

# Context for WEC's Rate Increase Filing

By Louis Porter

Washington Electric Cooperative has filed for a 14.19% increase in its rates. The need for this increase is driven by several factors, but the primary ones are a decline in production at the Coventry landfill gas-to-electricity plant and high and volatile prices in the New England energy market that are occurring at the same time.

The result is that WEC needs to buy additional power while prices for that power are high.

The Coventry plant, which is owned by WEC, can provide 70% or more of the power used by our members. Necessary work by Casella at the landfill to expand its capacity, which began last year, resulted in less usable gas reaching WEC's plant. That decrease in production over the winter coincided with a cold January and with global volatility in the supply and cost of energy. That was based largely on natural gas supply and cost, much of it related to the war in Ukraine.

All of this has resulted in the request to state regulators to approve an increase in rates necessary to cover those increased costs and to keep WEC on solid financial footing so it can continue providing 100% renewable electricity to our members.

As members likely already know, there are several reasons that WEC's

rates for electricity are generally high compared to other Vermont utilities. The Co-op came into existence because WEC's territory was rural and rugged, and therefore difficult to serve in a profitable way. Our part of Vermont is the most rural in Vermont,

*The result is that WEC needs to buy additional power while prices for that power are high.*

with only about nine members per mile of line.

More recently, net metering power has increased costs for WEC, which had already made investments in long-term renewable power supplies. Finally, decisions based on protecting the environment, such as stopping using nuclear power, transitioning to all renewable power, and not using herbicides in WEC's rights-of-way have all added incrementally to the Co-op's costs.

Between 2012 and now, WEC's rates have increased by an average of 3.02% annually. As a co-op, WEC also returns money when the amounts collected are more than needed for operations. We're required to raise more in revenue than it takes to operate the business. That excess revenue doesn't belong to the Co-op. It belongs to the members, and that's why we return it. Since 1998, WEC has returned more than \$9 million to current and former members in this way: money which might have been profits for a for-profit business.

Finally, it is important to note that WEC is not alone. Other Vermont utilities have, or are expected to, file

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Members Monique Hayden and Stan Peake catch up after lunch as they watch WEC's Apprentice Lineworkers demonstrate gloving – a technique that allows crews to work safely on electrified lines, reducing outage time. On September 10, WEC hosted its first member gathering in more than two years. Story on p. 6.

## What the Co-op Means to Me

*A meditation on Co-op Month from a recently elected Director*

By Betsy Allen

When I first moved to the Northeast Kingdom, I heard about a neighbor who was selling bulk food items from her home in town. I could fill out a piece of paper with how many pounds of flour or beans or dried fruits I'd like. Once a month, she placed an order, received bulk amounts, and then we all pitched in to divide up the food into the right quantities. It was exciting to join with neighbors as this food cooperative was born!

It is amazing to me that the Washington Electric Co-op was born

in the 1930s for a similar reason: to meet the electric needs of neighbors that were not available to them at that time. Barry Bernstein explained it this way in the June 2009 *Co-op Currents*. "Electricity came to rural America after the Roosevelt Administration maneuvered the 1936 Rural Electrification Act through Congress. The Act created access to capital for extending power into the countryside by means of consumer-owned cooperatives, whereas, investor-owned utilities had declined to spend the money to provide rural Americans with

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### Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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WEC President Stephen Knowlton tours WEC's Coventry landfill gas generation plant during WEC's open house September 17.

## President's and General Manager's Message

# Reckoning Cooperative Values with Market-Based Incentive Systems In Our Collective Shift Away From Fossil Fuels

*Rate case, response to net metering issue, new CVFiber column, Coventry update, member cookout*

### Co-op Month: Reckoning individual incentives with cooperative values

**Steve:** October is Co-op Month. When I joined Washington Electric's Board of Directors and was figuring out my responsibilities, a wise Board member told me, whatever decision we make should be made on the basis of what is good for the majority of the membership. I came to realize the way a co-op is different from an investor-owned utility is that at every point, we ask ourselves, "Is this going to benefit as many member-owners as it possibly can?" In our Co-op, we're all members seeking reliable electric

power, not investors expecting a profit, and we should try to treat ourselves as equitably as possible.

That's the advantage of a co-op, and it's also the disadvantage of a co-op, with state-mandated incentives for EVs and net metering in which the financial benefits paid for by all WEC's members are targeted toward individual members.

I expect most of us would agree that working to reduce the use of fossil fuels in our vehicles and heating our homes while producing electricity and other forms of usable energy in a renewable manner is a priority, as long as what we end up with is as or more reliable than what we started with.

It's curious to me that in this state, a program of such global importance is largely tasked to the electric ratepayer to fund, and not spread out among all Vermont taxpayers who would benefit from mitigating climate change if it's possible. As it stands now, whether we like it or not, the cost of some of the expenditures we make on behalf of individuals are transferred to the rest of the membership.

I think our cooperative model is kind of under a strain now. As a collective of equal members, our natural inclination had been to provide rates that incentivized efficiency for all, and, over the last few decades, to go fully renewable. Each of these benefits was accessible to all our members 24 hours a day. They weren't intended to be reserved for some over others.

**Louis:** On one hand, the cooperative model seems antiquated and something time has maybe passed by, the idea that non-expert citizens would get together to operate in an economy and world and business in which expertise is growing rapidly and complexity is growing rapidly. On the other hand, cooperative principles are values, in Vermont and nationally too, that have become increasingly important and relevant to people.

There's a give and take there: between time, tech, and economic systems becoming more complicated, and a stronger than ever desire among people to have their lives and businesses adhere to longstanding cooperative principles. I don't know where that leaves cooperatives. I see a strong movement toward ESG [Environmental / Social / Governance] principles among businesses around the world; co-ops have been doing this for decades.

So while it might seem antiquated that a bunch of non-expert volunteers could get together to do something as complicated as deliver electricity in the 21st century, the principles that underlie that structure are more welcome and interesting to people than they have ever been.

**Steve:** The GM and staff run the Co-op, but the Co-op is overseen by ratepaying members who, in my

experience, support cooperative principles. The values that a co-op expresses are just as important now as they've ever been. We're just finding the culture of the cooperative is being challenged by the modern world.

**Louis:** It's important to remember WEC would have to be replaced by something. People still need the electric grid to get power to their houses. The reason Washington Electric and other co-ops needed to come into existence in the first place remains true: there aren't investor-owned utilities clamoring to come do business in a heavily forested, rural area like ours. Our service would have to be replaced by something, and that something hasn't come into being yet. Perhaps microgrids, battery storage, might change the complexion of our Co-op and territory, but right now, there isn't another entity offering to do the service Washington Electric supplies.

### WEC files for 14.19% rate increase

**Louis:** Washington Electric has filed for a 14.19% rate increase. It's a substantial increase. And that has an impact on our members, especially lower income members. It's in line with the increases of other costs, and it's basically a function of two things.

The first is the unexpected reduction, and length of reduction, of generation from our Coventry plant over the last year or so. Second is the simultaneous and extraordinarily high prices for electricity in New England driven by natural gas supply. The cost of natural gas is driving up the cost of electricity.

It's a fair question why the price of natural gas drives up costs at a utility that provides 100% electricity to its members. The answer is, in the winter, we have to buy electricity on the open market, and those prices are set to a large extent by the price of natural gas. The war in Ukraine, the increased purchase of natural gas in Europe, and the return of the economy as the COVID slowdown has changed, have driven up costs in New England and made them less predictable.

There are other factors that figure into our rate case. We need to have a certain amount of operating margins

## Co-op Currents

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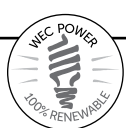
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*The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting 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](http://wec.coop/board-of-directors).*

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





to borrow money from our lenders and continue to operate the Co-op. Net metering, staff wage increases, and the costs of materials are factors, although smaller than the ones I just mentioned. All info about the rate case can be found in the ePUC system [direct link: [epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/64/173705/FV-PFEXAFF-PTL](https://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/64/173705/FV-PFEXAFF-PTL)]. You can read the full spreadsheet the rate case is based on as well as testimony regarding the reasons for the rate case.

This may not be much comfort to our members, but other utilities in Vermont are likely to file for rate cases if not at the level, close to the level we've filed at. In deregulated parts of New England and those areas without long term power contracts, increases are many, many times what our proposal is, but a direct comparison is difficult.

**Steve:** We expect production at Coventry will rebound; it is already increasing. As Louis said, the problem we face occurs fairly regularly in the winter, when our loads get higher because of wintertime temperatures. The wind resources we contract for are typically higher in winter but solar is not nearly as productive in those months.

For now, we've got a cash flow problem. If we're fortunate to solve it sooner rather than later, I hope we will be able to return more money to members in capital credits to mitigate the rate increase. But time will tell on that.

### Response to net metering issue

**Louis:** We've gotten some response to our September issue focused on net metering. Some are supportive of Washington Electric's position, some are very much in opposition to it. We have an obligation to provide information to our members about what affects their power bills and the future of the utility that they own. That requires us talking about the impact net metering has on members' bills. Whether or not you agree with WEC's position – that there should be change to net metering regulations in the way in which solar production is compensated – or not is a legitimate discussion



*While it might seem antiquated that a bunch of non-expert volunteers could get together to do something as complicated as deliver electricity in the 21st century, the principles that underlie that structure are more welcome and interesting to people than they have ever been.*

– Louis Porter

point. But I firmly believe we do need to talk to our members about net metering and the effect it has on the Co-op.

**Steve:** Some respondents criticized WEC for being discouraging of net metering, some for being encouraging of, or allowing net metering. We appreciate the dialogue. Our intent is not to criticize solar energy, which is a key renewable energy technology. It is, primarily, to inform the members of the growing impact on their bills. There are a number of accepted schemes of fairly compensating home solar producers who don't use batteries to store the energy they produce. While the specific scheme of net metering has been effective in incentivizing the installation of solar, it comes at a cost. The greater the number of net metered installations, the

greater that impact is going to be.

This is a complicated subject, and it's important to start having that discussion now, with our members, other stakeholders, and legislators, before the impact really becomes serious in the coming years. WEC is not against solar or home solar owners. We assume that anybody should be free to consume the energy they produce onsite. Going forward from here, we feel that solar power exported to the grid, in comparison with that from other renewable resources, doesn't need to be as costly to the ratepayer that many net metering advocates claim it has to be. What I understand from the Department of Public Service's annual energy report last year is that they feel the same.

**Louis:** Taking it a step further, WEC is also not against net metering. But beyond the impact to WEC and WEC members, I am really concerned about increasing the cost of renewable electricity more than necessary, because it provides a disincentive for people to switch from fossil fuels to electricity. If we're serious about climate change we need to provide low- and no-carbon power at the lowest cost we can to push people toward those power sources instead of fossil fuels. I hold that concern totally independently from

my concern about WEC's finances and cost shifting among members.

The Co-op has a tradition and history of dialogue with members, and that's to our credit. It's our intention to keep it going, particularly with the net metering issue. Steve and I have responded to many members over phone and email. We're also a democratic organization. If people think our position on net metering is wrong, they can run for the Board and support candidates who represent their interests. The one caveat is: Board members at WEC are fiduciaries. They're personally accountable for the financial health of the institution. Any new leaders need to recognize that shifting costs to fellow members and the financial health of the organization needs to be addressed.

### New broadband updates from CVFiber

**Louis:** The mission of CVFiber is similar to and connected to WEC's mission of providing essential services to our members that would be unlikely to be provided by for-profit entities. When new federal broadband grants became available to CUDs [Communications Union Districts] and WEC, CVFiber, and the other CUDs realized the original structure of our fiber-leasing partnership didn't make sense anymore, we committed to helping and aiding CVFiber in their mission. One way we can do that is giving them the opportunity to provide updates and information to



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– Stephen Knowlton

our members in *Co-op Currents*.

We know our members, many of whom are served by CVFiber, are eager for broadband updates. We're thrilled to partner with CVFiber on this outreach.

### Coventry open house

**Steve:** We had a good turnout at our Coventry landfill gas generation plant open house, operated jointly with Casella's annual open house – the first one in a couple of years. There were a lot of people who were fascinated by how the plant operated and what has to be done to actually make energy out of landfill gas. It's not like you flip a switch. The gas has to be drawn in, purified, burned in a

generator to create electricity, which is sent out on transmission lines. My impression was a lot of people were glad to see this landfill gas is being used for something useful, not just going up into the air.

**Louis:** Construction has concluded and so has the downturn in gas production. They also sank seven additional wells, and production has recovered some. We're also replacing the piping that brings the gas through the plant, and we are adding an additional blower to help draw the gas into the engines. We're also changing the way we manage the gas flow to increase production and efficiency, so we're not flaring gas when we have additional engine capacity.

**Steve:** And if you want some bad news, the facility will need roof repair over the next few years, but it's an important plant and needs to be maintained.

### Member cookout

**Steve:** We were fortunate to have a nice day between rainstorms, and we had a good time. I enjoyed talking with people about the pleasures and challenges of having an electric vehicle. Betsy Allen, Bill Powell and I all brought our EVs and enjoyed conversations about them. We enjoyed watching our three apprentice linemen show their skills and what they're learning to do. It was just nice to see our members after not having a real gathering for over two years.

**Louis:** One of the funnest parts for me was having my WEC colleagues and I and current and former Board members come together to provide food instead of providing electricity to members. It was providing, in a small way, a service to members that's outside of our normal work. That was fun and I enjoyed doing it very much.

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## 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?

#### Bradford roads:

- Fulton
- Upper Plain
- Wayne Hill PVT
- Wrights Mtn

#### East Montpelier roads:

- County
- Fitch
- Horn of the Moon
- Jacobs
- Sanders Circle

#### Worcester roads:

- Eagle Ledge
- Fraizer
- West Hill
- Wood

#### Middlesex:

- Macey Road

### For up to date information:

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

## Members Write

# Members Write: Responses to September 2022 Issue

To *Co-op Currents*:

I applaud the Co-op for making the *Co-op Currents* digital.

However, the September issue had me confused with the links to read the “net metering” pieces at the tail end of the print issue. I first clicked on each of the links and read those pieces; they seemed short and disjointed. I then read the PDF of the whole issue; reading first the front page story apparently written by the Manager and Board Chair. The end pieces seemed duplicative of the front page story.

I appreciated the discussion about equity and net metering, but did not see any intention of getting the legislature to “fix” the situation. Is the Co-op going to lobby the legislature to reduce net metering payments? Who is lobbying the Legislature for the WECOop?

As far as reading the digital *Currents*, I recommend readers click directly to the PDF to read the print version (virtually).

— Bud Haas  
Bradford

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To *Co-op Currents*:

Interesting!! After encouraging customers with incentives to install solar systems, heat pumps for heat and hot water, buy other appliances including electric cars you go for a substantial rate hike. I do hope the new rate will be on those with net metering to balance out the inequity between the haves and have nots.

— James Lynch  
Barre

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To *Co-op Currents*:

I wanted to thank the WEC Board President, General Manager, and Board for their clear and informative statement on the current net metering compensation program and its impact on WEC members, and as important, how it is a deterrent to encouraging our members to move off of fossil fuel for meeting their heating and transportation needs to using electricity, supplied by renewable energy generation.

A few facts: if all fixed costs to run our not-for-profit Co-op were recovered in our monthly member charge, it would be more than \$90, not under \$30/month. How much does each WEC household spend on their monthly bills for cell phone, cable, landline with DSL? Since the 1990s, WEC has been a strong supporter of conservation, energy efficiency, and net metering (including meeting and surpassing the Public Utility Commission 4% of sales, then the 10% requirement). WEC was one of

For the WEC Board of Directors' position statement, context, and more information on the Co-op's ongoing conversation about net metering, please see:

- The President's and General Manager's message in this issue (p. 2)
- The September 2022 net metering theme issue of *Co-op Currents*

the first Vermont utilities to divest from nuclear power generation, to move to landfill gas generation, and the first to have a 100% non-fossil fuel power supply for our members. The issue has never been WEC support for renewable generation, but rather: after 25 years, the outdated net metering cost subsidy reimbursement, its spread from its original residential home focus, paying commercial for-profit companies residential kWh rate subsidies, while selling power during winter at lower commercial rates, with non-net metering members picking up more of the share of

operating and fixed costs.

But even more important is the counterproductive impact on WEC's ability to be able to lower its upper block cost per kWh so as to make the transition off fossil fuel for our members' heating and transportation use more economical. The net metering program over 25 years has been highly successful, and it is now time to refocus, finding the most effective and efficient ways to use solar and other renewables and to more appropriately incentivize our transition for heat and transportation away from fossil fuel.

— Barry Bernstein  
Calais

*Barry Bernstein is a former President of WEC'S Board and co-owner of BWE, and was involved in the installation of 100 wood chip heating systems in New England, including National Life, Norwich University, Green Acres Housing Project, and over 40 Vermont schools and businesses.*

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## ASK THE ENERGY COACH:

### Do net meterers sell their power to WEC?

**Dear Energy Coach: Do net meterers actually sell WEC the power they generate, like a commodity on an open market?**



No, and the easiest way to explain this is by describing the economic relationship between homeowners with net metering systems and their utility. All net meterers in Vermont are compensated by their utility for the power they export to the grid. They are all compensated the same rate, which is set by the Public Utility Commission, and they are all compensated by a bill credit. We often see sales terminology used to put the transaction into simpler terms, but it's quite different from a market transaction.

The value of the power generated by a net meterer is not fungible, and no one other than the net meterer owns it. WEC just follows the rules set by the state. The amount of money a net meterer receives for the energy they export to the grid is applied to their bill, and only to the elements of the bill permitted by statute: it offsets the energy charge (or the kilowatt hours you use each month), and the recurring monthly net metering service charge. The credit can't be applied to any other part of the bill, such as the member service charge.

The economics get complicated when a large-scale net metering project partners with a member. For an example of this, see “An attractive partnership” in the September 2022 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

Finally, it's important to remember this arrangement is exclusive to Vermont. There is no federal standard program or law for net metering. Each state comes up with its own method of allowing or not allowing, favoring or disadvantaging the program. WEC, and all other Vermont utilities, operate by the state's rules.

Have an energy question? Ask the Energy Coach:  
[energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop)

To *Co-op Currents*:

I read with disappointment the WEC Board's recent letter of opposition to net metering and home solar power.

It's obvious that Vermont's net metering structure as it's set up needs to change — it is penalizing utilities in direct proportion to the number of subscribers who use it. That's the reverse of what you'd hope for. One thought is, the State could assume the subsidy payments, so the costs are shared equally.

Three years ago, my concern about runaway global warming and our country's lack of action to slow it down became so acute that I decided I had to do what I could on my own. I was well aware that the Co-op's power mix is fully “renewable,” though unclear about what that means for global warming. But I was also concerned that given WEC's sky-high rates and the good chance of further big increases (as we are seeing now), converting our heating oil and gasoline use to electric would expose us to unforeseeable and possibly huge future costs.

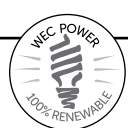
So I bought a solar array big enough to power not only our existing load, but also heat pumps and an electric vehicle charger. Now that it's been a few years, I feel our experience could be useful to others. In broad terms, our kWh usage has nearly tripled, from around 6,000/year to 17,000. We have almost stopped burning gasoline—how can that not be a great thing for the Earth? Our heating oil has declined, and we burn less than a cord of wood, down from 3 a year.

Ironically, it turns out we could have afforded to just stick with WEC power, at least at for now. If I'd had some trustworthy guidance to forecast our usage and analyze this, I might have elected not to get the solar, and see what happened. If WEC wants people to consider this option, it could help members assess it.

Sadly, as the Board's letter makes clear, the Co-op still conceives its role as supplying light and appliance power; the idea of families converting off fossil fuels by expanding their use of electricity seems not to be in its thinking. I feel a little leadership here might have saved the Coop a world of hurt.

So what about our costs? Our Co-op bills have gone from about \$1,000 in 2018 to around \$875 in 2020 (2019 was the conversion year). But in 2021, we spent \$1300. Why? To our surprise, running the heat pumps as a/c in the summer has dramatically improved our allergies. So we may be spending more, not less —of course, for a ton more power.

The battery we bought with the system for backup has another





capability that could be great for the Co-op. I can easily set it to sequester power from the solar array during sunlight hours, and then release it to WEC during peak usage hours. At those times the Co-op could use that power and not have to sell it at a loss. You would think the Co-op would

have interest in that. GMP actually gives batteries to solar subscribers for that purpose. But in spite of asking, I've heard nothing. So, I just set it by my best guess. But imagine if all the members with batteries used them to shift locally generated power to the time it's needed! I could literally

shift nearly half my production on a sunny day. (And yes I know a signaling system would be ideal. But isn't there a benefit in the current world as well?)

Beyond the immediate financial issues with net metering, I hope the Co-op will expand its vision to its potential for helping displace fossil


fuel use in cars and home heating. Batteries to complement home solar are one avenue, but I'm sure there are others, such as implications for both generation and transmission.

— Charles Byron Peacham

**Rate Increase**

*continued from page 1*

for significant rate increases this year. And much of the rest of New England has seen greater increases in the price of electricity, although it is difficult to accurately compare states in which the energy market has been deregulated to Vermont, where it has not.

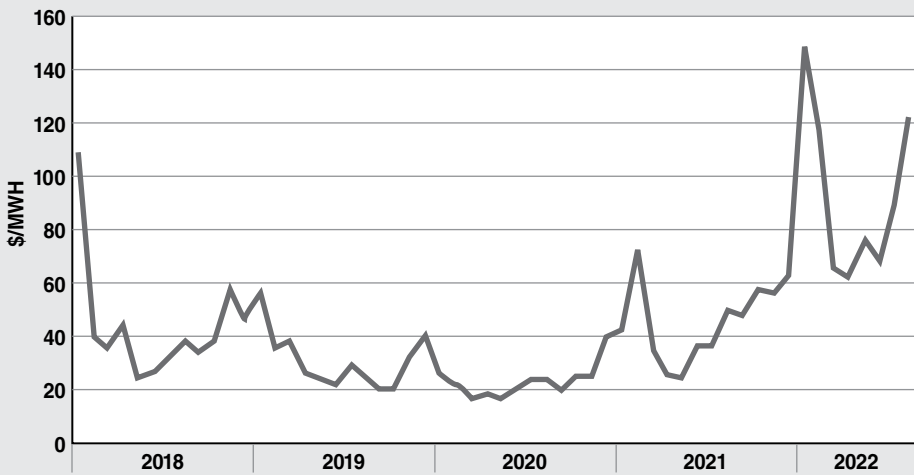
We understand that none of this provides much comfort to WEC members who will likely see their power bills increase significantly. Anyone who is interested in this rate increase or in commenting on it can find that information on the Public Utility Commission electronic docket system here: [epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/64/173705/FV-PFEXAFF-PTL](http://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/64/173705/FV-PFEXAFF-PTL). 

**Why is New England seeing increased electricity costs?**

Read this news story from WBUR Boston: "Why electricity prices are rising unevenly across New England," by Miriam Wasser (WBUR) and Mara Hoplamazian (NHPR), published September 8, 2022. Direct link: [wbur.org/news/2022/09/08/new-england-electricity-prices-natural-gas-utility-auctions](http://wbur.org/news/2022/09/08/new-england-electricity-prices-natural-gas-utility-auctions)

**New England Electricity Prices**

(Monthly average \$/MWH)



**Dollars Given Back to Members**

1998 . . . . .	\$273,173
1999 . . . . .	\$231,221
2000 . . . . .	\$287,695
2001 . . . . .	\$221,316
2002 . . . . .	\$203,241
2003 . . . . .	\$204,649
2004 . . . . .	\$277,129
2005 . . . . .	\$275,010
2006 . . . . .	\$272,815
2007 . . . . .	\$276,258
2008 . . . . .	\$318,221
2009 . . . . .	\$275,006
2010 . . . . .	\$272,999
2011 . . . . .	\$275,025
2012 . . . . .	\$275,329
2013 . . . . .	\$274,949
2014 . . . . .	\$299,992
2015 . . . . .	\$349,996
2016 . . . . .	\$460,001
2017 . . . . .	\$719,999
2018 . . . . .	\$750,000
2019 . . . . .	\$750,000
2020 . . . . .	\$770,000
2021 . . . . .	\$770,000
2022 . . . . .	\$400,000*
<b>Total . . . . .</b>	<b>\$9,484,023</b>

\*to be distributed in fall of 2022


**What the Co-op Means to Me**

*continued from page 1*

electricity." Barry goes on to explain that the idea of a cooperative was not embraced by all; some thought it was a "socialist scheme." But they prevailed; WEC was formed and people actually set poles themselves! No hired linesmen then! When I moved to Plainfield with my partner, who was a long time WEC member, I initially had no idea about this cooperative. But these informative *Co-op Currents* kept arriving with interesting articles and I began to learn about WEC. In 2017 when I was looking into purchasing an electric car, I read about the rebate from WEC in *Co-op Currents*. That little extra incentive made it possible for me to purchase a Nissan Leaf. Then, coincidentally, I purchased a used Level 2 Charger from Steve Knowlton, who is now our current WEC President.

My first WEC community meeting was shortly after my car purchase – a dinner gathering at the Worcester Town Hall in 2017, encouraged by our friend Annie Reed. It was packed! Barry Bernstein led a lively discussion during which I shared about my electric car. There was a strong feeling of community and interest in the Co-op which motivated me to attend other annual meetings and run for election to the Board.

As a new Board member, I am committed to considering the needs of all 11,000 members! As part of a team that works closely with Louis Porter, the General Manager, and the staff, we have to balance financial responsibility, Vermont utility regulations, renewable energy generation, customer solar generation, electrification incentives, line installations, clearing and safety for linesmen, support for income eligible families, grants for community organizations, and more.

With climate change and environmental concerns, along with the move away from fossil fuels to renewable sources, the important role of electric utilities has grown. I am glad to be part of this cooperative. WEC is about neighbors caring about neighbors as we make decisions and provide this essential service to our rural communities. 

*Betsy Allen of Plainfield was elected to WEC's Board of Directors in 2022.*

**Co-op Principles**



**1. Voluntary and Open Membership** — Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

**2. Democratic Member Control** — Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

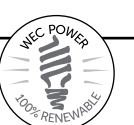
**3. Member Economic Participation** — Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

**4. Autonomy and Independence** — Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

**5. Education, Training and Information** — Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

**6. Cooperation among Cooperatives** — Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

**7. Concern for Community** — While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.





# Together Again

*Co-op gathers members together for a cookout, connections, and engineering demonstration on a sunny September day*

September 10 was hot and sunny. But with almost 150 members expected for lunch, the grills were busy at WEC's Operations Center, cooking burgers and chicken from local farms.

Typically, WEC hosts the Annual Meeting of the membership in early May, and holds a community meeting in one of the 41 towns it serves during baseball playoffs. In recent years, the Annual Meeting has been held in the Operations Center, which can hold hundreds in a space most members never otherwise get to see. The Operations Center is home to all the big trucks and equipment, an unelectrified span of poles and wires line crews use for practice, and a huge mural showing WEC's landscape through the changing seasons.

But there hasn't been a Co-op gathering since the community meeting held in Cabot in October 2019. As COVID restrictions began to lift this summer, WEC leaders saw an opportunity. The September cookout had no agenda as far as discussing Co-op business – this was a casual event. This was a time to meet new staff and board members, to talk with neighbors long unseen, to see bucket truck and electric vehicle demos, to enjoy good food and music together.

The staff and Board tasked with welcoming had all arrived in their positions at the Co-op since the last gathering. Apprentice Lineworkers Ryan Martel, Dylan Gagnon, and Christian Gagne, and Lineworker & Equipment Operator Donnie Singleton, cleaned



*Products & Services Director Bill Powell, WEC's Energy Coach, talks electric vehicles with Sandal Cate, who is considering purchasing one.*

and set up the huge garage, and offered tours. Board members Betsy Allen and Susan Alexander greeted guests and handed out name tags. Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero ran the show. Outside, Engineering & Operations Director Dave Kresock and General Manager Louis Porter worked the blazing grills with support from former Board member Roy Folsom. Molly Porter lent a hand with just about everything, there to help her brother, the GM, throw a party.

Longtime Board and staff were also present, including President Steve

Knowlton, Treasurer Don Douglas, and Mary Just Skinner; and Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden, Plant Accountant Dawn Johnson, and Products & Services Director Bill Powell. Also present were Barry Bernstein and Annie Reed, who both recently stepped off WEC's Board, and served for many years as President and Secretary, respectively.

After the assembled members had some time to eat and visit with each other, Porter and Knowlton gave brief remarks. "It's good to see everyone in person after a long time of only

seeing you on computer screens," acknowledged Porter. He grew up with WEC electricity, and commented that he's proud to be leading an unusual organization like WEC, which only exists because people "banded together to provide a service in a territory commercial entities declined to

## Sign up for Outage Alerts on SmartHub

As of May 15, 2022, Washington Electric Co-op is sending emailed notifications of scheduled outages through SmartHub. To continue receiving outage updates by email, you must sign up through SmartHub, accessible through [wec.coop](http://wec.coop).

Outage updates will continue to be posted on the Outage Center page of [wec.coop](http://wec.coop), and auto-calls will be generated to those affected by outages.

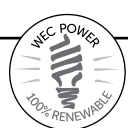
By updating your notifications settings in SmartHub, you will receive targeted, real-time information about the outage affecting your line, delivered right to your phone or email. You can also receive billing and usage alerts.

If you don't yet use SmartHub, you can start today: it's accessible by computer, tablet, or smartphone. Call in an outage, manage your usage, pay your bill, and review your payment history all in one place.

If you would like help setting up your account, a WEC Member Services Representative will be happy to help: call 802-223-5245.



*General Manager Louis Porter and daughter Mae take a break in the shade.*





serve, and to do it in a transparent and democratic way,” he said. “I think that’s pretty neat.”

Knowlton spoke about the change in staff and on the Board of the Co-op, remarking on the service of former staff and Board, welcoming new additions, and warmly acknowledging internal moves. Teia Greenslit, he said, “a WEC

stalwart” in the finance office for many years, is now Director of Finance & Administration. Dawn Johnson has moved from a front-facing role to Plant Accountant, “but is still the backbone of WEC,” he said.

Faces may change, but WEC is still the same WEC, he said, with the same values and mission: reliable power,

at reasonable rates, with low environmental impact.

The music started – led by multi-instrumentalists Patrick Ross and Doug Perkins, whose live performances over Zoom provided the entertainment for two virtual Annual Meetings. Outside, the Apprentice Lineworkers began a gloving demo – showing how they can use a new tool called rubber gloving to work safely on an energized line. Dave Kresock commented, “We’ve been doing

it for about three months and I can’t tell you how many outages we haven’t had to take.” Historically, WEC never worked on energized lines, he explained, so the power went off for all kinds of maintenance work. But, he said, some work can be done on energized lines, like taking out a transformer, as long as all safety precautions are in place. With a new policy and training, the practice means outages are down over last year. Sometimes, change really is good.



Former WEC Board member Roy Folsom of Cabot gamely helped out at the grill.



After more than two years with no member gathering, WEC members line up for local burgers and grilled chicken in the Operations Center. WEC served beef from McKnight Farm in East Montpelier and chicken from Schoolhouse Farm in Calais. Other catering came from Delicate Decadence in Barre.

## Button Up Incentive Pause

**W**EC is pausing distribution of Button Up incentives for the fourth quarter in an effort to help resolve the Co-op’s cash flow. The Co-op already met the state target for this year for its Renewable Energy Standard (Tier III) targets, said Products & Services Director Bill Powell, and will not incur any penalties for pausing the program.

Members upgrading to equipment eligible for incentives should continue to submit their invoices, said Powell. Fourth quarter 2022 purchases, and any remaining third quarter purchases dated from September 2022, will be honored, likely in the first quarter of 2023, according to Powell.

WEC has already met state goals for reducing emissions among its membership, he said. “We met our target, and since we have a rate case, we’re pausing because we need to save cash and keep our rates as low as we can,” he explained.

In 2023, he said, WEC will come back with a revised incentive system to support members transitioning from fossil fuel to 100% renewable power.



**Monique Hayden**, former Board member from Williamstown, took a behind-the-scenes tour of the warehouse with the lineworkers and was delighted to watch the gloving demo: “This allows them to work on hot lines so they don’t need to shut the power off. It’s a benefit to them. It’s a benefit to the customers of WEC. It’s a win-win-win. They’re so excited about that. It’s important to have that buy-in from employees,” she said. WEC boasts an outstanding safety record, and the crews work in all weather – wearing heavy gear in the hot sun, and going out on cold wet winter nights, she added. “We should all think about them when we turn the lights on. It was so good to talk to the guys about this.”

After the gloving demonstration, the lineworkers moved on to plucking a piece of equipment called a **cutout** from the top of a pole with a tool resembling a metal lobster claw on a 30-foot stick. The cutout is a tube about eight inches long, with a tiny fuse inside. Dave Kresock asked, “Can you imagine doing that in 30 mile an hour winds during a freezing rainstorm?”

The tool is called an extend-o-stick and it’s somewhat heavy – especially if you have to hold it up over your head in order to reach. You’re supposed to hook and retrieve the cutout with it and replace it the same way.

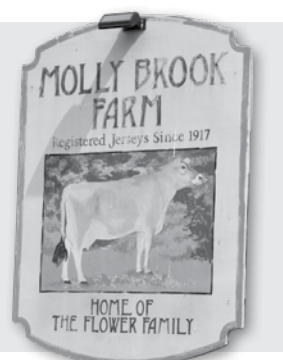
Once the cutout was at ground level, Apprentice Lineworker **Ryan Martel** showed it off.

Kresock explained that a cutout is a protective device that, like a breaker in a house, opens when a line is overloaded. “It protects people from getting hurt and equipment damage by opening. This is often the loud bang folks hear when it does blow. It also gives line crews a visual indication as to where the trouble is during an outage and speeds up restoration,” he said.



## Molly Brook Farm: Dairy Farm of the Year

Congratulations to WEC members and organic dairy farmers Myles and Rhonda Goodrich! Molly Brook Farm of Cabot was recently named Vermont Dairy Farm of the Year.





# An Appreciation of Stanley and Elaine Fitch, Stewards Of Land And Community

By Barry Bernstein

The lives of Stan and Elaine Fitch, who died together on August 30 in the home in Kent's Corner where Stanley was born, run parallel with the history of the Co-op. Stanley's family and Elaine's family were both among the 150 families that were the first ones hooked up when Governor Aiken flipped the switch and Washington Electric Co-op started generating power. Stan's uncle Clarence Fitch was one of the original incorporators of the Co-op; his father later served on the Board. Stan and Elaine both remembered that moment when electricity arrived. In a 2019 *Co-op Currents* interview, Stanley said that when his family turned on their one 25 watt bulb back in 1941, it was the brightest light he'd ever seen. That's a pretty amazing statement.

Stan and Elaine were notable for many reasons – in their careers in dairy farming and education, in public service, in painting, in dancing, and as parents. Here, I want to focus on one thing that was so important to them, and that's the whole cooperative spirit. I saw a letter to the editor Stan wrote



Elaine and Stan Fitch circa 1976.

in 1973, questioning the reasoning behind people posting their land. He felt posting land was losing the whole community spirit that we are merely stewards of our land and as part of a community we should welcome others

to share it. It's a philosophical framing that comes from the same roots as the whole cooperative movement.

Their family hosted an open house to celebrate Stan and Elaine on September 25. Will Lindner, the former

editor of *Co-op Currents*, and his brother Dan played music. Whenever Stan and Elaine had parties, they brought Will and Dan's band, Banjo Dan and the Mid-Nite Plowboys, to play.

I met a young woman from Montpelier who met Stanley and Elaine because she knocked on the door and asked them to walk on their land, and they told her, "Of course you're welcome to walk on our land. We're just stewards of our land." I thought it was so fitting that this is someone who didn't really know them, but just by being in the community, she got the benefit of their spirit. There were people there from all over the community, touched by their nearly 100 years of living here and stewarding this land and community. 🐾

Barry Bernstein lives in Calais and is the former President of Washington Electric Cooperative.

Stanley and Elaine Fitch remembered the early days of WEC on the occasion of the Co-op's 80th anniversary in the March 2019 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

## CVFIBER

### Broadband Update from CVFiber's Governing Board Chair

By Jerry Diamantides

As the season changes in Central Vermont, CVFiber is also changing from pre-design and design work to construction. I want to give the largest expression of thanks that I can to Louis Porter, Dave Kresock, and all of the WEC team that has supported CVFiber by housing our reels of fiber and working with us through the pole licensing process.

You may have already seen some of our pre-design and design workers evaluating WEC's utility poles for placement of the fiber that will connect CVFiber's 1,000-mile community broadband network. We are planning for construction workers to be in Calais, East Montpelier, and Worcester this Fall with the hope of getting real high-speed Internet service into homes in early 2023.

It's important to know that CVFiber is bringing next-generation Internet speeds, capability, and capacity to Central Vermont. We're not playing catch-up, we're leaping ahead. Our minimum speed of 100 Mbps (Megabits per second) for downloads and uploads means that streaming video, playing on-line games, and working from home can all occur concurrently. With higher speeds up to 1 and 2 Gigabits per second that we will offer, you can add concurrent access to online education, remote work in art, design, and medical professions, telemedicine, home security, smart home devices, and more. With CVFiber, Central Vermont won't have to upgrade Internet infrastructure for a generation or more.

Connectivity is not the end; connectivity is just the beginning. Watch our progress at [cvfiber.net](http://cvfiber.net).

### Replace Your Ride Program Launches

Eligible Vermonters can now participate in Replace Your Ride: a new, stackable incentive program to scrap combustion engine cars that are at least 10 years old and replace them with new or used plug-in electric vehicles. Incentives are first come, first served.

This is the first phase of an incentive program to lower Vermont's transportation emissions and make the availability of electric vehicles more equitable. Phase two is intended to roll out this fall. The program was established through the 2021-22 Transportation Bill (Act 55).

All details, including eligibility information, are available at [DriveElectricVT.com](http://DriveElectricVT.com) under the Incentives tab. 🐾

### 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.

### 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 Crisis Line:

(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:

1-800-585-2265.

##### Capstone Community Action:

[capstonevt.org](http://capstonevt.org)

##### NEKCA: [nekcavt.org](http://nekcavt.org)

##### Everyone Eats:

[vteveryoneeats.org](http://vteveryoneeats.org)

#### 211

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

