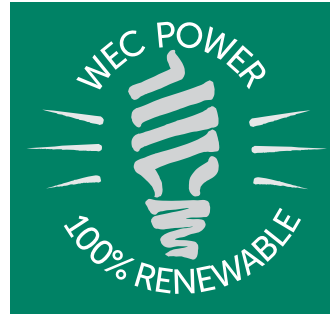




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CO-OP CURRENTS



Vol. 86, No. 2

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

February-March 2025

Meet the 2025 Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Every year, WEC's membership elects three fellow members to serve on the Co-op's nine-seat Board of Directors. Board members oversee management of the Co-op, approve financial decisions, and make policy for the member-owned electric utility.

2025 is shaping up to be another competitive election: so far, five candidates are running. The candidates are Susan Alexander, Betsy Allen, Ian Buchanan, Steven Farnham, and Bill Powell. Alexander, Allen, and Farnham are incumbents; Buchanan first ran for the Board in 2024; and Powell recently retired after more than three decades on WEC staff.

All candidates have the opportunity to submit a brief biography for publication, unedited, in this issue. Please learn more about them on pages 4-5.


Members may continue to enter candidacy materials until March 2. All candidates' bios and policy statements are or will be posted on wec.coop.

In this issue of *Co-op Currents*, all known candidates introduce themselves to members. In the following Annual Meeting-themed issue, candidates may expand on their introductory statement in answers to policy questions. See updates about the Board of Directors election and the Annual Meeting at wec.coop/annual-meeting.

How to vote

Members may mail in their ballots, or hold their ballots to vote in person at

the Annual Meeting. In April, members will receive a packet containing a ballot for the Board of Directors election along with the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents*. Check the deadline to post your votes by mail. WEC members may write in names of unofficial candidates. All candidates run at-large.

WEC will hold its Annual Meeting at Barre Memorial Auditorium on Thursday, May 1. 



A cold, snowy winter—at last!—in WEC territory. Alas, cold can cause members to plug in space heaters, and space heaters can cause electric bill spikes. Learn more on p.7.

ANNUAL MEETING DINNER RESERVATION

WEC'S 86th Annual Meeting • Thursday, May 1, 2025

BARRE AUDITORIUM – 16 Auditorium Hill, Barre, VT 05641

4:30 pm registration • Buffet opening to be determined

Return Form by Friday, April 19 – WEC, Attn: Admin Asst., PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651

Return this dinner reservation form by April 19 to receive dinner at no charge. Dinner at no charge is by RESERVATION ONLY.

Walk-ins will be charged: \$22 – Adult; \$12 – Child (ages 10+); Children under 10 free. (No guarantee that meals will be available for those who do not register in advance).

No-shows will incur a \$3 charge on their May electric bill.

The buffet will have a variety of foods, including vegetarian/vegan and gluten-free options.

For special food requests not indicated below, additional accessibility needs, or questions, please contact us at (802) 223-5245 by April 18.

Registration also available online at wec.coop/annual-meeting

	Member	Guest	Child/Age	
Name: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Name: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Name: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Name: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Special food requests/accessibility needs: _____				
Map/Account # _____				Telephone # listed on account _____

Please do not return this form in ballot envelope.

Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Efficiency Vermont: Louis and Steve encourage members to take advantage of Efficiency Vermont resources. President's and General Manager's message, p. 2

Meet the Candidates: Five members have announced their candidacy for the Board of Directors. Meet them on pp. 4-5.

More Efficiency Vermont: See the latest tips and incentives from Efficiency Vermont on pp. 6-7.

Puzzle: New word search p. 7.



Curious about heat pump water heaters? Don Douglas shares his experience. Write in with your own beneficial electrification story: p. 5.

President's and General Manager's Message

WEC Encourages Members to Use Efficiency Vermont Resources

Co-op focuses Tier III incentives to benefit income-qualified members; updates on regulatory requirements; a new legislative session; another competitive Board election

Appreciation for Retired Energy Coach Bill Powell

Steve: Bill Powell retired after 33 years at WEC. He served as Director of Products and Services, and is known to most members as the Energy Coach. For most of us members, Bill was the face and voice of WEC when we contacted the Co-op with questions about our energy use or upgrades.

things at the Co-op. What he's done has grown in importance and volume over the years. We are going to have a lot of different people at Washington Electric fill some of the individual roles Bill has filled, and that will be a different experience for members who have gone to Bill for everything from new connects, to net metering, to incentives.

Louis: Bill has been the face of Washington Electric for members for a long time in a lot of different contexts. It wouldn't be possible to replace him with one person, because he has so much knowledge and has been involved in such a wide variety of

Steve: I also want to note that Bill has been an enthusiastic and passionate proponent and driver of WEC's pioneering engagement with electricity-related environmental issues. And he began this when environmental efforts by state utilities were largely

voluntary compared to the legislative mandates of today. He's a big part of the fact that people recognize WEC as a forward-looking utility when it comes to renewable energy.

Changes to Efficiency Incentive Process

Steve: Bill also dealt a lot with efficient use of electricity by our members. Every state ratepayer has access to Efficiency Vermont's incentive programs, and Bill has done an excellent job of fielding requests from our members about incentives that are available. As Louis has mentioned in the past, WEC is restructuring our incentive programs to enhance the benefit to income-qualified members who might otherwise find it difficult to make improvements in efficient electric use without some financial support and technical assistance. So, going forward, we'll be directing our members to go right to Efficiency Vermont for the incentives and help that they offer to Vermonters. Like all Vermont ratepayers, our members are required to pay a charge on their bills to support Efficiency Vermont programs and services. In encouraging a more direct connection to Efficiency Vermont, we're trying to ensure WEC members get good access to Efficiency Vermont services they are paying for on their electric bills.

to good effect. To Steve's point, these are services members are paying for through the Efficiency Vermont charge on WEC bills, so we should make sure they're getting the benefit they're paying for.

Focus on Income-Qualified Programs

Louis: Steve mentioned changes to some of our programs at Washington Electric, and how we're directing resources to help our members who really need those resources the most. I'd like to go into that a little more. One of these programs, that we're offering in partnership with Vermont Electric Co-op, is the Affordable Community Renewable Energy program, or ACRE. We ran a story on this in the September *Co-op Currents*. The ACRE program is going very well: we're very close to being fully subscribed, although we anticipate additional money and spots becoming available soon. Income-qualified members get significant discounts on their electric bills. The program is federally funded. We're watching the developing Solar for All program created by Sen. Sanders: that would likely be an extension or expansion of the ACRE program, and we'll participate in that. Also, as always, our Tier III incentive programs, and Efficiency Vermont's incentive programs, benefit income-qualified members and many of these programs have an additional layer of incentive available for those who do qualify.

Louis: We'll have some adjustments to make with this new approach, but basically, our Member Service Representatives will be our in-house contacts for most inquiries about products and services, and those questions will either be fielded right away, or else members will receive follow-up from the appropriate staffer by email or phone.

To Steve's point, we're also going to use Efficiency Vermont's services more than we have in the past. That includes their advice and recommendations on incentives for different beneficial electrification tech options, and advice for members concerned about the amount of electricity they're using and the amount of their bill. Bill kind of built this coaching model here at Washington Electric with his style and knowledge, and Efficiency Vermont uses it now

Steve: WEC also participates in the state's WARMTH program where members can donate by rounding up the total on their electric bills. This is money that offsets some of income-eligible WEC members' energy bills.

Louis: Great point, Steve, and of course members contribute to our Community Fund through their

Co-op Currents

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Board of Directors

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Editorial Committee

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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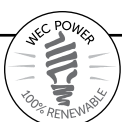
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capital credit donations. Those grants go to local nonprofits. They're not all income-eligible programs, but some of them are, and they benefit Vermonters and many of our members who need assistance.

Steve: It's important to keep in mind WEC is a not-for-profit utility and its key responsibility is to provide electricity reliably, equitably, and safely to all its members. That's what a co-op is formed to do. We are grateful that we can channel members' voluntary donations back to our community and to members in need. That's what a co-op also does. We're happy to participate in income-eligible programs, and collaborate in some that are developed with partial state or federal funding, like ACRE. Nonetheless, in managing most of WEC's assistance and incentivization programs whether they are required by the state or not, we're taking money from other members to pay for them. Most WEC members are aware that their electric bills tend to be somewhat higher than those in other Vermont utilities because WEC's territory is rural, re-forested, more sparsely populated, and has very few industrial and commercial members to generate outsized revenue to offset utility expenses. WEC's Board members, because they are rate-paying members themselves, are continually aware of the balances to be made between the cost of providing our members' basic electricity needs, and those of social assistance and electrification incentivization programs. If our members want more or less of one or the other, it would be great to hear from them; the Co-op is run for their benefit. I occasionally talk to members who might remark, "Why doesn't WEC incentivize more of this or that?" and I'm obliged to respond, "We can do that, and recognize that you are paying for it."

I read a study in a recent issue of the journal *Science* reporting that nationwide, about 70% of incentives for EVs went to people who would've



In encouraging a more direct connection to Efficiency Vermont, we're trying to ensure WEC members get good access to Efficiency Vermont services they are paying for on their electric bills.

— Stephen Knowlton

bought an EV anyway using their own resources. So when using revenue provided by the members, I feel it's important to prioritize the incentives and benefits that have real impact toward WEC's income-sensitive members who need them.

Regulatory Requirements

Steve: The regulatory landscape has changed since WEC became a recognized leader of Vermont utilities in environmental concerns. Under the revised RES [Renewable Energy Standard], all utilities are now required to become 100% renewable in the near future under electricity procurement restrictions to benefit

the Vermont renewable energy industry. As Louis tells me, I expect we'll need more staff to manage the increased regulatory burden of this new landscape. I take Louis at his word that regulators will need more information and place more requirements on utilities as a result of the RES and other legislation.

Louis: The expectations and requirements of the IRP [Integrated Resource Plan; a regulatory requirement for all electric distribution utilities] increase every time there's a three-year cycle they need to be done. That's top of my mind considering we spent the last year working on that, and the Department of Public Service has made it clear the requirements will be bigger the next time. But that's just one example of the regulatory processes and reporting we have to do as a utility in Vermont.

Another thing about regulatory compliance work: it's repetitive from utility to utility. So if we add 10 members to our lines, it requires line work and administrative work, but that's true whether 10 members were added in our territory or in a different territory. It's true regardless of how many ratepayers are served by the utility where those new people are added.

On the other hand, the regulatory work is repetitive across utilities. The costs are redundant and repetitive, so for smaller utilities like ours, it's about scale, and not about the type of requirement.

And we have fewer members to pay for the work. I think there is room to adjust the regulatory reporting and compliance requirements in a way that will not diminish the protection for ratepayers or the ability for regulators to do their jobs, but could reduce costs significantly for members. That's a project all on its own. Off the top of my head, we do a number of different reports and data collection related to net metering, all in different formats, on different schedules, with slightly different information. That's an area where I could see us still providing regulators, grid managers, and members the information they need regarding net metering, but without producing redundant reports providing the same information.

Legislature Update

Louis: The legislative session has returned, and with a new legislature given there was an election last year. That'll result in big changes in the world of energy legislation. The House has recreated a committee specific to energy, now called the Energy and Digital Infrastructure Committee. The former Senate committee chair, Chris Bray, was defeated in the election last fall, so there's a new chair, Sen. Anne Watson from Washington County, and many new members in both committees. With many freshman legislators, and the defeat or retirement of longtime incumbents, the legislature will have a lot to do to learn the basics all legislators need to know to make policy on these kinds of questions. It may be a slower start to the session as legislators come up to speed, and more time for the basic foundation-laying before the bills start moving and being written and amended.

We passed a huge Renewable Energy Standard [RES] bill last year, which sped up the schedule for the remainder of Vermont utilities to become 100% renewable. Of course, WEC already is 100% renewable. The new RES placed requirements on utilities like WEC to cover our load growth by buying new renewables instead of investing in old renewables. That bill also effectively ended group net metering, offsite net metering, as of the end of December. Renewable Energy Vermont [REV] is proposing,



Our Member Service Representatives will be our in-house contacts for most inquiries about products and services, and those questions will either be fielded right away, or else members will quickly receive follow-up from the appropriate staffer by email or phone.

— Louis Porter

with Sen. Watson, a bill to require an extension of the Standard Offer power. That's projects that go through a kind of a reverse auction for renewable power, and then the utilities that aren't 100% renewable are required to purchase that power. WEC is exempt from that. The program is set to sunset, but REV would like to see it extended.

Rate Increase Response

Louis: We've heard quite a few objections to the January 1, 2025 rate increase of 2.91%. We've heard more than we heard for the last one, which was over 12%. We're increasing 2.91% over a two year period, and given the rate of inflation is around 4% or more, 2.91% isn't unreasonable—especially when most of that is based on a property tax increase we didn't have

any way to control. WEC pays property taxes to our towns, and those went up significantly, as they did to homeowners and businesses as well. As a reminder, we covered rate increase factors in the December-January issue.

Steve: Louis raises an interesting point. Our property taxes went up; that led the cause for the rate increase, and everyone else's property taxes went up too. It's not surprising people got upset; they feel they're getting hit from both sides. But it's for the same reason, and WEC is subject to the same forces. I think people are more dissatisfied now than they were several years ago, when we had the larger rate increase because costs appear to be rising on everything. Ratepayers and taxpayers alike are both concerned. I'm not surprised we're getting some flak; we're not joyful about it either.

Updates: Wrightsville Sale, Board Election

Louis: A quick update on WEC's decision to sell the Wrightsville hydro plant: we have a purchase and sale agreement. However, it is contingent on the remaining hurdles getting cleared, such as approval from our regulators and lenders.

On the topic of our leadership: once again, Washington Electric has a competitive election for its Board of Directors. Members will receive a ballot in the mail with our Annual Meeting issue in April, which they may mail in or bring to our Annual Meeting on May 1. Members are tired of me saying this, but we're lucky to have a lot of

continued on page 8

Don's Chronicles

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

Co-op Currents is asking our members to write in with their stories and advice about beneficial electrification, or switching out the carbon-powered things in our lives with electric ones. We're looking for your unvarnished experiences here. I have the inaugural story in this issue, about our experience with a new heat pump water heater. Read my piece on page 5, and write in with your own!



Meet the 2025 Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Susan Alexander

Thank you for considering my second term as Director of the Washington Electric Coop. I was first elected during a Zoom meeting in 2022 with Patrick Ross fiddling



away in the background. Joining the Board was equal parts excitement and trepidation given the continuously evolving utility industry. Thanks to detailed orientation sessions and mentoring from both former and current Board members I have amassed a decent command of WEC's challenges and strengths and am prepared to maximize that experience, knowledge and resources in a second term.

For the past 3 years I've been a freshman member of the Finance, Administration, and Power Planning (FAPP) Committee and the Power and Operations (P&O) Committee. I have also taken on an advisory role in Community Fund disbursements (N.B. if you are not familiar with this program visit WEC's website for information on financial support for your non-profit or community organization: <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Fund-Guidelines-2021.pdf>). I love the Community Fund program which is well aligned with cooperative principles, funded through donations of capital credits by members, and benefits our greater community.

My 3-year stint taught me a lot and was certainly one for the history books. I started in the midst of considerable staff and Board changes and the subsequent transfer of decades of knowledge and experience. Then back-to-back storms in December 2022 caused an extended outage during the holidays followed by unprecedented flooding in July 2023 and again in 2024. It should be no surprise then that FEMA updates become a regular agenda item with implications for budgets and cash flow.

WEC staff have been stellar in responding while simultaneously working towards improved communications, reliability, and resilience. The workplans developed by staff and their consultants and reviewed by the Board identify the tools and resources needed to mitigate service vulnerability. Our challenge has been to appropriate the financial means to implement projects being cognizant of increased costs. Projects are already underway to update substation infrastructure, install

an automated metering information system, and optimize right-of-way management. While storms and outages will surely continue, WEC is becoming better equipped to respond to, and rebound from them.

I truly appreciate those who have reached out to me to discuss WEC issues, statewide energy policy, and the affordability of electricity. I welcome the opportunity to continue the conversations, to serve on the Board and to see the work we have invested in these past three years come to fruition.

Betsy Allen

Hello Members!

After serving as a Board Director, and Secretary, for three years, I am running again for another three year term and would appreciate your support. It is lovely to meet and greet and talk with so many of you at the Annual Meetings, informally around towns, and through this Currents publication.

When I built my home in East Hardwick in the early 2000s, I wanted nothing to do with the electric grid! I put in a small solar system with a gas generator and used as little electricity as possible. The only unit plugged in full time was a refrigerator. I walked out of a room and turned the lights off (still do!).

Today I live with my partner in Plainfield and am 100% on our grid with multiple units plugged in 24/7! Unfortunately, our home is in the woods, so solar is not a viable option now. But I feel so fortunate to be part of the Washington Electric Cooperative that provides 100% renewable energy for all of us.

As a retired elementary teacher and math coach to teachers for over 30 years, I now have the opportunity to serve our communities in a new way. That is why I ran for the Board three years ago, and again now.

In addition to that commitment, I am a bit of a fitness nut and am active in Pilates, dance, cross country skiing, hiking, gardening and cooking, swimming, biking, splitting, stacking and burning wood. (Our wonderful neighbor, Mike Nolan, fells the trees for us.)

One of my favorite seasonal activities, though, is maple sugaring. My partner and I built the cutest little 12 x 16 sugarhouse, from hemlock on our land, for my Leader Half Pint evaporator. I hang two dozen buckets and gather by hand. Last year was easy with almost no snow on the ground.



Sometimes my grandchildren, who live in Atlanta Georgia, are visiting and love to help gather and drink the sap and eat pancakes with syrup!

We may be a diverse community of 41 towns in our electric cooperative, but we all have a common need for reliable and affordable electricity. As your board representative, that is what I strive to support.

With thanks, Betsy Allen

Ian Buchanan

Born, raised, and educated in Vermont, I have long had a vested interest in the well-being of Vermont and its communities. I have owned a Vermont business for



25 years and my family has been WEC members since 2018. My interests and experience in energy, technology, planning, risk management, permanence, and equity align well with the Board's mission.

Having attended or viewed recordings of all WEC Board meetings over the past year, I am familiar with WEC's issues and the dynamics between management and the Board. WEC is fortunate to have many Board members and employees who are conscientious, intelligent, and dedicated. That said, I have concerns about the limitations of WEC's human and financial resources. As a Board member, I will strongly encourage increased focus on the following:

- 1) Advocacy. WEC has a proud history of working to shape electricity access on behalf of Vermonters. However, powerful lobbies, often focused on profit over serving Vermont consumers, are exercising control over our energy options. All utilities, including WEC, should be more vocal and forthright raising concerns about – and, in some cases, directly opposing – energy legislation and regulations that are regressive and harmful to Vermont consumers. Simultaneously, WEC should encourage things like “future proof” electrical codes and press regulators for more direct value from what members pay Efficiency Vermont.
- 2) Address the Scope of Change. Particularly as a small player, WEC should engage in more proactive planning to navigate the changes in electricity markets and technology that AI and increasing consumer demand are creating. This is a long-term investment that will minimize

disproportionate rate increases and improve reliability in the future.

- 3) Explore Resource Options. The viability of sharing resources and/or merging with other utilities for more stable, reliable, and lower-priced electricity should be considered and pursued accordingly.

The past should be respected, but it is essential to be dynamic and future-facing in times of change. As a productive and committed member of the WEC Board, I will work hard and advocate for members. I look forward to continuing to learn about the complexities that drive the greater electrical grid, proposing well-vetted ideas, and contributing to the team that helps make it all work. I am grateful for the opportunity to earn your vote.

I can be reached at 802-595-3828 or isb900@gmail.com. Please don't hesitate to reach out to discuss energy in general or WEC in particular.

Steven Farnham

Three generations of my family have been WEC members since WEC strung power lines across our Plainfield farm, my home since birth. My contact information: Steven4WEC@gmail.com, or 802-917-2581.



When I was first elected for WEC Board, I ran in support of what I call Home-Generated power*, aka DERs (Distributed Energy Resources). DERs with which WEC members are most familiar are NM (net metered) systems, the most common form of which are rooftop and back yard solar.

Recently, Co-op Currents published articles describing how such systems shift WEC infrastructure maintenance costs from NM members to those who can not or choose not to install NM, a cost shift these articles characterize as unfair. While none of these articles claim WEC is expressly anti-NM, they don't have to.

If the US is to shift its energy demand away from fossil fuels, there will be a dramatically increased demand for clean electricity. One way to solve that is to add generation to the grid. Another solution is to remove load from the grid. Generating power at (or near) the point of use is one way to reduce load. While wide spread indiscriminate deployment of “basic” NM creates load management headaches for utilities, if properly matched to loads, or coupled with storage, DERs can benefit both the utility and the end user.



NM's infrastructure maintenance cost shift can be partially addressed in the utility's rate design, but a better solution is for the legislature to identify less regressive funding sources for consumer choices they wish to incentivise.

As a tenth-generation Vermonter, I strongly believe independence is key to rural living, but the fleeting nature of electricity makes energy independence really elusive. I'm optimistic the day will come when energy independence will cost the average homeowner about as much as a new heating system (and/or will be integral to it), and rural power outage emergencies will be obsolete.

It took out-of-the-box thinking to extract WEC from its commitment to Seabrook Nuclear, and to build Coventry. If WEC wants to continue to pioneer revolutionary, innovative, cost-effective, environmentally friendly means to keep members' homes and businesses powered, and illuminated, then WEC's "generals" need to fight this war, not the last one.

*My profile, page 5 here:

[washingtonelectric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/4-2022-WEC-CURRENTS-FOR-WEB.PDF](https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/4-2022-WEC-CURRENTS-FOR-WEB.PDF)

Bill Powell

Before being hired in 1991 as WEC's Director of Energy Services I was a co-owner of a solar construction company serving residential and commercial projects in Vermont and New England. My Middlebury College degree (1977) is in Environmental



Science/Economics. I earned a Masters in Business Administration (UVM) in 1993. During my WEC tenure I obtained the Certified Energy Manager credentials as well as on-going professional development.

In 1998 my role at WEC was expanded as the Director of Products and Services which I held until December 2024. In my three decades I had the privilege of working with each board of directors and multiple General Managers.

I can say the experience and institutional memory gained gives me a long term view of the regulated utility business in Vermont. I also want to pay tribute to the lessons learned from working with thousands of Co-op members over the years.

The experience of working to solve member problems and their service needs, whether helping with high use issues or questions about using energy for heating and hot water and more recently with EVs has given me valuable insight into what the membership wants and expects from their Co-op.


I am especially proud to have worked with our linemen and engineers, and the staff of the Co-op every day for 33 years.

The challenges a member-owned utility faces in the twenty-first century include meeting the environmental and political/regulatory policies in Vermont. WEC is a small enterprise with a 41 town piece of rugged rural territory with low member density.

The existential climate challenges we face were already evident before the Covid pandemic. That period brought demographic changes including new members from outside Vermont increasing membership and our business while also increasing

our responsibility to ensure reliable electric service. WEC's capacity to deal with wide-spread outages has improved immensely but we still have much improvement to invest in. WEC needs to expand its use of technology that reduces outage duration. With the current Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) and Construction Work Plan (C.W.P.) WEC has the gameplan

and management elements to meet member expectations.

Now that Donna Jerry and I have retired we continue to live in Calais. I serve on the board of the Central Vermont Solid Waste District, an appointed role. I am treasurer of the Maple Corner Community Center. I welcome your inquiry and would appreciate your support. 

Members Write

Heat Pump Water Heater

By Don Douglas

We decided to replace our gas-fired water heater about three years ago. The old water heater was a replacement for the electric water heater that had failed just when WEC was paying an incentive to change from electric to propane to help members keep their bills as low as possible.

This time there's an incentive to change from fossil fuels back to a heat pump electric water heater. The gas-fired water heater was still working but we wanted to try the new heat pump water heater for a couple of reasons. We heat our two hundred year old house with a wood furnace which is in the old root cellar just behind the wall for our kitchen and dining room. The cellar is very hot all winter while we are burning wood. We wanted to capture the excess heat and use it to heat our water. The idea of a heat pump is basically very simple, it's just moving heat from one place to another. The old water heater used electric resistance to produce heat, like a toaster or a regular electric stove. The heat pump transfers the heat from the air in the cellar to the water in the tank. The other advantage for us was the location of the new water heater. We moved it from a far corner to the center of the wall in front of the wood furnace. That let us put in a laundry sink in that corner where there was a drain for the washing machine.

There other were other benefits I did not realize at first. The cellar was always a little damp and during the summer months we had to run a dehumidifier or mold would begin to grow. The heat pump water heater also takes humidity out of the air which we could channel down to the drain where we installed the laundry sink. And in the summer, besides removing humidity, the heat pump water heater also acts as an air conditioner and made the whole house a few degrees cooler.

However, it's hard to be an advocate for energy efficiency when you suffer financially. First of all, every application is a little bit different, it really depends on the specific location in your house and what benefits you can realize. There is an incentive from Efficiency Vermont and WEC, but the heat pump water heater is still more expensive than a traditional propane water heater. In addition, the heat pump is a much more complicated device. After less than three years the motherboard failed. It was under warranty and a new one was shipped very quickly, but the warranty did not cover the labor. I believe that all of the brands available use the same vendors for the electronics and I was unhappy to learn that this is the sixth upgrade to the heat pump water heater that we purchased. It is a Bradford White and the model number starts with RE2H. Perhaps the seventh model will be more reliable. Nobody expects to purchase a new water heater every three years!

Don Douglas of Orange is the Treasurer of WEC's Board of Directors.

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. Submit stories to currents@wec.coop. See more details on this page.



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?

Take Advantage of Resources from Efficiency Vermont

No matter your income, or whether you rent or own, all WEC members can take advantage of energy resources from Efficiency Vermont. I've collected some recent resources here that I think are of greatest value to our members.

Looking for incentives? Efficiency Vermont has the tool that will help you calculate everything you are eligible for. Have questions about getting a home

energy audit? Efficiency Vermont's advisors are happy to talk with you. No internet? Give them a call.

My motto is "more impact, less effort." All WEC members are already chipping in to pay for Efficiency Vermont through the required energy efficiency charges on our electric bills, so we might as well be using

Efficiency Vermont

their services! My goal is to send more WEC members directly to Efficiency Vermont to take advantage of their resources. Their staff can help take you through the steps of weatherization, incentives for new equipment, finding a contractor, accessing low- or no-cost financing, and so much more. Full disclosure: I worked at Efficiency

Vermont before I started working at WEC, so I know the team there is well-equipped to help you through your own process, start to finish.

All the resources on this page can be accessed via [EfficiencyVermont.com](https://www.EfficiencyVermont.com), or call 888-921-5990.

— JJ Vandette,
Director of Special Projects and Innovation

Five energy efficiency resolutions for the new year

Have you made any energy-saving resolutions for the new year? With bigger-than-ever incentives available, 2025 may be one of the best times to invest in making your home more efficient. This year, you can get up to \$15,000 to repair the issues that have prevented you from doing a weatherization project. Paired with up to \$9,500 in rebates for weatherization, you can get as much as \$24,500 to make your home safer, more comfortable, and more energy efficient. When you begin to explore the possibilities, you also find opportunities to upgrade your electric panel and cover the entire cost of a new heat pump water heater. And you have access to financing designed just for energy-saving projects.

Five ways to jumpstart an energy-savvy home

The reason for saving energy can be simple, like saving money on your energy bills. Or it can be part of your journey to make your home more sustainable and resilient for your future, or the planet. Use these tips and explore our recommended reading to start your year with energy-saving wins.

1. Start with small changes to your home

You can switch to LED lightbulbs or use an advanced power strip. No matter whether you rent or own, those small changes can make an impact on your energy bills and your carbon footprint.


2. Tackle one thing at a time

One of the best times to level up your home's efficiency is when an appliance or heating and cooling equipment is at the end of its life. For example, if your refrigerator is over 12 years old, check out the latest ENERGY STAR models and choose the most efficient one in your price range.

Don't Miss This!

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

- It's easy to get overwhelmed by options. I recommend taking advantage of Efficiency Vermont's free Virtual Home Energy Visit to make a plan for tackling and budgeting for energy-saving projects: [EfficiencyVermont.com/Rebates/List/Home-Energy-Visit](https://www.EfficiencyVermont.com/Rebates/List/Home-Energy-Visit)
- I recommend every WEC member try out Efficiency Vermont's Energy Savings Calculator. This tool, developed by Rewiring America, shows you all the federal, state, and WEC incentives you're eligible for. This information can impact your budget—in a good way—so use it early in your planning process. [EfficiencyVermont.com/Calculator](https://www.EfficiencyVermont.com/Calculator)
- Sometimes you discover you need to deal with one thing before you can upgrade another. Maybe you need an upgraded electrical panel before you can install an EV charger: look into Efficiency Vermont's home electric system upgrade rebate, for up to \$10,000. Or maybe you need to do mold remediation before you can weatherize your home: look into the home repair rebate of up to \$15,000 for income-eligible members.
- If you're not a computer user, or if you don't have high-speed internet, we still want you to take advantage of these resources. That's part of the reason we decided to print these Efficiency Vermont resources in Co-op Currents. If you can't use the website [efficiencyvermont.com](https://www.EfficiencyVermont.com), that's okay. You can call Efficiency Vermont toll-free to talk to an energy advisor. They also offer translation services. Call Efficiency Vermont at 888-921-5990.



3. Get a Virtual Home Energy Visit and make your plan

One of the most impactful ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to make your home more energy efficient. Creating a plan helps your goal become more achievable. A free virtual home energy visit with an Efficiency Vermont energy expert is a good place to start when you are in planning mode.

4. Find and plan out your incentives

With a plan in hand, you can use Vermont's one-stop shop to find rebates to make your home greener [[EfficiencyVermont.com/Calculator](https://www.EfficiencyVermont.com/Calculator)]. This tool, brought to you in partnership with Rewiring America, is a great place to find federal and state incentives for projects like insulation and air-sealing, weatherized windows and doors, energy-efficient electric appliances, electric vehicles and charging equipment, heat pump heating systems, and heat pump water heaters.

5. Learn about financing options

There are no- and low-cost loan options to help you make energy efficiency improvements. Larger projects, like comprehensive weatherization or heat pumps, may come with a higher upfront cost. Many projects can be structured so that the amount you save on your energy bills is greater than the amount you spend on your monthly loan payment.

Don't leave money on the table for weatherization

Peter Walke, Managing Director,
Efficiency Vermont

Weatherization makes homes more comfortable, decreases costs, can improve health, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Weatherization makes sense, but I know that the upfront costs of weatherizing can be difficult to fit into

a tight budget. If you've thought of weatherizing your home in the past but got discouraged by the cost, now is the time to explore the possibilities.

Our current incentive is one of the largest we have ever offered. While funds last, qualified households can get up to \$9,500. The incentive covers 75% of the project cost for moderate-income households and 90% for low-income households. You can also pay for your project monthly through our Home Energy Loan, with interest rates as low as zero percent, or monthly via your utility bill.

What incentives do you qualify for?

About 60% of Vermont households qualify as low or moderate income. View the household income limits to see if yours might be one of them. Our customer support team can help you, too.

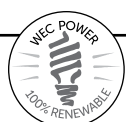
If you don't qualify as low or moderate income, you can still get up to 75% of the project costs back, up to \$4,000. If you meet low-income thresholds, you may qualify for free weatherization (as well as other services and products). You can learn more by working with your regional weatherization agency.

Does your home need repairs before weatherization?

Income-eligible Vermonters can also get up to \$15,000 for home repairs that are necessary to address barriers to completing a weatherization project (such as remediation of asbestos, mold, or vermiculite). That's a total of up to \$24,500 to weatherize your home.

Weatherization supports you and supports the climate

Weatherization is a cost-effective way to keep your home comfortable and to reduce carbon pollution. Heating our buildings in Vermont causes 36% of our state's carbon emissions. Efficiency Vermont experts predict that this increased weatherization incentive could result in hundreds of additional Vermont homes getting weatherized. That has me excited!



Discover Vermont households that have weatherized and saved

Kelsey hired the Efficiency Excellence Network contractors. The crew air-sealed and insulated Kelsey's entire home, resulting in fresher indoor air and comfortable temperatures year-round. Ice buildups are now a thing of the past, and Kelsey is estimated to save \$400 each year on heating costs. And you will save too. Those are dollars that you can spend on your family and reinvest in the local economy.

How to prepare for a virtual home energy visit

Research is one of the first steps in every home improvement project. Need to un-clog the sink? Google it. Need a new kitchen appliance? Search for an energy-efficient one at your local retailer or with our marketplace tool. Need to address that pesky draft in your house? Ask an expert.

Knowledge really is power when it comes to solving your home's biggest issues and making your space more energy efficient. A virtual home energy visit empowers homeowners and renters with the information they need to make informed decisions. "It was easy," says one Barre couple who got a virtual home energy visit in 2021. "I wish all things were that easy."

What's a virtual home energy visit?

A virtual home energy visit is a video call between you and an energy expert. The expert can identify opportunities to improve the comfort and energy efficiency of your home. In other words, they know where to look and what questions to ask. They're a neutral source of information, so you can rest assured that they won't try to sell you anything. Efficiency Vermont offers free virtual home energy visits to Vermont homeowners and renters all year long.

Virtual home energy visits typically take 1.5 hours, and they can be scheduled at your convenience. You'll give the energy expert a tour of some important aspects of your home, like your heating system, your electrical panel, and your basement. You might also show them copies of your energy bills so they can understand how much fuel or electricity your home uses annually.

Based on the learnings from the virtual home energy visit, you might decide to pursue a comprehensive home weatherization project. Those projects require an additional on-site home assessment by a contractor to

qualify for incentives.

Benefits of a virtual home energy visit

- A virtual home energy visit is a no-brainer.
- Get expert advice from the comfort of your home
- See a holistic view of your home's energy consumption and understand how the different systems work together
- Receive customized advice on how to address your home's specific issues or areas for improvement
- Walk away with a personalized list of next steps to help you prioritize your projects
- Did we mention it's free?

When should you have a virtual home energy visit?

There's never a bad time to have a virtual home energy visit. Our energy experts are available year-round to answer your questions and help you prioritize your next projects. That said, here are some times when a virtual home energy visit might be especially helpful:

- While issues are visible:** It's best to schedule your visit when the energy expert will be able to see any specific issues you're having. For example, if your basement is wet in the spring or if you have an ant issue every summer, schedule your visit during that time.
- When moving into a new home:** Did you just buy a house, or start renting a new place? It's a great time for a virtual home energy visit to get the lay of the land and learn about your new home.
- Before starting a new project:** We recommend getting a virtual home energy visit before embarking on a big home improvement project. You might gain new or deeper information which can help inform your priorities and approach.

How to prepare for your virtual home energy visit


Once you've scheduled your visit, take a few minutes to prepare your space and gather some documentation. A little bit of preparation goes a long way toward getting the most out of your virtual home energy visit.

- Identify your goals: To maximize the value of your virtual home energy visit, spend some time in advance thinking about your goals. Do you have specific issues that you want to address, like drafty rooms, dampness, or pest problems? Maybe you're thinking of buying an electric car or a heat pump and wondering whether your home has enough electrical service to handle the addi-

tional load. Or do you just want to learn how to make your home more energy efficient? Understanding your goals will help guide the conversation with the energy expert.

- Charge your phone or tablet: You'll be giving the energy expert a tour of your home, so make sure your device is fully charged.
- Write down your home information: Be prepared to share the following information.
 - Age of the home
 - Home type (farmhouse, ranch, colonial, etc.)
 - Number of occupants
 - Number of heating and cooling zones
 - Heating sources and fuel type(s)
 - Presence of energy-intensive appliances or devices (such as heat pumps, electric space heaters, chest freezers, or medical equipment)
- Clear a path: Make sure that you have easy access to your electrical panel, heating system, and water

heater. If you want to discuss your attic or basement, make sure those spaces are easily accessible, too. For example, if you'd like the energy expert to see your attic, set up a ladder ahead of time. For dark spaces, please have a flashlight handy.

- Gather documentation: Have copies of your energy bills (ideally for the past 12 months) so the energy expert can understand your home's annual fuel and electricity usage. The bills should show the quantity (in gallons) of fuel used and the quantity (in kWh) of electricity used. Since energy prices vary, the quantity of fuel and electricity helps establish a stronger baseline than the amount you paid in any given year. Ready to schedule your visit? 

Schedule your personalized Virtual Home Energy Visit from Efficiency Vermont today: <https://www.encyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-energy-visit>

Puzzle by Betsy Allen

Causes of Power Outages

W A F D M I R R W A J P T J O U U J Y V
 E Z V V C O X U Y R D V S J A U B L K Y
 A H R R S O K W T A H A H K M J H V S C
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 E B E E W S P J A Z F L E D I V D P B C
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|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| company initiated | equipment failure | power supplier |
| major storm | animals | accidents |
| members | trees | weather |
| unknown | snow | |

Emergency Resources

Fuel

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

Mental health: 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

Food

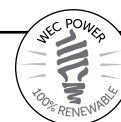
Vermont Foodbank: 800-585-2265.
Capstone Community Action: capstonevt.org
Northeast Kingdom Community Action: nekcavt.org
3SquaresVT: 855-855-6181, vermontfoodhelp.com

211

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

Did You Know?

Space heaters are the usual culprit behind unexpected winter bill spikes. Devices that may claim to heat a room for "pennies a day" are often tested in climates much warmer than ours. So while a space heater may indeed cost pennies a day in Florida, they require much more energy—and cost much more to run—in Vermont.



Safety Minute: Underground Electrical Safety and 811 (DigSafe)

When we think of our electric distribution grid, we talk a lot about “poles and wires.” But in some cases, electrical equipment is located on the ground and wires travel underground. Here’s an example: most WEC members have a transformer that resembles a gray can, located high on a pole outside their home. But some housing developments have what’s called a padmount transformer: in this case, the transformer is on the ground, usually housed in a greenish metal box, and the wire that carries electricity is buried underground.



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

needed vegetation cleared away. The last padmount transformer I came across was unlocked, and there were several matchbox cars in front of it. First: the padmount should never be unlocked, and second: nobody matchbox car-aged should be playing around any transformer. There are safety measures in place to prevent shock, but it’s far too risky. So far we’ve just talked about what’s aboveground. Underground, there are

live electric wires connecting your padmount transformer to your home, just like the wire that travels overhead from a pole-mounted transformer. 811, or DigSafe, marks the location of those wires. But you may also have propane lines, or other underground systems, that are unmarked: 811 only marks equipment that is utility-owned. Hire an underground locating company to mark your underground systems, and your aboveground equipment. Taking the time to locate and mark underground systems prevents accidents that occur when someone using digging equipment cuts into their own equipment, or a wire.

Here’s what you need to know:

- Keep padmounted transformers free of vegetation.
- Call WEC if your padmount transformer is unlocked or looks like it needs maintenance.
- Call 811 (DigSafe) to mark utility-owned equipment.
- Hire an underground locating company to locate and mark non-utility facilities and equipment.

Recently, up in the northern part of our service area, a private plow truck driver was unaware that a padmount transformer was in the path of his plow. When he drove into it, the damage caused the equipment to leak oil. This was close to a lake, so it became not only an electrical safety concern, but an environmental safety concern. With some awareness of ground-based electric equipment, the accident could have been avoided.

Padmount transformers require 10 feet of access in the front, and 4 feet around the side. Brush and vegetation should not be planted or allowed to grow right around them—although to many, it’s an ugly green box, so I understand efforts to improve aesthetics.

And here’s another story that really spooked me: I once patrolled a development where several padmounts



This warning sticker should be located on all padmount transformers.

Changing gears: after my Safety Minute on generator safety (October-November 2024), I received a letter from member Stuart Granoff. He had just bought a generator, and wanted to know if the less expensive interlock was a better option than a transfer switch.

Here’s a synopsis of my response: First, if you install a transfer switch: I trust that any licensed electrician (Journeyman or Master Electrician) can safely install a transfer switch to eliminate the potential for backfeeding the lines. The State maintains a database of licensed electricians.

And yes, the inexpensive interlock can be used instead of an expensive transfer switch. However: the connection depends on the kind of generator you have, and the decision really depends on the owner. The interlock takes more owner involvement and understanding of electric systems. And unlike some transfer switches, it is not automatic. The interlock physically allows only one breaker to feed the circuits in

the house, either utility service (main breaker) or emergency generator (auxiliary breaker). If using an interlock, I recommend you have a strong understanding of home electrical systems, and build out a system to slowly warm up the generator and add back critical load.

Thank you to Stuart for writing in. I love talking with members about electrical safety: please contact me anytime with your questions, feedback, or to request a presentation. 🐱

Full link to State database of currently licensed electricians in Vermont: https://data.vermont.gov/Government/DFS-Licensing-MasterList/cy8e-89cz/data_preview

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.

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

President & General Manager’s Message

continued from page 3

members running for the Washington Electric Board. We’re lucky that among our 12,000 or so members, there are people eager and willing to serve. We’ve had more candidates than spots in every election since I’ve gotten here. I encourage readers to read the bios on pages 4-5, and next issue, read the candidates’ policy statements. We’re lucky to have more people who want to do the job than we have seats.

Steve: Member participation on the Board is critical because the Co-op

exists to serve its members who have their money invested in it. Because the Cooperative makes financial and policy decisions on behalf of the entire membership, we benefit from engaged member participation, and we seek Board members who see their primary role to be loyalty and attention to the needs of all their fellow members during the time they serve on the Board. Ours is a democratic institution, and for better or worse it takes vigilance and commitment to make it work well.

Editorial disclosure: Bill Powell is a 2025 candidate for WEC’s Board of Directors.

