

Vermont Climate Council Process Roadmap

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Overview

This document offers a process roadmap for the Vermont Climate Council to conduct its work as mandated by the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA).

The Council is tasked with developing by Dec 1, 2021 a Vermont Climate Action Plan that “shall set forth the specific initiatives, programs, and strategies, including regulatory and legislative changes, necessary to achieve the State’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction...and build resilience to prepare the State’s communities, infrastructure, and economy to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change...” The statute describes in more detail the specific topical areas that the plan must cover.

This document describes **roles** for the Council and the Subcommittees, **tasks** for the Subcommittees, a **leadership structure** for the Council and Subcommittees and **decision-making rules** for the different groups. In addition, it outlines the role of the initiative’s **Director**, the **support** that will be available as well as planned public and stakeholder **engagement**.

Finally, the document also provides the **charges**, or specific focus, of each Subcommittee.

Role of the Council

The primary body for decision as defined in the legislation is the Climate Council. This is the body who is charged to bring forth clear recommendations for action and its implementation.

The Council's responsibilities shall include the following

- Set the overall direction for the work of the Council
- Generate and hone expectations for and themes to be covered in the final report to be submitted to the Legislature
- Agree on an overall process plan and confirm membership in and overall charges of the Subcommittees
- Assign responsibility to the Subcommittees to generate recommended, draft initiatives, programs and strategies in their respective areas
- Oversee and provide guidance to the Subcommittees in their work, including review their workplans, their progress and ensuring gaps are filled, redundancy is reduced, and overall efforts are coordinated
- Review, compile, refine and finalize the outputs of Subcommittees to create the Vermont Climate Action Plan
- Conduct public engagement during the process and around the draft recommendations prior to finalization
- Integrate, resolve differences, and decide upon the final content in the Vermont Climate Action Plan

Leadership structure for the Council – Steering Committee

Given the breadth and complexity of the Council's work, the Council will establish a Steering Committee to guide the overall process and ensure progress of the work across Subcommittees. The Steering Committee will:

- Develop Council meeting agendas, in collaboration with the Council
- Serve as a clearinghouse for requests for technical help/contractor support
- Assist the Council to develop a slate of membership for the Subcommittees
- Develop common frameworks for Subcommittee work such as a work plan templates, recommendations template, and other useful tools
- Track progress to ensure the process is within its timeline and delivering the expected outputs.

The Council will create a Steering Committee comprised of the following individuals:

- 2 individuals from among the Council's Executive Branch members
 - The Council Chair - Secretary of the Agency of Administration)
 - Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources

- 4 individuals from among the Council’s members who were appointed by the legislature
 - These 4 individuals will include 2 from members who were appointed by the House of Representatives and 2 who were appointed by the Senate
 - Members who were appointed by the legislature will choose these 4 individuals
- In addition, on a regular basis, the Steering Committee will convene the co-chairs of the Subcommittees to ensure cross-fertilization and coordination among the Subcommittees and relevant state agencies.
- The Steering Committee will act in service of the Council, organizing the work, but not controlling it.

Role of the Subcommittees

To achieve the Council’s mandate, the GWSA establishes four Subcommittees and charges them to *“assist with preparing the [Climate Action] Plan and carry out other duties.”* The four Subcommittees specifically identified in §591(c) of the GWSA are:

- Rural resilience and adaptation
- Cross-sector mitigation
- Just transitions
- Agriculture and ecosystems

The GWSA also allows the Council to create additional Subcommittees to advise the Council. To address the technical complexity and data needed for this effort, to improve upon the state’s emissions inventory, undertaking scenario evaluation of draft recommendations, and establishing from which to measure progress over time, the Council also will create a fifth Subcommittee:

- Science and data

The core function of the Subcommittees is to recommend draft initiatives, programs and strategies for the Council to review, refine and compile into Vermont’s Climate Action Plan. As outlined in the legislation, the Subcommittees collectively must further the following objectives:

- Prioritize the most cost-effective, technologically feasible, and equitable GHG emissions reduction pathways, adaptation and preparedness strategies;
- Provide for GHG emissions reductions that reflect the relative contribution of emissions from different sectors;
- Minimize negative impacts on marginalized and rural communities and individuals with low and moderate incomes;
- Ensure that all regions of the state benefit from GHG emissions reductions;
- Support economic sectors and regions of the state that face the greatest barriers to emissions reductions, especially rural and economically distressed regions and industries;

- Support industries, technology, and training that will allow workers and businesses in the state to benefit from GHG reduction solutions;
- Support the use of natural and working lands to reduce GHG, sequester carbon and increase resilience; and
- Maximize the state’s involvement in interstate and regional initiatives and programs designed to reduce GHG emissions, and build upon state, national, and international partnerships and programs.

Two of the Subcommittees – Just transitions and Science and data – will create a workplan that focuses on providing inputs into and reviewing outputs from the other three Subcommittees. The remaining three Subcommittees will create a workplan that, among them, mirrors the tasks described in the statute:

1. Inventory existing programs to related to your Subcommittee’s Charge;
2. Identify, analyze and evaluate new strategies/programs needed to meet your Subcommittee’s Charge;
3. Evaluate cost-effectiveness of both existing and new strategies and programs;
4. Develop financing strategies;
5. Develop monitoring strategy for assessing:
 - a. GHG emissions
 - b. Program effectiveness
 - c. Impacts of climate change on Vermont’s climate, wildlife and natural resources
 - d. Community resilience;
6. Identify rules to be adopted (by ANR)

Additional detail on the specific charge for each of the Subcommittees is provided below.

As noted in the statute, the Subcommittees works will be based on the “reports, plans, and information pertaining to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate resilience strategies from the Agency of Natural Resources, the Department of Public Service, other State agencies and departments, and, where appropriate, the State Comprehensive Energy Plan...”

In addition, the statute calls for the adoption of the Vermont Climate Action Plan by Dec 1, 2021 and an update of the Plan every four years thereafter.

Leadership structure for the Subcommittees – Co-Chairs

Each Subcommittee will have co-chairs. One co-chair will be a Council executive-appointed member or their designee, and one co-chair will be a Council member appointed by the legislature or their designee. In specific cases, an additional co-chair may be designated from

outside the Council depending on the needs and purpose of a particular Subcommittee. The primary criteria for selecting co-chairs are:

- Sufficient availability to dedicate substantial time to the Subcommittee, particularly during the initial months of developing the group's draft recommendations.
- A substantive expertise on the topics and ideally some direct role in, or clear understanding of, aspects of the implementation of the proposed recommendations.
- A willingness to work collaboratively with a diverse group of experts and stakeholders to develop recommendations.

The Subcommittee co-chairs will:

- Take the lead in implementing the workplan of their respective Subcommittees, including designing a sequence of conversations and developing draft recommendations
- Coordinate regularly with other co-chairs and the Steering Committee, and report back to the Council on issues and progress on a regular basis
- Be supported by agency staff¹, technical consultants, and facilitators
- Direct their technical requests and needs through agency staff. Only the contracting agency can direct technical consultants (with the exception of the facilitators who are jointly directed by the Steering Committee).
- Ensure all Subcommittee members have been trained on open meeting laws and their implications for the work of the Subcommittees.

Subcommittee membership

Subcommittees should aim for a limited number of core members (approximately 8 to 12) ready and willing to do the work. *However, please note that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee and Just Transitions may need more members given the range of economic sectors involved and diversity of Vermonters we are trying to reach, respectively.* Agency staff and technical consultants, if available, will support each Subcommittee.

The Subcommittees will include non-Council members. Time commitment is intensive and could include as much as a meeting per week (4 to 6 hours per week of time commitment during the initial months).

Subcommittee membership should consider the following:

- Council members and some measure of balance across the three designations
- Specific expertise necessary to create the work
- As needed, geographic balance
- As needed, sectoral balance
- Equity and representation of vulnerable populations

¹ The level of support will depend on the availability of staff time.

To establish the Subcommittees, the Council's Steering Committee will:

- Ask Council members to self-select in which Subcommittee they wish to participate, and work with Council members to address gaps and achieve balance.
- Solicit ideas from Council members about names of non-Council members to add to the Subcommittees.
- Create and disseminate a public participation survey whereby members of the general public can indicate their interest in being considered for a Subcommittee.
- Generate a slate based on this input and public survey feedback, including rounding out any key missing technical expertise or stakeholder interests
- Present the slate to the Council for final additions, if needed, and approval

All Subcommittee meetings will be noticed and managed through all applicable open meeting laws.

Decision-making by the Council

The Council will strive to make decisions by consensus, including matters of process and substance.

The Council will strive to reach as broad a consensus as possible on its Vermont Climate Action Plan in order to promote state-wide buy-in into the strategies it is proposing and to motivate a range of actors to be active participants in the implementation of the strategies. Consensus is defined by broad agreement among Council Members: all or nearly all Council members can live with the proposed decision. Consensus is also defined by the process as well as the outcome of group deliberation. Thus, the Council will seek to articulate and explore members' interests and concerns, creatively develop ideas and options, seek to meet the needs and concerns of members to the greatest extent possible, and problem-solve in the face of disagreement. Consensus on the final slate of recommendations does not suggest all members will be equally satisfied with the outcomes nor prefer each and every recommendation. Rather, a consensus indicates that the slate of recommendations in total advances the public interest and well-being of the citizens of Vermont to the greatest extent it can.

Broad consensus has several benefits: 1) politically more powerful; 2) brings in cross-sectoral support essential for such a complex problem; 3) ensures more rapid implementation, reducing or avoiding litigation, and moving forward more quickly.

The Council will be supported in reaching consensus by: 1) extensive vetting and work at the Subcommittee level; 2) an iterative process of development of ideas, honing, and prioritizing; 3) facilitated dialogue that avoids the many pitfalls of classic Roberts Rules of Orders created to achieve majority vote, not broad acceptance; and, 4) Steering Committee guidance, support, and informal "mediation" to bridge differences between meetings as needed (within Open Meeting Laws). Consensus will be tested at various steps in the process through discussion,

straw polls, informal, non-decisional surveying on issues and ideas between meetings, and carefully facilitated discussion toward the end of formal votes.

If the Council cannot reach consensus on specific issues, despite its best efforts, the Council will use the majority voting protocol described in the GWSA. In addition, different viewpoints on specific issues can be noted in the Council's Climate Action Plan, which will be one, single report. The Council will use a high bar to include multiple viewpoints in the final report and will agree on what constitutes that high bar prior to discussions on a consolidated draft Action Plan document.

Decision-making by Subcommittees

The Subcommittees will be operated by consensus as well, as defined above for the Council. For disagreements that can't be resolved in a Subcommittee as part of a consensus set of recommendations to the Council, the Council members of the Subcommittee will determine what is forwarded to the Council. What is forwarded may include:

- The recommendations supported by all or most of the Council members of that Subcommittee
- A slate of options for a particular issue or recommendation, together with the advantages and disadvantages of these options as developed by the Subcommittee.

Public engagement

This process of developing the Vermont Climate Action Plan will have multiple layers of stakeholder and public engagement designed to promote a Plan that is wiser, better informed, and broadly supported. The process of public and stakeholder engagement should seek to foster information exchange and shared learning. The intent is dialogue and joint development.

- The Council's membership represents diverse interests and stakeholders in the state
- The Subcommittees' membership will represent an even broader group of interests and stakeholders in Vermont, all working collaboratively towards draft recommendations.
- The Subcommittees will conduct targeted outreach as needed to improve their discussions and decision-making.
- The Just Transitions Subcommittee will play a leading role in designing a public participation plan that facilitates broad engagement to gain input from all residents of the State, paying particular attention to creating opportunities for rural, low income and marginalized communities to engage meaningfully and with voice and influence. The Just Transitions Subcommittee will strive to develop tool(s) that can be used to assess the efficacy of community engagement efforts related to the development of the Climate Action Plan.
- At a minimum, Subcommittees will hold at least one public on-line meeting to create public dialogue around their initial draft recommendations. These may need to be held

at a variety of times (nights and days), formats (webinars, focus groups, written comment) and means to input (verbal, written).

- In addition, at a minimum, the Council will hold public input sessions for several weeks on a draft version of its Climate Action Plan, prior to finalizing the document. These may need to be held at a variety of times (nights and days), formats (webinars, focus groups, written comment) and means to input (verbal, written).
- All meetings of the Council and the Subcommittees will be open to the public. Most will include a time on the agenda for public input. Non-members will be also to reframe from the chat function and turning cameras on until the public comment period. The Council will explore digital platforms such as Zoom that simplify and facilitate online public meetings.
- The initiative will have a website that allows for asynchronous input.

Project Director and support

The process will have a Director housed in ANR whose primary functions will be to:

- Manage and keep track of the different components of the process, in particular the coordination of the Subcommittees, the Steering Committee and the Council.
- Oversee contractors, including the facilitation team and the technical services.
- Shephard the written deliverables, in particular the Climate Action Plan.

In addition, each Subcommittee will have staff support assigned to it from different state agencies. These staff will assist Subcommittees to prepare meeting inputs, plan meetings with co-chairs and draft outputs. Staff will coordinate with the Director to assist in shepherding written deliverables.

Facilitation team

A facilitation team will assist with the following tasks:

- Prepare and lead monthly Council meetings
- Prepare and facilitate Steering Committee meetings
- Support Subcommittees be assisting during their initial set-up, during stakeholder and public outreach and during particularly difficult decision-making moments
- Assist the Director with process advice
- Provide materials and tools to help the Council make decisions as it consolidates its Climate Action Plan
- Support public meetings around the Draft Climate Action Plan

Technical Services

ANR will hire technical experts to provide priority technical analysis that will assist the Council and Subcommittees to make informed decisions. The Director will work collaboratively with the Council and Subcommittees to identify the most useful technical inputs that can be delivered in time to support decision-making.

Specific Duties of Each Subcommittee

Rural Resilience and Adaptation Subcommittee

AWAITING FINAL TEXT.

Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee

AWAITING FINAL TEXT

Just Transitions Subcommittee

AWAITING FINAL TEXT

Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee

AWAITING FINAL TEXT

Science and Data Subcommittee

AWAITING FINAL TEXT