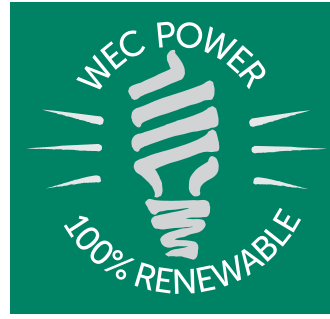




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# CO-OP CURRENTS



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The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

June-July 2024

## Knowlton, Barnes, Campbell Andersen Elected at 2024 Annual Meeting

*Recount upholds Campbell Andersen by one vote; meeting focused on storm-related outages*

In an extraordinarily close race, a single vote separated the third- and fourth-place finishers in WEC's Board of Directors election. Incumbent President Stephen Knowlton, recent appointee Pat Barnes, and new Director Olivia Campbell Andersen were elected. Long-serving Board member Richard Rubin and first-time candidate Ian Buchanan finished fourth and fifth. A recount, mandated by WEC policy for close votes, corroborated the results.

After the meeting, Knowlton congratulated Barnes and Campbell Andersen and thanked Rubin and Buchanan. "Rich has provided a number of years of highly informed service to the members of the Co-op, and we all appreciate it. I also thank Ian for running and volunteering to serve. The willingness to serve is the lifeblood of the cooperative model," Knowlton said.

### 2024 Annual Meeting

As 208 members and guests entered the Barre Auditorium for the Annual Meeting on May 2, only 30 submitted their votes in person. Ballot Committee co-chair Nancy Fuller explained that the 767 ballots received by mail had already been counted. Mailed ballots are tracked and stored at the accounting firm Salvador and Babic in Barre, but not opened, Fuller said, until the day before the Annual

Meeting. Then, the Ballot Committee alphabetizes all ballots, confirms membership for all voters, and finally begins tallying votes by hand.

It's as time consuming as it sounds: Fuller said the committee worked from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM on May 1, and then from 11:00 AM until 4:00 PM on May 2, finishing just before the meeting began. (The recount was completed by the ballot committee on Saturday, May 11).

The 85th Annual Meeting brought a new agenda order as well as a new venue. As members found seats and enjoyed cheese appetizers from Cabot Creamery Cooperative, presentations began: first, a Safety Minute courtesy of Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist David Young, who gave an affectionate presentation modeling how to show care by tending to others' safety: what he called "packing their parachutes." These behind-the-scenes acts include salting icy steps, improving lighting, mopping slippery floors, even wiping off the backup camera on his wife's car. The presentation from meteorologist Roger Hill followed.

### Special recognition

After a break for dinner, the business meeting opened with appreciation. President Stephen Knowlton acknowledged the night's sponsors and several special guests

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Olivia Campbell Anderson talks with Ballot Committee Co-Chair Cort Richardson at WEC's 85th Annual Meeting on May 2. Campbell Andersen, of East Montpelier, was elected that evening to WEC's Board of Directors.

## More Weather Extremes; More Outages

*Meteorologist Roger Hill predicts wetter storms and increased outages; GM Louis Porter on WEC's response*

Meteorologist and WEC member Roger Hill reads weather maps and models from his home office on a Worcester mountainside. Since 2007, he has provided forecasting for all Vermont utilities; he's forecasted for WEC a few years longer. On May 2, Hill was the featured presenter at WEC's Annual Meeting. In a voice familiar to many members from his weather spots on WDEV Radio Vermont—deep and animated, with the flattish vowels of his California roots—he presented analysis of recent storms, and what this means for the future.

Using slides of weather models and storm photos, Hill described characteristics of recent major storms to hit

WEC territory. As he went through the features of each storm, trends became clear. Until recently, snowfall in Central Vermont tended toward the kind of dry snow that accumulates on the ground but not on trees. But increasingly, winter temperatures between 30-35 degrees result in wet, heavy snow accumulation on trees, and that leads to outages as the overloaded branches and trees are more likely to come down. "This is becoming extremely common," warned Hill.

Hill introduced storms still fresh in the memories of most members—December 23, 2022, which resulted in a week-long outage; July 11, 2023,

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### Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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In 2024, the Annual Meeting was held in the storied Barre Auditorium.

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

# Cooperative Systems Work in Close Election

*WEC's response to meteorologist Roger Hill's predictions for more outages*

**Election and recount process**

**Steve:** In the annual election of Board members last month, Washington Electric Co-op had the closest election that anyone on the board or staff can recall. When the counting was concluded, Rich Rubin's and Olivia Campbell Andersen's tallies differed by a single vote with well over 700 ballots cast. This unprecedented result required us to dust off a previously-unused WEC policy that mandates conducting a recount for such close votes. The recount was performed by our stalwart Ballot Committee within the requisite 10-day period, and Olivia Campbell Andersen remained a one-vote leader, and her election was confirmed.

I would like to thank all the candidates for their willingness to serve their fellow members of WEC. WEC is looking forward to the contributions Pat [Barnes] and Olivia will make. I also want to thank Ian Buchanan for his candidacy and the interest he has shown in wishing to serve on the board. And last but not least, all of us on the Board recognize Rich Rubin's many and varied contributions from his extended time on the Board, and commend him for a job well done. Louis, I know you have a comment to make about Rich Rubin, and his 25 years of service to WEC.

**Louis:** Yes, it's one thing that occurred to me about working with

Rich for the last two and a half years, and knowing him longer. When you're part of an organization for a long time, your relationships with people in the organization can dissuade you from challenging and questioning things. That's never been true with Rich. He's always been willing to ask the hard questions. That's a real testament to his work as a Board member, making sure his work didn't blunt that instinct. He was important to this Board and its operations.

**Steve:** There are other groups here that deserve thanks. They are the Nominations Committee that verifies the eligibility of each candidate, and the Ballot Committee that counts the votes. Both committees consist of regular members and perform their functions independently of the Board to ensure fairness. We are run by members, and not just Board members.

To perform the recount after the Annual Meeting, a majority of the Ballot Committee got together indoors on the first sunny Saturday we've had in a long time, and spent much of the day counting ballots they'd looked at before to guarantee the election results are honest. This is an example of what it means to be a co-op.

**Louis:** Steve makes a good point that members run for the Board, members serve on the Board, and members oversee the ballot process. Staff help, and make sure they have lunch, but the actual election process is run by members, and that's important and good.

**Steve:** This close election is also an example of why you should vote in any election that could have an impact on your life. Every vote counts, and specifically, your vote counts.

**Louis:** Two more things about this. One, it's good when you go through a stress test of your system and it works well. It's common in a recount for not only the result to change, but the total number of votes to change. For WEC's Ballot Committee to run a recount with no substantive change in the results is a testament to the quality of their work in the first place. The other—we've said it before, but

it's important—we had a contested election. It's not always easy to get people to volunteer for organizations of various kinds. Boards of cooperative utilities are no different. We had more people interested in volunteering than spots available on the Board. That's a wonderful thing for the Co-op and our membership.

**Steve:** I take comfort, and hope others do too, in knowing the Co-op is governed by sound policy and members who take their responsibilities seriously. A close election gives a little bit of excitement, but as Louis said, the job was well done the first time and the cooperative system worked. It reminds me of the number of dedicated people we have who are part of this Co-op and why it's an honor to take my turn serving on the Board on behalf of the members of the Co-op.

**Annual Meeting acknowledgments**

**Steve:** Dawn Johnson [Administrative Assistant] and her fellow staff members did a great job picking a new venue, organizing the meeting, and selecting really good catering.

**Louis:** It was a great meeting, and our suppliers, vendors, and sponsors also deserve thanks for their support.

I've begun a Managers Award for staff at WEC who consistently go above and beyond in their service to its members. This year I awarded it to Amos Turner [Construction Foreman]. During any outage, Amos seems to be everywhere, doing twice as much as what was asked of him. I was honored to give him the award and pleased he was able to be there to receive it.

Amos has also served WEC for many years. Lineworkers who stay at WEC for a long period of time, don't do it for the pay or the ease of

## Co-op Currents

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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 us, at 224-2332, or visit [wec.coop/board](http://wec.coop/board).*

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work. People who stay a long time do it for their commitment to the area and to the community. We have a lot of people who have done a lot of different jobs, and they're knowledgeable about WEC in a very deep way. It's a special thing. It's important to recognize the staff who serve WEC for many years, and I'm proud we acknowledge anniversaries at the Annual Meeting. This year we recognized Pat Smith for five years, and Beth Ouellette for 25 years of service.

**Steve:** People who contribute their skills and good work need to be commended. They're contributing to our mission and to our well-being, and we're glad to have them.

**Roger Hill presentation**

**Louis:** One of our primary responsibilities is to make sure members know about things that are likely to impact the Co-op and ultimately impact their bills and the reliability of their power. I wanted to give members the chance to see what Washington Electric and fellow utilities learn from Roger Hill and fellow meteorologists, and the likelihood of what we will continue to see in storm intensity and damage and length of outages and restoration.

Next I wanted to give members the opportunity to ask why outages happen, and why they last as long as they do. Roger is both a member and our weather advisor, and it was great to see firsthand what he sees out there.



*Resilience is not zero outages. Resilience is managing your safety and well-being during an outage and bouncing back afterward.*

— Stephen Knowlton

**Steve:** I couldn't help but think his message was "a hard rain's going to fall." We anticipate our electric system will be increasingly challenged by weather conditions while regional policy leaders are simultaneously encouraging everyone to rely more on electricity. WEC's key role in adjusting to what Roger thinks are going to be significantly changing conditions is investing in reliable hardware and updating its management of outages.

But there's no silver bullet to guarantee total reliability, and there's likely to be a need for discussion among

regular WEC members and within WEC leadership about how each of us can plan to adapt to potentially longer outages, and how to help out our neighbors during these episodes.

Resilience is not zero outages. Resilience is managing your safety and well-being during an outage and bouncing back afterward. WEC can and does assist emergency services to our most vulnerable members. But WEC can't address every problem by itself: the repair crews' main focus will always be on restoring electric service as rapidly and safely as possible. As the head of operations at our fellow co-op in Vermont remarked recently, when people live in a rural area, they need Vermont grit to get through some of these situations. Preparing yourself is the message.

I was moved by what Angela Manning said at the Annual Meeting: that WEC needs member money to fix the system, but a lot of our members

are on fixed incomes, so this will be a challenge. I couldn't agree more.

**Louis:** I agree with you. There are things we can do to reduce the risk, reduce the number of outages, and we're doing those. Like any investment, it costs money. Members will have to balance their desire for reasonable electric service and the cost of providing that service in a territory like ours.

**Transformers**

**Louis:** We're working through our backlog of requests for transformers to support net metering or increases in service load.

For several years—the whole time I've been here—we've been triaging and prioritizing transformers for immediate needs. Our transformer supply has improved greatly in terms of supply, time to delivery, and cost. Barring any changes, we'll see that continue.

**Federal and state grants for new metering system**

**Louis:** Senator Sanders has gone to bat for Washington Electric in congressionally directed spending and advocated for a \$2.5 million grant to support Washington Electric's new metering system. That will be coupled with a state grant we anticipate of \$2.25 million. We're still working through conditions and approvals for both of those. When both of those are taken into account, that will largely pay for Washington Electric's upgrades to its meters, which will make a tremendous difference in our outage response, and pave the way



*Members will have to balance their desire for reasonable electric service and the cost of providing that service in a territory like ours.*

— Louis Porter

for modernizing our grid to our members' benefit. We're grateful to Sen. Sanders and will work through the final steps of approvals and implementing that.

**WEC's Integrated Resource Plan**

**Louis:** The IRP [Integrated Resource Plan] has been submitted to regulators. This is probably the single best document for any member who wants to know Washington Electric's current status, what we spend money on, what we plan to do over the next few years, and why. It covers a huge amount of our work and decision-making, where

our power comes from, how we make decisions about various things. I can't use the word "concise" for a document that's 70 pages, but it's all in that one resource. For members who want to know more, it's a good place to look. The IRP is on our website.

**Lineworker Appreciation Day**

**Louis:** Lineworker Appreciation Day was April 18. Vermont Electric Co-op did a great job organizing an event at the Statehouse. The people who work on utility line crews have work that is very difficult, sometimes dangerous, always time-consuming, and often at off-hours. And their work is essential to keeping the power system functional. It was really nice to see legislators and Governor Scott recognize the importance of their work and thank a few members of the line crew of Washington Electric, Vermont Electric, and Green Mountain Power [See photo and caption on p. 8].



Angela Manning of Orange (with microphone) inquires about wellness checks during outages, and the potential for rising costs, at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Also pictured: Harland Manning, WEC's David Young, Elizabeth Mathai.



# Getting to Know WEC Directors

## Pat Barnes, Olivia Campbell Andersen

Co-op Currents invites new WEC Directors to talk about the values and experience they bring to the role, how they'll balance vision and fiscal responsibility, and what drives them to serve fellow members. Profiles do not necessarily represent the values and policy decisions set by WEC's Board as a whole, but rather the individual perspectives of Board members. In 2024, Pat Barnes and Olivia Campbell Andersen were elected to their first terms (Barnes had been appointed to fill a vacancy in late 2023).

### Pat Barnes

Pat Barnes lives in Vershire. The home where he and his spouse raised three children is more than 200 years old. After retiring from his career as a science teacher, his ancient house and interest in energy inspired a new business: providing energy audits and helping people improve their home weatherization. Called C Quester—the “C” stands interchangeably for carbon, comfort, or cost—he identifies “the lowest hanging fruit to help people weatherize, use less carbon, move toward becoming carbon neutral, and be more comfortable.”

He first ran for the Board in 2022, just after he retired from teaching, and was appointed by the Board in 2023. He was motivated to serve because of his concern about “issues of electrical transmission and access,” he said, and the environmental impact of carbon. “If we don't get a handle on carbon, carbon dioxide, and other greenhouse gases, we are in deep, deep trouble. I come as someone trained in science who taught environmental science for my career. I think our solution is to electrify everything,” he said.

Cutting carbon emissions by electrifying everything means electricity needs to be accessible, affordable, and reliable for everyone, he said. “I suspect that means we'll need distributed generation.” Barnes allowed that he joined the Board assuming he would “rally for more net metering and for policies that would allow behind-the-meter storage. Of course,” he added, “the reality is far more complicated than it appeared from the outside.”

The challenges of distributed generation start with cost: “for the average member,” he said, “it makes their electricity slightly more expensive.” He envisions solutions will need to come through the state and federal legislatures, and sees WEC leadership having a voice in shaping policies to create a stronger, more equitable grid. “Washington Electric Co-op inherited just the most treacherous region, and



Pat Barnes of Vershire and David Young, WEC's Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist. Barnes was elected to his first term on WEC's Board of Directors after being appointed in November to fill a vacancy.

so few customers per mile; it can't be expected to solve these problems all on its lonesome,” he said. “We'll need some legislative help.”

Stemming from his science background, Barnes has a special interest in the gadgetry and circuitry that grids are built on. “I'm really excited about working with JJ [new Director of Special Projects and Innovation JJ Vandette] on the next generation of meters and what that will allow the Co-op to do,” he said. For instance, Barnes knows there are devices in his home that draw a lot of power, and could be programmed to charge during the night when demand is down, which would help to reduce WEC members' peak costs. Advanced meters provide data that inform that kind of innovation.

Barnes is generous with praise for WEC staff. “People like to complain about their electric service when they get their bill or when the power goes out,” he said, but when he was teaching, his school was served by a different utility, two miles from his WEC-served home at the end of a spur. He realized the school power tended to go out more often and for longer durations than his power at home. As a result, he said, “I have a front row seat to say, our line crews are doing great work. I often try to express to folks, ‘when your power is out it's terribly frustrating, but the WEC system is working pretty well.’”

He is also impressed with his fellow Board members. “They are smart, thoughtful, capable people who are trying to do really good work by the Co-op,” he said. Honored to join a

Board tackling such complex issues, he said, “I hope I can be useful.”

### Olivia Campbell Andersen

Olivia Campbell Andersen lives with her family on a regenerative farm in East Montpelier. She works leading transportation electrification policy for the eastern US for ABB E-mobility, a global EV charging technology company, and has previous policy experience in federal government and with Vermont's legislature and Public Utility Commission, as the former head of Renewable Energy Vermont. She brings that policy background, along with a farmer's perspective on weather, to the Board.

The three issues that led her to run, she said, reflect her personal experience on her farm and what she hears from fellow members. “Those issues are reliability and communications, affordability, and adapting for the challenges we're facing from climate change,” she explained. Her experience with communications and with new tech that supports climate resilience, she said, can help the Co-op improve and adapt.

Campbell Andersen's vision for communications begins with ensuring members are heard. “It's interesting. Utilities work on long timeframes,” she offered. “Some of the challenges we're facing as a community, and modern expectations people have, are on much shorter timeframes.” Openminded dialogue, she explained, helps people discover that they often

have the same underlying goal, but may be approaching or talking about it in different ways. She has developed the skill of being able to “really listen, digest complex information, and distill it into actionable solutions.”

She also brings both openness and urgency to new ideas and opportunities, she said. She's had to, considering how climate change has already forced her farm to act. “We've had to make changes to the types of crops we're growing and our management plans,” she said “WEC is also looking at how its operations are going to be affected both financially and day-to-day, with things like vegetation management and increased outages.”

When it comes to affordability, Campbell Andersen thinks about access. “I'm concerned that folks are being left behind and not able to access the new technologies that could ultimately help them save money on their household costs, like electric vehicles, cold climate heat pumps, or battery storage, instead of expensive and polluting gas generators,” she said. Some innovative programs and technologies that WEC has yet to deploy are now available to customers of other Vermont utilities, she noted. She's interested in the idea of collaborating with fellow utilities on administrative or operational resources to reduce costs and increase members' access to climate solutions.

She's also invested in the concept of equity. “Some decisions may not benefit you directly, but may benefit the larger community. In terms of equity, people have different needs.” While WEC's first mandate is safe and reliable provision of electricity, she said, its members have multiple and differing needs. Leadership should bring intentionality and balance to consider other guidance and resources it makes available, she suggested, including ensuring everyone who wishes to can benefit from new, climate-resilient technology. “I've been solutions-oriented throughout my career,” she said, “and my experience has focused on environmental and energy sustainability issues. Every decision has the underlying need for fiscal responsibility.”

At the Annual Meeting, she said, several members approached her to say they were moved by her candidate statement. She deeply appreciated that. “It's a tremendous responsibility and privilege to serve on the Board, and I really do look forward to hearing from people about their ideas,” she said. “I hope folks will reach out to me and I look forward to reaching out to members before we vote on major decisions.”



## Annual Meeting

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in attendance: Paul Lambert, vice president of Vermont Electric Co-op (VEC), also representing his day job at the Efficiency Vermont table; VEC Treasurer Charles Van Winkle, State Rep. Carl Demrow (Orange-1), Jared Duval and Cara Robeck of Energy Action Network; Doug Smith, chief power supply executive at Green Mountain Power (GMP); and Geetha Ganesan, consultant with the firm Entegre, which is supporting WEC's implementation of a new metering system.

Knowlton continued with special thanks to WEC's Committee on Candidates and Ballot Committee. These committees, all members, are dedicated to ensuring the integrity of WEC's democratic election process, Knowlton said. "They deserve our gratitude for their selfless and dedicated effort," he remarked.

Knowlton also recognized the contributions of past Directors, including Roger Fox, WEC's long-serving Vice President, who stepped off the Board in 2023. Also present were Rick Cawley, Michael Duane, Bud Haas, Monique Hayden, and Annie Reed.

General Manager Louis Porter recognized the achievements of three staff members: Pat Smith was recognized for five years of service. Smith joined WEC as an Apprentice Lineworker and is now a First Class Lineworker. Beth Ouellette, who has held multiple positions at WEC and is now Senior Accountant, was honored for her 25 years of service.

Porter then recognized Amos Turner, Construction Foreman, with the Manager's Award for staff excellence. Turner, Porter said, is exceptional for his dependability, somehow appearing to be in multiple places at once. "He always is where he is needed," Porter said, "and always with good cheer."

### Officers' remarks

President Knowlton offered a brief meditation on democratic governance. In terms of WEC, he indicated, that's



Ian Buchanan of East Montpelier ran as a first-time candidate for WEC's Board of Directors.



Construction Foreman Amos Turner received the 2024 Manager's Award at the Annual Meeting. The Manager's Award recognizes staff excellence and service to the membership. General Manager Louis Porter said of Turner, "He always is where he is needed, and always with good cheer."

governing for equity and member well-being within the framework of a cooperative. "Equity is at the heart of what it means to be a cooperative," he confirmed. Without offering specifics, Knowlton warned some values that may appear self-evident may not necessarily be so for other stakeholders in the state, and may lead to policies that may not address complexities in supplying electricity reliably and affordably to our members. Ratepayers, he said, need to be aware of these complexities. "My message to you tonight," he said, "is your Board is trying to protect your rights as ratepayers within the regulatory framework within which we operate."

Treasurer Don Douglas announced that Co-op revenue is up, in part due to 2023's rate increase. Also, 2023's storm costs exceeded a million dollars. "Well, even though [storms] cost over a million dollars, we still made all of our covenants," he said proudly. Douglas reminded members that capital credits set electric co-ops apart from investor-owned utilities, and that since 1998, WEC has returned \$9,697,000 to its members. He also congratulated the finance department on another clean audit.

General Manager Porter reflected that WEC began "during a turbulent time in the electrification of Vermont." After a long period of relative stability and reliability, he said, "We're back in a time as turbulent, if not more, so than 85 years ago." That turbulence comes from rapid changes: in how electricity is generated and stored, in Vermont's legislative and regulatory environment, and in our climate. Porter asked members to "recognize the incredible changes we are working through to serve you," and to understand that while change will bring benefits, there will also be costs.

### Member Q&A

Angela Manning of Orange described the hardship an extended outage caused an elderly neighbor, and inquired about WEC providing wellness checks, or prioritizing power

restoration for vulnerable peoples' homes.

Porter answered that WEC does maintain a list for wellness checks. During outages, "we contact state authorities to have them check in on individuals we know about," he said. But the way restoration works, from substation to distribution and homes, no one individual location can be restored until power is restored upstream. "Even if you look out the window and tell us you can see the tree on the line, there may be several other places where lines that feed your line are damaged, and those need to get fixed first for power to be restored to your property," he explained.

Ken Davis of Middlesex, responding to Roger Hill's presentation, asked about WEC's plan for climate change mitigation. Specifically, he asked, does WEC have a formal long term plan, and how will that affect rates?

Porter offered tangible steps the Co-op is taking toward mitigation, including moving power lines from the woods to the roadside and building out a new metering system designed to improve outage response. "And, we are going to have outages, and

unfortunately, a lot will last for a long period of time," he acknowledged. As far as formal plans and impact to rates, he told Davis, electric distribution utilities in Vermont are tightly regulated, "so we have plans on plans of plans," most of which are publicly accessible to members on [wec.coop](http://wec.coop). But yes, he said, implementing plans costs money, "and that comes through rates, though we've recently been successful with grants and FEMA reimbursement."

Carlos Pinkham of Northfield wondered if the power generated through his net metered solar installation and put on the grid counts toward WEC's renewable portfolio.

Technically yes, said Porter, but because WEC's power portfolio is already 100% renewable based on investments made on behalf of all members, "what you're doing is displacing renewable power with renewable power."

Michael Thompson of East Montpelier asked if WEC can help its members be more resilient in the face of increasing severe weather and outages. "I resisted for two years buying a fossil fuel generator," he pointed out, suggesting a program to help members afford battery backup could address multiple Co-op goals.

Porter noted that no, WEC does not yet have a home-based battery program, but "I think you can expect that from us in the next few years." Such a program would be developed, he said, by adapting other utilities' programs into a WEC program "that is cost effective, beneficial to individuals, and—this is important to me—does not benefit one member at another's expense."

Goddard Graves of East Calais asked about broadband progress. Knowlton noted this work is now led by Communications Union Districts (CUDs) following major federal investments into rural broadband expansion. WEC is still an involved partner in expansion, and its primary role is to make sure its poles are ready to have fiber strung on them.

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Paul Lambert of Efficiency Vermont, who also serves as Vice President of Vermont Electric Co-op's Board of Directors, catches up with former colleague JJ Vandette, WEC's new Director of Special Projects and Innovation.

## Roger Hill

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which resulted in catastrophic flooding; the cycle of wind and heavy snow storms in November and December, 2023. First, he described what storm modeling predicted, and then he showed each storm’s memorable impact. There are different types of models Hill consults, and they show information in different ways. The models he showed were very different from a TV meteorologist’s map: for example, a BUFKIT model showing “basically a cross-section of those high winds” looked like a vivid purple Spiderman web. Five or six days before the storm that caused the July 2023 flood, Hill said, the modeling showed major flooding was likely.

Rarely is WEC the only utility bearing the brunt of the damage. “Sometimes we get a local storm. Most of the time, they affect just about everyone, in some way, in the state of Vermont,” Hill noted. Later, GM Louis Porter pointed out that as storm intensity increases, widespread damage can mean longer outages, reduced capacity for mutual aid from neighboring utilities, and overwhelmed call centers.

The takeaway, Hill explained, is that a changing climate means wetter snow and more damaging winter storms. “Dry snow used to hinder travel, but not utilities,” he said; heavy snow load on trees is a growing concern. If you observe young birch trees, Hill pointed out, many now grow with irregular or bent trunks, instead of straight up: the result of snow load on these flexible trees. WEC’s David Young agreed with this: birch trees increasingly contribute to outages, he said, bending under snow load from outside rights-of-way to touch power lines.

As global weather heads into a La Niña pattern, Hill said multiple weather models show a warmer than usual summer, with the possibility of above normal rainfall “More heat, more rain, more thunder, more outages,” predicted Hill. “The oddball tornado is a possibility.”



Meteorologist Roger Hill listens to a question from a fellow WEC member. In his presentation, Hill showed members the weather models he studied before several recent storms, described precipitation trends, and predicted warmer, wetter weather with increasing likelihood of power outages.

Member Nona Estrin asked if Vermont is at increasing risk of wildfires, especially with forests full of ash trees dying from emerald ash borer infestations. In other parts of North America, Hill said, fire used to be seasonal: now fires occur year-round. “Fire is definitely in our future because of extreme wet periods followed by extreme dry periods,” he explained. “If it can happen to the north of us in Canada, it can happen here in Vermont.”

### Porter on WEC’s response

After the business portion of the Annual Meeting concluded, Porter provided a quick presentation to WEC members who stayed on to learn how their cooperative utility responds to outage challenges. First, Porter described the staff commitment to restoring power. During an extended outage, “the work schedule is usually 18 hours on, six hours off, for crews and dispatch,” he reported—grueling work completed with the single goal of ensuring every members’ power is returned as quickly and safely as possible.

Complications may include managing calls and inaccessible lines. “Our own call center gets overwhelmed,” Porter conceded, “but the national system also gets overwhelmed” by major regional storms. WEC generally performs well on its service performance metrics, but speedy call management is a persistent trouble spot during storms (see “Tracking WEC’s Performance,” p. 8).

Meanwhile, some landowners don’t allow crews access to rights-of-way by crossing their properties, requiring crews to reach the lines through longer and less efficient routes. Often, the refusal to allow access is because landowners don’t want trees cut, Porter said. The problem is communicating that the reason power goes out is because those trees aren’t maintained. “We don’t cut trees because we hate trees. We cut trees because they fall on power lines,” Porter said.

be completely accurate—he has received an overwhelming positive response from members. Elizabeth Locke of Corinth added that she also appreciates WEC’s outage maps, accessible via [wec.coop](http://wec.coop).

David Spooner of Marshfield raised the question of batteries, and if it’s possible to create microgrids for local resilience to outages. Porter thought WEC’s population density—rural and lacking population clusters—made microgrid creation more difficult, but that WEC staff are looking at how the Co-op could use batteries to support resilience.

Ken Davis of Middlesex wondered how fellow members responded to Porter’s General Manager’s report in the previous issue of *Co-op Currents*. In that message, Porter advised members that WEC has the responsibility to prepare for and respond to outages, and members are responsible for their own preparation as well—a point he reiterated during his presentation. Members responded well and with understanding, Porter said. “I think we need to keep educating members, and I don’t think we should sugarcoat the fact that there will be outages of long duration.”

To learn more about WEC’s service performance, read “Tracking WEC’s Performance” on p. 8.

To learn more about WEC’s resource planning, read about WEC’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) filing in the President’s and General Manager’s message and view the IRP document on [wec.coop](http://wec.coop).

With multiple challenges in mind, WEC has started making some changes, especially in the way it communicates to members. WEC regularly updates outage information on [wec.coop](http://wec.coop), and continues to improve its tech: line crews now bring tablets into the field, where they can log and compare outage updates in real time.

One major change has been providing time of restoration estimates to members. Porter acknowledged while he maintains hesitation about offering estimates—they can never

## Miss the Annual Meeting? Watch It Online!



Visit [washingtonelectric.coop/annual-meeting](http://washingtonelectric.coop/annual-meeting) to

watch a video of the Annual Meeting, including Roger Hill’s presentation and officers’ reports. Recorded and produced by ORCA Recording Studio.

## Notice to Members of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. of Filing of Proposed Integrated Resource Plan

Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. has submitted its 2024 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) to the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) for review. The IRP represents WEC’s plan for meeting the public’s need for energy services safely, reliably, and at the lowest cost possible. The plan includes an analysis of WEC’s energy needs and supply resources, its planned distribution system improvements, vegetation management, and potential environmental impacts. WEC’s IRP can be accessed through its website: [www.washingtonelectric.coop](http://www.washingtonelectric.coop) or through the PUC’s electronic filing system (“ePUC”) at <http://epuc.vermont.gov/>. Search by Case Number 24-1106-PET. Customers wishing to comment on WEC’s IRP, intervene in this proceeding, or request that the PUC hold a public hearing may do so by making a filing in this case in ePUC or contacting the PUC at: [puc.clerk@vermont.gov](mailto:puc.clerk@vermont.gov) or 112 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05620-2701, or (802) 828-2358 by June 26th, 2024. Please reference Case Number 24-1106-PET.

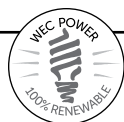
## Election Results

### Vote totals for the Board of Directors election:

*Stephen Knowlton . . . . .	565
*Pat Barnes . . . . .	469
*Olivia Campbell Andersen . . . . .	397
Richard Rubin . . . . .	396
Ian Buchanan . . . . .	346
Write-ins . . . . .	3

*elected to the Board of Directors	
Total valid ballots cast . . . . .	740
Spoiled ballots . . . . .	35
Blank votes . . . . .	125

These numbers are from the May 11, 2024 recount. The totals announced at the Annual Meeting were slightly different. The small difference in numbers from the recount had no impact on the election results.




### Annual Meeting

continued from page 5

Angela Manning asked a second question about affordability: how can WEC raise rates when Vermont is aging and so many members live on fixed incomes?

Knowlton pointed out that WEC generates no profit, and collects only enough funds to operate the system. Any excess funds are returned to members. "There's a lot of concern

among a lot of stakeholders about this," Porter noted, and policymakers are having conversations about subsidizing costs. He noted that if a subsidy is created, he believes it should be implemented statewide, because forced utility-wide subsidy programs would disadvantage rural utilities like WEC.

The evening concluded with door prizes and a brief presentation from Porter on WEC's outage response. 

## Where's WEC?

Right-of-way maintenance is necessary to keep your power safe and reliable. Pole inspections are also underway. This is to maintain reliable electric service and to test the integrity of the poles.

### Where are pole inspections happening in 2024?

Chelsea, Corinth, Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard, Tunbridge, Vershire, Walden, and Wheelock



Washington Electric, or its designee Alamon, will be inspecting and testing the integrity of the poles. This is to maintain reliable electric service in your area.

No power outages will occur as a result of pole inspections.

### Questions about pole inspections?

Please contact Ed Schunk: 802-224-2317 or [poleinsp@wec.coop](mailto:poleinsp@wec.coop).

## Puzzle by Betsy Allen

### Towns in WEC Northern Territory

P L L A Q M I D D L E S E X P R M Q U M J G W M J  
W E L H V F I B J X B R D T Z W H E E L O C K M J  
A E A C E A S T M O N T P E L I E R I N W S X K P  
C F A C A L A I S U H A R D W I C K F O E Q K E M  
A B G N H S Q F L B Y F C B L L T Y F P J Q W H S  
B Y E V R A G M H B L Z S T B R H Q V X U S M G W  
O H F I W A M D B A R N E T B K S H C N R O D N Z  
T E O Y F Y E D F G P W K R M A R S H F I E L D D  
E I I Q I N V B N A F O C U O Y R C O O I Z C G Y  
B S S U P L A I N F I E L D R P F P F I Y Q S V B  
T I R M L S T V Z L U S V I E P Y M G G X Y C F I  
O S K B Y C W O O D B U R Y T O B I R R K I Y V K  
R Y E G A T E B L J F L P L O U O W O E Z M Z L G  
S X O V Y X Q B V R I C J M W S V N T E J F J D S  
G H D A N V I L L E R M R Z N K K K O N N R U Q Y  
I Y A Y U Y V W A L D E N P O R K F N S R X I X H  
Z E R X W I U W O R C E S T E R Y M E B X W F L I  
S J D U X B U R Y D A T W N O C L Q P O Z B J W U  
J Z Z A P F U A A S T A N N A R D T Q R P X K X N  
I D V Z S I A A Y R Y V A T S J I A K O K M O T K

East Montpelier  
Plainfield  
Hardwick  
Stannard  
Peacham  
Ryegate  
Groton

Greensboro  
Middlesex  
Danville  
Wheelock  
Duxbury  
Calais  
Cabot

Marshfield  
Worcester  
Moretown  
Woodbury  
Barnet  
Walden

## Go Green. Go Electric. Go WEC!

## ASK THE ENERGY COACH



### One-stop shopping for energy upgrade savings?

*Dear Energy Coach: I'm making some energy upgrades at home and in a separate rental property I own. I can't keep track of changes in every federal, state, or utility incentive, but I know there's money out there. I don't want to miss out on potentially thousands of dollars in savings. Do you have all these at your fingertips? Does anyone?*

The Energy Coach is a big fan of a savings calculator published online by Rewiring America.

Now that very calculator is available on Efficiency Vermont's website, which is good news for WEC members and all Vermonters in your position. When the savings calculator is embedded on Vermont's energy efficiency utility site, you really do have one-stop shopping.

You can navigate to the calculator easily from the EfficiencyVermont.com homepage: look for the icon marked "Rewiring America Incentive Calculator."

**How it works:** Plug in some household information, including your income, household size, filing status, zip, and utility. Check off all the projects you're interested in. The calculator immediately shows you federal, state, and utility-level incentives available to you, and links through to each offer for details. For example, some incentives are available as point of sale discounts, some as rebates, some as tax credits. The savings calculator clearly shows what's available, what type of incentive it is, and how to access it.

WEC members, if you have electric upgrades planned, you will need a transformer that can support your future electric load. Contact WEC before you add any significant load—anything that requires a 240 volt outlet—and contact me with any additional questions.

**Ask your energy questions and get energy answers: [energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop)**

**Find the savings calculator and resources from Efficiency Vermont: [efficiencyvermont.com/blog/how-to/how-much-money-can-you-actually-get-in-clean-energy-incentives](https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/blog/how-to/how-much-money-can-you-actually-get-in-clean-energy-incentives)**

## Emergency Resources

### Financial and energy coaching

Contact your local Community Action Agency: Capstone at [capstonevt.org](https://www.capstonevt.org) or Northeast Kingdom Community Action at [nekcavt.org](https://www.nekcavt.org).

### 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: call 988

If you are in distress or crisis, call 988. If you prefer to text, text VT to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor quickly. For peer support, call/text 833-888-2557. More resources are at [mentalhealth.vermont.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.vermont.gov)

### Food

**Vermont Foodbank:** 800-585-2265.  
**Capstone Community Action:** [capstonevt.org](https://www.capstonevt.org)  
**Northeast Kingdom Community Action:** [nekcavt.org](https://www.nekcavt.org)  
**3SquaresVT:** 855-855-6181, [vermontfoodhelp.com](https://www.vermontfoodhelp.com)

### 211

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



# Tracking WEC's Performance

## Service Quality and Reliability Plan Results for 2023

By Louis Porter

Washington Electric Cooperative annually reports to state regulators how well it provided service to its members over the last year. The Service Quality and Reliability Plan or SQRP report consists of 12 categories designed to take a snapshot of where we are doing well and where we need to improve.

While this report is filed with the Vermont Public Utility Commission, it is also a useful tool for WEC and those we serve to track performance and highlight trends. SQRP results inform WEC's decisions and planning.

In 2023, WEC fell short in two of the categories in which the Cooperative has struggled in the past to meet our goals. First, 18% of calls were not answered within 20 seconds. The standard WEC is expected to meet is that only 15% of calls linger past that period of time. Second, we did not meet the requirement for the length of time members are out of power, or the Customer Average Interruption Duration Index.

It is important to note that some of these measures do not include major storm periods, and of course, WEC workers and members dealt with significant outages and delays in restoration in the aftermath of Winter Storm Elliott.

**1. Work Safety Performance.**

The safety of WEC workers and


of the general public is of great importance and is a top priority for WEC. The jobs of any electrical utility workers can be difficult, strenuous and pose significant risks. Given WEC's service territory, with relatively few workers and many miles of power lines, and with some of those lines being far away from roads, those dangers can be even higher in our part of Vermont. Although WEC experienced an incident resulting in loss of time in 2022, happily the Co-op did not have such an incident during 2023.

- 2. **Outage Incidents.** The "System Average Interruption Frequency Index" or SAIFI measures the average number of outage incidents that occurred per member, exclusive of major storms. Our goal is no more than 3.8 outages per member, and we averaged 2.8 in 2023, an improvement over 2022.
- 3. **Outage Duration.** The "Customer Average Interruption Duration Index" or CAIDI measures the average time it takes to restore power when there was an outage, exclusive of major storms. Our goal is to restore power in 2.7 hours, and in 2023 we missed that objective and restored power in 3.2 hours on average. That was still an improvement over 2022.
- 4. **Calls not answered within 20 seconds.** One of our requirements from regulators is that we answer calls to WEC within 20 seconds in

all but 15% of the cases. In 2023, we did not meet that measurement, with 18% of calls lingering too long. After having increased staff capacity and meeting the metric in 2022, we had hoped we had made progress on a long-running issue for WEC. We are working with the call answering service which handles after hours and excess calls, and with our own staff, to improve.

- 5. **Bills not rendered in seven days.** Our goal is to have no more than 0.1% of bills (one in 1,000) issued more than seven days after they were supposed to go out. No bills were issued late in 2023 to WEC's members.
- 6. **Bills found inaccurate.** No more than 0.1% of all bills sent out should be inaccurate. We met that goal, but still have room for improvement, with 0.05% of bills inaccurate.
- 7. **Payment posting complaints.** Our target is no more than 0.05% of members (one in 2,000) having complaints about payments not being posted promptly and accurately to their accounts. We had no complaints in 2023, exceeding the goal, as we did in 2022.
- 8. **Meter readings a month.** Although there are situations in which a meter cannot be read and WEC has to issue an estimated bill, the goal is to have that occur for no more than 5% of bills. In 2023 0.17% of bills were based on estimated meter readings.
- 9. **Requested work not done on time.** When we extend lines to new homes or do work requested by members, we try hard to do that work efficiently and on time. Although this can be a challenge

for a small organization, particularly when WEC has seen a large number of new service requests in recent years, we have a target of no more than five percent of jobs not being completed on time. In 2023, as in past years, all jobs were completed on time.

- 10. **Average delay days after missed delivery date.** This measure is not applicable, given that all jobs were completed on time as noted above.
- 11. **Customer satisfaction.** WEC conducts a professional survey of members every five years to gauge customer satisfaction. WEC's most recent member survey was completed in 2020, and WEC received high marks in most categories. Overall, member satisfaction was good, with a mean rating of 8.34 (out of 10), with 57% of respondents giving a 9 or 10. We will conduct the next survey next year.
- 12. **Complaints to DPS/Consumer affairs.** Vermonters who get their electricity from any of the state's utilities can report those problems to the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service. The Department then contacts the utility to get more information. In most cases, those issues are resolved through discussion or the DPS determines there was no basis for the complaint. However, if the DPS determines that a utility has not done something right and requires that it be corrected this is recorded as an "escalation." WEC's SQRP requires that the number of escalations not exceed 0.07% of our membership (or about 7 per year). In 2023, as in 2022, no escalations were reported. 



Governor Phil Scott, center, with WEC Apprentice Lineworkers Ryan Martel and Tucker Bullard (L-R) in the Cedar Creek Room of Vermont's Statehouse in an event organized by Vermont Electric Co-op (VEC) and attended by staff from WEC, VEC, and Green Mountain Power. The Vermont Legislature recognized the critical role of Vermont's electric lineworkers on National Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 18 during the floor session of the Vermont House.

### Employee Celebrations

WEC staff celebrating milestone employment anniversaries in 2024:

**5 years**

Pat Smith  
First Class Lineman

**25 years**

Beth Ouellette  
Senior Accountant

**Manager's Award:**

Amos Turner  
Construction Foreman

Thank you for your service!

### Thank You Annual Meeting Vendors and Sponsors

Several area businesses supported the Annual Meeting with their services and donated door prizes:

- Barre Auditorium
- Cabot Creamery
- Caledonia Spirits
- CED Twin State Electric
- Farnham Farm Sugaring
- Green Mountain Rentals
- Hunger Mountain Co-op
- Lowell McLeods
- ORCA Recording Studio
- Sugarsnap Catering
- VEIC
- WEC

