

# Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)

## MEETING MINUTES

Friday, September 13, 2024, 1–4 p.m.

Hybrid meeting

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**Councilors Present:** Liz Anderson; Larry Chretien (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), Kathryn Wright (virtual), Sarah Bresolin Silver, Amy McGuire (virtual), Marybeth Campbell (virtual)

**Councilors Absent:** --

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

**DOER Staff Present:** Aurora Edington, Julia Fox, Marian Harkavy (virtual), Colin Carroll (virtual), Charles Dawson

**Consultants Present:** Tim Woolf, Chelsea Mattioda (virtual)

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### 1. Call to Order

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

### 2. Welcome, Roll Call, Agenda

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

### 3. Public Comment Period

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 was one pre-registered commenter. No one provided public comments.

#### **4. Meeting Minutes Review and Voting**

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony asked if there were any corrections or additions to either the June 13, 2024, GMAC or August 9, 2024, Executive Committee minutes. None were offered.

Councilor Kyle Murray moved to approve the June 13, 2024, GMAC meeting minutes. Councilor Sarah Bresolin seconded. The motion carried.

Councilor Kyle Murray moved to approve the August 9, 2024, Executive Committee meeting minutes. Councilor Sarah Bresolin seconded. The motion carried.

#### **5. Updates from the Executive Committee: 2025 GMAC Budget Filing**

Aurora Edington, DOER staff, presented the update on the 2025 GMAC Budget Filing. The 2025 GMAC budget will be submitted to the DPU by October 18, 2024.

#### **6. ESMP Order Review**

##### **a. GMAC Opening Thoughts**

*Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:* cued up the presentation and invited GMAC members to provide opening thoughts.

*Councilor Liz Anderson, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, representing ratepayers:* As a ratepayer advocate, we are extremely disappointed in this Order. Despite many implications in the Order, the Department is capable and within its rights to act here like it did with recent gas Orders. We have ended up with a siloed GMAC 3.0 proceeding. Concerned that ratepayers will be left holding the bag. This is not an efficient way to promote the clean energy transition.

*Councilor Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance, representing low- to moderate-income residential consumers:* I concur 100% with Liz Anderson and the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office.

*Councilor Kyle Murray, Acadia Center, representing the environmental advocacy community:* Three for three.

*Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:* A lot of work went into the ESMPs by a lot of people, the utilities and this body. Like the AG's office, the DOER office put a lot into these proceedings and has its own frustrations, many similar to what Liz expressed today. Always frustrating to put info on the record and then not get what you want. It's part of the work we do. We are trying to decide what to do next as DOER and as the GMAC. It's clear that the statute creating the GMAC

is solid. We are going to try to use this body to do as much of the work as we can. We are looking forward to building on our work from the last year and hopefully making a difference in the next couple of months and years to make these useful tools for stakeholders and ratepayers.

***Councilor Sarah Cullinan, Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, representing the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center:*** Thank you Liz and Commissioner Mahony for sharing. I want to commend the Department for all of their work into getting their decisions where they are. This took a lot of time and labor. I'm sure there were a lot of difficult decisions. I think we are dealing with a lot of limitations on policy and procedure. In terms of how to make GMAC more useful – procedures and policies make it difficult for DPU to be as flexible as they maybe want to be. We all have the same goal. It's our job now to figure out how we fix those processes and procedures.

***Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:*** There's no doubt that this was a lot of work, and now we have 5 years to work toward the next one.

***Councilor Kyle Murray:*** This was an enormous amount of work for the Department to come to this decision. I do appreciate the work that went in. I'm disappointed with the decisions, but we are breaking new ground in a lot of ways. A lot of these meaty questions don't have easy answers.

#### **b. Consultant Summary and Discussion**

Tim Woolf, Consultant, presented the consultants' slides.

***Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:*** What we all lived through last year was a very condensed timeline. It's frustrating that the DPU is not swayed to direct the GMAC to have additional time to do its work and order the utilities file certain information with the GMAC earlier. The DPU provided good thoughts for us to understand what they're looking for. I'm concerned about everyone's bandwidth. Not being able to align the GMAC and CESAG groups is unfortunate, but we are not beholden to the DPU on this. We will try to create processes that align with utilities and CESAG

***Councilor Kyle Murray:*** On timing, had there been consideration to amend the statute to allow for more time? That's a strategy we could pursue, and it shouldn't be a difficult fix to get through.

***Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:*** Senator Barrett is open to listening to potential statutory updates with GMAC. These are some open vehicles that I would suggest are difficult and targeted vehicles. We have time next session to make those suggestions with enough notice for the next round.

***Councilor Sarah Cullinan:*** The Order declines to direct EDCs to provide forecasts and things like that ahead of time. It doesn't preclude us from doing that work or asking that of the EDCs. It seems like there's a gray area.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** DOER is thinking about that, how we work in the coming years. We are not precluded from that. The Order repeatedly tells utilities to work with the GMAC, and that leaves good space there for us to coordinate.

**Tim Woolf, Synapse Energy Economics, Consultant:** Our slides try to prompt thinking on next steps, and we'll turn back to that at the end of today's meeting.

Tim Woolf, Consultant continued to present, turning to forecasts and demand assessments.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** This is a big space for the GMAC to be involved in the next couple years. The Order says that our clean energy goals are speculative according to the Order, which I consider to not be correct. Massachusetts has firm legal requirements to decarbonize.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** There is a lot of space here for collaboration especially in terms of policy and planning levers. If utilities and the state and GMAC entities work together to identify what we can do to plan most efficiently - people interpret EDCs' assumptions as too conservative. With more collaboration we could agree on more assumptions and come up with sensitivities that will tell us what we can do to move forward.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver, ENGIE North America, representing the energy storage industry:** In terms of working together to develop and talk about inputs, I think forecasting pulls information from so many places, but for some resource types we don't have much historical data. Hopefully that improves in the next couple of years. It would be great if GMAC could develop its own forecast, which is a heavy lift, but it would be an interesting end goal.

**Councilor Kate Tohme, New Leaf Energy, representing the distributed generation renewable energy industry:** I agree that this is a space where GMAC can have a lot of input and participation. The Department didn't specifically direct engagement from EDCs, but I hope they are open. Engagement could help the public and GMAC to understand their process. It would make a lot of sense for us to come up with a procedural schedule with EDCs to identify times it would be most appropriate to provide input.

**Amy McGuire, Highland Electric Fleets:** As we think about impacting/participating in forecasting, is there an opportunity for GMAC to help with policy initiatives and program design that we think will move the needle on appropriately siting DERs, and optimizing DERs on the system so that we are positively impacting what we'd like to see on the utility system so we can sway that and become part of the DOER process and broader EDC process? Curious what our role will be.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** Today we will talk about next steps. To Amy's point, as we work together on building out forecasts and demand assessments, we need to identify where those gaps are as others have said. GMAC is not an advocacy organization. This is a good place to raise the questions and then individual members of the GMAC can do with that what they please.

**Councilor Alex Worsley, Stack Energy Consulting:** I want to tie this to the conversation on resourcing and budget. In terms of potentially developing a forecast or other things, we should think about that with the resources we are planning for.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** On the last bullet on slide 30, I'm curious – is this saying that the companies should coordinate among the companies?

**Tim Woolf, Consultant:** That was my read that instead of the Department directing them, they should get together and coordinate.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** I'm confused by bifurcation of ESMP v. non-ESMP investments. The entire system is being built for the future. How do you say what is incremental and non-incremental to that goal? When would that converge?

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** That's an existential question we asked in this docket, and we will keep asking it.

**Tim Woolf, Consultant:** My reading of DPU's rationale is that non-ESMP investment are to serve reliability, but ESMP are to serve policy-related goals. That's my reading. The line between goals gets to your question.

**Councilor Liz Anderson, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office:** To the extent that the GMAC can encourage the EDCs to be consistent – EDCs' customers in Massachusetts have elected Massachusetts's leaders, and Massachusetts has decided to meet clean energy goals. Customers elected leaders that set these goals. I don't understand where there is a difference between core and ESMP when customers are demanding a system that can accomplish these goals.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** I acknowledge the massive task of gathering all of our different processes that are modernizing the grid. When I joined the GMAC, my hope or assumption was that the plan would encompass all of these efforts, but I acknowledge the difficulty of doing this on the first go. Hopefully that happens for the next plan. I'm disappointed the DPU is bifurcating this.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** My understanding of what it means to have an alternative to a proposed investment is still vague. The GMAC could build out a way to assess what is on the table. Is there a policy change to avoid a substation or other facility? What do we mean?

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** Kathryn Wright has joined for the record at 2:09 PM.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** (on DER interconnection planning and cost allocation) It's terrific DPU ordered LTSP with the dates they have and requirements of twice monthly meetings. We've been having this discussion for 5 years and should be able to accomplish a lot by April. We want to take advantage of the next 6 months. However, this is hyper-focused on DG interconnection. GMAC has been struggling with this. This is not just about group studies, it's about what is mandated – so it's also about electrification and transportation. This misses the mark. CIPs were supposed to be short-term based on historical information. We need to plan

ahead for what is helpful and efficient for system operators and ratepayers. I'm hopeful this planning program will be rapid and useful.

**Councilor Liz Anderson, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office:** I agree with Commissioner Mahony. We will participate in this process as AG's office. More appropriate for individual members.

**Councilor Kate Tohme:** I agree with Liz, it is appropriate for individual members to participate significantly in this process. Looking forward to kickoff and this process has been going for 5+ years. Already have a lot of work we can use and not start at zero. Really important that we use this process for true collaboration and make sure all relevant voices are heard. We need to get ahead of this with a procedural schedule so we can jump right into substance. We need to identify comprehensive final package. Will be a benefit to MA to get LTSPP get up and running ASAP.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** I found the outcome here to be a headscratcher. ESMP process was born out of doing long-term system planning for DG and if we are doing that, we need to think about everything else and now just doing DG. Convoluted path to another unproductive place. If you're doing something like the CIPs...you're not designing the system efficiently to put all the pieces of the puzzle in place.

**Councilor Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation, representing the environmental justice community:** I second the Commissioner, AG, and Sarah Cullinan. I don't think it makes sense for GMAC to participate in this process, but I recognize our role as a public body of providing digestible information to the public. We should think about how to report out on key decisions from LTSPP stakeholder process.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** Going back to Sarah Cullinan's comments – the amount of work that goes into CIPs for everyone – developers, utilities, DPU, Intervenors – I wish we could have advanced this more to save ratepayer money and everyone's time.

**Councilor Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation:** I was happy to see DPU required reporting on equity in biannual reports, but expectations remain vague. I hope this is a chance for GMAC and its EWG to coordinate with utilities on what to report. I was also concerned about CESAG being separate. It's another thing for stakeholders to follow. I am hoping to get more information on the CESAG to reduce the burden on the public and EJ organizations trying to engage in this process.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** We are all talking about what GMAC's stakeholder engagement will look like.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan** (on reporting requirements) – Is the GMAC's role in summarizing this and providing public-facing updates?

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** I'd be curious to hear from EDCs on the level of burden from these biannual reporting requirements. It seems to be a lot to report on.

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee, representing Eversource:** We will comply with all of the reporting requirements.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** We assumed you'd comply.

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee, Eversource:** This whole process has taken a lot of time for my team.

**Councilor Andrew Schneller, representing National Grid:** I agree with Digaunto. My team is still unpacking the Order and reporting requirements to set up processes and procedures to satisfy the reporting requirements.

**Councilor Kevin Sprague, representing Unitil:** We'll comply, but there's not a lot that changes in 6 months for all this where it's projects that take years to implement. I'm not sure the benefit of having to report every 6 months. They'll still be a good amount of work to pull together.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** We know this has been a lot of work. There were suggestions to condense reporting that were not picked up on. We can try in another 5 years. We would like less work for everyone and less reading for the public.

**Aurora Edington, DOER Staff:** Biannual reports will be discussed more after the National Grid rate case. That will be in the next phase.

**Jeremy Koo, designee for Councilor Julie Curti, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, representing municipal or regional interests:** I am cognizant of the amount of work from reporting requirements, but I'm a little disappointed the data sharing platform was rejected. We should consider some centralization of this information, and we hope the EDCs will work collaboratively with us.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** There are many places where EDC info is filed every year. Maybe something productive the GMAC could do would be to provide an annual summary of status of the grid to ratepayers – here's how much investment there was, etc. Maybe a one-pager.

**Councilor Liz Anderson:** That's a great idea but should be more than one page. As for the data sharing platform, the Massachusetts AGO has advocated for this since 2016. The DPU seems to acknowledge that this could be helpful and wants to open a proceeding there, but it hasn't.

**BREAK**

## **7. ESMP Order Review**

### **a. EDC Next Steps**

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony stepped out, temporarily designating Aurora Edington, DOER, as Chair.

Councilor Andrew Schneller, National Grid presented on progress and immediate plans with input from Digaunto Chatterjee, Eversource, and Kevin Sprague, Unitil.

**Aurora Edington, DOER Staff:** Do you have a plan for how you want to engage with the GMAC for parts where you do want to communicate with the GMAC? We have a meeting in October and again in December. Or are you looking at individual outreach?

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee:** We are looking at resilience as one area for more discussion.

**Councilor Andrew Schneller:** At this point we're currently standing up different initiatives that we're discussing here and once we have more, we will start to think about how best to engage GMAC.

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee:** I think December could be good timing. The IEP is another area for collaboration.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** On resilience, what is the level of planning investment for planning investment facilities? Is that in terms of the lines that are feeding or lines delivering energy to those facilities? Is there coordination on whether a micro-grid can be established there?

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee:** The intention is to provide clarity on benefits for certain customer, but we haven't thought it through entirely.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** So, this would be an upgrade in facilities' coordination with you?

**Councilor Andrew Schneller:** For critical facilities, what we do is operational, and we identify contacts annually, we refresh maps to prioritize them during restoration and provide notice of major storms. We'll provide them with redundant service if they pay for it. They may have their own resiliency plan. That's the scope today generally. The Order asks for us to do more than that and essentially as we make resiliency investments do more stakeholder engagement to make the system that serves them more robust.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** There is federal money on the table to support resiliency investments. For IEP, will there be some MLPs there? They may have gas or electric that could overlap with EDC territories.

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee:** We want to ensure National Grid and Unitil are thinking similarly.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** At this point focus on electrification pilots?

**Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee:** Yes, we are using those pilots to figure out how to scale from here.

#### ***b. GMAC Next Steps***

Tim Woolf, Consultant, asked if there were more details on the IEP working group dates.

Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee, Eversource, confirmed the IEP working group dates to be confirmed soon.

## 8. 2024 Meeting Schedule

**Aurora Edington, DOER Staff:** We have calendar for the rest of 2024. Two GMAC meetings, one ExCom meeting, and one Equity Working Group meeting. We have time and consultant budget around \$70-80k. We are going to be working on engagement materials but if there's appetite to do more, we've talked about forecasting, independent forecasts, other ideas we can brainstorm, some kind of synthesis of everything happening in distribution system planning. Any ideas we can brainstorm today will help with the budget request for next year?

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** We are in a weird interim period of being so far from next ESMP, still ramp up digestion period. Maybe next couple months planning on how we want next couple years to look. If we want forecasting outside of DPU direction, maybe we need to figure out what level of coordination we can expect from EDCs. Maybe more debriefing on what process toward next ESMP can look like.

**Aurora Edington, DOER Staff:** There are explicit items we need to plan for. I may recommend a monthly meeting in 2025.

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** Monthly feels too frequent. However, we have an important role to get info to the public. Maybe planning one month and next month is on accessible materials

**Tim Woolf, Consultant:** These don't all have to be 3 hours.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** I am happy to commit to monthly. I trust we won't have meetings just to have meetings.

**Councilor Kathryn Wright**– Building on Sarah's point of our role to provide materials to stakeholders. Now that we have time, we should think about doing more of that. We were thinking about some kind of public event after the ESMP Order came out. We could discuss that rather than adding another topic

**Councilor Sarah Cullinan:** The metrics piece is something GMAC could have a role in.

**Councilor Liz Anderson:** I think it would be helpful for someone like GMAC to develop metrics.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** I'm looking at slide 77. It may be good homework for us to brainstorm what may not be on this list where we want more engagement. We may want to go through Tim's presentation again and prioritize questions we want to answer.

**Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:** This is a great place to start but not exhaustive.

**Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:** It's hard for me to prioritize.

**Councilor Liz Anderson:** The AGO team is working on brainstorming so we can bring more next time.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony returned and resumed as Chair.

## **9. Stakeholder Engagement Materials and GMAC Logo**

Aurora Edington, DOER staff presented stakeholder engagement materials.

*Councilor Marybeth Campbell:* Thanks to Julia for coordinating focus group. I see a lot of their feedback captured here.

*Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:* I'm curious about the outreach you did a few weeks ago. Were people familiar/could they understand?

*Julia Fox, DOER staff:* Grid modernization as a term is unclear. We got feedback to use more relevant terms. I liked Sarah Cullinan's feedback to frame it like updating homes and highways.

*Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:* The 101 factsheet looks great.

*Julia Fox, DOER staff:* For feedback on the factsheet, some GMAC members have been coordinating via email. If you want to provide feedback by, email you know where to reach us.

*Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony:* I like that we have two different levels and two different work products.

Julia Fox, DOER staff took up presenting on the timeline.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony presented on GMAC logo options. GMAC members will decide on a final logo at the following GMAC meeting.

*Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:* I like number 2.

*Councilor Liz Anderson:* Seconded.

*Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver:* The green makes me think clean.

*Councilor Larry Chretien:* I like 2, but as a boomer we need larger font like number 5.

*Councilor Marybeth Campbell:* I concur on 2 with Larry's addition.

*Councilor Kathryn Wright:* I like 2 if we take larger text from 4, we can use highlighting as well.

*Councilor Kate Tohme:* I like 2.

## **10. Additional time for Public Comment**

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony opened up time. No one offered additional comment.

## **11. Close and Next Steps**

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Chelsea Mattioda*

Synapse Energy Economics

Meeting Attachments

- Meeting Agenda
- Meeting Slide Deck