

# Counting Ballots and Marking Changes at WEC's 2022 Annual Meeting

Typically, at WEC's Annual Meetings, there is little drawn-out suspense regarding the results of the Board of Directors election. That's true even in years when the Annual Meeting is held in-person, when the ballot box remains open during a community dinner. The quorum is established and votes are counted quickly, and results are announced shortly after the Board President opens the meeting.

But at the 83rd Annual Meeting on May 5, an unusually high number of candidates and a bylaw amendment on the ballot kept the Ballot Committee busy tallying votes on hundreds of mailed-in ballots for well over an hour. Ultimately, incumbent Steven Farnham of Plainfield was re-elected, and new Directors Betsy Allen of Plainfield and Susan Alexander of Cabot were voted to the Board. The bylaw amendment, which would allow for online voting, passed by a wide margin.

A few dozen members and guests attended the meeting virtually, with several Directors and WEC staff gathered, masked, in the Co-op's conference room in East Montpelier. President Stephen Knowlton started the meeting expressing his wish that this 83rd Annual Meeting is the last one to be held virtually.

From there, the theme of the meeting was one of appreciation for service – for many people, in many ways. WEC welcomed Rebecca Towne, general manager of Vermont Electric Co-op, who spoke about valuing the sister cooperatives' ongoing mutual support. Knowlton expressed his gratitude to the seven candidates who ran for the Board. "The willingness to spend some time and effort to learn how our Co-op works and how we can serve our fellow members, to have power owned by the people for the people, is something we don't find every day," he observed.

Knowlton thanked former GM Patty Richards and Co-op staff who left for other ventures in the past year. And he acknowledged the many years of service of two Board members whose terms concluded that night: Annie Reed of Marshfield, who served as Board Secretary, and Barry Bernstein of Calais, who for many years served as WEC's President.

In positioning WEC as an environmental steward, Knowlton said, "Annie has been a leader in insisting and promoting that WEC live its values in more than just in being reliable and renewable."

Reed, with heartfelt simplicity,

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*Doug desGroseilliers, Utility Field Technician, shows Cabot students around a bucket truck. Students learned how their local electric cooperative prepares for and responds to outage-causing weather events, and what they can do to prepare for storms and outages.*

## WEC Presents on Outage Restoration to Cabot Students Studying Disaster Preparedness

How do you capture the attention of a nine-year-old? You need a topic with action, danger, and the potential for knowledgeable kids to save the day. At the Cabot School, grade 3-4 co-teachers Alison Morrow and Rebecca Nally have landed on a class exploration topic that has, unfortunately, real-world application: natural disasters.

The class studies disasters for months. "We integrate everything into it," said Nally, including language arts and math. The project culminates in a community-wide public presentation by the students.

Their study is not limited to the

conditions that create wildfires and floods: the students are also learning how people repair the damage caused by disasters, and what steps to take to prepare for and survive calamity, and ride out the aftermath. Each student understood they had a role to play in preparation, and created lists of steps to take and items to store in a kit.

Nally invited Director of Engineering & Operations Dave Kresock and Utility Field Technician Doug desGroseilliers to speak to the class about how an electric utility prepares for and responds to outages. And to sweeten the demo,

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### Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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*While ballots were counted, musicians Patrick Ross and Doug Perkins provided music for attendees of the 2022 Annual Meeting.*

## President's and General Manager's Message

# WEC Welcomes New Leadership, Looks Ahead to Grid Updates

*Seasonal right-of-way clearing underway to support reliability, broadband rollout, and advanced metering infrastructure*

### Election results; welcome new Directors

**Steve:** We had an unusual number of candidates running for election in 2022, so that's a good sign that people are interested in serving their community and spending time on the Board. Something else that's unusual, in my experience, is we had two open seats. Whether this is a sea change or not, indicating more turnover on the Board over the next couple years, we'll have to see. I look forward to working alongside new Directors Betsy Allen and Susan Alexander and returning director Steven Farnham.

I thought the candidates who were not elected were highly qualified and would bring their own experiences and backgrounds to be able to contribute

to the WEC Board, so I hope they'll consider running again. I didn't get elected the first time I ran for the board, and I believe that's true of some my other colleagues on the board. I hope this spring's candidates will try in the future if they'd like to serve.

**Louis:** Against the background of volunteer boards of all kinds struggling to find people interested to serve and give their time, seven well-qualified candidates for three spots is pretty unusual right now, and a great thing for the Co-op and the membership. We don't have districts for our Board members, they all serve at-large, though it's nice that we happen to have geographic diversity across the 41 towns WEC serves.

There's another group of members who makes this possible: the Committee on Candidates volunteers and the ballot counters. It was a little more complicated for them this year, but they did great work and we're appreciative of their help.

**Steve:** I'm very happy with the professionalism and integrity they brought to their job.

### Bylaw amendment

**Steve:** The membership voted to amend our bylaws to allow for electronic voting. This bylaw change is essential for WEC continuing to adapt its procedures to keep up with the times. Electronic voting has become more prevalent. It's not just a reaction to the pandemic, though to some extent it was motivated by the pandemic. For better or worse, people are doing a lot more of their communication online, so I think it's a natural thing to allow our members to get the information they need and be able to cast their ballots online.

**Louis:** There are some technical and financial pieces to figure out how to implement electronic voting and at a reasonable cost. We'll plan on keeping mail-in voting as well, but I'd like to make this available.

**Steve:** Yes, we have to kick the tires and figure out how to make it work in real life. At the same time, we recognize the virtue of getting together and talking about issues that face us today.

**Louis:** The balance is trying to make it possible for people to participate and to make sure the quality of their interaction is high. We faced a similar balancing act with our Annual Meeting, holding it again virtually because of Covid. We're thinking of having a late summer get together at the warehouse with members, so we can get some of that face-to-face interaction with members as well.

**Steve:** We feel this is a twenty-first century way of approaching it, but it's an age-old issue of how to get people informed and participatory.

### Staffing update

**Steve:** In the past year, we've had significant turnover of staff, particularly at the leadership level. That includes the President of the Board. We are proceeding with largely new leadership in some areas, which can facilitate some new approaches while nonetheless adhering to our values and mission previous boards and staff have set.

**Louis:** And that's balanced with a large number of people who have been at the Co-op for quite a while. We're lucky to have people in all different sections of the organization who have a lot of institutional knowledge. That's less common than it was years ago, to have people remain at one organization for most of their entire careers.

There has been a big shift at WEC particularly at the management level, but there are people who've been here a long time whose service to the Co-op and its members is lengthy and valued. It was good to see the list and recognize the people at the Annual Meeting who've been here a long time and done a lot for the Co-op over a number of years.

### Legislative update: advanced metering infrastructure

**Louis:** There were a couple of items in bills passed this legislative session that could have an effect on WEC. The Clean Heat Standard bill, which was the centerpiece of climate legislation this year, was vetoed. That was mostly related to fossil fuel companies, but there's an interplay there, because one of the goals of that bill was to require that fossil fuel heating dealers move their members onto other forms of energy, and away from fossil fuels. That would interact with WEC in

## Co-op Currents

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### Board of Directors

<b>President</b>	STEPHEN KNOWLTON <i>(May 2024)</i>	East Montpelier <a href="mailto:knowlsf@auburn.edu">knowlsf@auburn.edu</a>	223-2230
<b>Vice President</b>	ROGER FOX <i>(May 2024)</i>	Walden <a href="mailto:rfox@pivot.net">rfox@pivot.net</a>	563-2321
<b>Treasurer</b>	DONALD DOUGLAS <i>(May 2023)</i>	East Orange <a href="mailto:dondouglas@gmail.com">dondouglas@gmail.com</a>	439-5364
<b>Secretary</b>	MARY JUST SKINNER <i>(May 2023)</i>	Middlesex <a href="mailto:maryjustskinner@gmail.com">maryjustskinner@gmail.com</a>	223-7123
	SUSAN ALEXANDER <i>(May 2025)</i>	Cabot <a href="mailto:mullandmor@gmail.com">mullandmor@gmail.com</a>	563-3259
	BESTY ALLEN <i>(May 2025)</i>	Plainfield <a href="mailto:betsallen@gmail.com">betsallen@gmail.com</a>	535-7088
	STEVEN FARNHAM <i>(May 2025)</i>	Plainfield <a href="mailto:steven4wec@gmail.com">steven4wec@gmail.com</a>	917-2581
	JEAN HAMILTON <i>(May 2023)</i>	Plainfield <a href="mailto:Jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com">Jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com</a>	777-6546
	RICHARD RUBIN <i>(May 2024)</i>	Plainfield <a href="mailto:richardrubin@gmail.com">richardrubin@gmail.com</a>	454-8542

LOUIS PORTER  
General Manager  
[louis.porter@wec.coop](mailto:louis.porter@wec.coop)

KATIE TITTERTON  
Editor  
[katie@clearspotvt.com](mailto:katie@clearspotvt.com)

TIM NEWCOMB  
Layout

### Editorial Committee

Louis Porter Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Anne Reed Katie Titterton

*The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero, at 224-2322, or visit [wec.coop/board-of-directors](http://wec.coop/board-of-directors).*

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### Stay Tuned: Fall Membership Gathering

Join WEC for an in-person membership gathering and cookout lunch on Saturday, September 10, 2022 from 11 AM - 3 PM at the WEC Operations Center, 230 Fassett Road in East Montpelier. More information and reservations at [wec.coop/events](http://wec.coop/events) and in the July issue of *Co-op Currents*. Hope to see you there and celebrate being together once again.

### Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at [currents@wec.coop](mailto:currents@wec.coop) or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: *Co-op Currents*.



several ways. That was vetoed this year, but is likely to be taken up by the Legislature in future years.

In the state budget this year, the Legislature included \$8 million for advanced metering infrastructure [AMI] at public power utilities. We don't know yet how that will be split up between the municipals and co-ops. For a while, WEC has had an objective to improve the AMI we operate on, and we expect to make those improvements in the near future.

Basically, now we communicate with members' meters through copper lines, and that's fairly limited in the scope of the communications it can provide. Over time, we'd like to move to a smart meter system.

That will give us greater ability to provide time of use rates, allow us to identify outages and the sources of outages more quickly than we do now, and provide a lot of benefits in our up-to-date grid management system.

**Steve:** Getting a finer-grain knowledge of how power is being distributed and where it's going, who's using it, and how and when they're using it, is the first step for a lot of these broader issues Louis just outlined. We need to understand when our members use their power – and how that evolves over time as, say, net metering, or whatever its solar replacement might be, evolves. Getting that type of info from our members' meters may help us roll out more flexible rate structures that could benefit members while enhancing state energy programs. I think it's



*Over time, we'd like to move to a smart meter system. That will give us greater ability to provide time of use rates and allow us to identify outages and the sources of outages more quickly than we do now.*

– Louis Porter

appropriate to start planning for this now as it is the key to potential upgrades in operations.

**Louis:** In regard to state funding, WEC will certainly have to match at least 50% or probably more. We're looking for meters that communicate either through broadband internet, which we expect will be more widely available to members as a result of the work of the CUDs [Communications Union Districts], or through radio frequency. As members and readers already know, the amount of federal money that came down meant WEC's access to federal loans was no longer necessary, and we're grateful that the CUDs will be able to do this on their own.

**Steve:** One of the reasons WEC started thinking about broadband in the first place was envisioning many of our members' needs, and their overall quality of life related to digital communication. An ancillary benefit was using this for WEC's own communications to provide the Co-op operations staff a better view of what's going on during maintenance and outages. It's possible our new metering network may make use of fiber backhaul from the meters to WEC headquarters, and some of that may be on newly strung lines. It's a little early to tell the details.

The common theme is member service, providing what we think our membership will be needing.

#### Right-of-way updates

**Louis:** It can be surprising to see a line that hasn't been cleared for many years, after it's been cleared. But it's our right and responsibility to clear rights-of-way. We do it for the safety of our members and neighbors.

This year, we're looking at a lot of make-ready work on our lines for the CUDs to string fiber, and the tree crews are part of that. A lot of those lines will need to be cleared before the fiber can be strung. We've hired Asplundh in addition to the crews we have been contracting with for a number of years.

**Steve:** I see announcements in the *Times-Argus* from other utilities reminding landowners it's their

responsibility to ensure herbicides in rights-of-way don't make their way into ponds and whatnot. We know these herbicides – there are powerful ones being used – may be lethal to aquatic life and disruptive to beneficial insects to name a few issues. I want to remind our members WEC does not use any herbicides in our rights-of-way. Does it cost a bit more in the short run? Probably. We have to clear more often with mechanical methods. But it's part of our mission to be a responsible partner with all our members. That includes not spraying herbicides in rights-of-way, especially those that go across people's land. We try to be a good environmental steward in more than just sourcing renewable power. That's what we hear from our members that they want.

**Louis:** It's a good environmental part of our mission, but it does make keeping rights-of-way clear more complicated in what is already a rural co-op. It does add to our challenges, for sure.

#### Supply chain

**Louis:** The story on supply chain issues is still mixed. We've had some trouble getting the types of equipment and materials we need. We've been lucky getting some of the transformers we need, so we haven't needed to suspend transformers for what we call "discretionary use," such as upgrading them for members who want to increase the size of their service or install fast EV chargers. We are taking a cautious approach to those discretionary use upgrades, because we need to make sure we have enough transformers in stock if we have an outage and have transformer damage – which we do, not infrequently, over the course of the year. We need to be cautious in monitoring our supplies, but haven't had to suspend those programs, which is great.

Supply chain issues are affecting other things, like meters in availability and cost. The availability of utility poles has been somewhat spotty. We've managed to avoid the worst of the



*We try to be a responsible partner with all our members. That includes not spraying herbicides in public rights-of-way, especially those that go across people's land.*

– Stephen Knowlton

supply chain issues so far, but are still cautious about our use and about laying in adequate supplies to make sure we have enough materials.

**Steve:** It's a universal problem across a lot of industries. It's not surprising we'd be one of them.

#### WEC on Rumble Strip/VPR

**Louis:** This was an idea that Erica Heilman, the producer of the *Rumble Strip Vermont* podcast who also does work for VPR, and I had when I came to WEC: about joining us when we had a significant outage to see what it's

like when we have an outage that lasts a couple of days. In late April we had a pretty significant outage, with 130 or more different issues on the lines. Erica came and talked to folks in different places in WEC, including Operations and Member Services, and went out with a crew as they worked on some power lines that had trees come down on them. The line crews did a tremendous job. We actually brought in a couple crews through mutual aid, and got power restored in good time.

The most interesting and fun part of that story is it got into what makes WEC unique and unusual as an electric co-op: that it's member-owned, has a renewable energy mission, and serves a territory that's rural and difficult to serve. The nature of WEC, and the family spirit and attitude of members and people who work here, really came through in that piece, and it was fun to see. The folks at WEC proved to be natural radio personalities, especially Amos Turner, who's one of the line crew foremen, who really did a great job expressing why our territory is different and why the Co-op is different.

**Steve:** I enjoyed the piece. To me, it illustrated that a rural co-op doesn't just sell power. We really do keep the lights on. Our operations crew and staff do it, despite what nature throws at them. I'm very proud of them and happy to be a part of an organization with this attitude. 🐌

#### Where's WEC?

Summer is here, and crews are busy working to keep rights-of-way clear. Right-of-way maintenance is necessary to keep your power safe and reliable.

#### Where are tree crews trimming WEC's roadside rights-of-way?

**Worcester:** Minister Brook, Calais

**Middlesex:** Shady Rill

For the most up to date information:  
[wec.coop/wec-operations/right-of-way-notice](http://wec.coop/wec-operations/right-of-way-notice)

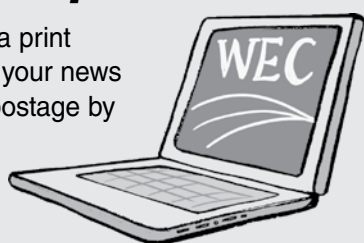
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WEC's office in East Montpelier is currently closed to members of the public. Thank you for understanding. You may reach any staff member or Board member by phone or email.

WEC's website is [wec.coop](http://wec.coop) and phone numbers are 802-223-5245 and toll free at 1-800-932-5245.

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**Cabot**

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Kresock and desGroseilliers brought a bucket truck. Kids took turns climbing into the lowered bucket and sitting behind the wheel.

First, Kresock explained how the grid works. After power is generated, he explained, it's carried long distances over transmission lines

to a distribution utility's substation. From there, it's sent out over relatively shorter distances. The distribution is like a tree, he explained, with the roots at the substation, the trunk as the three-phase lines, and the branches as the single-phase lines that fork off and carry power down smaller roads to homes.

WEC plans ahead for outages

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Doug desGroseilliers elevates a bucket truck for an enthusiastic audience.



Doug desGroseilliers talks power line safety and outage restoration with Cabot third- and fourth-graders.



"You look like you belong up there!" Director of Engineering & Operations Dave Kresock tells a Cabot student behind the wheel of WEC's bucket truck.



During WEC's demo, Cabot students sported not-very-hard hats.

**Kids' Answers to Utility Questions**

**W**EC visitors asked Cabot third and fourth graders questions about electricity. These are some of their answers.

**What is electricity?**  
*"The power source for electronics."*

**Why are electric wires up on poles?**  
*"When they're in the air, you can't get to them that easily."*

**What can generate electricity?**  
*Answers: Solar, wind, water*

**How do you know when there's a power outage?**  
*"The internet doesn't work."*

**What do you think causes outages?**  
*Answers: Thunderstorms, earthquakes, blizzards, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, falling trees, wildfires, accidents.*

**How can you and your family prepare for outages?**  
*Some of a cacophony of answers: Flashlight, batteries, portable radio, water, nonperishable food*

**If there's a tree down on a power line and someone wants to cut down the tree, what do you tell them?**  
*"Don't do it!"*

**Lineworker Gear**

**L**ike firefighters, lineworkers are always ready, said Doug desGroseilliers. The truck is always full of gas and equipment, and lineworkers have their gear ready to go. He showed the class each item a lineworker brings out in the field.

- Pants: "These protect my legs from chainsaws or other accidents."
- Hard hat: "This keeps my head safe from falling tree branches. It also protects me when I'm climbing up the pole and bump into something I'm not supposed to."
- Winter gloves
- Summer gloves
- Rubber insulated gloves
- Climbing belt: "A bucket truck is one way of lifting up the pole, but sometimes you can't bring the truck out." One student asked if it was heavy—it is—and the class took turns trying to lift it.
- Climbers (metal boot gaiters with spurs)
- Protective goggles
- Flame resistant clothes
- Good sturdy waterproof boots
- Reflective rainsuits: for safety in low visibility conditions. "So when people see you, they know that their power will be back," said a student.

To report an outage, call 802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245. Visit [wec.coop](http://wec.coop) for outage information and for tips on outage preparation.



## Annual Meeting

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responded, “This has been one of the best educational experiences of my life. I’ve just loved being on the Board.”

Bernstein, a member for over 50 years, is a Co-op legend. His Board service began in 1999, though he influenced WEC’s environmental policy long before that. Bernstein’s leadership combined political acumen, sense of community, and technical knowledge, said Knowlton, as well as a vision of what electric cooperatives can accomplish for their communities. Bernstein had a role in WEC’s divestment from the shuttered nuclear power plant Vermont Yankee and investment in the landfill gas plant at Coventry, and his signature achievement, said Knowlton, was leading WEC to be the first of now three utilities in the state that are powered by 100% renewable sources. “It’s a clear recognition of where the state needs to go, and Barry brought us there ahead of schedule,” he said.

Bernstein said he’s grateful for the service of all present and past Directors. He spoke about WEC’s role as a yardstick for shifts in policy aims in the Vermont energy community regarding efficiency and rate design as well as other issues. Finally, he said, a cooperative is still a business. “We still have the responsibility to represent 12,000 households, and that’s a balancing act,” between fiscal responsibility and keeping rates as reasonable as possible, he said.

Over the rest of the meeting, members submitted well-wishes and appreciation for Reed and Bernstein through the Zoom chat.

## Broadband and grid update

The question of how high-speed internet will reach WEC members is now mostly understood, after many years and countless hours of problem-solving in partnership with Communications Union Districts (CUDs). As federal grants for broadband became available this year, WEC’s access to a low-interest

USDA loan was no longer the most cost-effective source of capital. “We’re fortunate WEC members will have broadband built out over the next several years,” provided by CUDs NEK Broadband, CVFiber, or ECFiber, Knowlton said. “We believe that’s a win, even though I don’t think I could have predicted the path at the start of this.”

Adjacent to the broadband project is smart grid development, Knowlton said. WEC is looking at grid upgrades that would incorporate advanced meters, progressive rate structures, and eventually, battery storage. In the future, better integrated net metering and intermittent solar and wind power will be “perhaps a more efficient way of making those sources reliable and dependable as what WEC currently provides you,” he said.

And, he continued, WEC will continue to uphold its duty to provide power safely and reliably. When a utility fails on that front, he pointed out, failure doesn’t just mean outages – it means people get hurt, or they lose some quality of life. “WEC will make the best use of today’s technology today, and as tomorrow’s technology becomes available, we’ll use that to be reliable as well as modern,” he concluded.

## Treasurer’s report

Treasurer Don Douglas usually leads with a joke, but this time he led with a million bucks. “We ended the year with net margins of \$1,040,204, and that was sufficient to meet all the bank’s requirements,” he reported. Those net margins, a buffer required by lenders and a marker of fiscal responsibility, ensure the Co-op has more than enough money on hand to do business. Eventually, each year’s net margins are returned to the membership in the form of capital credits.

More than \$9 million in capital credits has now been returned to the membership, said Douglas. Recently, he added, Barry Bernstein added up all the Co-op’s rate increases since it



WEC staff and Directors attended the virtual Annual Meeting from WEC’s office in East Montpelier. Other Directors and members joined from their homes. A few dozen people attended this year’s meeting. After the meeting, WEC leaders decided to hold an in-person member gathering on September 10.

began returning capital credits, and the total was about \$9 million. “You can see where we’re going with this,” he said.

Douglas welcomed Director of Finance & Administration Larry Monserrate, who joined Co-op staff in 2021, and praised the finance team for another clean audit. But he didn’t offer any jokes. “That’ll have to wait until we do this live again,” he said.

## General Manager’s report

In his first Annual Meeting report to the membership, General Manager Louis Porter said, “I grew up at the very end of a WEC line, a power line that goes through about a quarter mile of beaver pond.” Members of WEC’s operations team had recently described to Porter a memorable repair to his line: to restore power, WEC lineworkers had to take a boat to the pole and then climb the pole. The Co-op’s lines were originally strung to distribute power by the shortest route possible, he explained, which is “why it remains a difficult and frankly expensive territory to provide electricity across.”

Since joining WEC’s staff, Porter said, he personally experienced WEC’s cooperative principles in action, through the generosity of time and expertise of former GMs Patty Richards and Avram Patt, current and former Board members, and particularly the Co-op’s staff. He arrived at a point in WEC’s history, he said, when many factors and challenges converged: increasing storm severity due to climate change, and the necessity of policy responses to climate change; increasing expectations for electricity as a clean and reliable power source; COVID and climate migration leading to an influx of new members. “Our part will be well-informed and grounded in the history and background and principles of this co-op,” he promised. The three dozen or so employees of WEC could not accomplish so much, he added, without the support of the Co-op community, including the Board, membership, and other partners in public power.

## Q&A

With the ballot committee still counting, Knowlton opened the floor for public comment. Bud Haas of Bradford, a former Director, expressed disappointment at yet another virtual Annual Meeting and at the meeting’s attendance – about a tenth of typical in-person Annual Meeting attendance. He also endorsed the Board’s selection of Porter as GM.

Sandal Cate of East Montpelier said her son is acquiring an electric

vehicle and is nudging his parents to purchase one too. “I’m wondering what WEC’s vision is for helping individuals to acquire electric vehicles,” she said, pointing to charger installation, potential demand on the grid if a large number of people buy electric vehicles at the same time, and the personal factors that might make an EV a good or impractical choice. Knowlton responded that WEC offered a \$1,200 cash incentive to purchase an EV, and members who take advantage of it receive a Level II EVSE charger through WEC. In his experience as an EV driver, he added, he finds “it’s perfect for a local vehicle.”

Annie Reed added that WEC installed five charging stations throughout its territory: at Middlesex Park & Ride, Harwood Union High School, the Rumney School, at Cabot Creamery, and across from the Co-op’s office in East Montpelier.

Bill Powell, WEC’s Director of Products & Services, invited Sandal and Paul Cate and all members to reach out to him with their questions and factors. The decision also includes each member’s transformer size, wiring, and how much additional electric load their fuse box can handle. Before purchasing an EV, all members should call WEC for an electric load checkup as well as information about incentives and other support (see Energy Coach, p. 8).

Michael Duane wondered if the Co-op has seen an increase in new membership as the climate changes and people fled cities during the pandemic. Porter reported that WEC has seen a number of new connections, and new members’ electric use signals they are working from home.

With an hour elapsed and the ballot count still unfinished, musicians Doug Perkins and Patrick Ross took the screen. Members enjoyed their performance at the 2021 Annual Meeting, and they returned in 2022 with a broad selection of tunes performed on guitar, fiddle, and mandolin.

When the music finished, a quorum had been established. Annie Reed rose up in WEC’s conference room and announced, “I’m standing for my last official act,” as Secretary of the Board, declaring the election and official notice met bylaw requirements. Knowlton announced the passage of the bylaw, reiterated his gratitude to all candidates, and announced the election of Steven Farnham, Susan Alexander, and Betsy Allen. 🙌

## Election Results

### Vote totals for the Board of Directors election

\*Steven Farnham: 545  
\*Susan Alexander: 468  
\*Betsy Allen: 377  
Joseph “JJ” Vandette: 329  
Pat Barnes: 267  
Olivia Campbell Andersen: 204  
Rachel Onuf: 138  
Write-ins: 4

\*elected to the Board of Directors

Total ballots cast: 853  
Less spoiled: 0  
Less blank: 104  
Less unopened: 31  
Total valid ballots received: 718

### Bylaw amendment

Total “Yes”: 649  
Total “No”: 69

## Employee Anniversaries

In 2022, several WEC staff are celebrating milestone employment anniversaries. Thank you for your many years of service!

### Five years

Jamie Dailey, *First Class Lineworker*  
Rick Stergas, *Safety & Environment Compliance Specialist*

### Fifteen years

Doug desGroseilliers, *Utility Field Technician*  
Sandy Gendron, *Information Database Technician*  
Susan Golden, *Member Services Supervisor*  
Donnie Singleton, *Lineworker & Equipment Operator*

### Twenty years

Elaine Gonier, *Senior Member Services Representative*

# Getting to Know WEC Directors Susan Alexander, Betsy Allen, Steven Farnham

In 2022, WEC members elected one incumbent and two new Directors to the Board. Co-op Currents invited these three Directors to talk about the values and experience they bring to the role, how they'll balance vision and fiscal responsibility, and what interests them most. The following profiles do not necessarily represent the values and policy decisions set by WEC's Board as a whole, but rather represent the individual perspectives of these three Board members.

## Susan Alexander

Susan Alexander of Cabot was tapped by a Board member to run for an open seat several years ago, but she was too



busy to run. She loved that her electric utility was a cooperative, she felt good about WEC's leadership in renewable generation, and she liked that WEC was involved in the statewide conversation about climate policy, because she thinks it's unfortunate "to see decisions young people are making now are based on environmental crisis."

In 2022, with some extra time, she decided it was the year to run. And then she almost backed out, when she saw the number of candidates and the breadth of knowledge and experience they brought to their campaigns. "The class of 2022, there were some valedictorians, for sure," she said.

During her campaign Alexander was pleased with how many members contacted her, and the level of engagement she saw. "There are a lot of caring, concerned, and curious people out there who don't necessarily want to serve on the Board, but are clear about their expectations and want to be assured a lot of things are taken into consideration."

Many members contacted Alexander

with concerns about net metering, framed as an equity problem with "the majority of the membership footing the bill for those who are doing solar and not paying for the infrastructure. I got letters from people asking if I agree or disagree." Decisions like this aren't cut-and-dry, she said. Her response was to appreciate each writer's thoughtfulness in raising the issue, but that "I don't come to the board with that perfect knowledge and perfect experience, and I hope that's not the expectation of the membership. But I am clearly willing to learn."

Another juggle, she said, is lining up WEC's commitment to affordability and reliability with its commitment to the environment. Nobody gets everything they want in the end, she conceded. Alexander is not necessarily talking about meet-in-the-middle compromises, but rather, making decisions through sort of a ranked-choice grid approach. Often, it can turn out that an obviously good choice through one lens—say, replace all combustion-engine vehicles with electric vehicles—doesn't work for other reasons: affordability, sudden increase to grid load, battery-related environmental costs, and of course personal reasons. "We have to make rubrics and matrixes every time we make a decision," she pointed out. "You have to weigh all the options and give different weights to different factors to come up with what's, in the end, defensible, smart, and forward thinking." And, she said, there is honor in allowing decision makers the room to backtrack and amend decisions that have unintended consequences. "I think honesty and transparency are what's going to make us successful in the long run," she said.

Alexander works for a board as the independent contractor managing the Lamoille Solid Waste District's recycling and composting facilities. Reporting directly to a board, as well as serving on WEC's, improves her ability to understand staff needs and to contribute to open communication,

clarity, setting expectations, and relationship building, she said.

And, she said, she's already reached out to some candidates who were not elected this cycle, to make sure they stay engaged. "I thought there was some great knowledge and experience and good creative thinking. When people have obvious value and knowledge and want to be useful, that's a good thing to continue to capture," she said.

## Betsy Allen

Allen first thought about running for the Board several years ago, at the recommendation of her friend, former Board Secretary Annie Reed. But in 2022, she was newly retired from full-time work, and ready to dedicate the time. "I want to keep learning new things," she said. "New technology, and the relationship between electricity and our environment and climate change. There are big decisions to be made, like how to deal with net metering, which seems to be a hot topic."

As an educator and former business owner, Allen enjoys working on teams – the diversity of experience, personalities, and expertise, the complex logistics, the environmental factors. "One of the things that appealed to me about WEC is it's a group of people who are working with each other with a similar mission in mind, responding to the direction our country is going with climate change."

Before she participates in setting policy for the Co-op, Allen says, she needs to learn a lot. She's new to serving on a board, and she needs to learn more about the membership and all its nuances. As an example of that complexity, she described the question that stuck with her after a meeting where WEC leaders discussed how to help members who were unable to pay their bills, when the Co-op depends on that revenue – "if part of WEC's vision is supplying reliable electricity to all of its members in a fiscally responsible way, how do we do that?"

But Allen has lots of experience with hands-on energy use, and she is a student of new technology. About fifteen years ago, Allen chose to live off the grid with a solar and battery system—though installing solar was expensive at that time, it was part of her philosophical choice to live in as self-reliant and low-impact a manner as possible. She loves the simple, frugal lifestyle of rural Vermont: chopping her own wood, gardening, living quietly.

Now, grid-tied and living in Plainfield,

she's exploring the nuances of solar as it relates to the WEC membership. As a community, she said, Plainfield has talked about installing a community solar array. On one hand, net metering as it's currently structured leads to cost inequities. On the other hand, "people want to keep their bills down." If it works cooperatively, she said, she would certainly be interested in community solar.

When she was collecting signatures to get on WEC's ballot, she said, "questions about solar were definitely on people's minds." She asked a net-metering friend on a different utility's lines what their bill looked like, because "I wanted a better understanding of why it's not working here and what we can do. I certainly do believe in solar."

Allen is also on her second electric car, and has experienced both the transition from combustion to electric, and the progression of electric technology: what happens with batteries in the winter, how it drives in the summer, how it changes her bill. She's asked herself if she would drive all-electric if she were single or if she frequently drove long distances. Parking an EV to shop at the Hunger Mountain Co-op, she noted, is like having a baby or a dog: other EV drivers approach her and they talk about their cars.

Allen is attuned to battery storage as an important and still emerging technology. She likes the idea behind WEC's PowerShift concept: using heat pump water heaters or, in the future, electric vehicles as battery storage, that members can share with WEC's grid to reduce peak power. And she wonders if battery storage will allow for more equity with distributed generation, like net metering, "so it doesn't cost WEC money to have people have solar."

In her candidacy, Allen said members asked her a lot of questions about broadband – particularly younger members who work remotely. The direction is clearer now, she said, that Communications Union Districts have access to federal grants, and WEC's partnership no longer involves taking out a loan.

The second topic, she said, involves WEC's rate redesign. "There are still

*continued on page 7*

## Sign up for Outage Alerts on SmartHub

As of May 15, 2022, Washington Electric Co-op is sending emailed notifications of scheduled outages through SmartHub. To continue receiving outage updates by email, you must sign up through SmartHub, accessible through [wec.coop](http://wec.coop).

Outage updates will continue to be posted on the Outage Center page of [wec.coop](http://wec.coop), and auto-calls will be generated to those affected by outages.

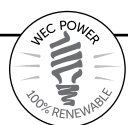
By updating your notifications settings in SmartHub, you will receive targeted, real-time information about the outage affecting your line, delivered right to your phone or email. You can also receive billing and usage alerts.

If you don't yet use SmartHub, you can start today: it's accessible by computer, tablet, or smartphone. Call in an outage, manage your usage, pay your bill, and review your payment history all in one place.

If you would like help setting up your account, a WEC Member Services Representative will be happy to help: call 802-223-5245.

## WEC in the News

At the end of April, Erica Heilman – East Calais resident, WEC member, and independent producer of the podcast *Rumble Strip Vermont* – rode along with WEC crews restoring power after a storm. Hear her story, which was featured on VPR: [wec.coop/2022/04/wec-featured-on-vpr-podcast/](http://wec.coop/2022/04/wec-featured-on-vpr-podcast/)



**Directors**

continued from page 6

people who are upset about the rate change, who worked so hard to cut down on their electricity," she noted. There needs to be more education about why the rate change was important, and how it compares across markets, she suggested. "We should talk more about that, to help people understand the base fee and how rates work," she suggested.

**Steven Farnham**

The only incumbent running during the 2022 election cycle, Steven Farnham said, "I have a particular interest in the future of the way we energize our homes." He sees his role on the Board



as a necessary, and sometimes lone, voice raising ideas that challenge conventional thinking. Farnham agrees that WEC's primary role is to provide electricity safely, reliably, and affordably to its membership, and to maintain fiscal responsibility so that it may continue to do so. Where his philosophy differs from that of his fellow Directors, he explained, is he believes WEC's objective ought to be "just energizing its members' homes, full stop. If that means the Co-op is a retailer and installer of home energy systems, that's what they are."

Farnham sees WEC entering the retail space—or re-entering the retail space, for those who remember the Co-op Store—as a way to recoup income lost as members install net metering. He raised the concept at members' meetings before he was first elected to the Board in 2019: "if our members are going to buy solar installations anyway," he asked, "why not have WEC sell it to them, and profit

from it, instead of somebody else?"

As it is currently structured, net metering shifts fixed costs onto members who do not net meter. Farnham thinks it's possible to make net metering a more equitable proposition – if statewide regulations changed to allow it – by charging net metering members a higher monthly membership fee, to more adequately cover their portion of infrastructure costs, or to implement a rate structure specific to net meterers. "You can't use communally-owned resources without paying your fair share for them, but that's what's happening now," he said.

A key difference between the status quo Farnham perceives and his own view is whether, in a cooperative utility, power sources ought to be collectively held. Farnham thinks there is room for individual ownership, like net metering, and that distributed generation allows more room for WEC to share its 100% renewable generated power with other utilities whose power mixes are not yet

so green.

Beneficial electrification is the idea that lower rates and financial incentives will help members cycle off of fossil fuel combustion heaters, vehicles, and other devices, reducing emissions and fossil fuel reliance. Farnham is concerned about what he sees as the prevailing idea that "beneficial electrification is the panacea that's going to solve all of our environmental problems, if it means all members must buy power from the Co-op, just because the Co-op is 100% renewable."

He said it's not only about freedom of choice, but about potential grid load. Farnham understands that WEC's landfill gas plant in Coventry is generating power at full capacity, and pointed to curtailments as a result of SHEI (the Sheffield-Highgate Export Interface) grid constraints that prevent some of the capacity that's already available from even being transmitted. If, he asked, electric demand increases as members switch off of fossil fuels, how will WEC supply that additional power?

Farnham thinks it will be bought off the grid, which would reduce the amount of renewable power on the market for utilities with a less green power mix. So, he would like to see WEC envision a future that encourages, and perhaps also harnesses, distributed generation installed and owned by its members. "If we all have our own solar array or microhydro, we're generating our own power, we're not putting that load on the grid, and that makes more of the green energy on the grid available to urban dwellers who need it because they don't have access to the resources we have."

Farnham hasn't explored the Co-op's role in distributed generation from a financial standpoint, because, he said, he's first trying to open the conversation. "The WEC Board should be having these conversations, saying, 'How could we make this work?'" he said.

He'd also like the Board to encourage more input from the membership at large. "I would like the Co-op to continue as a member-owned business, to provide goods and services to its members, rather than just being an electric utility. Other people are more traditional and would like the Co-op to remain more like what it is now. I represent this viewpoint, others represent the other, but every Board member has the responsibility to carry out their fiduciary responsibilities and make sure the lights stay on."



# Button Up 2022 Incentives for WEC Members

## Thermal Incentives

### Weatherization



**WEC**

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

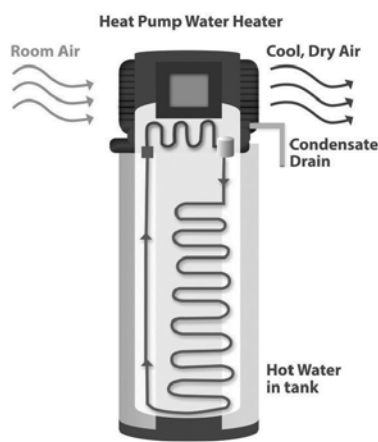
**Efficiency Vermont**

- Receive 50% of project cost back, up to \$1,000. Income-eligible Vermonters are eligible for up to \$3,000. <https://www.energysavings.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star>

### Heat Pump Incentives

**WEC & EVT 2022 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives**

	Point of purchase discount <sup>1</sup>	WEC bonus incentive
<b>Ductless - ≤2 tons</b>	\$350	\$250
<b>Ductless - &gt;2 tons</b>	\$450	\$250
<b>Ducted - ≤2 tons</b>	\$1,000	\$250
<b>Ducted - &gt;2-&lt;4 tons</b>	\$1,500	\$250
<b>Ducted - ≥4 tons</b>	\$2,000	\$250
<b>Air to water (A2W) heat pump</b>	\$1,000/ton	\$500
<b>Ground source heat pump (GSHP)</b>		
	EVT	WEC
Up to 10 tons:	\$2,100/ton	\$2,000
10-20 tons:	\$1,500/ton	\$1,000
20-50 tons	\$1,000/ton	\$ 500



<sup>1</sup> Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont

**Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives<sup>1</sup>**

	Point of purchase discount <sup>1</sup>	WEC bonus incentive <sup>4</sup>
<b>Replacing conventional electric hot water</b>	Up to \$600	-
<b>Replacing fossil-fired hot water system</b>	Up to \$600	\$250

WEC encourages members considering purchase of HPWH to select unit with CTA-2045 communication port, to enable future participation in a Co-op load management program

### Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers

**WEC**

- \$250 for first time installation of wood or pellet stove; replacement unit for existing stove is not eligible for either Efficiency Vermont or WEC incentives.

**Efficiency Vermont\***

- Central wood pellet furnaces and boilers: Work with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor to install a wood pellet boiler or furnace and get \$6,000 back (includes \$3,000 purchase rebate and \$3,000 installer incentive).

Note: WEC incentives of \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. See <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/energy-coach-home/>

\*Offers subject to change. See [EfficiencyVermont.com](https://www.energysavings.com) for current details.

802.224.2329 • [energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop)

## Have Your Finances Taken a Hit?

Don't let your WEC bill go past due, or grow beyond what you can manage. Help is available: A Member Services Representative will help you put together a budget that works for you. Plus, there are state programs that may help pay down your bill.

Call us today, and we'll help you put together a plan: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-932-5245.



**Cabot**


*continued from page 4*

by following weather reports that meteorologist and Co-op member Roger Hill prepares for Vermont utilities, and

posts alerts on [wec.coop](http://wec.coop). “So, a lot of you had ‘check alerts’ on your prep lists,” Nally told the class. “That’s one way you could check.”

The length of time to restore an outage depends – it could take from

half an hour to many days, said Kresock and desGroseilliers. If the outage is severe enough, Kresock told the class, utilities can request help from other utilities by way of a nationwide network called “mutual aid”.

Then the home utility’s crews work with visiting crews to restore power. “In a natural disaster, it takes many days to get the power back on,” desGroseilliers told the class. 



Doug desGrosilliers brought all his equipment for Cabot students to check out. Here, a student tries on a safety glove.



“Is it heavy?” When Doug desGroseilliers said yes, Cabot students lined up to try to lift his utility belt.

## Final Phase of Rate Design Effective July 1

On July 1, the final phase of WEC’s rate redesign takes effect:

- The residential monthly customer charge will rise to \$26.49
- The residential charge per kilowatt hour will drop to \$0.21149
- Members will continue to purchase the first 100 kilowatt hours each month at the reduced rate of \$0.08476.

This is not a rate increase. The monthly service charge

is increasing; the cost per kilowatt hour is decreasing. This stabilizes the Co-op’s finances and incentivizes members to use more electricity for home heating and transportation.

**Previous Co-op Currents coverage of WEC’s rate redesign:**

July 2018: “With New Rate Design Structure, WEC Looks to the Future”

January 2018: “Listening for Consensus”

June 2017: “WEC Eyes Changes to Its Rate Structure”

### Energy Coach: Call Before You Buy an EV

Ready to buy your first electric vehicle? Call WEC before you drive it home. Electric vehicle charging increases your electric load.



**The Energy Coach’s checklist:**

1. Look at your circuit breaker box. Is it a 100 or 200 amp box? How many remaining slots are there? Take a photo.
2. Call or email the Energy Coach to inquire about adding an EV to your peak load. If you email, attach the photo.
3. WEC’s teams will assess your service. You’ll learn what, if any, work needs to be done to prepare your home electrically for EV load, about how long it will take, and how much it will cost. Any work you may require from a qualified electrician is not part of this equation.
4. The Energy Coach also knows about available EV incentives. It never hurts to ask.

Contact the Energy Coach today:

**802-224-2329** or

[energycoach@wec.coop](mailto:energycoach@wec.coop).

CLASS OF SERVICE	PHASE 2 <i>Effective July 2021 billing date</i>		PHASE 3 <i>Effective July 2022 billing date</i>	
<b>Residential</b>	Monthly Customer Charge	\$22.25	Monthly Customer Charge	\$26.49
	1st 100 kWh/month	\$0.08476	1st 100 kWh/month	\$0.08476
	Over 100 kWh/month	\$0.22220	Over 100 kWh/month	\$0.21149
<b>Small Commercial</b>	Monthly Customer Charge	\$26.49	Monthly Customer Charge	\$26.49
	Per kWh/month	\$0.20136	Per kWh/month	\$0.20136
<b>Large Power</b>	Monthly Customer Charge	\$31.79	Monthly Customer Charge	\$31.79
	Demand Charge per kW/month	\$16.53	Demand Charge per kW/month	\$16.53
	Per kWh/month	\$0.11434	Per kWh/month	\$0.11434
<b>Time of Day</b>	Monthly Customer Charge	\$15.03	Monthly Customer Charge	\$15.03
	<b>Peak Hours</b>		<b>Peak Hours</b>	
	First 60 kWh/month	\$0.12025	First 60 kWh/month	\$0.12025
	All kWh over 60 kWh/month	\$0.29720	All kWh over 60 kWh/month	\$0.29720
	<b>Off Peak Hours</b>		<b>Off Peak Hours</b>	
	First 140 kWh/month	\$0.12025	First 140 kWh/month	\$0.12025
All kWh over 140 kWh/month	\$0.25273	All kWh over 140 kWh/month	\$0.25273	
<b>Security Light</b>	Per 100 Watt HPS/month	\$23.39	Per 100 Watt HPS/month	\$23.39
	Per 400 Watt HPS/month	\$46.78	Per 400 Watt HPS/month	\$46.78
	Per 30-40 Watt LED	\$22.04	Per 30-40 Watt LED	\$22.04
	Per 40-50 Watt LED	\$22.44	Per 40-50 Watt LED	\$22.44
	Per 50-60 Watt LED	\$23.37	Per 50-60 Watt LED	\$23.37
	Per 60-70 Watt LED	\$22.30	Per 60-70 Watt LED	\$22.30

