opportunities to provide electricity cheaply (or freely) to each household, or greater incentives for the utilities to invest in electric or thermal efficiency” [citations removed].

But while public power exists in Vermont, community-owned utilities like WEC must still comply with the rules and norms of the greater system. Vermont leadership has, laudably, acted to spur urgent climate action with well-intentioned ideas driven by economic incentives. The unintended consequences of these decisions are what the Co-op is grappling with now.

For more information: “In net metering talks, state ideals clash with ratepayer realities.” *VTDigger.org*, Nov. 13, 2019
“State’s Department of Public Service recommends cuts to net metering rates.” *VTDigger.org*, Apr. 19, 2022

Keady et al: “Energy justice gaps in renewable energy transition policy initiatives.” Link on wec.coop. 