

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; 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: Vernon Walker, Clean Water Action

DOER Staff Present: Aurora Edington, Colin Carroll

Consultants Present: Tim Woolf, Synapse; Chelsea Mattioda, Synapse

1. Call to Order

Kathryn Wright, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

2. Agenda, Roll Call, Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chair Wright took roll call.

Kyle Murray moved to approve the Equity Working Group (EWG) minutes of June 26, 2024. The motion was seconded by Julia Fox and carried unanimously.

Chair Wright gave an overview of the agenda.

3. Consultant Presentation on ESMP Order

GMAC Consultant, Tim Woolf, presented on the treatment of equity and related topics in the DPU’s ESMP Order.

Discussion:

Kathryn Wright: I want to offer insights on talking with Chair Von Nordstrom who was at an event yesterday. He mentioned that NWAs will also be part of burden of proof calculation for utilities. He emphasized the importance of metrics and coming up with a regulatory framework.

Aurora Edington: I think you covered everything. Your summary was good and reflective of general comments of the fireside chat portion of the event.

Chair Wright deputized Julia Fox to briefly run the meeting while she switched to phone.

Mary Wambui: Bear with me. This is not personal, but there was nothing about equity in that presentation. This Order reminds me of the 2019/2021 Energy Efficiency (EE) plan, this feels the same, that the DPU cannot leave EDCs in charge of equity. EDCs have not been known to be fair. They cannot be left in charge of equity. Until there is a meaningful inclusion of voices in this proceeding there is no equity. The only thing I totally appreciate is that we can talk about equity when there is no equity. It opens a door.

Chair Wright returned.

Chair Wright: I appreciate that. Those of you who were at the last GMAC meeting, we expressed areas of the Order where we were all disappointed. There was concern about EDCs and the CESAG, and how to maintain a good public engagement process. The Order was vague about what would be required of the utilities. I appreciate your comments.

Mary Wambui: There's a can that has been kicked down the road, the long-term system planning program. What's that? How should people participate? Is it just a CESAG thing?

Tim Woolf: I think your metaphor is very apt for the whole Order. This is the one piece where they identified some specific actions October to March. EDCs will be in charge and convene these bimonthly stakeholder meetings – at a minimum. After that they'll direct next steps based on those discussions. The topics they must consider are here on slide 12. It's sort of a microcosm of the issues they want to address up front because they are more pressing.

Larry Chretien: Is this slide about grid mod more broadly or just the ESMPs? If someone goes to these stakeholder meetings, will they be told they have to stay in the lane of ESMPs? That's a big area of confusion.

Tim Woolf: I just assumed that everything would be relevant. I don't like to distinguish between the two. I assume ESMP and non-ESMP investments would be covered, but that question should be asked immediately.

Julia Fox: On the process itself, the Order said the LTSPP stakeholder process should start 10/1. We heard from EDCs they want to hold the first meeting the first week of October (8th, 9th, or 10th).

Mary Wambui: I do want to appreciate the Synapse presentation. The PowerPoint was done very well. We can easily draw conclusions about the whole process here.

Chair Wright: I have a follow-up conversation set with the folks at the Alliance for the Climate Transition (ACT). Several of their members have been conferring about this. If I get clarity, I will ping you all.

Mary Wambui: As far as grid mod is concerned, I don't think they are weighing equity as they should.

Chair Wright: That is fair, but they may have more timing and scope information than we do.

Aurora Edington: We have talked to ACT to try to coordinate with the utilities about the bounds of this process and expectations. I think confirming the goals with the final report due in April, the schedule or process stakeholders should expect for the first one is important. We're still waiting for outreach from the companies for a scheduling poll for the first meeting which is anticipated to be the 8th, 9th, and 10th. There is a GMAC meeting on the 10th so we will provide more information on scheduling. I missed that the ESMP Order saying that they thought equity would be discussed in the LTSPP. I think it will be a difficult task to have 6 months to turn around the scope of this group. It's a big scope.

Tim Woolf: This is not as efficient as it could be. They refer to cost allocation as a discussion point in this process. I guess cost recovery is addressed elsewhere. They are different but there's overlap. Cost recovery will be discussed in later phases of the ESMP docket.

Chris Modlish: For cost allocation regarding this process – I think that specific topic will be limited to how to allocate costs between DG developers and rate payers. That process is supposed to take the place of the CIP process. Cost recovery will be separate and focus on recovery by EDCs for specific ESMP costs.

4. CESAG Update from EDCs

Erin Engstrom presented on EDC responses to EWG feedback. She communicated that she wants the EWG to give the CESAG a chance and the EDCs see the feedback loop as important. Erin then moved on to present updates on CESAG.

Discussion:

Chair Wright: I'm curious how you're trying to navigate working group fatigue as the number of working groups and obligations is growing every day.

Erin Engstrom: I can send the list around that we have of all groups and participants to all of you. There is a new working group forming every day. In thinking about the LTSPP, people are already saying they want subcommittees, and we are feeling the fatigue too. With that said, it's not all of the people already participating who would take part in CESAG. There would be

people focused on community health or affordable housing. Those are more community-focused rather than the statewide working groups.

Chair Wright: Thanks for the clarification. Have you all worked with ASG before?

Erin Engstrom: Eversource has worked with them. I'd have to confirm if other EDCs have. ASG helped with a lot of engagement with our upcoming Hyde Park to Dorchester to Mattapan projects. They've been instrumental in helping us do better in the community engagement space and finding trusted allies. I talk to Mary about this frequently. The EDCs do not always come across as the trusted partner, so we must find ways to build that trust. We think about the in-depth community involvement and facilitation as a positive. They seem to be an expert in that. That's something we looked for. Of the five bids we received, they were strongest there.

Mary Wambui: Do you have any metrics or something that defines successful community engagement? Community engagement is not new, and that checkbox is easily ticked, but engagement often leaves a lot to be desired.

Erin Engstrom: The initial focus of the CESAG is to develop the engagement process to set us up for more success. That's the bare minimum of the engagement we would do to level set expectations for communities. The DPU added additional things they want CESAG to consider like equity. I could envision – but can't speak on behalf of all EDCs – that after the framework is developed that we would do additional touch points with the CESAG on lessons learned. I would think metrics and measuring success would be a component once the framework is developed. We would likely include what we're doing to measure the success and any feedback on implementation as part of the biannual reporting requirements for transparency.

5. Discussion on Next Steps

Chair Wright opened a discussion on next steps and a work plan for the EWG.

Larry Chretien: I think you're on the right track. As I indicated in my conversations with Julia and Tim, any reports produced by EDCs in the ESMP and other processes. Bringing those back to the GMAC and equity to this group is important.

Mary Wambui: I want to encourage what Larry said. Reports on equity metrics on the EE side are important to have here too.

Chair Wright: I think the DPU is requiring the EDCs to report on distributional and structural equity. That's the level in the Order, so there's a lot left vague on what to expect.

Larry Chretien: I don't know enough about the East Boston substation issue. As a member of GMAC, I'd like to know if something like that is going to happen again. Substations will have to be built and so will other infrastructure. Numbers and metrics are important, but if there is some important anecdote or event – it could be good or bad – we would like to know about it. I want to know about these projects. I don't think it has to be every project, just the highlights.

Erin Engstrom: I completely agree, Larry. I worked on the East Eagle project. I don't want that again, and neither does Eversource or other EDCs. You have our commitment on that. That's why we proposed the CESAG. We looked at what went wrong and where there were opportunities for improvement. A lot of that will be about education and hearing from the community what's important. Infrastructure will need to be built so we want to do it right. We'd like to bring some feedback back to this group. The CESAG can be an opportunity to build on and adjust the framework.

Kyle Murray: Erin, can you or someone else remind me of the pending siting and permitting reform bill deals with utility infrastructure too?

Erin Engstrom: Yes.

Kyle Murray: We'll be in a different landscape if that goes through. We'll be in a different world if that goes through. I think that's worthy of a discussion at some point too if that goes through.

6. GMAC Stakeholder Engagement Materials

Chair Wright asked members to provide Julia feedback by email on these materials based on time.

7. Closing

Chair Wright: How often do we want to meet? There's some talk of GMAC meeting every other month. Does quarterly still feel right? Are there any changes we want to make to EWG membership? Do we want to add additional members? We would have to submit a charter change to the GMAC. We can have 2 external members – currently Mary and Vernon – but we could have more.

Julia Fox: We will be discussing some of this for ExCom. We are thinking of proposing a monthly GMAC meeting with a shorter duration in 2025. We're looking at best ways to structure that each month and pick topics. We want to do a lot of information sharing and learning so we can dig more into utility planning prescribed in the Order and prepare for the next plan.

Chair Wright: I'm cognizant of everyone's time. Maybe we keep quarterly but revisit when we know what the GMAC plans are. Any reactions to the membership question?

Larry Chretien: There's nothing magical about two. If we think there is someone who will add value, why not add one or two?

Chair Wright: That makes sense to me. I can try to do some outreach to see if there is interest in joining the working group.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chelsea Mattioda
Synapse Energy Economics

Meeting materials:

- Meeting agenda
- Meeting presentation slides