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NH Office of Energy and Planning
Concord

Comments on the NH State Energy Strategy Draft of May 2014

First, I would like to thank the committee for allowing public input on this draft and the possibility of enactment of a comprehensive energy policy. I would also like to extend my thanks for allowing a public hearing to be held at Plymouth State University. I know that the requisite amount of hearings were already performed, so we appreciate the extra effort to make it to Plymouth.

I am writing these comments personally, but I come to the table with a little bit of knowledge. In 2004, along with Sandra Jones, I started the Plymouth Area Renewable Energy Initiative (PAREI) to help citizens in the Plymouth area plan and prepare for an uncertain energy future. Over the past 10 years our members have been looking for leadership. I think it is imperative that a plan be put in place so that our citizens can then assess their own situation and take appropriate action.

In the past decade the residents and businesses of the Plymouth New Hampshire region have installed over 300 solar systems. In addition to this, hundreds have performed deep energy retrofits to their buildings. The result is that close to \$1 million dollars no longer leaves the Plymouth Area. Businesses are thriving, people have more money to spend and our energy future is more assured.

When these business and homeowners started to convert to a more efficient lifestyle there was little support and even less will in the state and local governments to do anything but business as usual. But these people took action anyway. Through the years there has been assistance and with the help of PAREI to watch the ebbs and flows of incentives and tax breaks the people of Plymouth have been able to take advantage of these opportunities.

After listening to our citizen's voice their opinion at the Plymouth informational meeting I am concerned that there are far too many conflicting voices to come up with a truly comprehensive energy plan. But ever the optimist, I would like to forward a few ideas (some already highlighted in the draft strategy) that might be able to get some traction.

Real Estate Value

I feel that without proper valuation of weatherization upgrades to a home or business it will be a very hard sell to consumers to weatherize even if a "green bank" provides low interest financing. As an example, if I am to put tens of thousands of dollars in energy upgrades to my house, not knowing if I am to stay in that house for many more years, I have to conclude that I might just be handing a new buyer all of the upgrade money.

If there were a mandatory HERS (or other type) rating required before the sale of a house the homeowner would know that their expensive efforts would be reimbursed in a sale. I would go a step further to say that there would be little need for incentive to weatherize. The norm would become: if you don't upgrade it would be likely that your home may not be sellable. People would weatherize, leading to more jobs in the weatherization field, to more training being needed and further supporting the community colleges of the state that provide that training.

Decoupling

I believe unless the utilities want to decouple they won't, but I think we should talk strongly about moving in that direction. If the utilities are in the business of making money on power there is little incentive for them to get on board with weatherization and personal renewable energy. If transmission was decoupled from power the utilities could charge a real and true cost of delivery and then would be in the business of providing solutions to their customers energy needs.

Again, I believe that the utilities have to WANT to do this for us to take the time to propose it.

Even Playing Field

If all power sources were rated on the same level and on the same terms renewable energy would very likely come out at least equal if not more favorable than their competitors. But we don't play on the same field.

We need to factor in many aspects that are currently being ignored if we want to have an equal playing field. Issues like health, environment, tax incentives, access to right of ways, preferred dealings with state government, access to lobby services and funds, not to mention nation wide issues like energy security and advantages achieved for the major energy players in military protection funded by us citizens. These all need to be added into the mix. We need to hold renewables to the same standards, but these standards need to be put on the table, analyzed, and measured.

Many of the incentives for the major utilities are hidden where incentives for renewables are in the open for all to see. This needs to change if there is going to truly be a comprehensive strategy.

Goals

We need to set goals and implement programs that move us to those goals. I felt the draft strategy was far too vague in the form of tangible strategies. Far too much of: "You could look at this, or look at that".

The goals need to be realistic, achievable and tangible. Talking about expanding natural gas to the rest of the state when the natural gas bubble could likely burst before the 10 years of this plan is up is very expensive folly.

On the other hand how much energy can renewals truly provide given a lack of desire to curb our states consumption?

We need to make sure that the goals are revenue neutral to the players and that revenues and profits are not part of the discussion. We need to stop hearing “that technology is too expensive” when the real statement should be “we can’t make enough money by using that technology”.

Incentives

I would like to thank the State for the incentives that have already been realized over the last decade. Those incentives have gone a long way to making NH more efficient and economically stable.

I know that the State works on very short budget cycles. But it is imperative that any future incentives be structured so they can be guaranteed well into the future. I believe that a .50 per watt incentive for solar PV over 20 years is better than a \$3.00 per watt over 3 years. The ebb and flow of incentives is more harmful than the not having any incentive at all, in my opinion.

We need to earn this!

About this overall process of producing a compressive plan, we need to make sure we earn back the money and time that is being spent on this process.

\$200,000 was spent on the study (with a Massachusetts company) when other studies very similar to this existed and could have been brought into the light. Hundreds of meetings, thousands of miles driven, copies, staff time etc etc. The cost of this process is likely to exceed \$1,000,000. And with the previous studies by GDS and others the cost could be in the multiple millions. We need to earn this. If a comprehensive policy is not adopted and implemented, we have just thrown away millions of dollars. Not to mention wasted the time of countless people that could have been doing other very good projects to prepare of a very uncertain energy future.

To put this into prospective: A portion of the money that we will have wasted is equal to the savings the Plymouth Area achieves every year from solar and weatherization efforts. So we will have negated everything those good people did for at least one full year.

We need to earn this...

Go and do good work and let us know how we can help.

Thanks for listening,

Peter Adams