

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)
Executive Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, May 17, 2024, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Councilors Present: Liz Anderson, Sarah Bresolin Silver, Sarah Cullinan, Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, Kyle Murray

Non-voting Councilors: Digaunto Chatterjee (Eversource)

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

Consultants Present: Jennifer Haugh, Tim Woolf

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony, as chair, called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m.

2. Welcome, Roll Call, and Agenda

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony welcomed the group, took roll call, and went through the meeting agenda on slide 2. She mentioned that today is the deadline for filing intervenor briefs in the ESMP dockets. The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) order on the ESMPs is expected by August 29, 2024.

3. 2024 GMAC/ESMP Schedule

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony shared slide 3, listing upcoming dates for GMAC, Equity Working Group, and significant DPU events.

4. 2025 Budget Planning

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony shared slide 4, a recap of the GMAC budget, regarding how the consultants will be spending their time for the remainder of 2024. All of these items have been approved by the DPU.

Sharing slide 5, Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony indicated a preference for using our consultants' time and ratepayer dollars effectively. Part of the challenge is not knowing the outcome of the DPU order in late August, which could affect the role of the GMAC in 2025. The DPU has asked for an August 15 filing of our budget request, but we're going to ask for a deadline of October 18 so we can get an understanding what is being asked of the utilities and what will be in GMAC's hands. We do want to be respectful of the DPU's time, so we want to make sure they have enough time before 2025 to respond. In the meantime, we think we can file some additional information about our expenditures in 2023 and 2024 while we're planning for 2025.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony shared slide 6 and noted that August 15, which was set by the DPU, is about a year from when we requested our consultant budget for 2024, so there may have been some symmetry there. But we hope they recognize that we want to give them an honest work product that is tied to their order. This gives us time to work together, because there are activities in September that would help us prepare for a quality filing to the department.

Councilor Liz Anderson, Office of the Attorney General, representing the Office of the Attorney General: I would definitely support this extension request. It's reasonable, logical, and makes a lot of sense.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: Does everyone agree we should set up an Executive Committee (ExCom) meeting in September to talk about this? I recognize that it's May, and we have a lot to think through, but we do have to think ahead. The proposal is September 20, but we can always adjust, given people's schedules.

5. Stakeholder Engagement Materials Proposal

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony cued up slide 8 and reintroduced the context for the GMAC providing stakeholder engagement materials.

Aurora Edington, DOER staff, went through slide 8. We thought through the pros and cons of fact sheets and vignettes vs. videos. After discussion with the consultants, we're leaning toward fact sheets for a time and budget perspective.

Edington shared slide 9 regarding project goals and scope. The directive ties this back to the statute with goals to create public awareness, offer clear and succinct context, encourage sign-ups for a listserv, and encourage participation in GMAC-related activities. We discussed what was in scope vs. out of scope, since the lines can blur quickly and the amount of information we are sharing can get unwieldy.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver, ENGIE North America, representing the energy storage industry: Thank you for doing all of this work. My first suggestion is to include everything that

is out of scope; one of the things we hear the most is that it will be great to go somewhere and have all the information in one place, which can be very challenging. Already, this is a big scope, but I think you're right that everything "in scope" is correct. I'm not sure if these bullets are in order of how a document may be presented, but to me, bullets one and three are both really important and should be explained in the same part of the document. I don't know if we'll have an opportunity to comment on the document, but this can get complicated really quickly. But I think this is a good start.

Councilor Sarah Cullinan, Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, representing the

Massachusetts Clean Energy Center: I definitely agree with everything Councilor Bresolin Silver said. Something that we in my role and organization have struggled with here and there—and we'll stumble on the same thing here—is grid planning, modernization, and climate targets almost have to assume some understanding of electricity and the grid and the basics. It gets really difficult to figure out where the starting point is and the assumed level of understanding of whom we want to reach. Yes, there's information out there on incentives and the state's climate goals, but I guess the challenge is making that link—where's your starting point before you even get to the relevant information forth is the purpose here and what part of that do we capture in this information. I'm just pointing out that I think it's still valuable to try and develop something specific to grid planning and modernization, but when the rubber hits the road on how to make it accessible to the right people, that will be difficult area to navigate potentially.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: If I can jump in, I totally agree. We are trying to develop some of those materials at the DOER; it's a big goal for us in 2024, because as we know, you can never learn everything in the world of electricity. But for the purpose of this information, we really do need to home in on the connection of grid buildout and the clean energy goals and what that all means. So I do think that unfortunately we're going to have to start at a mid-point perspective and rely on other materials and other circumstances to fill in the starter pack. But I think that GMAC is really here for a certain perspective and hopefully some of this stuff aligns with the work that DOER is starting to engage behind the scenes.

Councilor Liz Anderson: One of the things I thought of when I reviewed this—and thanks for putting it together—is one of the main pieces of the statute is to ensure that the investments are cost effective and are minimizing or mitigating impacts, and a big part of the ESMPs are ensuring that we're doing this in a proactive and effective way and controlling costs. There are a lot of pieces to ensure that we're containing grid expansion through managing charging, distributed resources, etc. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) talked about interconnection and other ways to manage costs. But this comes to engaging with the public: hearing from people who might be customers on the grid about how some of those programs could benefit them, how they might interact with those programs, being proactive to manage their own costs, and the overall costs of the grid. This whole process is to do just that; here are proposals to put that forward. Certain proposals will be implemented to address costs. That would be really helpful from the AGO's perspective especially; we've been really advocating for more of that, but it's going to be hard—it'll be helpful to have stakeholder feedback on how it will be received by end users. I'm definitely open to anybody's thoughts on that, because it's something that's a little beyond the scope of what you all have here.

Aurora Edington: I will say this is just very early stages of these materials; they won't be published until after the DPU order, so late fall. These are the right types of questions to be asking. Slide 10 goes into the structure and slide 11 goes into audiences and different angles to take with audiences. In terms of structure of the materials, we are thinking about two main components. The first one is fact sheets. Our materials would be more text-heavy vs. graphical. We're working on an inspiration slide deck so we can compile good examples. The plan is to make them digitally available on a website, then create a campaign to reach out to stakeholders and distribute the information. Thinking about addressing specific concerns related to the grid, using plainspoken language and using first-person narratives and storytelling elements, translating into top five spoken languages in Massachusetts. We intend to keep on iterating in the ExCom and with the GMAC and individually as they have interest and availability. We've touched base with Councilor Kathryn Wright a couple times. If there are members interested in having a few more individual touch points, let us know, because want to work that into this. We know the utilities do a lot of work in this space, so we're looking forward to coordinating with them. We'd like to get this right, so we welcome everyone's engagement. The other side is the website: we're working on making the GMAC website more approachable, but also having a landing page to host more graphical and interesting content. We can do a better job of making the language plainer. I imagine there will be a footer that provides information on where to find more information on different topics.

Edington reviewed slide 11 covering messages for different audiences. The main takeaway is importance of grid planning and how the GMAC.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver: Under the first bullet, what sticks out most in terms of difficulty in messaging, is what are the challenges. I'm curious if you've thought a little bit about what this means. I think that's going to be complex. This might require a little bit more discussion and agreement on what are the challenges and I'm curious if you've thought about that.

Aurora Edington: My initial response is pointing to issue areas to address, which is not exactly an answer; these are potential concerns that stakeholders might have about grid planning, so it's a slightly different angle. These issue areas are slightly different versions of the fact sheet focused on different issue areas: each of these is a different concern. That's my first take as a response.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver: That's interesting because I don't know if I would characterize those as challenges, but I think you're right in that it depends on what your lens is. I look forward to working on this.

Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee, representing Eversource: If you ask an ordinary citizen where their fire station is, they probably have a good idea. If you ask them where their power station is, they probably have no clue. So what is the electric grid is a good place to start: do you know where your electric grid is, your substation that supplies power to you? Making it more about that engagement being understanding your system better. I don't know if there's a way to weave that into this. Grid reliability is important, but the ordinary citizen may feel this is more real if they know the location of their power supply.

Councilor Kyle Murray, Acadia Center, representing the environmental advocacy community: I like the idea Digaunto is bringing up here. I think it also could potentially help with acceptance along with understanding of the needs for future infrastructure. You've already got one of these in your community and you've never noticed it before. Just getting more understanding that some of this stuff isn't scary. We always need to have long conversations about where this stuff is sited and where it's involved there. It would help if residents had an understanding of the technology and that it's okay to have it be near you in a lot of cases.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I have a question, and we can continue to discuss and think about how to provide this information: how do we get that information out? I personally don't know where my substation is and I don't want to know, but I can give you an example of a major storm last fall before Christmas when there were a lot of power outages; my sister lives in Millis, and the road she's on is near a main road. On my sister's side, they were attached to the Millis substation and across the street was coming from Norfolk. This was maybe 200 yards away. It made a big difference in their restoration time. This is really good information and practical to have for those sorts of circumstances, but how do customers actually find out that information and how do we make it easier for them to find out?

Councilor Digaunto Chatterjee: I was just going to add about blue sky and during a storm, how we have staging areas where we bring crews in; residents want to know where Eversource is staging their crews, how we do storm restoration, protocols we follow. There's something here to drive some of that engagement: know your substation, your crews, restoration practices, get to know your utility better, basically.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I encourage Digaunto to take notes, because it sounds like something the utilities could do on their own.

Aurora Edington: We'll keep on iterating on this. Initially, some of the example audiences we've brainstormed are residential customers, LMI, businesses, developers, municipalities, etc. We imagine these fact sheets would be broadly distributed. It's a broad group of individuals and a tough task. It'd be interesting to hear from all of you about if you think we can craft a series of fact sheets to modify these issues in different areas, or if we need to narrow this down even more.

Councilor Sarah Cullinan: I had a couple thoughts related to that question, but also a reaction. To me, from that list, a good entry point feels like municipal leaders, boards, and commissions that do things related to clean energy and siting and things like that. They're already engaged, and they have access to the general ratepayer population. That feels like a good initial strategy. Also, CBOs do similar things. Is this just one swath of information, this one effort? Is this something the GMAC continues to do, has a committee for, continues to support? That's just a question. Maybe it's a subgroup or something. Also, to the point of what utilities' role is here, they obviously already have many touch points with every rate payer and they're already providing valuable information in terms of how they interact with utility and their energy infrastructure. Feels like this should be a second voice in amplifying; if there is a committee that works on this with the GMAC, we can work on messaging with grid mod related things that the

utilities can also use these materials as a communication piece, another voice from the state, engagement from ratepayers to utilities, but this should be a coordinated effort that amplifies what's already being done and we're working together on it.

Edington shared slide 12: discussion questions.

Aurora Edington: I think your point is well taken in terms of coordinating and messaging. I think I get maybe two emails a week from Eversource on different offerings. We need to make sure we're coordinating. My takeaways are continuing to further narrow the scope and be even more surgical about what we will and won't include.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: As a reminder, this is just the start of this discussion.

Councilor Sarah Bresolin Silver: I would be happy to be further involved.

Aurora Edington: If other ExCom members have staff who work on engagement, we'd welcome their involvement as well.

6. Strategic Planning Post-DPU Order

Commissioner Mahony cued up slide 13: questions for discussion.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: We are a new body that knew what we had to do in 2023, and now we need to discuss what's next. Were interested to hear what the larger body and ExCom think we should be doing in 2025. Do we set up other working groups? How often do we need to meet? I'm not sure if this is a chicken-and-egg problem with the DPU order forthcoming, but we wanted to start planting some seeds about what we should be doing in 2025.

Councilor Kyle Murray: This is sort of a thought on the lack of thoughts I have right now, because as identified in this slide, do we want to establish new working groups without knowing the result of the DPU order? I have genuinely no idea what's going to happen with the DPU order. I know what I and others are arguing, but I have no idea what will come out of this, so to try and plan for it is difficult. I'm not sure what we're going to do, because what might actually happen as a result of these dockets could be there's a large number of possible results of this.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony: I hear you. I'll suggest that as everyone is finishing up their briefs and thinking about replies and also prepare for the GMAC meeting on June 13 where we're going to hear a good summary of what's been discussed. That's a good opportunity for all of us to start brainstorming what we'd like to see in a perfect world. But we'll have some further guidance from the DPU. We'll circle back.

7. Other Discussion Areas

None were proposed.

8. Close and Next Steps

The next ExCom meeting is scheduled for August 9, 2024, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Elizabeth Mahony adjourned the meeting at 11:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer A. Haugh
GreenerU

Meeting attachments:

- Meeting agenda
- Slide deck