

Draft Vermont Climate Council Report to General Assembly, 1/10/21

Introduction

This report is required by §591 of the [Vermont Global Warming Solutions Act \(GWSA\) of 2020 \(Act 153\)](#) enacted by the Vermont Legislature on September 24, 2020. The Act requires the Vermont Climate Council (VCC) created in the Act to report on its activities and progress towards meeting the greenhouse gas reduction requirements in the Act.

Core elements of the GWSA include:

- Codifying Vermont’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions goals as statutory requirements and providing an explicit cause of action should the State fail to adopt sufficient measures to achieve the statutory requirements. The requirements are:
 - Not less than 26% from 2005 greenhouse gas emissions by January 1, 2025;
 - Not less than 40% from 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by January 1, 2030; and,
 - Not less than 80% from 1990 greenhouse gas emissions by January 1, 2050.
- Establishing the Vermont Climate Council (VCC)

Vermont Climate Council Role and Responsibility

The VCC is comprised of 23 members, including eight ex-officio members from the Executive Branch, eight members appointed by the Speaker of the House, and seven members appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees. The [names of the members and their biographies are available on the Climate Council website](#) established by the Agency of Administration.

The GWSA charges the VCC with adopting the “Vermont Climate Action Plan” by December 1, 2021 and identifies the following elements that must be included in the Plan:

- Strategies and programs to achieve the GHG emissions requirements established in §578 of the GWSA and adopting them in the Vermont Climate Action Plan by December 1, 2021;
- Strategies and programs that build resilience and prepare the State to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change;
- Means to measure the State’s progress towards meeting the greenhouse gas emissions requirements; and,
- Guidance to the Vermont General Assembly and the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources on legislative and regulatory changes necessary to implement the Plan.

In §591(b), the GWSA also establishes specific steps to be taken by VCC in developing the Plan, to include:

- Completing inventories of existing programs to reduce GHG emissions and build resilience;
- Identifying new strategies and programs that will be needed to meet GHG emission requirements and improve resilience;

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- Developing financing strategies to support implementation of the work;
- Developing a monitoring strategy for tracking implementation efforts and assessing program effectiveness; and,
- Providing guidance to the Secretary of Natural Resources on rules needed to support implementation.

In addition, as identified in §592(d), 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.

Activities of Council to Date

Final legislative appointments to the VCC were received by the Administration on October 23, 2020 and the first meeting of the Climate Council was held on November 20, 2020. Subsequent meetings of the VCC occurred on December 21, 2020, and January 4 and January 14, 2021. All meeting materials, including meeting minutes and recordings of the meetings, are on the [Climate Council website established by Agency of Administration](#). A brief synopsis of each meeting is provided below.

November 20, 2020

The inaugural meeting of the VCC outlined the legal framework for the substantive and procedural work on the Council.

- ANR Secretary Julie Moore provided an [overview of the legislative charge](#) given to the VCC and the timeline for the Council's work.
- The Executive Director of the Vermont Ethics Commission, Larry Novins, provided an overview of the [ethical considerations of serving on a public body](#) for the legislative

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members and reminded the ex-officio members that they are guided by the Executive Code of Ethics.

- The Chief of Staff for the Vermont Attorney General, Charity Clark, provided an [overview of the Vermont Public Records Act](#) and its applicability to the Council's records and communications.
- The Attorney General's Office General Counsel and Administrative Law Division Chief, Michelle Anderson, provided an [overview of the applicable provisions of Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#).

December 21, 2020

The December 21 meeting of the VCC was the first of two meetings dedicated to establishing a common foundation for the Council's work. The presentations, prepared by technical staff, focused on current programs which reduce GHG emissions, as well as efforts to evaluate Vermont's GHG emissions and understand the impacts of climate change that are currently being experienced in Vermont.

- State Climatologist, Dr. Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux, provided an [overview of the impacts and risks of climate change in Vermont](#) drawn from her work on the National Climate Assessment.
- State agency staff presented [Vermont's current GHG emissions profile](#) and an overview of Vermont's [existing programs and mitigation activities designed to reduce GHG emissions](#). These presentations covered work being conducted by the agencies of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Human Services, Natural Resources, and Transportation as well as the Public Service Department.

January 4, 2021

The January 4 meeting of the VCC began with a presentation on the [importance of racial equity in developing Vermont's Climate Action Plan](#) from Xusana Davis, Vermont's Executive Director for Racial Equity. Strategies for outreach to effectively engage marginalized and traditionally under-served communities in developing the Plan were discussed with Executive Director Davis.

State agency subject matter experts presented an [overview of Vermont's existing programs to build resilience](#), including work being conducted by the Agencies of Natural Resources and Transportation as well as Vermont Emergency Management.

[Opportunities to mitigate emissions and build resilience through Vermont's natural and working lands](#) were highlighted, with presentations focused on work being done by the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation and the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

January 14, 2021

A special meeting on the VCC was convened on January 14 to review and provide comment on this report, prior to its delivery to the General Assembly on January 15, 2021.

Next Steps

The VCC has established the fourth Monday of every month for regular meetings of the full Council. The next meeting is on January 25, 2021.

A panel discussion with representatives from other states, including Maine, Massachusetts and New York, that have councils similar to Vermont's for a "lessons learned" discussion is planned, followed by a facilitated discussion about the Council's organization, consideration of a Council charter, and transition to the important subcommittee work ahead. Staffing of those subcommittees, subcommittee charters, and establishment of interim deadlines for subcommittee work will be discussed. The Agency of Natural Resources has executed a contract with the Consensus Building Institute (<https://www.cbi.org/>) to facilitate the meeting.

In addition, the Agency of Natural Resources has taken the following steps in support of the work of the Council:

- Recruitment to fill the three staff positions provided in the GWSA, including a full-time Project Manager;
- Issued a Request for Information (RFI) to gather input and obtain information needed to develop and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant services related to emissions modeling, development of analytical tools, policy analysis and development, regulatory support, economic modeling and cost-benefit analysis and monitoring and program evaluation; and,
- Developing an RFP for facilitator services to support constructive deliberation, development of recommendations and consensus building agreement around the complex issues of reducing GHG emissions and building resilience.

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