

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 legislative describes in more detail the specific topical areas that the plan must cover.

This document offers procedural recommendations for the Council and its Sub-Committees to follow. It describes proposed **roles** for the Council and the Sub-Committees, **tasks** for the Sub-committees, a **leadership structure** for the Council and Sub-Committees, **decision-making rules** for the different groups, and other suggested details.

This document also provides an **initial draft orientation** for the specific duties of each sub-committees.

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 Sub-Committees
- Assign responsibility to the Sub-Committees to generate recommended, draft initiatives, programs and strategies in their respective areas
- Oversee and provide guidance to the Sub-Committees 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 Sub-Committees 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

Role of the Sub-Committees

To achieve the Council's mandate, the GWSA establishes four sub-committees and charges them to *"assist with preparing the [Climate Action] Plan and carry out other duties."* The four sub-committees 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 sub-committees to advise the Council. To address the technical complexity and data needed for this effort for improving 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 Sub-committee:

- Science and data

The core function of the sub-committees is to create recommended, draft initiatives, programs and strategies for the Council to review, refine and compile into Vermont's Climate Action Plan. As outlined in the legislation, it is anticipated that the Sub-committees will seek to address the following in their respective topic areas:

- Identify and inventory existing initiatives, programs and strategies.
- Identify, analyze and evaluate new initiatives, programs and strategies necessary to meet legislative goals.
- Present a package of draft initiatives, programs and strategies to the Council for inclusions in the Plan;
- Identify regulatory or statutory areas for action necessary to implement new or modified initiatives, programs and strategies; and,
- Identify monitoring and evaluation needed to track implementation and progress toward the GHG emission reduction requirements of the GWSA.

In addition, the specific initiatives, strategies and programs identified in the Plan 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.

Additional detail on the specific scope of work for each of the sub-committees is provided below.

[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 Sub-committees. 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 Sub-Committees
- Develop common frameworks for Sub-committee work such as a work plan templates, recommendations template, and other useful tools
- Track progress and ensure the process is effective and efficient.

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 (Agency of Administration Secretary Susanne Young)
 - Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Julie Moore
- 4 individuals from among the Council's members appointed by the legislature
 - These 4 individuals will include 2 from members appointed by the House of Representatives and 2 appointed by the Senate
 - Members appointed by the legislature will choose these 4 individuals
- In addition, on a regular basis, the Steering Committee will meet with the co-chairs of the Sub-committees to ensure cross-fertilization and coordination among the Sub-committees.
- The Steering Committee will act in service of the Council, organizing the work, but not controlling it.

Leadership structure for the Sub-Committees – Co-Chairs

Each Sub-Committee 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 sub-committee. The primary criteria for selecting co-chairs are:

- Sufficient availability to dedicate substantial time to the Sub-Committee, 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 Sub-Committee co-chairs will:

- Take the lead in implementing the workplan of their respective Sub-Committees, 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 staff, technical consultants, and facilitators
- Sub-committees will 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).

Sub-Committee membership

Sub-Committees 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 Sub-Committee may need more members given the range of economic sectors involved.* Agency staff and technical consultants, if available, will support each sub-committee.

The Sub-committees may include non-Council members. However, to the extent possible, the Sub-committees should include at least a majority of Council members¹. 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).

Sub-committee 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

To establish the Sub-committees, the Council's Steering Committee will:

- Ask Council members to self-select in which Sub-committee 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 Sub-committees.
- Generate a slate based on this input, 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 Sub-committee meetings will be noticed and managed through all applicable open meeting laws.

¹ See the Decision-Making by Subcommittees section below.

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 Member: 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 Sub-committee 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 can 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.

Decision-making by Sub-Committees

The Sub-committees will be operated by consensus as well, as defined above for the Council. For disagreements that can't be resolved in a Sub-Committee as part of a consensus set of recommendations to the Council, the Council members of the Sub-committee 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 Sub-committee
- A slate of options for a particular issue or recommendation, together with the advantages and disadvantages of these options as developed by the Sub-committee.

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 Sub-Committees' membership will represent an even broader group of interests and stakeholders in Vermont, all working collaboratively towards draft recommendations.
- The Sub-Committees will conduct targeted outreach as needed to improve their discussions and decision-making.
- The Sub-Committees 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).
- 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 Sub-Committees will be open to the public. Most will include a time on the agenda for public input.
- The initiative will have a website that allows for asynchronous input.

Specific Duties of Each Subcommittee

Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee will focus on pressures climate change will place on Vermont's transportation, electricity, housing, emergency services and communications infrastructure, with particular attention to the challenges faced by rural communities across the state in addressing these pressures.

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee shall identify, evaluate and analyze existing and new strategies and programs that build resilience and prepare the State's communities, infrastructure, and economy to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change.

This work is anticipated to emphasize reducing Vermonters' energy burden and seeking opportunities for nature-based solutions within the built environment.

The Rural Resilience and Adaptation Sub-committee shall:

1. Develop a "municipal vulnerability index" to identify those communities that may be most adversely affected by climate change;
2. Develop best practice recommendations specific to rural communities for reducing municipal, school district, and residential fossil fuel consumption; fortifying critical transportation, electricity, and community infrastructure; and creating a distributed, redundant, storage-supported local electrical system;
3. Recommend a means of securely sharing self-identified vulnerable residents' information with State and local emergency responders and utilities;
4. Recommend tools for municipalities to assess their climate emergency preparedness, consider land use changes that reduce vulnerabilities, evaluate their financial capacity to address infrastructure resilience, and prioritize investment in that infrastructure;
5. Review existing planning efforts, including local and regional land use planning, transportation planning, energy planning and operations planning, and identify opportunities to better integrate and support these efforts in service of GHG emissions reductions, building resilience and designing a resilient future.
6. Utilize Vermont Emergency Management biennial reports to recommend program, policy, and legislative changes that will enhance municipal resilience to increased hazards presented by climate change.

Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee

The Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee will focus on comprehensively identifying scientifically and technologically feasible initiatives, strategies and programs available to achieve the GHG emissions reductions requirements of the GWSA. It should be noted that local and regional land use planning and decision-making has long-term impacts on GHG emissions that should be incorporated into the work of this Sub-committee. Initiatives, strategies and programs found to be feasible will then be evaluated through economic analyses to determine the economic case and relative cost-effectiveness of each initiative, strategy or program.

The Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee will establish a framework for consistently evaluating initiatives, strategies and programs, with support from the Science and Data Sub-committee. The framework should include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

- CO₂ mitigation potential;
- Cost-effectiveness;
- Affordability and impacts on vulnerable populations;
- Ability to identify and track measurable outcomes;
- Demonstrated/proven effectiveness;
- Legal authority (existing or needed) to support implementation;
- Co-benefits.

In service of this effort, it is anticipated that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee will need to establish sector-specific working groups to ensure the capacity and expertise needed in order to identify and evaluate a full range of sector-specific initiatives, strategies and programs. Because of the scope of this Sub-committee, the membership may need to be somewhat large than the other Sub-committees.

In preparing its annual GHG emissions inventory, the State of Vermont currently tracks emissions from the following sectors: agriculture; buildings (residential/commercial/industrial); electricity (consumption); fossil fuel; industrial processes; transportation; and waste. The GWSA also specifically calls for strategies that limit in use of chemicals and substances or products that contribute to climate change. It is anticipated that the Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-committee's work will be organized consistent with these sectors. Once formed, this Sub-committee will determine a work structure regarding sectors to be reviewed and approved by the Council.

Just Transitions Sub-committee

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will develop principles to guide the work of the other sub-committees to ensure that the initiatives, programs and strategies necessary to achieve the State's GHG emission reduction requirements and build resilience and climate adaptation of Vermont communities and natural systems support all residents of the State fairly and equitably. This will include considering job, economic and demographic impacts of various proposed recommendations set forth by other Sub-committees. Particular attention will be given to ensuring that climate policy is developed in a manner that is based on mutual respect and justice for all, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

It is anticipated that, once the set of principles that will be used to guide Vermont's climate have been established, members of the Just Transitions Sub-committee will: 1) offer tools or processes for evaluating recommended programs and strategies through a just transitions filter or lens, 2) to the extent they are able, join and participate in the other Sub-committees to ensure that these principles are fully integrated into the more technical components of this work; and, 3) review recommendations from other Sub-committees for their just transition impacts. This approach will help ensure that the initiatives, programs and strategies consider the disproportionate impact of climate change on rural, low income and marginalized communities and that programs and incentives for building resilience are accessible to all Vermonters and do not unfairly burden any groups, communities, geographic locations or economic sectors.

The Just Transitions Sub-committee will also have 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 meaningful and with voice and influence. The Just

Transitions Sub-committee will strive develop tool(s) that can be used to assess the efficacy of community engagement efforts related to the development of the Climate Action Plan.

Agriculture and Ecosystems Sub-committee

The Agriculture and Ecosystems Sub-committee shall focus on the role Vermont's natural and working lands play in carbon sequestration and storage, climate adaptation, and ecosystem and community resilience. This work shall emphasize opportunities for nature-based solutions in areas outside the built environment, including actions and policies that restore wetlands, increase carbon stored on agricultural and forest land and in forest products, and support healthy agricultural soils and local food systems.

Specifically, the Agriculture and Ecosystems Sub-committee shall:

1. Develop a full carbon budget for the State of Vermont that quantifies carbon emissions and sequestration associated with biomass growth, management and utilization, in support of the GWSA requirement to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across all sectors
2. Identify initiatives, programs and strategies that achieve sequestration and storage of carbon and promote best management practices to achieve climate adaptation and resilience on natural working lands
3. Identify the co-benefits of strategies for such factors as water quality, quality of life, food security, and economic resilience and sustainability
4. Identify initiatives, programs and strategies for mitigation to reduce gross and net annual greenhouse gas emissions from Vermont's agricultural and forested working lands

Science and Data Sub-committee

While the GWSA did not explicitly contemplate the need for a Science and Data Sub-committee, it did provide the opportunity for the Council to create other sub-committees to advise the Council and undertake the work needed to create the Plan. The Science and Data Sub-committee will be responsible for reviewing the latest information on direct and indirect effects of climate change, drawing on existing data and studies, as well as identifying critical scientific information needs. In addition, the Science and Data Sub-committee will be responsible for establishing an energy use and emissions baseline, including reviewing the suitability of Vermont's current GHG emissions inventory for assessing progress toward meeting the requirements of the GWSA.

Specifically, the Science and Data Sub-committee shall:

1. Establish an energy use and emissions baseline based on current state and regional policies, as well as an assessment of options for meeting Vermont's energy needs (and allowing economic growth) while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
 - a. Review the State of Vermont's approach to preparing the existing GHG emissions inventory and recommend modifications or adjustments, if needed,

so that the inventory can serve as the basis for measuring progress toward meeting the GHG reductions requirements established in the GWSA.

2. Build scenarios based on the work of the Cross-Sector Sub-committee including:
 - a. The cost of doing nothing in response to climate change to the State; an emissions analysis of draft greenhouse gas reductions strategies proposed by the Working Groups; and an economic analysis of the draft emissions- and adaptation-related strategies proposed by the Working Groups.
 - b. Reflect the relative contribution of each source or category of source of emissions.
3. Identify critical scientific information needs pertaining to priority research and monitoring of state-based changes in the climate and its impacts.
 - o Strengthen research and development and monitoring of climate mitigation and adaptation practices.
4. Recommendations for monitoring and tracking the Climate Plan's progress over time.

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