

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC) Equity Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

Friday September 27, 2024

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Members Present: Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation (chair); Julia Fox, Department of Energy Resources; Chris Modlish, Attorney General’s Office; Joy Yakie (designee for Kyle Murray), Acadia Center; Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance; Mary Wambui, Planning Office for Urban Affairs

Non-Voting Members: Erin Engstrom, Eversource

Members Absent: --

DOER Staff Present: Elischia Fludd, Colin Carroll, Aurora Edington

Consultants Present: Chelsea Mattioda, Synapse

1. Call to Order

Kathryn Wright, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

2. Agenda, Roll Call, Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chair Wright took roll call.

Chair Wright called for approval of the minutes, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Chair Wright gave an overview of the agenda.

3. EWG Seat Vacancy

Chair Wright read from slide 5. Vernon Walker departed Clean Water Action, leaving a vacancy for a voting member on the GMAC Equity Working Group. Chair Wright has talked to Clean Water Fund to see if there are other employees who want to participate. Jollette Westbrook of the Environmental Defense Fund has also expressed interest. The GMAC needs to vote to approve a

candidate. The next meeting is December 17th. There is the option to expand membership, too. Any nominations for membership must be received by MA-GMAC@mass.gov no later than December 12th.

4. 2025 EWG Planning Proposal

Chair Wright gave an overview of the proposed 2025 Plan for the EWG.

Larry Chretien: Thank you for laying this out. I'm good with what you have, and I don't see missing things now. We can't do much until we have something to react to. Maybe we ask the Chair for 10 minutes at the next meeting to let GMAC know we have a plan for the year, and they can ask questions. We can let them know that we may want time at a following meeting for a breakout session, but not a standing commitment there.

Erin Engstrom: I echo what Larry said. It's helpful from a planning perspective to lay this all out. Are you envisioning that the quarterly meeting will be early or late in the quarter? I want to make sure the EDCs have clear guidance from this group to incorporate feedback from this group in our September report.

Chair Wright: We haven't set a precise schedule, but I was trying to think about when things are due. There are preliminary metrics and reporting due in May, so I'd like it to be early in the quarter to align with the procedural schedule. However, early in Q1 may not align well with when we think we will have proposals. Q2 would likely need to be towards the beginning.

Erin Engstrom: Thank you.

Julia Fox: In the appendix of these slides, we've also included more information on the GMAC's plan, which will also be provided at the December 17th meeting. We also have an activity tracker developed by our consultants that will be hosted publicly on our website. If people have questions, I'm happy to chat or take those offline.

Chair Wright: Kyle's colleague Joy is attending on his behalf today and cannot raise her hand. Let's get her added.

Mary Wambui: It seems there will be a lot of stakeholder engagement in the first couple of months. I'm wondering if the GMAC ever discussed how to track whether true procedural justice is happening in these engagements.

Chair Wright: There are two separate things going on. GMAC is proposing its own listening sessions, and DPU is hosting separate sessions. This is what the GMAC is discussing in terms of having deeper public/stakeholder engagement around grid planning. The thought is that those would be in June and December. I think, yes, the GMAC is trying to improve stakeholder engagement with grid planning, and there are a lot of other processes that the GMAC will track but does not have authority over.

Mary Wambui: I'm comparing two processes and the success of equity in energy efficiency planning, where on that side we seem to have been leading because energy justice has not given the attention it should get in energy proceedings. When I look at the GMAC process, I feel that we are following and I want to resolve that, because I don't think following will get us where we need to be. I haven't fleshed out my thoughts, but these are my reactions that this is a challenge we need to think about. If our system has not prioritized equity, how do we carve out a place for us to lead? With respect to EDCs, I don't think their proposals will accomplish what we want.

Chair Wright: I appreciate your thinking, and we were wrestling with that ourselves – how to take our conversations about distributional equity analysis and start applying them to parts of the plans or start to have a more serious conversation about how equity is embedded in parts of the GMAC. Maybe we need to adjust how we are thinking about the next ESMP or try to do a little bit throughout the year to ensure we're making forward progress. I agree and we can take that back.

Larry Chretien: I think the schedule is still pretty good, but we are not here to be academic observers or witnesses, we want to act to the best we can in our limited authority. Some members of this committee reserve the right to then try to get the committee to express an opinion. I keep coming back to – I have nothing now without more data and reports. When I see them, I will comment on them.

Chair Wright: I am hopeful we can get to a joint set of comments or recommendations like last time.

Erin Engstrom: I agree with what Mary and Larry said. We are not experts in the space, and we look to all of you to help us incorporate equity into what we do, which is provide safe/reliable power to our customers. We welcome all your feedback. We weren't trying to oppose everything created by this group the first time. We are open to hearing more.

Chair Wright: As part of the Phase II proceeding, I hope we can go back to the metrics we created.

Mary Wambui: That's good you raised that, Erin. Should we expect to see some of those recommendations in any of the documentation or reports that you will be sharing? On the EE side, PAs take some of those. The best way to incorporate metrics is to bring in those to your reporting.

Erin Engstrom: I think going back to those metrics makes sense, and maybe not the metrics as worded today. We should have conversations – all of us – to make sure we have a metric that this group is looking for. We're going to have to provide a report in September as part of our biannual reporting requirement. We didn't have a lot of time prior to the filing to really talk through some of these things and we had to develop GMAC recommendations quickly. Now we have more time. We would absolutely be willing to have a conversation about this.

Chair Wright: Erin, based on your offer, we can start trying to lay out that conversation. To the extent EDCs are starting to think about what reporting will look like, it may make sense for us to get a sense of the structure of what would be submitted for Phase II.

Julia Fox: When we went to this slide, [slide 19] Mary brought up a point – GMAC will be discussing our stakeholder engagement sessions. I think it would be worthwhile to get feedback from this group as we develop those. It would be great for the core planning EWG group to get feedback from others in this group.

Chair Wright: We will work on refining this plan and getting back to all of you. Thank you all.

5. Equity in Long-Term System Planning Process (LTSP)

Chair Wright turned the conversation over to Julia Fox to discuss equity in the Long-Term System Planning Process.

Joy Yakie: This is helpful. Will there be a final conversation to summarize this?

Julia Fox: This group is still meeting at a bimonthly schedule to narrow down consensus and non-consensus items for stakeholders. I'd encourage you to look at the link on my previous slide with those materials.

Chair Wright: I attended the initial meeting, which had a lot of information from the EDCs. My sense from those in the process is to what extent there has been a dialogue many organizations have had to improve system planning versus utility proposals. I want to get a sense of when the true opportunity for feedback is.

Chris Modlish: There's two main areas we are focusing on: the planning aspect and cost allocation. The EDCs gave their initial presentations on both topics in a summary way, resembling those in DPU 20-75. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to present their perspectives on both topics. We've had one meeting since those 4 meetings where we kind of went back and the EDCs addressed the topic of scope for what the LTSP compared to ESMP encompasses. The EDCs are hard at work to put together a draft proposal and then everyone will have an opportunity to give feedback and make edits before things are submitted to the DPU in April.

Erin Engstrom: I would add that we are meeting every other week. The October meetings were EDC-led and the ones in November were stakeholder-led. I would say there has been a significant amount of dialogue at all meetings.

Mary Wambui: Where are load growth conversations or carve out of DER for equity purposes happening? Is that part of this or happening elsewhere?

Julia Fox: From my perspective, I think right now stakeholders are discussing the scope of the LTSP whether it should include load growth – I don't believe equity has been discussed so far.

Mary Wambui: These are two big equity issues that need to be discussed somewhere.

Erin Engstrom: Load growth is not part of the LTSPP per the DPU order, that's part of the ESMP. The LTSPP is an extension of the DPU 20-75 process focused on proactive planning related to DG, and we need to have conversations about equity there too. Folks are getting confused about the two. We must submit something in April for LTSPP, so we needed to move past planning/scope. The conversation on equity needs to happen and this EWG can talk about it too. The load conversation is specific to the ESMP.

Mary Wambui: Thank you.

Julia Fox: Your point is something I wanted to brainstorm. Some topic areas for how this could fit in would include thinking about forecasting inputs to get a better understanding of utility propensity models which inform the forecast and ultimately investment proposals. We can also think about distributional equity analysis, something this group recommended, but the DPU Order did not find that it needed to be included. However, there was a reference about evaluating locational equity implications for certain investments. That's another area this group should discuss. Finally – metrics. We need to revisit what metrics for stakeholder engagement and equity need to inform planning. I wanted to put this out there for people to be thinking about. There are more questions in the appendix too. We can revisit these at the next meeting when people have more time to digest these, but I welcome feedback now.

Mary Wambui: This is pretty good, but we need to think about metrics that account for historic trends and enable forward looking analysis.

Julia Fox: This is not the only opportunity to provide feedback.

Chair Wright: Given the call back to distributional equity analysis, I wonder if there is a way we can have a more targeted conversation about what that might mean for the LTSPP. I went to a training on this, and they were challenged about my asking about larger grid planning, like the ESMP. I wonder if we can dig into this more.

Larry Chretien: I think we must look at grid modernization holistically. It's not just about infrastructure, it's also about who is paying for it. We need a certain amount of infrastructure to accommodate emissions reductions – solar panels, EVs, heat pumps. In a perfect world, we know we get something worth the cost, and we figure out how to distribute the cost equitably. We need to look for those opportunities. Some scenarios are trickier. You want a disadvantaged community to have access to these things but not overburden them. You want to make sure everyone's grid is modernized to accommodate growth. It's those decisions of when and where to build. When is it a zero-sum game and when is it not? Going forward, we want broad access to distributed energy resources, but they'll likely be driven to more affluent people first. That could be okay if disadvantaged communities are not paying for it. You need several metrics to look at this.

Mary Wambui: We cannot forget the past. Energy and equity injustice must be the pivot point. There is a lot of reading out there to make sure we balance the whole equation.

6. Closing

Chair Wright shared that the next GMAC meeting is December 17th, and that if anyone is interested in joining the EWG they should share their information before that meeting.

Then, she shared that there are a lot of new engagement materials in the newsletter and on people's LinkedIn. We'd appreciate help getting the word out. Those links are in the slide deck.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chelsea Mattioda
Synapse Energy Economics

Meeting materials:

- Meeting agenda
- Meeting presentation slides