

TOWN ENERGY and CLIMATE ACTION GUIDE

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Starting an Energy Committee in Your Town

Below is an abstract from the [Town Energy and Climate Action Guide](#), a publication of the Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network (VECAN). The complete guide is available by clicking on "Town Energy Committees" at www.serg-info.org.

Structures for your committee

(from p. 7)

Identify the most appropriate group structure that will help advance your town's energy or climate action project. The structure of your group may depend on such factors as buy-in from your local government, the municipality's capacity to "staff" the committee, volunteer capacity, the complexity of the project, or the most strategic way to advance your short- and long-term goals. Three basic structures for committees are:

An ad hoc citizen energy and climate action committee.

Organize a group of concerned citizens with varied expertise and a passion for the issue. Ad hoc citizen committee, the most grassroots type of committee, are commonly formed when communities wish to accomplish finite tasks.

A subcommittee of an existing municipal committee (i.e. work under a planning or conservation commission)

Vermont communities are currently enabled to plan for their energy future (24 VSA, Chapter 117). *[In Massachusetts this is MA General Law, Chapter 40, Section 8i.]* This [VT] statute provides communities with the ability to plan for future energy demand and supply, as well as energy-conservation and renewable energy opportunities. Local boards and commissions can influence future development and land uses for greater conservation and energy efficiency. Town policies and bylaws suggesting increased use of renewable sources (i.e., wind, hydro, solar and biomass) should be assessed with other resource values (i.e., wildlife, open space, views and recreation).

Many communities have established a conservation commission to assist planning commissions with natural resource and conservation matters. If your community does not have a conservation commission, consider forming one and making renewable, local energy efforts a primary focus of their work.

An independent municipal committee or task force appointed by and responding to the Select Board or City Council.

As noted above, state-enabling legislation allows communities to assess and establish strategies and policies that help chart the community's energy future. When considering the best form for your community's energy or climate action committee, weigh the options. For example, an official town-appointed committee may have more legitimacy in the public's eye, more direct access to the Select Board, and funding for initiatives. If the Select Board or City Council is not ready or willing to advance a proposed project initiative, however, it might be more beneficial to form an ad hoc committee. Or, if the planning or conservation commission needs help exploring ways to advance renewable energy solutions, a subcommittee of one of those bodies, which can focus solely on different energy-saving strategies, might be the best fit. Ultimately, any committee structure you choose should help plan and implement projects and lead to rational policies, goals, and objectives for adoption at the municipal and state levels.