

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING  
BURLINGTON ELECTRIC COMMISSION**

**Wednesday, July 23, 2025**

The regular meeting of the Burlington Electric Commission was convened at 5:02 pm on Wednesday, July 23, 2025, at Burlington Electric Department, 585 Pine Street, Burlington, Vermont, and on Microsoft Teams.

**Attendance**

- Channel 17 was present to record this meeting.
- Commissioners Lara Bonn, Michelle Hobbs, Scott Moody, Andy Vota, and Bethany Whitaker were present.
- Staff members Elena Alexander, Paul Alexander, Mike Kanarick, Darren Springer, and Emily Stebbins-Wheelock were present at 585 Pine St.
- Staff members James Gibbons and Amber Widmayer were present via Microsoft Teams.
- Public members Nick Persampieri, Ashley Adams, Leendert Huisman, Peter MacAusland, Tate Agnew, Steve Goodkind, and Kim Horning-Mavey were present at 585 Pine St.
- Public member Pike Porter was present via Microsoft Teams.

**Agenda**

Commissioner Whitaker made a motion to add item #9, Sheffield Wind Contract Extension – Discussion and Vote, to the agenda. Commissioner Vota seconded the motion. Vote: 5 ayes 0 nays.

**Election of Officers**

- Commissioner Moody made a motion to elect Lara Bonn as Commission Chair; Commissioner Whitaker seconded the motion. Vote: 4 ayes 0 nays.
- Commissioner Whitaker made a motion to elect Andy Vota as Commission Vice Chair; Commissioner Moody seconded the motion. Vote: 4 ayes 0 nays.
- Commissioner Vota made a motion to elect Elena Alexander as Commission Clerk; Commissioner Moody seconded the motion. Vote: 5 ayes 0 nays.

**Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Moody made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2025, Commission Meeting; Commissioner Hobbs seconded the motion. Vote: 5 ayes 0 nays.

**Public Forum**

*Pike Porter* expressed appreciation for Burlington Electric Department's Strategic Direction document, commending its focus on low-income customers. However, he stressed the importance of acknowledging the 2019 climate emergency resolution committing Burlington to achieve net-zero

greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 across all sectors. Porter argued that net-zero references in BED documents need to be revised to align with this resolution.

Porter opposed the inclusion of the District Energy System (DES) in the Strategic Direction, citing concerns that it could increase greenhouse gas emissions and consumer costs, believing that funds could be better spent on community solar initiatives for those unable to install solar panels. Porter advocated for the removal of the DES from the document.

While Porter supports BED's directive to seek customer input, he argued that BED has not fully realized this goal despite years of advocacy. Porter applauded the idea of creating educational tools and a website for customers to evaluate heat pumps, electric vehicles, and electrification technologies, although he questioned if those tools are currently available.

Additionally, Porter called for the development of a similar tool for Commissioners and the public that compares costs and emissions of various power sources, specifically evaluating how the McNeil facility compares to other grid sources. Overall, Porter urged BED to better align with the city's climate goals, improve community engagement, and enhance transparency regarding energy costs and emissions.

*Nick Persampieri*, a resident of Ward 3, expressed significant concerns regarding recent legislation signed by the Connecticut governor that may hinder BED's ability to sell renewable energy credits (RECs) from the McNeil plant in the Connecticut Class 1 market. Persampieri highlighted that McNeil's financial viability relies heavily on these REC sales, which typically generate between \$6 million to \$8 million annually, with Burlington Electric receiving approximately half of that revenue. He pointed out that the plant is already facing financial losses, and potential changes in legislation could exacerbate the situation.

Persampieri referenced General Manager Springer's memo from July 2025 that suggests BED might need to undergo a proposal process through the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to continue selling RECs, raising questions about the future of these sales. He voiced his opposition to pursuing long-term commitments for selling power or RECs from McNeil and advocated for considering the closure of McNeil. He also raised concerns about negotiations related to a potential buyout of the plant's other joint owners, which could lead BED to bear the full financial burden of the plant's losses.

Persampieri criticized the lack of transparency regarding Burlington Electric's DES project, suggesting it might further entrench the plant's operations and losses. He stressed the need for increased public disclosure on both the buyout negotiations and the DES project to allow citizens to engage in these critical discussions.

Persampieri concluded by urging a reevaluation of BED's strategic goals aimed at achieving net-zero energy by 2025. Persampieri advocated for a strategy that focuses on reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions, given that the wood-burning power plant is a significant source of carbon dioxide emissions within the state. He emphasized the importance of public discourse on these matters for more informed decision-making, particularly regarding environmental impacts.

*Ashley Adams* expressed concern about BED's direction, particularly regarding the continued operation of the McNeil plant. Adams cited the plant's significant contribution to climate change and environmental degradation. Adams voiced her disappointment with the Commission's support for McNeil, deeming it disgraceful and not serving the public good. Adams argued that investing in the plant, which is Vermont's highest carbon emitter, exacerbates the climate emergency and compromises efforts to protect habitats and biodiversity.

Adams criticized BED for maintaining misleading claims on its website about McNeil's reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, labeling such assertions as scientifically inaccurate. Adams strongly opposes the DES project, which she believes would increase greenhouse gas emissions and entrench Burlington in reliance on dirty energy. She reflected on the City Council's 2019 call for significant climate action and cited losses incurred by ratepayers due to inaction and mismanagement, including a million-dollar loss from improper paperwork filings.

Additionally, Adams addressed the need to confront anticipated losses of RECs and dispel myths surrounding McNeil's role in ensuring reliability or keeping rates low. Adams asserted that the plant's costs far exceed those of cleaner alternatives available in the grid. Adams stated that it should not be the responsibility of ratepayers to subsidize forestry industries at such a high environmental cost.

Adams urged the Commission to act in their fiduciary duty by retiring the McNeil plant and advocated for a fair transition for its workers while prioritizing climate action and public health. She called for immediate measures that reflect a commitment to sustainability and the well-being of Burlington's residents.

*Peter MacAusland* asked several questions regarding communication and accountability within Burlington. He inquired if Commissioners are expected to acknowledge correspondence from residents, to which the answer was affirmative. MacAusland referenced a personal email he sent to Commissioner Moody, apologizing for his behavior during a previous Council meeting and mentioning his queries about Quantified Ventures, a potential funding source for the DES.

MacAusland noted that he has attempted to contact Quantified Ventures multiple times and visited their office in Montpelier, seeking information on who serves as Burlington's spokesperson. He emphasized the importance of receiving acknowledgment for correspondence, especially when dealing with significant proposals, such as a \$49 million project mentioned in July 2024 by Michael Ahern of Evergreen Energy. MacAusland challenged the notion that financing from Quantified Ventures is unlikely for energy-related projects, citing a lack of formal communication or partnership despite prior exchanges about low-interest financing opportunities through the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

MacAusland also mentioned potential increases in DES project costs, estimating the proposal could be approaching \$60 million, urging the need for transparency and communication with the city council regarding financial implications.

*Steve Goodkind*, a retired Burlington public works director and city engineer, shared his perspective on the DES project. Goodkind, a member of the Stop Vermont Biomass organization, emphasized the

need for clarity regarding the project, which was initially perceived as urgent when a resolution was passed twenty months ago. Goodkind believes that the context surrounding the resolution has changed, leading to a mischaracterization of the project as an emergency. He asserted that the resolution, while containing potential positive aspects, was negotiated under undue pressure.

Goodkind raised concerns about comparing environmental hazards, likening it to debating which of two unsafe bridges is worse. He argued that both the McNeil plant's CO2 emissions and vehicle emissions are harmful, and downplaying one over the other is unproductive. Goodkind noted that, as of December 2, the McNeil plant is the largest stationary CO2 producer in Vermont, suggesting that arguing over relative harm is misguided. He called for a calm evaluation of the project, free from the emergency narrative that has shaped prior discussions.

*Kim Horning-Mavey* expressed gratitude for BED's efforts made to improve Burlington's building operations and their transition to more efficient, less polluting systems, particularly heat pumps. Horning-Mavey addressed the health impacts associated with burning wood, which has been her primary area of study for the past four years. Drawing on research from the American Lung Association and medical connections, Horning-Mavey asserted the extreme toxicity of wood fuel, specifically its emissions of PM2.5, a critical air pollutant regulated by the EPA. Horning-Mavey noted that PM2.5 is extremely small and poses significant health risks, contributing to respiratory issues like asthma and COPD, and is linked to emergencies in local healthcare facilities.

Horning-Mavey stated that despite the use of advanced electrostatic precipitators at McNeil, the facility still emits over five tons of PM2.5, affecting nearby neighborhoods. Horning-Mavey referenced research from Harvard indicating that PM2.5 exposure correlates with heart issues, cancer, mood disorders, and dementia, particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as unborn children, seniors, and those living in impoverished or marginalized communities. Horning-Mavey stated that Vermont ranks fifth nationally for asthma prevalence, with certain demographics, including low-income individuals, the LBGTQ community, and people of color, experiencing higher rates of asthma.

Horning-Mavey stated that wood burning releases more harmful pollutants than coal, with studies suggesting that rising wood combustion is leading to increased mortality rates. Horning-Mavey cited a New York Times article discussing research that indicates 10 to 25 percent of lung cancer cases are now found in non-smokers exposed to air pollution, highlighting the significant health risks posed by air quality.

Horning-Mavey urged a transition away from burning fuels for electricity generation, particularly given the ongoing climate crisis exacerbating air pollution and public health issues. She also noted a potential positive development in solar energy, mentioning that a friend in the solar industry shared insights about projected reductions in solar panel costs due to oversupply. Horning-Mavey believes that this, alongside the incentive for transitioning to solar and heat pump technology, presents an opportunity for significant improvement in public health and environmental outcomes.

## **Commissioners Corner**

Commissioner Whitaker requested updates regarding District Energy. General Manager Springer indicated that, although City Council approval was granted in November for the District Energy initiative, progress was delayed due to proposed changes to a recently approved carbon fee. This led to a pause in discussions initiated by the UVM Medical Center and extended into early 2024. A transition in the mayoral office delayed matters further as the new administration's priorities took time to assess.

Throughout this time, the focus remained on finalizing a land use Memorandum of Understanding with the UVM Medical Center, which wrapped up in February 2025. Due to limited capacity and competing priorities, discussions on District Energy, along with various other studies and projects (including battery storage and wood chip dryer engineering), were sidelined. General Manager Springer expressed the hope that meaningful discussions and updates on District Energy would resume in the coming months.

General Manager Springer responded to a query regarding comparisons between ISO New England's greenhouse gas emissions and those of the McNeil facility. While some argue that the ISO-NE grid energy mix has lower emissions, this perspective narrowly considers only stack emissions without considering upstream methane leakage associated with natural gas, which comprises more than half of the ISO-NE energy mix. Conversely, the lifecycle benefits of biomass, such as carbon cycling from certain wood sources, are often dismissed, despite studies indicating a more favorable carbon profile for sustainably harvested wood compared to fossil fuels.

General Manager Springer highlighted the importance of a lifecycle emissions perspective rather than a solely stack emissions approach. Additionally, he noted that all renewables are generally more expensive than the ISO-NE grid mix; while economics should be considered, they should be considered for all potential resources, not solely for wood resources.

### **FY25 May Financials**

Ms. Stebbins-Wheelock shared several financial updates before discussing the results for May 2025.

- The BED accounting team is in the process of closing June with a preliminary report on fiscal year 2025 expected in September. As of June 30, the operating cash position stands at \$8.5 million, which is \$1.3 million under budget. Additionally, preparations are underway for the year-end audit, with auditors starting their fieldwork in September.
- Regarding the refinancing of the 2014A revenue bonds, the Vermont Bond Bank is set to price the issuance next week, with a closing date on August 7.
- The Department is finalizing a filing of miscellaneous service fees for the Public Utility Commission and plans to submit it by week's end.
- The Department has negotiated terms for a new credit card processor; these changes will be implemented coincident with the new customer information system and customer portal next spring. A 3% fee on credit card payments will replace the previous flat fee of \$3.50 and the ACH/e-check fee will decrease from \$3.50 to \$1 per transaction. This revised structure is expected to be more beneficial for customers, particularly low-volume users, addressing concerns surrounding how flat fees impact their payments.

May 2025 results, net income was \$340,000 against a budget of \$1.56 million, creating a variance of \$1.2 million, predominantly due to a drop in REC revenues. While there was a favorable variance in

customer sales of \$76,000, other revenues fell short due to lower-than-expected EEU reimbursements. REC revenues were \$1.37 million less than budget due to both timing (some RECs were delivered in April instead of May) and lower wind production in calendar year 2024.

Year-to-date, REC revenues are down by a net of \$190,000, with all REC transactions concluded. McNeil REC sales for the fiscal year were favorable to budget by \$425,000, wind REC sales were less than budget by \$471,000 and hydro and solar REC sales were less than budget by \$96,000 and \$47,000, respectively due to lower production in prior periods.

Net power supply expense was favorable compared to budget by \$67,000, with higher fuel costs offset by lower transmission and purchased power expenses. Other operating and maintenance expenses were favorable by \$146,000 compared to budget.

Year-to-date net income is \$4.5 million compared to a budgeted \$3.9 million, a positive variance of \$542,000. Commissioner Vota asked for a projection of year-end net income. Ms. Stebbins-Wheelock responded that the Department's most recent forecast projected a net income of \$3.5 million by fiscal year-end, which would be slightly better than the budgeted net income of \$3.4 million.

Commissioner Vota asked about the favorable variance in the Winooski property tax. Ms. Stebbins-Wheelock responded that the FY25 budget was set prior to the completion of Winooski's recent reappraisal, which resulted in a lower property value for Winooski One based on the plant's historical revenues and expenses.

Capital expenditures for May year-to-date were \$7.5 million against a budget of \$11.2 million, largely due to delays in IT projects and vehicle replacements. The operating cash position at the end of May was \$9.5 million compared to a budgeted amount of \$11 million, largely due to additional REC purchases. The debt service coverage is reported at 4.91, with an adjusted ratio of 1.26, and days cash on hand was 144 days, including the \$10 million line of credit.

### **General Manager's Update**

In response to Nick Persampieri's inquiry regarding Connecticut RECs, General Manager Springer confirmed that wood energy remains eligible for Class 1 RECs under the recently passed Connecticut legislation. However, this eligibility is contingent on qualified biomass plants being awarded a contract in an upcoming RFP process through the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, expected to begin in September. Importantly, McNeil is eligible to participate in the RFP, and BED will be focused on maintaining McNeil's CT Class 1 REC eligibility to mitigate adverse impacts on revenue in the fourth quarter of the current fiscal year and beyond. Additionally, McNeil RECs are still eligible for other New England REC markets, including Vermont, albeit with lower REC values.

Connecticut's action to reduce its renewable portfolio standard due to affordability challenges is concerning from a climate perspective, especially considering the recent changes to federal incentives for renewable energy. BED is actively engaged in scenario and financial contingency planning related to the uncertainty created by the new Connecticut law.

The Department anticipates that at the August Transportation, Utilities & Energy Committee meeting the SYNAPSE team will be ready to present modeling of energy efficiency costs and on-site electrification for three building types using anonymized, real-world data from Burlington.

The Department has been using a mobile battery and its Defeat the Peak initiative to reduce peak demand this summer, with a successful peak event in June. Ita Meno, the 2025 Jim Reardon Award winner, selected the Richard Kemp Center as this year's first Defeat the Peak partner. BED will continue to use and test the battery through September. The battery has a nominal output of 1.2 megawatts and can provide up to 240 kW in an hour. BED is reviewing updated bids from its RFP for a larger 5-megawatt battery.

Recent federal legislation poses significant challenges to climate action and strategic electrification in Burlington, especially the removal of incentives for solar and wind energy, while fossil fuel incentives persist. This could limit renewable energy access in New England, particularly with the administration's efforts to shut down offshore wind projects and the negative impact of tariff discussions on Vermont's relationship with Canada. The Net Zero Roadmap emphasizes the thermal and transportation sectors, but the recent end of various incentive programs, including EV and heat pump incentives—means that BED will be the only source of financial support for Burlington customers, particularly for EVs. The Department cannot fill this gap, but is evaluating what it can do to support customers doing this period to make EVs more affordable.

Regarding the 2025 rate case, there is a possibility that FY26 rates may be reduced from the proposed 4.5% to approximately 4.3% to adjust for one-time consulting fees that were inadvertently included in the 2024 rate case, which could be beneficial to customers. BED is engaged in process with the Department and PUC regarding both rate cases.

Lastly, the recent federal legislation did not eliminate the funding source for BED's \$4.85 million Charging & Fueling Infrastructure grant. The Department has engaged with the Vermont Attorney General's Office and other grantees to discuss potential legal actions to release these funds. Without securing this funding, EV charging investments will continue, albeit at a limited scale.

### **2025–2026 Strategic Direction**

General Manager Springer introduced the 2025-2026 Strategic Direction, stating that this year's draft reflects an updated yet stable strategic planning process. BED aims to create a concise, one-page strategic document reflecting the contributions of all organization members, encouraging input from the entire team for potential updates. Many of the updates this year have been suggested by the sustainability and equity team.

The community engagement section includes new language regarding capacity-building and energy literacy. There is also new language about collaboration with frontline communities to ensure equitable access to services, leveraging partnerships to extend outreach beyond traditional methods.

There is proposed new language calling for the renewal of the Vermont Energy Efficiency Modernization Act which allows for effective use of efficiency funds to reduce fossil fuel use, which

provides an opportunity to support improved incentives for EVs and heat pumps that may help address the loss of federal incentives.

Another proposed update expands district energy systems to include multiple energy sources, such as networked geothermal systems. The objective regarding charging infrastructure has been revised to emphasize prioritizing under-resourced areas and obtaining community feedback for charger placements.

Finally, there are proposed edits in the budget section regarding focusing on affordability and support for vulnerable communities.

Commissioner Vota asked what role the Commission plays in this document. General Manager Springer responded that the Commission does not have a formal role, but that the Department views the Strategic Direction as a communication tool to articulate its plans and goals and welcomes the Commission's feedback.

Commissioner Hobbs made a motion to adopt the 2025–2026 Strategic Direction as presented. Commissioner Whitaker seconded the motion. Vote: 5 ayes 0 nays.

### **Sheffield Wind Contract Extension**

James Gibbons provided an overview of BED's existing renewable energy contracts. Mr. Gibbons explained that three agreements will expire relatively soon: the Firstlight hydro contract on December 31, 2025, the Sheffield/Vermont Wind contract in October 2026, and the Hancock, ME Wind contract in December 2026. The Firstlight contract provides 35% of the energy output from a hydro plant in Connecticut along with the associated RECs, the Sheffield contract provides 40% of the plant's output, and the Hancock contract provides 26% of the plant's output.

Each contract provides approximately 30 GWh of energy to BED per year, and together account for approximately 30% of the BED's energy supply. BED is actively exploring options for contract renewals and replacements, including negotiating terms of a potential contract extension with Sheffield, which has provided favorable pricing and responsiveness to-date. The Department proposed that the Commission delegate authority to the General Manager to negotiate a contract extension with Sheffield for up to five years, provided that the contract rate is at or below current levels. This proposal would enable the Department to act quickly to execute a renewal, as City Council approval is not required for contracts less than 5 years in duration.

Commissioner Vota inquired about current energy market prices and trends. General Manager Springer responded that the head of ISO-New England recently advised that utilities should expect increasing energy contract prices across-the-board. The Department also gains value from being a 100% renewable energy provider.

The Department anticipates bringing replacement proposals for the First Light and Hancock contracts to the Commission in the coming months.

Commissioner Moody made a motion that delegates the Burlington Electric Department General

Manager the discretionary authority to negotiate and enter into an extension of the Sheffield Wind contract expiring 10/18/2026 for an additional term of up to five (5) years, provided that the extension price is at or below the current price and other contract conditions are appropriate. Commissioner Vota seconded the motion. Vote: 4 ayes 0 nays. (Commissioner Whitaker was absent for the vote)

**Commissioners' Check-In**

The Commission thanked Commissioner Michelle Hobbs for her time of service and expressed well wishes in future endeavors.

**Adjourn**

Commissioner Hobbs made a motion to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Moody; Commission vote; 4 ayes 0 nays.

The meeting of the Burlington Electric Commission adjourned at 6:28p.m.

*Microsoft Teams transcript used to create minutes drafted by Elena Alexander, Board Clerk, and edited by Emily Stebbins-Wheelock, CFO and Manager of Strategy & Innovation.*

Attest:  \_\_\_\_\_  
Elena Alexander, Board Clerk