

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 13, 2023, 1–4 p.m.

Hybrid meeting

Councilors Present: Chris Modlish, designee for Liz Anderson; Larry Chretien (virtual); Marybeth Campbell (virtual), Sarah Cullinan, Jeremy Koo, designee for Julie Curti (virtual); Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, Kyle Murray (virtual), JS Rancourt (virtual), Jonathan Stout (virtual), Andy Sun (virtual), Kate Tohme (virtual), Alex Worsley (virtual), Mireille Bejjani, designee for Kathryn Wright (virtual)

Councilors Absent: Amy McGuire

Non-voting Councilors: Digaunto Chatterjee (Eversource), Andrew Schneller (National Grid), Kevin Sprague (Unitil) (virtual)

DOER Staff Present: Aurora Edington, Julia Fox, Sarah McDaniel, Marian Harkavy, Colin Carroll

Consultants Present: Jennifer Haugh, Kyle Schultz, Tim Woolf

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

2. Welcome, Roll Call, Agenda

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, Department of Energy Resources (DOER): Commissioner Mahony welcomed all participants to the GMAC meeting and took roll call for voting and non-voting members.

3. Public Comment

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony explained the process for delivering public comments. Speakers will have up to three minutes to speak on any topics of interest related to the GMAC. Once everyone who has pre-registered has provided comment, others may speak, as time allows. There were no pre-registered commenters.

Russ Aney, *Parallel Products Solar Energy*: My question has to do with the proposals that both National Grid and Eversource have proposed for cost allocation for distributed energy resources. DPU 20-75 had a provisional planning process established where the cost-allocation methodology—a.k.a. cost causation—was updated, but instead the DPU took an approach of “beneficiary pays” that set two important new principles. One was that you shouldn’t just bill for projects in a group study. We know that capacity needs to grow in the future, so we should look at cost-effective solutions that can accommodate the future, as long as you can expect distributed energy resources that can connect projects in that particular group study. The second principle was that it’s not just these upgrades that increase capacity are a benefit to not only distributed energy resources projects, but all load customers as well, especially given that capacity needs to be increased to accommodate electrification of heating loads and EV adoption in Massachusetts. These are important when assessing costs that distributed energy resources customers would have to pay for when upgrading systems. In the near term, utilities are proposing to use a CIP-like process to continue the use of new building principles for the future and “beneficiary pay” instead of just using cost allocation, at least for group studies. My concern is that’s going to add on an extensive DPU adjudication period at the end of each group study, which takes considerably longer than initially expected (years). The best case is one additional year to approve a CIP proposal for group studies. I wonder if the utilities have considered certain principles such as a new rule that could be applied more universally without having to go through the DPU. The time it takes for approval is always growing considerably and adding to the new group study and impact study would be a significant deterrent to clean energy development.

Richard Kelliher, *Green Acton Energy Committee*: I’m on the Green Acton Energy Committee and we’ve been working to try to get solar installed all over town—over large parking lots, large rooftops, etc. And we keep bumping into this issue of grid availability and congestion. The local Town of Acton is served from one substation at the very southern tip of town and that’s it. It’s at near capacity. I just wanted to let you know that’s why I’m at this meeting. Thanks for letting me put my brief statement out.

Chris Mazzola, *Home Energy Raters*: I’m the production manager at Home Energy Raters in Sagamore Beach. We’re a large-scale residential HERS rating company; we do about 2,000 HERS ratings a year. We have several new residential subdivisions under construction across the state of Massachusetts that are being built under the expectation of Mass Save all-electric Tiers 1 and 2 incentive programs, and all these buildings are being marketed as net-zero ready with the anticipation of installing PV arrays on each rooftop. But the most recent six of these subdivisions, which are 30 single-family detached homes or more, have all been denied interconnection to the grid because of a capacity concern for where that energy would be going. And the issue we see is that in the current format, each one of these houses could be permitted individually by parcel, by meter, for anything under a 10kW DC array which would be approved by the utility company without question, but anything larger than that and ask permission on the

front end, we're denied. Wondering if there's something to be done to change the metric and explain why these can't be made on the front end. Assume it's the capacity of the transformers on site. Thank you.

4. Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony asked if there were any corrections or additions to either the February 28, 2024, GMAC or May 17, 2024, Executive Committee minutes. None were proffered.

Councilor Kyle Murray moved to approve the February 28, 2024, GMAC meeting minutes. Councilor Sarah Cullinan seconded. Chris Modlish, Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver, and Mireille Bejjani abstained. The motion carried.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver moved to approve the May 17, 2024, Executive Committee meeting minutes. Councilor Kyle Murray seconded. Chris Modlish abstained. The motion carried.

5. 2024 ESMP GMAC Schedule

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony shared the upcoming GMAC schedule on slide 5. The next GMAC meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2024.

6. GMAC Stakeholder Engagement Materials

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony cued up the next slides on materials. Aurora Edington, DOER, presented slides 7–12.

Councilor Marybeth Campbell, Worcester Community Action Council, representing a local agency administering the low-income weatherization program: Thank you for presenting this. I think you've been very thoughtful about it. A couple of comments: I do think having a trusted messenger, particularly when it comes to low- to moderate-income ratepayers, is going to be critical to both scale the volume of people to get access to the message but also input on what the message is. Community action agencies are trusted messengers that could perhaps be helpful in even creating a consistent, helpful message. I could help organize something in Worcester such as a focus group. We also have good relationships at the municipal level, too. I encourage you to reach out there, especially with low- to moderate-income groups. I also appreciate the effort to acknowledge a need for translated documents, and I would encourage you to think about nuances within regions, particularly with new arrivals—Afghanistan, Haiti, South America.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: Thanks for volunteering. Would love to continue conversation about how to maximize our trusted community partners in this discussion.

Councilor Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance, representing low- to moderate-income residential consumers: I think that you've done a great job with the fact sheet options; this will help. I kind of prefer Option B. My suggestion would be as you think of relevant

questions, maybe GMAC members can suggest questions that need answering. You can write and post them as staff work on them. These can just be added to and maybe occasionally you take something down. Breaking it down into three levels is the right approach. When you come to the GMAC website, I picture a map, like “you are here”—I think a lot of people need to be better informed of what GMAC is relative to the rest of the utility universe. A lot of people came to us in the last year thinking we’d be able to fix their solar interconnection problem or storage issue, or you name it. A lot of people conflate our work with EVICC; there’s a lot of overlap. And those of us who intervened into ESMP dockets, we found out that not everything we all thought would be in the ESMP was because they’re in the other dockets. I’m picturing a map that can display different dockets and where to find things. Not everything falls under the GMAC universe, but it is related. And maybe graphically is the best way to go on that one; I’m not sure. Thank you.

Mireille Bejjani, designee for Councilor Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation, representing the environmental justice community: Can we go back to the previous slide with the goals laid out? I was curious about this, and we’re talking about materials vs. process pieces, but in thinking about increasing transparency and stakeholder engagement and people actually engaging in this process, that’s where I think about transparency and accessibility. So not just making information available, but how can people tap in and make a comment and ask a question. So goals 2, 3, 4 are great, but they only go so far as the process is accessible. Signing up for an email is great, but sending emails won’t make a difference if the participation is at a time they can’t attend. That’s not addressed by these outreach materials here, so it’ll only go so far if people can’t engage. It’s just something to think about in parallel with these materials and boosting accessibility as much as possible. I’m happy to talk more about that. In terms of fact sheets, I prefer Option A because it’s just easier if each audience group has one fact sheet to look at instead of having to look across multiple fact sheets to find what they’re looking for. I would emphasize the 101 level more; maybe make multiple fact sheets that level—the 201 and 301 levels have a lot more access to this information and need less support in understanding the process than folks who are ratepayers and LMI in that audience group, so I think that should be the emphasis.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I think on your earlier comments, hopefully we’ll come back to that when we do a little discussion of strategic planning for 2025 and make sure we’re covering some of your points about how we’re actually engaging and providing opportunities for engagement. And then on your point about the 101, I think this is for everyone; it will also help us to start identifying what fact sheets are already out there so we’re not duplicating efforts and maybe elevating and highlighting work that’s already done so we can hone what our 101 information does. Part of this struggle we’re having is, are we providing stakeholder info about just GMAC, or ESMPs, or the bigger picture? I don’t know that any one of us has solved that question, but we’ll keep picking at it.

Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee, representing Eversource: I actually like Option A; I think it’s easier to implement. But related to the easier, on the flip side, I think no other state has done this. There are a lot of documents out there: the ESMP, DPU dockets, Larry was getting to that connectivity—we at Eversource, and most companies are doing this right now, there’s a handful of people using generative AI to pore through all those documents. So just feed all the

information to generative AI to navigate to the answers they're looking for. People are used to using ChatGPT. But otherwise I think Option A is a great start.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: Thinking of that and Larry's points, if everyone remembers, last year was an attempt to identify everything that was in this space, which is a struggle. I do think that there's some value in putting that in a graphic form to make it more easily digestible.

Councilor Kate Tohme, New Leaf Energy, representing the distributed generation renewable energy industry: I also support concept of a graphic tying together all the different pieces brought into the ESMPs and I prefer Option A for fact sheets as well. One thought is we might consider dividing and conquering in terms of different aspects of the ESMP: putting on our planned stakeholder engagements of one or a few GMAC consultants who have different interests. I think we're doing this to a certain extent individually and doing a good job, but we could benefit from having larger group coordination and use those engagements as an opportunity to provide feedback and input on what those groups are looking for and use on the website, fact sheets, or other stakeholder engagement.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I think you're proposing some breakout groups—are you suggesting small groups or committees? I'm thinking about public meeting laws and quorum, so I guess it depends on what you're suggesting and we'd have to come up with an appropriate solution under state law.

Councilor Kate Tohme: I'm talking about singular engagements. Say there's a meeting organized by the larger GMAC group and is, for example, dedicated to questions from stakeholders. Instead of requiring the entire GMAC attend that it be individual GMAC members who are interested in or represent those particular topics.

Jeremy Koo, designee for Councilor Julie Curti, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, representing municipal or regional interests: I would like to reemphasize Larry's point about what is not included in GMAC; we also get questions from our constituents and we should point to relevant dockets and other places where those questions are discussed. I lean toward Option A; in particular from looking at this breakout by audiences, there's this whole runway of near- to medium-term infrastructure needs. There is a lot of need for outreach, for example future siting, which will be valuable—where communities need to play host in the future will be better for community engagement. I agree with Kate's point in terms of audience focus engagement. Whether it's reviewing draft materials and/or targeting municipalities and communities, we'd be happy to be involved in that effort.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver, ENGIE North America, representing the energy storage industry: If I think about the provision of the statute about increasing transparency and engagement, whom do we want more engaged? Out of these two I would favor Option A, but with a significant emphasis on the 101 level. I don't know that we need to encourage the "301"-level people to be necessarily more engaged. As Mireille Bejjani said, a lot of that level have resources and are focused on going onto the websites and figuring out exactly what the GMAC is. The most meaningful impact we can have with the fact sheets is focusing on 101 and 201 levels.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: We're going to be working on it and figuring out how to pull this off.

Aurora Edington, DOER: Sounds like Option A is preferred. This is the first step of engagement. We'll start with this and keep developing and expanding as we need. I'm definitely hearing an interest in graphics for the website. I'm also hearing that we strike a 301 level and focus on a different question for 201. It would be helpful if there is any feedback on the high-level question, because for Option A, we had an example question at different levels. Are there any questions that GMAC members think come to mind for this kind of fact sheet?

Mireille Bejjani: This goes back to engagement and Sarah's questions about whom to engage more: "how can I participate?" There can be a fact sheet split between two different audiences; if you're a ratepayer, this is how you can engage, and then if you're municipality, a developer, etc. This might look a little more like Option B if it's relevant to multiple audiences.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I do like that suggestion.

Aurora Edington: We'll take it back to our brainstorming board and maybe come up with a straw proposal and create some draft language.

Councilor Larry Chretien: At some point people are going to want to go to your website and know what the rate impact is going to be and what the benefits are. Good luck pulling that into a fact sheet, but I think that's where you're going to need to go.

Chris Modlish, designee for Councilor Liz Anderson, Office of the Attorney General, representing the Office of the Attorney General: Specifically regarding benefits, to explain in simple terms, what is a list of some of the benefits you might be able to expect? You might be able to add additional solar panels to your house—accompany that with a distinct listing of the cost to try to answer that question in basic terms would be a good idea.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: We are losing a valued member of our team at DOER: Sarah McDaniel. She's moving on to an opportunity at EEA, so she's not going too far. Thank you, Sarah, for your good work.

7. Overview of Intervenor Briefs

Woolf shared the contents of slides 16-48, focusing on the summary slides with the detailed slides in the appendix.

Commissioner Mahony mentioned that all of the Reply Briefs are coming out within the next couple of weeks, and that this presentation is just for informational purposes.

Mireille Bejjani: Councilor Kathryn Wright passed along a question about this slide (34); can you clarify the point that CBOs don't have the same resources?

Councilor Kyle Murray, Acadia Center, representing the environmental advocacy community: This is regarding financial resources and staff capacity; I think that's how it's phrased in the brief, but this is of course abbreviated. It's mostly financial and staff time. I believe this is something we discussed during the Equity Working Group as well.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: You can point Councilor Wright in Councilor Murray's direction if she'd like more information.

Woolf continued presenting.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: We don't often get to have a summary on this and it's valuable to offer a summary for both the GMAC and the public. Some of us are intervening in the proceeding and are currently writing Reply Briefs.

Councilor Sarah Cullinan, Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, representing the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center: One thing that stood out to me as a general theme that I'm curious if the GMAC maybe has a role in trying to provide better guidance or clarity on, depending on what comes out of the DPU order: (1) what matters when we're talking about net benefits; and related, (2) how to do bill impacts that are meaningful? It seems to me from what's going on in the adjudication so far is that there's just not a lot of consensus or common thinking about even what those net benefits analyses should look like—what's important, what's the goal—and it's a lot of work and money and time that goes into doing those analyses to end up in a place at the end where it's just a big question mark and doesn't provide a ton of clarity. And that wasted time and resources is frustrating. I don't think that the work that was done in them is all that helpful and I think we should do better. Some conversation around what it means for there to be net benefits is an important one to focus on; is that a new working group of the GMAC? That's one area that I'm frustrated by and it's not something that should be an accessory analysis at the end, but should be how we make the best decisions for ratepayers. Maybe we need to look ahead in terms of we've already decided where we know what the ultimate goal is and shouldn't it be getting there in a least-cost way rather than looking at everything in terms of benefits. There are better ways to do that. Broader analysis among stakeholders could be beneficial. Regarding bill impact analysis: there should be an agreed-upon, discussed framework for how to design that in a way that makes the most sense for the greatest number of people. There are lots of iterations that can provide clarity and we can and should do better on. I don't think it's hard; it just deserves more time and attention, preferably before the next analysis happens. At least in this context, the legislature gives these broad directions; we allow the EDCs to interpret what that means, and then we critique what they did. There needs to be more discussion on the process of the framework before that happens.

Councilor Larry Chretien: I concur with Councilor Sarah Cullinan on both points. I will say that I think a year ago, my expectations—maybe I was naïve—that by now I would know a lot more about what grid modernization means in terms of those two factors, and honestly, it's still incredibly cloudy. Maybe a part of that was due to the timetable of getting ready for this first filing, but that can't be sustained. We've got to do something different.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: Particularly to your point, Councilor Sarah Cullinan, we can't have unknown expectations, wait for a response, and criticize it: we didn't have the time this go-around and that's why there's been a lot of discussion within the briefs about the long-term planning process.

Councilor Kyle Murray: I think we will get some clarity from the DPU on a lot of that coming out of what is and is not acceptable for, say, benefit cost analyses. And then I think once we have that, there will be that opportunity to further refine and see what we figure out where we want to go from there.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: Hopefully we'll have some light reading material for Labor Day weekend.

Councilor Kate Tohme: One more comment. I just wanted to say thank you to everybody in the room for all of your hard work. I think this presentation was representative of how so many people have spent so many hours working hard on this. We still have a long way to go and I completely agree that we need to set better expectations, and I think we're well on our way to achieving that and look forward to the DPU order as well. But nice work, everyone. Keep it up. There are lots of opportunities to criticize—as we should because we need to improve—but in working across the country, we're ahead of the game and others are looking to us.

8. Strategic Planning for 2025 Activities

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: A lot of what we do in 2025 will be dictated by the DPU orders, but we didn't want to miss an opportunity to kick off discussion and start brainstorming. We've got some questions up here and wanted to start thinking about it, to start reflecting on what we should be doing in 2025, so when we reconvene in September, we can talk more. Just a reminder that when we create new working groups, these fall under public meeting law, so we'll want to be careful about how much staff time we can commit to this work.

Councilor Kyle Murray: I'm just looking to get through June at this point, especially because the Senate is doing a climate bill next week now.

Councilor Sarah Cullinan: It's hard to think about this without the DPU order; my hope with the GMAC is there are some working groups to work on some of these issues and start the process earlier next time and create a better product in the next round. So just to the extent that if there's any planning we can do for working groups, I hope there are some and we'll have some sort of support for them, but I feel like that's all we can really say without knowing more about the end of this process that we're in right now.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver: I think I agree with Councilor Sarah Cullinan; unless there's something burning we need to get started on right now or continue, then I think this conversation will be better had or riper in September after the DPU issues its order.

Mireille Bejjani: This is the only other specific piece of feedback that Councilor Kathryn Wright asked me to relay, which is that her preference is to wait on creating working groups until after

the DPU order, and to think about how we can support public education beyond the proposed fact sheets, such as hosting public events and sharing next steps for the order.

Councilor Kate Tohme: I agree on waiting to form working groups until after seeing the DPU order. But it could be helpful for us to put together a set of standard procedures or a template for what a subgroup might look like so we don't spend significant time when already digesting the order on coming up with a process to take on the work that the order might entail.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: We can pull together the roles from our bylaws and will refresh that for everybody's recollection.

Chris Modlish: I know some of the other working groups have struggled with having agendas, minutes, and other administrative support, so perhaps the GMAC can assist in this regard.

9. Close and Next Steps

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 3:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Haugh
GreenerU

Meeting attachments:

- Meeting agenda
- Meeting presentation slides
- Draft February 28, 2024, GMAC meeting minutes
- Draft May 17, 2024, Executive Committee meeting minutes