



PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, February 28, 2018
Great Hall at Codman Square Health Center
6 Norfolk St.
Boston, MA 02124

1. Welcome and Introduction

Matt Rusteika welcomed everyone and introduced himself and the Department of Energy Resources (DOER). He noted that the public listening sessions were set up so that members of the public could weigh in on the upcoming three-year Mass Save Energy Efficiency Program Plan (“the Plan”).

2. Public Comment

Mike Oppel of Emerson Swan began by noting that they have worked in the energy efficiency programs with the Low-Income Energy Affordability Network (LEAN) for about five years. He noted that they do a lot of boiler and pump upgrades for low-income families. He added that most manufacturers that they deal with are based out of Massachusetts and that it is great that the products they make are installed within the state as part of the programs. Lastly, he noted that it has created a full time position at Emerson Swan and he expressed thanks for that.

Joshua Cayea of the General Mechanical Contractors Company noted that the programs save a lot of energy and that the tax revenue that comes back into the state is really important. He added that the programs are employing hundreds of people across the state, including himself and his company which employs about 150 people. He also noted that it is nice to see state money stay in the state. Lastly, he noted that Massachusetts has been the top energy efficiency state for seven years in a row and that the low-income program success has helped push that accomplishment.

Adam Mullen of the Boston Housing Authority shared a few examples of positive impacts that the programs have had. The examples included an increased sense of safety due to there being more efficient lighting at night, increased comfort in homes because of insulation and air sealing, and the city of Boston’s ability to meet its Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction goals.

Gabriela Boscio of Neighborhood of Affordable Housing in East Boston noted that they had been working with other stakeholders and have found that a lot of people were not successfully scheduling audits. She noted that they observed language, timing, and scheduling as barriers. She acknowledged that the programs have done some work to address those barriers, but that she felt that more could still be done. She also noted that it would be great if there was more detailed, localized data available so that they could do a better job with targeted outreach.

Mike Prokosch of Boston Climate Action Network noted that a recent study by Applied Economics revealed that the programs Greenhouse Gas emissions impact was much lower in low to moderate income communities. He indicated that he felt that the programs needed to redouble their efforts in reaching communities of color and low and moderate income ratepayers. He also noted that more detailed data is necessary and that incentive payments should be withheld until such data is released. Lastly, he suggested that the programs have increased focus on demand management and heat pumps.

Tabetha McCartney of the Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly applauded the programs, noting that they are reaching some of the neediest people in the city of Boston. She added that access to the LEAN program has been vital to their ability to keep residents in their homes.

Danilo Morales noted that over the last three years he has seen the tremendous impact that energy efficiency projects have on low-income families. He noted that energy efficiency projects help people save money on their utility bills and that they have positive health impacts. He added that there are language and financial barriers that do need to be addressed. He suggested that green banks or green loans could be used to encourage deep energy retrofits.

Madeleine Barr of Resonant Energy noted that her company focuses on making solar and clean energy available across the urban landscape. She indicated that she has worked with the Boston Affordable Energy Coalition and that they are looking to make clean energy and energy efficiency something that works for everyone. She asked that the next plan provide higher incentives for low-income access and that it prioritize communities who have been left out in the past.

Scott Greenbaum of Greene Energy Consultants noted that he primarily works on custom projects for large commercial customers and that he thinks the programs are broken and dysfunctional. He cited baselines as a primary reason, noting that incentives and savings should be based off of the existing building and not the code. He indicated that as a result, the quantity of rebated projects that he was able to get funded through the programs has dropped 90% in the past three years. He also noted that costs have gone up while incentives have gone down. He acknowledged the pay for performance program, but suggested that it is hard to sell to customers because it takes two or more years for the customer to get the incentive. He concluded by noting that there are no members on the Council that do the type of work that he does and that someone like him should be represented.

Marianne McLaughlin of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation began by noting that they are the owner and operators of over 400 units of affordable housing. She noted that since 2011 they have worked with the programs to provide more than a million dollars in

incentivized projects. She noted that in addition to the efficiency and cost savings, the ability for the low-income seniors to keep their living spaces at a comfortable temperature has been beneficial. She added that it is important to continue and expand the program offerings, especially since there are uncertainties over time about the amount of assistance they will receive from the government.

John Mahony with the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation began by noting that they have about 1,000 units of affordable housing rental. He indicated that their work with the programs through LEAN has been important to make it so they can hold on to their properties. He noted that the programs need to be more open and accessible to renters who find it difficult to access money for energy efficiency upgrades. He also suggested that it would be helpful if the programs could be used to access funding for renewables. Lastly, he raised concern about the requirements that must be met if they use their own contractors. He indicated that the utility requires a background check, including a social security trace, state, county, and federal criminal records check for seven years, national sex offender registry for seven years, seven years of address verification, three years of prior employment verification, a five-panel drug screening, and a global watch search. He indicated that he found it offensive that contractors would have to go through all of that, especially those that are working in empty buildings.

Bryndis Woods of the Applied Economics Clinic introduced a report that they recently published and is available on their website. She noted a highlight of the report that showed that the accomplishments of the programs have varied a lot by location and demographics.

Grace Hall of the Unitarian Universalist Mass Action organization spoke to reiterate what some others had already said. She suggested that the next plan should work to mitigate the discrepancy of success for moderate income folks and renters. She added that saying it is difficult is not good enough and that they need to provide solutions. She also suggested that incentives should be given for completing specific steps rather than the overall result. Lastly, she noted that there should be a greater focus on heat pump installations as opposed to incentivizing high efficiency boilers.

Peggy Lynch of the Unitarian Universalist Mass Action organization suggested that the programs should be moving away from transitioning heating fuel from oil to natural gas and towards doing more heat pumps and renewables. She also suggested that the utilities should be measuring the savings rather than estimating them.

Isaac Baker of Resonant Energy noted that they recently took on an experiment of building a local community based energy efficiency provider and home performance contractor with the goal of identifying existing problems in the Mass Save Program. He noted that one of their main findings was that a lot of the program design leads to programs serving suburban neighborhoods and therefore companies that do the work being placed in those areas. As a result, he suggested that the companies are not well suited to work across language and financial barriers in urban communities. He also noted that there has been little success in the 60-120% median income group where they have enough resources to not be able to access the fully funded low-income programs, but not enough resources to have the same success that middle- and upper-income folks have experienced.

A member of the Bethel AME Church gave public comment on behalf of Reverend Mariama White-Hammond and Sisters Sarah and Nancy. She first noted that their church has had success partnering with Mass Save to provide information to its members and to generate energy efficiency projects. She added that she did not think that they would be the only type of organization that would be open to that type of partnership. She also indicated that she hoped the next plan would include the ability for community organizations to help out. She also noted that there have been some issues with the program that need to be addressed for the next plan. These included addressing the disconnect between what type of energy efficiency retrofits can be done immediately and which require follow up, addressing data transparency issues, and meeting the needs of the 60-120% median income folks. She stressed that while these folks are referenced as hard to reach, they are not actually that hard to reach if the programs partnered more with community agencies. Lastly, she noted that there are not concrete goals associated with the hard to reach population. She suggested that incentives be tied towards serving these populations more equitably.

Drew Vernalia of the Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation noted that the programs have done a great job of serving multifamily building owners but that their service to the renters of those spaces could be improved. He also noted that on the development side, passive house initiatives help to achieve better energy efficiency in new housing and therefore should be part of the next plan.

State Representative Russell Homes from the 6th Suffolk district noted that he heard a lot of people speak about equity. He noted that the programs should focus on equity instead of equality. He added that it is important that the programs be accessible to those that need it most and that the next plan should focus on that.

Rusteika concluded the listening session by outlining the development process for the 2019-2021 Plan. He noted that the Council just recently voted on a resolution with recommendations for the Program Administrators (PAs) for the plan. He noted that the PAs would then submit a first draft of the plan by the end of April at which point the Council will review it. He added that the Council would likely submit another resolution with recommendations over the summer ahead of the final draft which would be submitted for Council and DPU approval in October.

3. Adjournment

Rusteika adjourned the meeting at 7:30 PM.