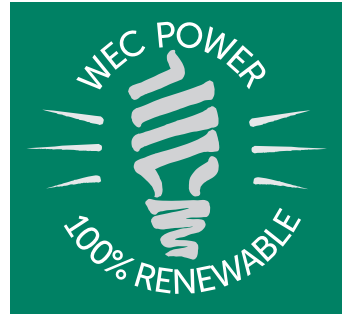




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CO-OP CURRENTS



Vol. 86, No. 1

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

Dec. 2024 – Jan. 2025

WEC Rates Increase 2.91% on January 1

Rising property taxes drive rate pressure while Co-op leaders work to keep it under 3%

On November 13, 2024, Washington Electric Cooperative filed a proposed rate increase of 2.91% with the Public Utility Commission (PUC). The rate increase takes effect January 1, 2025.

A major driver of the rate increase is a steep rise in WEC's property tax burden. WEC is a not-for-profit cooperative utility, but while many 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations may claim exemption from paying property taxes, WEC may not. The Co-op is still responsible for paying property tax to each town in which it has property—which includes 1,250 miles of line across 41 towns. Finance Director Teia Greenslit explained, "WEC's nonprofit status is a 501(c)(12), which only allows for the exemption of paying state and federal income taxes." WEC is required to pay all other taxes, including property, sales, and gross revenue taxes, she said.

WEC's Board of Directors approved the rate increase request at its meeting during the first week of November. "WEC is a not-for-profit: we don't, and can't, raise rates to generate a profit. We don't build or charge for things we don't need in order to generate more revenue," said Board President Stephen Knowlton.

"Our property taxes have gone up 20% over the last year," said General Manager Louis Porter. Many towns in WEC's service area have higher property tax rates than the state average, which means WEC's property

tax burden is higher than fellow utilities serving other regions. Regulations and joint ownership of some assets require the Co-op to be responsive, instead of proactive, in collecting funds to meet its budget. Porter explained, "The way it works is fractional cost, so we have to get the property tax bill first, and only then do we have the information to request a rate case."

Factors Contributing To—And Reducing—Rate Pressure

Porter noted that WEC member feedback consistently shows members prefer low rate increases more frequently to double-digit rate increases less frequently. This increase, under 3%, is balanced with respect to member wishes, he said.

Nevertheless, nobody wants to see cost increases of any size, Porter acknowledged, especially when Vermont households are also experiencing rapidly rising property taxes, as well as health care costs and other essentials. "We're member-owned, so affordability matters. That's especially important when we're forced to consider raising rates. What can we do to minimize the impact?" Porter continued. For example, he said, Dave Kresock, WEC's Director of Engineering and Operations, recently researched and selected a new supplier for transformers. This lowers WEC's infrastructure costs, increases

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Jocelyn Pateta

WEC participated in a Touch-a-Truck event at the Family Center of Washington County this fall. It was truly a family event for WEC Lineworker Richard Pateta and the Family Center's Jocelyn Pateta: Richard brought the truck, Jocelyn helped organize, and their children were more than happy to participate. More on p. 5.

WEC's Annual Meeting is May 1, 2025

Board Candidacy and Bylaws Petition Deadlines Due Feb/March

Time to flip open those new 2025 calendars: WEC's Annual Meeting will be held on **Thursday, May 1.**

At every Annual Meeting, three members are elected to WEC's Board of Directors. Any member of the Co-op is eligible to run for election. In recent years, Board of Directors elections have been competitive, and some results have been very close. If you're considering running for a seat, start planning now. Contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 or dawn.johnson@wec.coop to request a candidate packet.

Candidates have the opportunity to introduce themselves and their positions to the full Co-op membership through biographical and policy statements published in *Co-op Currents* and on wec.coop.

The deadline to submit candidate biographies for inclusion in the February-March print issue of *Co-op Currents* is **January 31.**

The deadline to submit all candidacy materials, including a petition signed by a minimum of 25 WEC members, is **March 2.** All candidates' policy statements will be printed in the April-May issue of *Co-op Currents*.

Members of the Co-op have the right to petition for changes to the Co-op's bylaws. The bylaws are available on wec.coop, or you may contact WEC for a hard copy. To petition for a change, members are required to collect signatures in support from at least 50 fellow members of WEC. Petitions for bylaws changes are due **February 10.**

Look for information about the candidates and the Annual Meeting in future issues of *Co-op Currents*.

Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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President's and General Manager's Message

Background for January's 2.91% Rate Increase

WEC Plans to Sell Wrightsville Plant, Understanding How WEC Responds to Winter Storm Outages

Rate Case

Louis: Washington Electric has filed for a rate increase of 2.91%. This is mainly due to rising property taxes, the costs of responding to storms, and general cost increases over time due to inflation. We know no one likes to see a rate increase, and we don't like to do them either, but this is a fairly modest increase compared to other utilities in the state. Many have either requested multiple rate increases in a row, or large increases of over 10%.

Our property taxes have gone up quite a lot. I know this is something our members are also experiencing in their personal tax burden and it's unfortunate that rising property taxes

have a rippling impact on the cost of other goods and services, including utility bills. WEC pays property taxes, which have risen 20%. We can't raise rates in anticipation of rising taxes. The way it works for our accounting is we need to receive our property tax bills first, to know what our tax share is for assets that have shared ownership. It's called fractional cost. After we know our tax responsibility, we can apply for a rate case if necessary. That's what happened this time.

Steve: Louis, can we tell our members why WEC is paying property taxes to Vermont towns, and why it is significant?

Louis: Good idea. As members

know, WEC is a not-for-profit cooperative utility. It's true that some nonprofits don't have to pay property taxes, but there are different classifications for different types of not-for-profits. Washington Electric is a 501(c)(12) and pays property taxes on all its assets, like poles, wires, and substations. The tax is based on a formula set by the state and is used by towns to estimate the value of these assets. We pay property taxes to the towns we serve, just like homes and businesses do. Statewide, property taxes have gone up about 14% on average, but for our specific towns and our specific assets, they've gone up 20%.

Steve: Our members' interests are represented by the nine members elected to our Board of Directors. Each of us is responsible for the financial health of our shared investment in this utility. The Board oversees the major budget requirements, including the assets the Co-op uses to provide reliable service, managing outages, and right-of-way maintenance. We balance the costs of the services WEC provides against the rates needed to reliably provide these services. The Board's job is to work with staff to ensure that any rate increase is necessary and the level is appropriate for members to continue to receive reliable and safe electricity. We also determine how much money we can return to members through capital credit retirements.

Louis: I think it's important to note that returning capital credits is a key part of what we do as a cooperative. Members who've been on the lines for some time get their investment back in capital credits. We're required to do this. The WEC Board, like all boards, looks at the finances—revenue, assets, services, and capital credits—carefully to make sure we're providing fair and reliable service for everyone.

I invite members to review the charts on page 4 of this issue. I'm a big believer in transparent governance and we're sharing these so members can compare Washington Electric's rate increases alongside our fellow utilities over the last few years, and to compare sample bills across utilities for roughly the same power use. You

can't compare exactly because different utilities have different fees and so on, but this is a pretty accurate sample.

The point is, we at Washington Electric try very hard to keep our bills in line with those of our fellow Vermont utilities, even though we have by far the fewest number of customers served per mile of line and increased costs associated with providing service in a heavily wooded and mountainous area. I always use this as a reminder that our region has never been attractive to for-profit providers of electricity, which is why our forebears formed a cooperative in the first place.

WEC to Sell Wrightsville Hydro Plant

Louis: We're moving ahead with selling the Wrightsville hydro generation plant. The Board has authorized me to enter into a sales agreement for \$1 million or more. We believe it's the right decision based on our current financial situation and the plant's output. Steve and I discussed our decision-making process at length in this column last issue.

Even once we reach an agreement to sell, several things still need to be done, including approvals from our lender, the Rural Utility Service, and the state, and we will need to transfer the FERC [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission] license. But we are moving forward.

Steve: It was a challenging decision; one of the hardest I've seen since I've served on the Board. I felt each Board member had to weigh the real pluses and minuses in their own minds to balance the risks against potential benefits before arriving at a yes/no decision. The Board supported the staff's recommendation to sell the plant. We will see how it unfolds.

Louis: In the end analysis, depending on what happens in the power markets and RECs [Renewable

Co-op Currents

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Betsy Allen, Puzzle Editor Dawn Johnson Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Louis Porter Katie Titterton

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.

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Energy Credits], selling Wrightsville could be either a slight positive or slight negative for WEC. The only real risk would be if a catastrophic event happened or were imminent at the plant, which would be very expensive for us. The risk of that happening is low, but it does exist.

Steve: The Board was mostly concerned about ongoing maintenance and licensing costs that effectively lead to a high cost of power under the restrictive provisions a reservoir-based hydro plant must adhere to. We are aware the plant needs significant maintenance and upgrades.

Louis: Whether you anticipate maintenance and prevent major issues, or wait until they happen and then repair them, it's costly either way.

New Metering System Update

Louis: We're close to selecting a vendor for new advanced meters. We're going back to our preferred vendor to finalize some questions before moving forward with the contract. We're on track to start deploying the system in 2025, and it will take a few years to fully deploy.

Steve: I've found it's common for co-ops to roll out the system in batches to give time for staff to adjust to the new technology and ensure that WEC continues to perform its metering and billing smoothly as the rollout proceeds. So, we'll be running a hybrid system for a while. We can't just put our members on hold while we make a change, so we'll keep running on our current system while we make the transition.

Louis: The new system will give Washington Electric and our members a lot more information about their power usage, and it will allow for remote disconnects and reconnects. This will save us from having to send trucks out, and we'll be able to respond more efficiently to outages. It will also help us handle things like net metering



From our substations, power is delivered to you from a branching network of electric lines. One or more breaks anywhere along this path, regardless if they're on WEC's lines or not, will cause your power to go out. That's how electricity flows. If we don't restore power to as many people as possible as quickly as possible, we may be assessed financial penalties. That's how regulation works.

– Stephen Knowlton

and heat pumps, which are difficult to manage with the current system.

Steve: It's also important that we encourage not only our members who are interested in using the new system, but also our staff to make sure they use it effectively, and to develop new rate structures that many could find useful. This won't happen overnight, but it will be a positive change for everyone.

Louis: And just to remind everyone, most of the new system will be paid for with grant money.

This new system creates a lot of benefits for members as well as making our operations more efficient. Our current system is by omission—if the system doesn't hear from a meter, we assume you don't have power—but the new system will automatically alert us when you are out. This is a big benefit for people who are away from home or unable to call us.

We're required to let members know they can opt out, but rolling trucks for meter reads is much, much more expensive for the Co-op. And if a member opts out, they won't be able to enjoy the benefits of the new meters, like remote disconnects and reconnects, time-of-use rates, load management tools, or those automatic outage alerts.

Call for Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Steve: In May of 2025, the members of the cooperative will hold its annual election to select three of the nine seats on the Board from among the members of the cooperative. As members themselves, those serving on the Board are there to represent the interests and needs of the members in seeing that the cooperative adheres to its mission. Individual Board members bring a variety of personal and professional skills to the Board table, but the

overarching benefit that they collectively deliver is loyalty: loyalty to WEC members' well-being and quality of life as regards their electric service, and not so much acting upon lofty philosophical goals, perfect though they may seem. That has been our focus. The electrical grid has been around for a hundred-plus years, and is a vital part of modern life. A cooperative electric utility that works for all members and not just a few at the expense of others, to provide an essential service without a profit motive, is as close to a public good that I can think of. It's important for public power institutions like ours that their members take an interest in how their power is provided and according to standards that they agreed to. I encourage any member who has the interest and willingness to spend some time in serving their community for several years and

getting a grounding in how their electric grid works for them to run for the Co-op Board.

Louis: Washington Electric is lucky to have had qualified candidates running for the Board in competitive elections. That's not always the case in volunteer civic organizations like ours, whether school boards, selectboards, or nonprofit boards. We've been lucky in having very qualified people interested in serving on this board.

Understanding Winter Outages

Louis: The remarkable thing about our part of Vermont even as many changes as it's gone through and is going through, people are so engaged in their communities and care so much for their communities. It's even more obvious in wintertime than other times of year, when during large storms and outage events, people check in on their neighbors. And people are really prepared to help, whether that's participating in food pantry drives or knowing somebody may need help and taking the initiative to look in on them.

Steve: Rural Vermonters have always seemed to look out for one another, especially in times of crisis. Washington Electric can't do it all, but we play our part. If we get information that someone needs urgent help during an outage, we'll work with emergency services to make sure they get the attention they need.

Louis: It's essential in our territory because, frankly, having 38 people on our staff to cover electrical needs for the most rural parts of 41 towns



The point is, we at Washington Electric try very hard to keep our bills in line with those of our fellow Vermont utilities, even though we have by far the fewest number of customers served per mile of line and increased costs associated with providing service in a heavily wooded and mountainous area.

– Louis Porter

is pretty daunting. We rely on our members reporting outages, helping their neighbors, helping their towns, and helping their emergency services departments. I encourage our members to save the checklist WEC publishes annually in *Co-op Currents* on outage and storm preparation, which ran in our October-November issue. Also, I encourage members to contact WEC if they have a health issue that might put them in jeopardy during an outage, and also, update us when they no longer have a health issue or no longer live in our territory. We maintain files, but peoples' situations change and our records go out of date quickly.

I also ask members to be very careful during outages about what info they report to us. We often get reports of trees on lines and trees on roads when they are not.

We deploy to health and safety situations first. We do look at all the messages we receive and dispatch differently based on those reports.

Steve: WEC's main role during major storm-related outages is to get the lines back up on the poles so that power can be restored as soon as possible. Our role intersects with the roles of every other emergency system in our towns and the state. We can't do everything, but we can make connections. When there is a storm and information is on hand or comes through that someone with health issues needs attention right away, WEC staff contacts emergency services whose role and training is to deal with situations exactly like this, and will respond however they are needed.

Louis: That's good information and expectation setting, Steve. I would just add something that members don't always know. If you're at the end of 10 miles of line from your substation, and over those 10 miles there are five trees on that line, those all need to be repaired before we can restore power to your house. You may be able to see one of those trees on the line in front of your house, but fixing that first won't solve anything until those other four incidents are resolved upstream.

Steve: Electric power flows from where it is generated along transmission lines to enter WEC's grid at its substations. For WEC, this transmitted power is provided by VELCO or Green Mountain Power. From our substations, power is delivered to you from a branching

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Don's Chronicles

Co-op Currents highlights from
Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair

"I learned something in this issue's Safety Minute on page 8. I try to follow all the rules but it seems I haven't always in the past—I used to keep a 600 pound pig named Ruth in a pigpen under the power lines on my property. I don't think there was ever much risk of a line falling in her pen, but if a lineman had ever needed to climb in there with Ruth, there would have been trouble."



Rate Increase

continued from page 1

transformer availability to members swapping out fossil fuel power for electric power, and helps reduce the pressure on this most recent rate increase.


Other factors contributing to the rate increase include rising operating expenses related to storm outage restoration, and general cost increases. Net metering remains a factor, in that the Co-op must pay premium prices for the power that solar net metering members return to the grid. In addition, net metering members are grid-connected in order to return generated electricity, but pay less to maintain grid infrastructure than members who pay a larger amount of upkeep costs through their bills. The rate redesign that took full effect in 2022 raised the customer service charge and lowered the cost per kWh with the intent to make the cost of grid upkeep somewhat more equitable, but net metering remains popular in WEC territory and a growing factor in rate increases.

Comparing WEC to Other Utilities

Customers of each electric utility pay different rates and receive different bills. There are multiple factors at play, including whether a utility's service area is municipal or rural, whether a utility is for-profit or non-profit, what fees are included, and others. But as all electric utilities are regulated, their rate increase information is publicly available. WEC pays attention to its fellow utilities' rates and rate trends, Porter explained: even with its extremely rural and rugged service area, WEC leaders work hard to keep rates in line with other state utilities. "There's a perception that Washington Electric has unreasonably high rates," he observed. "WEC residential rates are high compared with other utilities, but if you compare rate increases and bills across other Vermont utilities, the difference is not large. Every customer and every utility is unique, but several of our neighbors have been forced to raise rates at times when we have avoided increases, and some are looking at increases this year far more significant than 3%."

One factor that sets WEC apart from investor-owned utilities is that as a member-owned cooperative, it returns credits to its members over time. These refunds appear as a credit on current members' electric bills once a year; former members receive a check in the mail. WEC has returned just under \$10 million to its members.

All the same, electric bills can be painful, especially if they are higher during the winter. For members facing daunting bills, there are programs in place. WEC Member Services Representatives help members plan bill budgets they can afford. WEC is also piloting an income-based program in partnership with VEC to deeply reduce eligible members' electric bills. Called the Affordable Renewable Community Energy (ACRE) program, participation is first-come, first-served.

For members who wish to lower their bills overall, Efficiency Vermont offers substantial incentives on home weatherization and other cost-and-energy saving upgrades. Finally, coaches at community support agencies—for WEC members, these are Capstone and Northeast Kingdom Community Action—have information about all kinds of incentives to make living in this state more affordable and comfortable for any Vermonter who rents or owns a home, or drives a vehicle. 

See the box on this page for more information about how to access energy resources and incentives. Information about the ACRE program is on washingtonelectric.coop.

Example Residential Monthly Bills by Usage Group

	Low-Use (200 kWh/Mo)	Average WEC Use (475 kWh/Mo)	High-Use (700 kWh/Mo)
WEC 2024	\$65.54	\$134.22	\$190.41
WEC 2025	\$67.38	\$137.97	\$195.72
VEC 2025*	\$58.62	\$124.38	\$178.18
GMP 2025	\$64.80	\$124.60	\$173.53

**case pending as of Dec 2024*

Energy Resources and Incentives

Efficiency Vermont

Vermont's energy efficiency utility provides rebates, energy assessments, income-based assistance, as well as advice and support for projects, renovation and construction, and financing. Get started at efficiencyvermont.com.

Financial and Energy Coaching

Coaches help you save money and access income-based incentives. They help you make the dollars you spend do more to keep you and your family safe and saving energy in your home and on the road. Contact Capstone at capstonevt.org or Northeast Kingdom Community Action at nekcavt.org.

Past-Due Bills and Budgeting

Don't let your WEC bill go past due, or grow beyond what you can manage. WEC Member Services Representatives can help you put together a budget that works for you. Plus, there are state programs that may help pay down your bill. Call today for help putting together a plan: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-WEC-5245.

Incentive Calculator

Efficiency Vermont and Rewiring America's incentive calculator for Vermonters is a one-stop shop to find rebates to make your home greener. efficiencyvermont.com/calculator

Don't Miss This!

Major or time-sensitive incentive picks from JJ Vandette, Director of Special Projects and Innovation

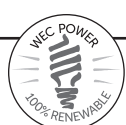
- Up to \$10,000 to upgrade your home electric panel, which may be necessary to support an EV charger, heat pumps, and other new tech. This incentive can help "future proof" a home for electrification with very few strings attached: efficiencyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-electric-system-upgrade
- If you're considering a water heater upgrade, act quickly: this rebate for heat pump water heaters may cycle out later in 2025. \$600 off a heat pump water heater—or up to 100%, for households that meet income eligibility thresholds: efficiencyvermont.com/rebates/list/heat-pump-water-heaters
- Are you a new or future EV driver? Join PowerShift to automatically charge your vehicle during off-peak hours, helping decrease the Co-op's power costs.. Plus, receive a Level 2 charger and \$500 rebate for joining the program: efficiencyvermont.com/powershift



Utility Rate Increases By Year of Implementation

Utility	2022	PUC Case	2023	PUC Case	2024	PUC Case	2025	PUC Case
WEC	12.83%	22-4100-TF	-	N/A	-	N/A	2.91%	24-3408-TF
BED	3.95%	22-2296-TF	5.50%	23-2044-TF	5.50%	24-1848-TF	TBD	N/A
GMP	2.34%	22-0175-TF	5.29%	23-1852-TF	5.26%	24-1709-TF	TBD	N/A
Morrisville	-	N/A	11.25%	22-5375-TF	16.33%	24-3211-TF*	TBD	N/A
Stowe	13.00%	22-2291-TF	11.50%	22-5372-TF	-	N/A	TBD	N/A
VEC	1.96%	21-4775-TF	8.19%	22-4868-TF	8.33%	23-3943-TF	4.84%	24-3432-TF*

**case pending as of Dec 2024*






Buckets of Fun: Making Family Memories and Building Community

On September 7, Central Vermont kids got to explore a WEC bucket truck at the second annual Touch-A-Truck event held by the Family Center of Washington County. About 180 children and families came to the event on a bright Saturday morning.

For the Patetas, it was truly a family event. WEC Lineworker Richard Pateta volunteered his time to bring the truck, the Family Center's Jocelyn Pateta helped organize the event, and their children happily participated.

"Participating in the Touch-A-Truck event at the Family Center was a wonderful opportunity to share a little bit of Richard's work with our family and our community, and for him to 'bring his daughters to work' in a safe and inviting environment!" said Jocelyn.

The Family Center is a regular recipient of WEC's Community Fund. Its mission is to build resourceful families and healthy children to create a strong community. 



In the Innovation Lab: Battery Storage, Time-of-Day Rates

JJ Vandette previews the opportunities and efficiencies he's focused on for next year and beyond

About a year in as WEC's first-ever Director of Special Projects and Innovation, JJ Vandette is already well-seasoned. He's helping lead the Co-op's process to switch to advanced meters, and he assembled WEC's Integrated Resource Plan—a comprehensive strategic document required by regulators. He's also keeping track and making priorities based on what tech is available today, what tech advances are coming soon, what incentives and investments members are asking for the most, what

funding is accessible to WEC for certain projects, and what projects align with WEC's cooperative values. Sounds like three-dimensional chess, but shortly after he joined WEC, JJ explained that his job is really about optimizing resources: "More impact, less effort," he said at the time.

Vandette selected three topics of member interest to forecast into 2025. The first is a thoughtful refocus of the incentives WEC offers members to switch from vehicles, appliances, and heat sources that burn and emit

greenhouse gases to those that are powered by WEC's 100% renewable electricity. These are offered by distribution utilities to their ratepayers per state law.

The second two topics include a new battery storage access grant program and an update on the rollout of advanced meters—and, eventually, time-of-day rates. These are both forecast out to 2026 —this is an early look at the sketches on Vandette's drawing board—but it's an opportunity to learn about how WEC is planning to

use its resources for member benefit over the coming years.

Incentives for Members

Vandette and other WEC leaders have edited WEC's incentive offerings with a commitment to economic fairness. In October, WEC filed its annual Tier 3 plan: no major changes, said Vandette, but there is some reorganization of priorities members may notice. For example, rebates for e-bikes and e-mowers are cycling out because,

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Innovation Lab

continued from page 5

Vandette said, data showed WEC's rebates weren't a decisive factor for members choosing to buy these items. And while e-bikes and e-mowers may certainly improve quality of life, they are not as essential as heat, shelter, and, in much of rural Vermont, cars.

Instead, said Vandette, "we're going to push our chips toward low-income fuel switch support." WEC will partner with Efficiency Vermont to help income-qualified members change polluting home heating systems to electric. The fuel switch program was piloted by Efficiency Vermont and Burlington Electric Department after the passage of Act 151 in 2020. At the time, the heads of all of Vermont's distribution utility signed a letter in support of the legislation that would create the program.

In addition, WEC will continue offering \$500 incentives to any member who purchases a new electric vehicle (EV), and \$250 for used EVs and new plug-in hybrids (PHEV). On top of that, income qualified members receive another \$500 incentive on any EV or PHEV purchase. For more information: wec.coop/energy-coach-home/

Battery Storage Access Grant

Together with the Vermont Public Power Supply Agency (VPPSA) and Burlington Electric Department, WEC received an energy storage access grant to start bringing battery storage to members. How that will look is still in development: Vandette explained that each utility will adapt the program. It will be "an opportunity for one municipal building and a handful of members to have battery storage at their home paid for by the grant," he predicted. Then, WEC will use what it learns to shape more battery storage opportunities in the future. Members will have to wait until 2026 for the Co-op to unveil opportunities for programs related to battery storage at home. Vandette understands members' eagerness for battery storage. In addition to outage resilience, a network of batteries connected to WEC's grid would offer the Co-op a way to access stored power at times when market power is most expensive: during hot summer days and cold winter nights, when demand for power from the grid is greatest.

Advanced Meters and Time-of-Day Rates

New advanced meters are a good example of Vandette's biggest-bang-for-the-buck strategy: The cost to upgrade will be substantially covered by state and federal grants. Advanced meters will accomplish several Co-op goals, like a better understanding of its own network and an ability to respond to outages with greater speed and accuracy. But it will also allow WEC to implement time-of-day rates, which could save members, and the Co-op membership as a whole, a great deal of money.


When electricity demand is high, market power is expensive. Every distribution utility is impacted by spikes in market power costs, and at WEC, members pay that premium cost. Through most of its history, WEC saw its greatest electric use during cold spells: it's known as a "winter peaking" utility. As a changing climate brings hotter, muggier summers through WEC territory and the whole northeast US, WEC is susceptible to high peak costs throughout the year.

And even when the weather is steady, there are daily peaks. "Power is more expensive when the sun goes down than in the middle of the day,"

explained Vandette. "Power costs different amounts at different times of day." A time-of-day rate would be built by analyzing data from new advanced meters that sense precisely when members are using power. The rate would reward members for minimizing their power use during peak times: members would pay a lower rate to charge their vehicles and large appliances at low-use times. "This incentive is worth it to offset peak power costs—and it's a big benefit to individual members and to the Co-op as a whole," said Vandette.

But who can remember to unplug or plug in devices at the right time?

The PowerShift program is designed to lower peak electricity costs through community participation, in which members agree to an EV charging schedule in an app, and don't think about it again. In the future, other devices and appliances may be able to be enrolled in PowerShift to take advantage of time-of-day rates, Vandette suggested.

But that's a few years ahead of today. WEC is close to selecting a vendor to build out the advanced metering system, Vandette reported, and he's at work analyzing data that could help the Co-op provide the flexible rates of the future. 

Did You Know?

The Vermont Public Utility Commission requires all electric utilities to publish this Herbicide Use Notification. **Washington Electric Cooperative does not use herbicides in its right-of-way management program.**

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

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

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

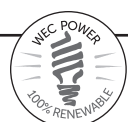
- Sign up to receive written notification** from your local electric utility of plans to apply herbicide on any ROW within 1000' of your property or the property where you reside. Check nearby poles for tags identifying the utility and/or pole number, complete the form below and submit it to your local electric utility by mail before February 15th, 2025 to be added to the notification list. If determined to be qualified, you will receive notification from the utility at least 30 days prior to scheduled herbicide application.
- You are responsible to make your local electric utility aware** of the location of any potentially affected water supply, and of any other environmentally sensitive area where herbicide application ought to be avoided.
- Watch and listen for public service announcements** in newspapers and radio ads noting upcoming herbicide applications.
- Check with your local electric utility** regarding the vegetation management cycle near your particular line.
- You have the right** to request, in writing, that the utility refrain from applying herbicides in the process of clearing the right-of-way, and the utility may offer alternatives such as herbicide stump treatment or herbicide stem injections.
- You have the right** to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever at no cost to you if the type of lines in the right-of-way are **distribution lines**, bringing electric service directly to individual customers.
- You have the right** to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever by paying a \$30 administration fee if the type of lines in the right-of-way are **transmission lines** or **sub-transmission lines**, bringing electricity to or between substations.

For more details, or to ask additional questions, please contact your local electric utility, or one of the following:

Washington Electric Co-op, Inc. 40 Church Street, PO Box 8 East Montpelier, VT 05651 1-802-223-5245	Agency of Agriculture Public Health & Ag. Resource Mgmt 116 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602 1-802-828-2431	Department of Public Service Consumer Affairs & Public Information 112 State St., Montpelier, VT 05620 1-800-622-4496
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Based on the information above, if you believe you qualify to be notified in advance of pending herbicide applications in the rights-of-way, mail the request below to your local electric company before February 15th, 2025.

Resident/Property Owner Request to be Added to Herbicide Treatment Notification Mailing List			
Name	Town/City of Affected Property		
Street Address	Home Phone Number		
Town	Work Phone Number		
State	Zip Code	O.K. to use work number?	Yes No
Electric Utility Account Number		Best time to contact you	
Affected Property: Year-Round Residence Summer Residence Commercial Property Water Supply Organic Farm Land Other (Circle all that apply)			
Line/Pole Identification: Utility Initials		Pole Numbers	
Please fill out this request completely to help us determine if you qualify for herbicide treatment notification. MAIL THIS REQUEST TO YOUR LOCAL ELECTRIC UTILITY AT THE ADDRESS LISTED ABOVE BEFORE FEBRUARY 15TH, 2025			



Making A Difference In Our Communities

WEC was created not in a boardroom, but by lamplight in the homes of its founding members. The people who work on the lines and in the office are often members themselves: you see them grocery shopping, attending school functions, or at Town Meeting in your own community. Community has always been at the heart of the Co-op, and the staff and members of WEC show their care for their neighbors in several different ways.

Everyday Member Support

The Co-op's first commitment is to meet its members' needs as best it can. Every day, Member Services Representatives are available to help members create budgets that keep the lights on. Leaders look for opportunities for bill relief for members who are income-eligible, like through the current Affordable Community Renewable Electricity (ACRE) pilot program in collaboration with sister co-op VEC. WEC also partners with community action agencies to design resource programs that prioritize access and equity.

Member households with someone who has severe medical needs should alert the Co-op, to ensure someone is checking on them in the event of an outage. If members with medical needs move or no longer have an issue that requires wellness checks, please let the Co-op know that, too, to save important time during outages.

Seasonal Programs

WEC staff are proud to organize support for donation drives that brighten holidays and help Vermonters through the winter. Staff, Board

members, vendors, and others involved in WEC's daily operations are invited to contribute to a gift basket for a veteran family. New this year, WEC began contributions to a national family fund for children who have a parent die while employed by an electric cooperative.

Veterans, Inc. is a regional nonprofit with a mission to end homelessness among military veterans. WEC staffers and vendors have a longstanding tradition of helping sponsor the holidays for veterans and their families served by the Bradford, Vermont office. In 2024, WEC's team supported a family with holiday gifts, a festive dinner, and necessities like groceries and gift cards. To learn more: veteransinc.org

The Cooperative Family Fund is a new nonprofit developed through the leadership of National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in collaboration with National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. Its primary purpose is to create trust accounts for the children of parents who die while actively employed at an electric cooperative. It also creates memory books for families and provides resources to co-ops for supporting grieving families and colleagues. Fund materials state, "This support actively demonstrates the value our cooperative network places on cooperative families at the time of their greatest need." To learn more: cooperativefamilyfund.com

WARMTH

All electric utilities in Vermont participate in the WARMTH emergency home heating assistance program. Vermont utility customers may contribute by rounding up their electric bill each month. The program is operated through local community action agencies. In WEC territory, that's Capstone and Northeast Kingdom Community Action, or NEKCA.

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

Members can also donate directly to fuel assistance through their community action agencies: visit capstonevt.org or nekca.org

Community Fund

All cooperatives share the principle Concern for Community. In recent years, communities served by WEC have faced some tough challenges. Some are weather-based, like repeated catastrophic flooding. Some are

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Share Your Story: Seeking Members' Experiences with EVs and New Electric Appliances

When making a big decision, many of us seek advice from friends and neighbors who have already been through the same process. *Co-op Currents* invites members to write in with their honest experiences buying and installing hot water heat pumps, cold climate heat pumps, electric vehicles, and other new electric tech. Your tips and advice are valuable to fellow members considering similar purchases.

Submit your stories to currents@wec.coop. Stories will be published as time and space allow. *Co-op Currents* will contact you to confirm before publication. Please keep stories to 500 words or less. If you have a longer story you'd like to share, please email first to inquire.

Some questions you may want to answer in your story:

- What factors, including incentives or rebates, led to your purchase?
- Did you use Efficiency Vermont resources?
- Did the installation go as expected?
- Did the performance meet your expectations?
- What was it like learning to use the new appliance or vehicle?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Did your electric bill change more or less than you expected?
- How satisfied are you with your purchase?



WEC wishes a happy retirement to **Ed Schunk**, T&D System Technician, after 36 years of service on our operations team!



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PS Form 3526, September 2007 (Page 2)

PRIVACY NOTICE: See our privacy policy on www.usps.com



Safety Minute: Why You Can't Post On Poles

Poles are an essential part of electric utility infrastructure, and all utilities take the time to monitor our poles and wires. A good number of WEC poles are accessible by road, but as many members know, we have a lot of poles and wires that travel through fields and forests to bring members power in some of the most rural parts of Vermont.



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

Not long ago, I was “walking the lines,” which is a utility term for performing visual safety inspections on foot, and noticed a deer stand attached to a WEC pole, just like it was a tree. To the landowner’s credit, it was removed quickly after I called it to their attention.

I can understand the appeal of using a utility pole for personal use. They’re sturdy and convenient. I have seen poles with all kinds of unauthorized attachments, including satellite TV antennae and home security cameras. I have seen

landowners substitute utility poles for fence posts and mount barbed wire and electric fencing to them. Of course, we’ve all seen yard sale signs, found or missing pet signs, posted land notices, and other flyers stapled to poles.

None of these are a good idea. Attaching anything to a utility pole is a violation of Vermont law, as well as the National Electric Safety Code. That goes for even a stapled notice.

The reason is because any unauthorized attachment poses a hazard to lineworkers. Lineworkers wear rubber gloves to climb poles. Staples and push pins puncture rubber very easily, and a punctured glove exposes lineworkers’ hands to the elements, and worse, to electric shock. Staples and pins also catch on lineworkers’ boots as they are climbing and can cause them to slip, or make it more difficult to get a grip with their climbing hooks. Lineworkers also climb

with a harness. When there’s anything on or around the pole, they have to transfer the harness over it. It’s hard enough to climb a pole, but it’s harder when lineworkers have to move that very heavy belt over objects sticking out of the pole that are not supposed to be there.

Poles may cross private land, and that land does belong to whoever owns it. But utility poles are owned by the utility—in WEC’s case, cooperatively owned by the membership—and nobody, including the landowner, can attach anything to poles without authorization. Rules like this are strictly for safety reasons.


Similarly, landowners can access the right of way—the land directly underneath and extending 20-50 feet to either side of the poles and wires. It’s their land. But the easement given to WEC allows line crews to access rights of way in order to service the line, and we have design specifications we must follow that do not allow anything too close to the wires.

So it pays to think twice and examine the right of way before putting

anything in that area. Stacked wood, brush piles, gardens, trees, vehicle or boat storage, or even a storage shed or tiny home built in the right of way: these are all likely to pose a problem sooner or later.

Here’s what you need to know:

- Don’t attach anything to utility poles.
- Unauthorized attachments to poles make lineworkers’ jobs more difficult and dangerous.
- Store objects and debris far from rights of way.

And a reminder: Out of respect to landowners whose properties WEC accesses to service our lines, and in line with our environmental mission, WEC crews don’t use herbicides in our right-of-way vegetation management. 

Members can recommend Safety Minute topics and request safety presentations from David Young for their school, organization, or community group. Contact him at 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop.

Making a Difference

continued from page 1

economic, like the fast-rising costs of goods and services in a rural state with a small tax base. Some communities face challenges that have a lot of different factors, like evolving local culture and values.

The small nonprofits that work within communities, and are run by staff and volunteers who live in those communities, are well-equipped to provide everyday resources to their neighbors, and to help respond to and navigate through challenging times. WEC members have the option to donate their capital credit refunds to the Community Fund. Through these voluntary member contributions, the Community Fund grants tens of thousands of dollars each year to small nonprofits that serve the communities in the Co-op’s service area. The application process is fast and easy, and when there is great and specific need, the Community Fund can quickly shift its giving focus.

Community Fund grants support some favorite seasonal programs in Central Vermont. This December, the Community Fund contributed to Toys for Tots and Vermont Foodbank, among


others.

This year, consider donating your capital credits to the Community Fund. Clip and send in the form on this page, or call Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332.

More Ways To Help

The Co-op’s list of Community Fund grantees is a good resource. Each organization on this list makes a difference right here in Central Vermont. See the most recent list of recipients in the August-September 2024 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

If You Need Help

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

Community Fund Authorization Form

Please mail to:

Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Attn: Capital Credits/Community Fund
PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651

Or email the following information to dawn.johnson@wec.coop

Date _____

I/We want to donate to WEC’s Community Fund. Please consider my/our signature below as authorization to contribute my/our capital credits as selected.

I/We wish to donate this year’s and all future years refunds.

I/We wish to donate only this year’s refund (Year _____).

Member Signature

Name(s):


Mailing Address:

Account #

President & General Manager’s Message

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network of electric lines. One or more breaks anywhere along this path, regardless if they’re on WEC’s lines or not, will cause your power to go out. That’s how electricity flows. If we don’t restore power to as many people as

possible as quickly as possible, we may be assessed financial penalties. That’s how regulation works. We’re regulated in how we operate during emergencies just as closely as we’re regulated in day-to-day operations. I’m proud that WEC works with emergency services to get the job done and to keep our members as safe and well as possible under difficult circumstances. 

Go Green. Go Electric. Go WEC!

