

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

ACT 174 AND REGIONAL PLANNING
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All eleven regional planning commissions (RPCs) in Vermont are actively engaged in energy planning work in support of Act 174. Three RPCs (Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, Northwest Regional Planning Commission, and the Bennington County Regional Commission) have completed drafts of new regional energy plans as part of a pilot project funded through the Department of Public Service (PSD). The BCRC has adopted its plan and soon will be submitting its plan (the energy plan plus its comprehensive plan) to the PSD for a determination of energy compliance in the near future. Public hearings to consider adoption of the other two pilot RPC energy plans are being planned.

The state's remaining eight RPCs currently are working on completing first drafts of their new energy plans, with funding provided through a separate contract with the PSD. Those drafts are expected to be completed by the end of May and submitted to the PSD for a preliminary review. Completion of final plans by all eight RPCs is expected by the end of this year. The regional plan projects are being guided by the Act 174 Standards and supported by analysis and planning tools developed cooperatively among RPCs.

Each RPC has developed estimates of current energy use by sector and fuel type, as well as projections – based on work completed by VEIC using the “LEAP” energy modeling program – of future energy supply and demand scenarios that support attainment of state energy goals. The RPCs also have completed regional renewable energy resource maps that illustrate the process of identifying locations with good access to solar, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass energy sources as well as environmental and other constraints that would complicate or preclude development. These regional data and mapping analyses are being refined to the municipal level and are being provided to each municipality to support local energy planning.

As part of the regional planning process, the RPCs are working with local and regional energy committees and other interested people and groups to identify strategies and pathways that will support conservation and efficiency measures and efforts to transition to local renewable fuels – in thermal, transportation, and electricity sectors. These ideas, together with the comprehensive discussions and examples provided in PSD planning guidance documents, provide a solid basis to support local planning efforts.

The regional planning process critical to the successful implementation of Act 174 is moving forward as anticipated and RPCs are supporting municipal energy planning in each region, thanks to essential technical assistance funding provided for that purpose. Although the process created through Act 174 is new, it is proceeding well and is appreciated by the communities where we have been working.