



## Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Energy Efficiency and Conservation Program

# Why Should Your Community Form an Energy Committee?

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission - 3117 Rose Hill - The King Farm - Woodstock, VT 05091 - 802-457-3188 - [www.trorc.org](http://www.trorc.org)

### By Creating an Energy Committee, Your Town Can...

**Save Money** - by shrinking the energy costs associated with municipal and/or school buildings, street lights, and vehicles. In a time of economic recession, it is critically important to utilize this cost-saving mechanism. While the up-front costs of installing efficiency measures can sometimes be expensive, other projects cost nothing at all, and the long-term benefit in savings is worth it. For instance, if RPC member towns implement all of the recommended upgrades to the eleven buildings which underwent audits, our region would save \$64,423 annually! You can also save by promoting energy efficiency improvements through outreach programs such as Button Up-Vermont, and by setting standards in appropriate planning documents, such as the Town Plan, Zoning bylaws, or building codes.

**Develop a Town Energy Plan** - by coordinating the Energy Committee's work with the local Planning Commission. An Energy Committee can research and advise the Planning Commission about energy issues, freeing up members' time to work on other pressing matters. Remember that all towns that choose to have a town plan should have an energy plan according to 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 § 4382(a)(9).

**Maintain the Character of Your Community** - through the implementation of clean technologies that will reduce environmental harm. By doing so, you can ensure that your town remains a great place to live, work, and play. If the suggested efficiency upgrades are made to the region's eleven audited buildings, we would reduce electricity usage by 66,671 kWh and fuel usage by 24,567 gallons per year.

### How is an Energy Committee Formed?

An Energy Committee can be formed by a group of dedicated citizens (on an ad-hoc basis); however, it is most useful for the Committee to be formally recognized by the Selectboard, since the two must ultimately work together and funding can sometimes be allocated by the Town.

The Selectboard can create an Energy Committee as an 'Advisory Commission' under 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 § 4433(1)(A) by municipal vote, adoption of bylaws, or through the town's charter. The Energy Committee/Advisory Commission could then assist the town in whatever capacity was most appropriate (see below).

Additionally, the Selectboard can appoint a Town Energy Coordinator for a one-year term under 24 V.S.A. § 1311. A Town Energy Coordinator would assess the town's current energy usage and initiate efficiency upgrades in the future.

### What is an Energy Committee?

*An energy committee is a team of community members who volunteer their time to help establish and implement your community's energy goals.*

*They can be an ad-hoc group of private citizens or a duly appointed advisory committee for the town.*

### Advisory Committees

*An advisory commission may be created at any time when a municipality votes to create one, or through adoption of bylaws, or if the charter of a municipality permits it, when the legislative body of the municipality votes to create one. 24 V.S.A. § 4433(1)(A)*

*An energy committee that is formally recognized by the selectboard is an advisory commission.*

### What is an Energy Coordinator?

*Some communities have an individual who is designated by the Selectboard as an "energy coordinator". This practice is most common in communities that do not have energy committees. In such cases, the role of the energy coordinator is determined by the Selectboard.*

## Capital Energy Planning

24 V.S.A. § 4443 enables communities to adopt a Capital Budget and Program. This is a budget and a written plan that outlines how capital investments are to be made over an extended period of time (such as twenty years). The advantage to the Capital Budget and Program is that the costs of capital investments are spread out over time using regular deposits into accounts that will fund any needed improvements.

We recommend our communities formally adopt such a program, and when doing so, it is advisable to consider the implementation of energy efficiency improvements when other capital investments are being made. For example, if a town building is in need of structural repairs to its exterior walls, that might be an optimal time to increase the level of insulation to improve energy efficiency.

A community's energy committee could work with the Planning Commission and budget committees to help develop a comprehensive Capital Budget and Program which considers energy efficiency improvements.

## Getting Started

The first step to forming a community energy committee is to decide whether or not you want your committee to be recognized by your community's legislative body (Selectboard). According to the Vermont Natural Resources Council's (VNRC) "Vermont Energy Planning Guide":

*"There are pros and cons to the two different types of energy committees. Establishing an advisory energy committee is an official act of the municipality [recognized by the Selectboard] that reflects its commitment to addressing energy issues and - as part of municipal government - typically results in a formal role in the development of the energy plan. Some people may prefer being part of a committee that is sanctioned by the town, although the resolution forming the committee may limit the scope of its work or areas of responsibility. Also, advisory committees established by the municipality are more likely to receive support through the municipal budget.*

*A grassroots energy committee is not bound by a resolution of the town and not accountable to the selectboard [unrecognized] or the voters and may therefore be better able to advance positions on energy policy that are not popular with elected officials. It may also be easier for them to serve multi-town regions. Unlike advisory committees, which are formed expressly to advise on the preparation and implementation of the plan, grassroots committees may be tasked with participating in the preparation of the plan to no greater degree than any other group of citizens who are free to attend hearings and provide comments."*

At TRORC, we generally recommend that communities opt to become recognized as an advisory committee. Although an advisory committee is generally charged with assisting with the town plan, its exact role is to be determined by the Selectboard. A Selectboard can, for example, ask that a municipal energy committee take on the role of analyzing municipal energy use. Many municipal energy committees have conducted audits of municipal buildings and have used that data to advise the Selectboard on where they can most effectively invest money in energy efficiency improvements.

## TRORC Can Help Get You Started

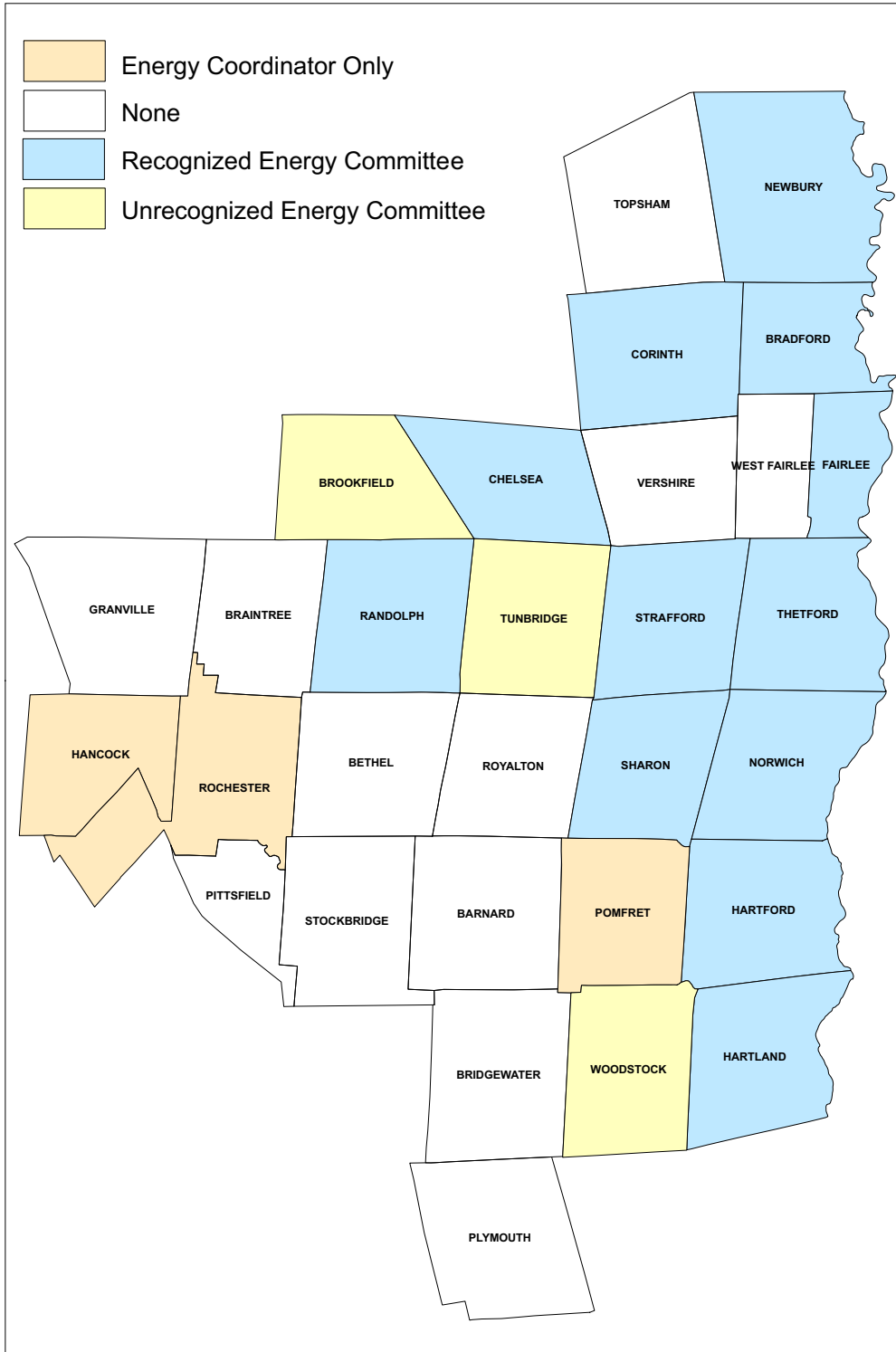
The Staff at TRORC is fully committed to helping our communities engage in good energy planning. We are available to assist your community with the formation of an energy committee. At your request, staff will help guide you through the start-up process including meeting with interested community members and the legislative body. We will also work with your newly formed committee and legislative body (if recognized by the Selectboard) to determine what initial steps your energy committee might want to take.

**For more information on what we can do for you, please contact Emma Zavez at 802-457-3188 ext.14 or via email at [ezavez@trorc.org](mailto:ezavez@trorc.org).**

In addition to TRORC, there are other sources of information, including the energy committees in our region (see next page) and several organizations who offer similar services (see p. 5).

## Energy Committees in Our Region

Currently, there are approximately 80 Energy Committees in VT, with 15 in the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee region. Existing energy committees are an excellent source of information for communities who are interested in forming their own committees. Energy committee members will often be willing to speak with you about their experiences - what worked, what didn't work, what were their successes or failures.



### Contact Information

*The following is a listing of some of the active energy committees in our region with their contact information.*

*Bradford Energy Com.  
Ed Wendell, Chair  
hills510@gmail.com  
802-222-5520*

*Brookfield Energy Group  
Anita Kelman  
802-485-4622*

*Chelsea Energy Com.  
Phillip Mulligan, Chair  
802-685-7784;  
phillip@sover.net*

*Fairlee Energy Com.  
Barbara Duncan  
802-333-3664;  
barbara.duncan@valley.net*

*Hartford Energy Com.  
Alan Johnson  
alan@datdec.com  
603-252-8451*

*Newbury Energy Com.  
Linda Ide  
permabooks@fairpoint.net  
802 429-2154*

*Norwich Energy Com.  
Alan Berolzheimer  
bercross@sover.net  
802-649-2857*

*Randolph Energy Com.  
Frank Reed, Chair  
802-345-6462;  
FReed@vtc.vsc.edu*

*Strafford Energy Com.  
Dori Wolfe  
dori@grosolar.com  
802-765-4632*

*Thetford Energy Com.  
Bob Walker  
bobwalker@valley.net  
802-785-4126*

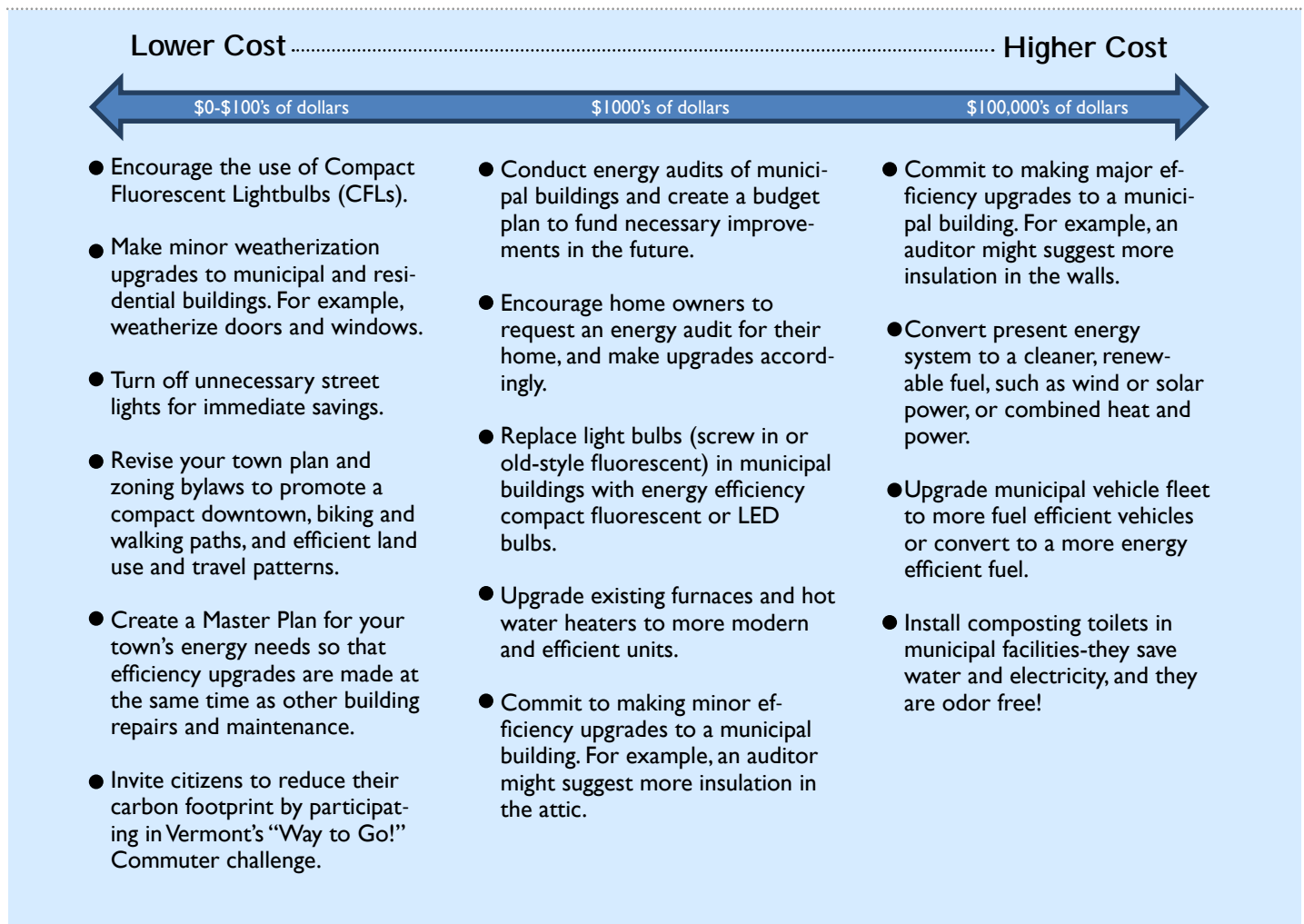
## What does an Energy Committee need to succeed?

An Energy Committee can be formed with virtually no funding; the most important ‘ingredient’ is a dedicated group of citizens who are willing to volunteer their time. Once formed, an Energy Committee can research the Town’s energy expenditures, develop and assess different proposals for energy and cost saving projects, and gather feedback from both residents and town officials. Energy efficiency projects vary in cost, and can be chosen based on available funding. Grant funding is available on a limited basis, and there are a number of incentive programs offered in Vermont. An Energy Committee will be able to research these options and apply for the ones that make sense.

Additionally, there are already many skilled people in town that can help implement building upgrades or other projects. Consider seeking out local professionals who will donate their time (for free or at a heavily discounted rate) to implement the more complex aspects of a project. For more simple tasks, recruit residents who want to help, but lack experience in construction or engineering.

## Potential Projects and Spectrum of Costs:

The biggest hurdle for communities who want to encourage energy efficiency and reduced energy use in their community is funding. A creative energy committee can use a wide range of resources to tackle their projects. Some tasks will only require volunteer work, others will require professionals and the funding to pay them. Remember that an efficiency project might move from the ‘high cost’ to ‘low cost’ category based on rebates, incentives, grants, or local fundraising.



## Vermont Energy Committee Success Stories

### *Montpelier: Improving Municipal Buildings' Efficiency*

*Total spent on energy in FY08: \$560,000*

*Total Cost of Retrofit/Upgrades: \$462,000*

*Estimated Payback Period: 10 years*

*Estimated Savings to the City: \$60,000 per year.  
\*Data is for Fiscal Year 2008*

*Source: Incorporating Efficiency Into Municipal Planning. Vermont Law School Land Use Institute. 2009, p. 20.*

### *Hartford: Streetlight Inventory*

*Hartford conducted an inventory of its street lights and found that 200 were unnecessary and could be permanently turned off. Of the remaining lights in town, Hartford sought bids to replace over 300 municipal light fixtures with more energy efficient LED bulbs. After a payback period of just 3 to 4 ½ years, the town may save \$42,245 per year and 130,288 KWH.*

*Source: Efficiency Vermont; Kirick Engineering Associates, P.C. "Town of Hartford Vermont - Case Study." Improving Efficiency in Municipal Street and Public Space Lighting: A Step-by-Step Guide. Appendix A p. 16-17.*

## Organizing and Networking

There are a wide range of resources available to your community about energy committees and possible energy committee projects. Below are some examples:

### **Sustainable Energy Resource Group (SERG)**

SERG is a local, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that promotes energy conservation, efficiency and renewables through the formation of town energy committees to help residents, businesses and the municipalities reduce energy consumption, save money, increase the sustainable use of renewables, strengthen the local economy and improve the environment. SERG has helped form and are consulting with Town Energy Committees in numerous Vermont and New Hampshire communities.

[http://www.serg-info.org/stories/storyReader\\$24](http://www.serg-info.org/stories/storyReader$24)

### **Town Energy and Climate Action Guide**

The Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network's "Town Energy and Climate Action Guide" (produced in 2007) offers an important resource to communities interested in establishing, or currently working on, town energy committees. The guide provides step-by-step information on how to establish an energy committee and also offers suggestions for state and local resources, funding, model bylaws and more. The document is currently being revised, but the 2007 version is available.

<http://www.vnrc.org/energy/hot-issues/town-energy-and-climate-action-guide/>

### **Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN)**

The Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network (VECAN) is a network of organizations helping communities across Vermont to reduce energy costs, promote clean energy solutions and address climate change through programs and policies aimed at promoting conservation, efficiency, renewables, alternative transportation and smart growth land use practices. VECAN's mission is to start, support and strengthen town energy committees. VECAN serves as an information resource and clearinghouse, provides direct technical assistance and education and facilitates networking among communities and resource providers. VECAN's web site is a great source of information on useful resources, events and opportunities likely of interest to town energy committees.

<http://www.vecan.net/index.php>

### **Energy Planning & Implementation Guide for VT Communities**

Released in 2011 and produced by staff at the Vermont Natural Resources Council, this guide is the most up-to-date energy planning guide available to our communities. It can be downloaded from:

<http://www.vnrc.org>