Fare Thee Well, Will

Will Lindner, 22-year editor of Co-op Currents, puts down his pen

For 22 years, Will Lindner has kept Washington Electric Co-op members informed with his sharp reporting and his neighborly style. The July 2017 issue was the last with Lindner as editor of Co-op Currents. Lindner, of Barre, is moving on to other pursuits.

He’s leaving an appreciative staff and board. “Will really came to know and love the Co-op. It was just such a pleasure to work with him, because he certainly understood what Washington Electric was all about,” said WEC board treasurer Don Douglas, who worked closely with Lindner on the Currents editorial committee. “He has a real gift for connecting with a lot of members. He writes like he’s close to the ground.”

In addition to his long tenure as editor of Currents, Co-op members may know Lindner, with his trademark long white whiskers and expressive blue eyes, from other fields of work and play. He’s reached Vermonters through Saturday night entertainment and the Sunday paper. He works with his hands, whether that means writing, playing music, or building the house that brought him to Vermont in the first place.

That house was his brother Dan’s, in Marshfield. The brothers grew up in Wood. The elder Lindner died tragically young, at age 41, and had already written several influential works.

Outgoing Currents editor Will Lindner, a true Renaissance man. An accomplished musician and writer, he departs for new adventures after 22 years with the Co-op.

That Rate Refund on Your September Bill

Beginning this September, Co-op members are receiving a one-time credit on their energy bills. This is a refund related to a change in rates that began earlier in the year.

WEC filed for a rate increase of 6.52% on November 15, 2016 for rates that went into effect January 1, 2017. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) approved the increase at the end of July, but regulators and WEC worked together to reduce the percentage to 5.95%.

Rules for cooperatives are that a temporary surcharge until approval is received from the PUC; explained Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden.

That surcharge showed up as a line item on bills for service provided from January through August 2017. When approval came through with a lower number, that meant WEC owed its members a refund to the tune of 0.57% on those prior eight months of surcharges.

“What they will see on their bills is a line item refund, and that’s the difference between the 6.52% that we asked for and the 5.95% that was approved,” said Golden.

continued on page 2
Finding Balance in Rate Structure and Renewable Growth

By Barry Bernstein

As summer winds down, you can feel the autumn in the air. Warm days, cool nights with that cool breeze, just causes you to realize it’s time to start buttoning up around the outside of the house and inside too.

Speaking of buttoning up, take a look at the graphic on page 7 showing how our Button Up! program saves you money on energy efficient purchases. It’s an opportunity for you to make your house warmer, more energy efficient, and less dependent on fossil fuels.

Rate Design

The board of directors is discussing rate design, or how WEC charges for its services. The philosophy behind our current rate structure is to encourage energy conservation. Low energy users find WEC rates to be very reasonable. We can personally attest to this on my own bill which is typically only $30 a month. But we need to evaluate this structure as our state moves toward 90% renewable energy by 2050. Our concern is if we encourage folks to move toward electric vehicles and electric home heating sources, that means more electric energy use. We want to help get members off fossil fuels, but our current rate structure doesn’t incentivize electric energy use at higher levels.

What’s the middle way between reforming our carbon footprint by using WEC’s 100% renewable energy instead of fossil fuel appliances, and staying committed to our core value of energy efficiency? We need your input. We will hold focus group discussions with members this fall. If you’re called, I hope you’ll chime in.

Too Much Power?

I feel it is important for our members to understand that in fully embracing a renewable grid, we must be forward-thinking in not stepping over ourselves. In the northern half of the state we are already experiencing curtailment of existing renewables to enable new renewables to come on line. We simply have too much generation in some areas in the state and limitations on the lines that connect projects to the grid. Some existing wind projects have had to be backed down to allow newer, smaller solar projects to operate.

In the energy industry, they call this “renewable cannibalization.” The grid operator doesn’t have dispatch control over many of the smaller and newer projects, so to maintain reliability of the grid, they back down the larger projects that they do have control over. The Sheffield wind project is producing less than it could, and we receive less value when energy is produced, due to lower market prices for the electricity in the area.

This affects generation at our renewable landfill methane plant in Coventry, too. We get fewer dollar credits for power produced at Coventry than we should, due to too much generation. Any new projects built in northern Vermont now add to the curtailment of existing renewables. State regulators, all electric utilities including the state’s transmission operator VELCO, and other stakeholders are meeting to identify short and long-term solutions. This issue affects all Vermont utilities. It adds to rate increase pressure along with other regional costs for transmission and reliability.

From the Home Front

My summer focused on recovery from my back surgery in late June. I am on the upswing of a six month recovery process, nearly at the halfway point. I had my surgery at Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC) in Berlin, by Dr. John Braun and his extremely capable staff. Spending eight days at CVMC made me really appreciate what a jewel we are fortunate to have in the heart of Central Vermont. All of the staff on the second floor—nurses, nurse aides, physical and occupational therapists, nutritional and environmental specialists, and kitchen staff—go out of their way to be professional, caring, and personal.

Evolve Tour and Community Meeting

We hope a few tour spots are coming up. I hope you will attend. We have an open house at our Coventry landfill generation plant on October 17 (see page 7 for more information). Staff will give fun and lively tours through the plant and answer your questions. This is a great time to see the plant up close. You can also check out the recent investment we made in the scrubbing technology that removes siloxanes from the gas stream. We spent $1.8 million on this new system (called an SRS) and the unit came on line in January 2017.

On October 12, we will be in Worcester for our annual fall community dinner and meeting. This is a great time to share a meal with neighbors, find out what’s going on at your electric Co-op, and talk to board members and staff. We want to hear what’s on your mind. Please see page 8 for details and reservation information.

Have a hopefully late Indian summer, and a great fall.
Focus on Rate Design, from WEC Focus Groups to Statewide Regulation Workshops

Also: Goodbyes, Welcomes, and Button Up!

By Patty Richards

Thank You Will Lindner

Please join me in a heartfelt thank you to Will Lindner, our long time editor of Co-op Currents, who is hanging up his editor hat. I don’t think Will is retiring in a classic sense, but I do think he will be enjoying more free time and less deadline-driven work. It has been a complete pleasure working with Will over the past several years. We had a delightful gathering with Will, his wife Nancy, and dog Jameson at his home. Board members, past and present WEC staff, and layout designer Tim Newcomb and his wife Sharon came together to wish him well and celebrate his 22 years of writing for Co-op Currents. We shared a meal, reminisced, and talked about Will’s future plans, including family fun, travel, and music. We all hope Will’s creative work will continue to flow, and we look forward to seeing him on the bestsellers list.

Welcome New Employees and New Editor

We are excited to bring on a few new faces to the WEC team: Tyler Skinner joins us as an apprentice lineman. He will be out and about working with our seasoned line crew to perform regular maintenance and to restore power during storms. Rick Stergas joins us as Safety and Environmental Coordinator. His important role maintains the safety culture and environmental standards that WEC upholds.

Inside the building, Sy Daubenspeck joins us in the position of Plant Accountant. Sy joins us with many years of utility accounting experience, and we look forward to tapping his wealth of knowledge.

We also introduce you to our new editor Katie Titterton, who is taking over the reins from Will. You will see Katie at upcoming meetings and events, and we look forward to working with her to provide you updates and energy news through Co-op Currents.

Please join me in welcoming all our new employees and our new editor to the WEC team. We are all dedicated to providing you, our member-owners, top-notch service each and every day!

Button Up Your Home

Many members are taking advantage of incentive dollars from our Button Up! program (formerly known as Tier III program) to help lower their fossil fuel use. We still have dollars available, so please contact us! WEC gives members money to lower their carbon footprints. Yes, you read that right, and in combination with Efficiency Vermont incentives and others, it adds up to a lot. Please see the table on page 7 to see how much you can save on energy-efficient appliances through Button Up! The program includes financial incentives to weatherize homes; install solar hot water systems, heat pump hot water systems, and wood-pellet boiler systems; and to add cold climate heat pumps in tight, well-weatherized homes.

WEC is committed to working with its members to achieve meaningful changes, and we want to work with you to lower your carbon footprint and Vermont’s greenhouse gas impacts. So if you are looking to weatherize your home and to make some energy-saving changes, this is a great time to do it. We encourage you to call Bill Powell, the Energy Coach here at Washington Electric, to learn more: 802-223-3245 or energycoach@wec.coop.

Rate Design Focus Groups

Vermont’s goal is to use 90% renewable energy by 2050 for all types of energy: electric, transportation, and heating. Even though WEC’s power supply is already 100% renewable, we are still affected by state mandates and changes in the statewide energy landscape. As we look to the future, WEC is evaluating how it charges for service.

The fundamental question is: Can we reach the state’s goals using the current way we charge for electric service? As you may know, WEC has a low monthly fixed charge ($12.97). This charge covers only a small portion of WEC’s basic service and fixed costs. The vast majority of WEC’s fixed costs are covered in its two tiered energy rate: the first 200 kWh is inexpensive at 10.373 cents per kWh. Anything used above 200 kWh is charged at the rate of 23.16 cents per kWh. The rate structure is designed to encourage energy conservation.

We want to know what our members think about the current way we charge, and we also want to find out what folks think about alternatives. For example: one idea is to increase the monthly fixed charge, but to lower the cost per kWh for energy use. This could encourage more folks to switch to electric vehicles, rather than burning gasoline to get around. Since WEC’s power is 100% renewable, that change would significantly benefit our environment.

However, we know this is complicated. So, in order to find out what members think, we're assembling focus groups to gain your important feedback, reactions, and opinions.

What this means is we’ll ask a small representative sample of Co-op members to discuss our rates and how we charge for service. This sample group will give us information about what our larger membership thinks. The focus group research technique is commonly used to learn about a population's perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product or service. We believe focus groups will be a very informative and helpful part of WEC's rate design discussion and process. If you are called on, we hope you will share your thoughts with us.

Public Utility Commission Rate Regulation Proceeding

At the same time WEC is exploring how it charges for electric service, the state’s regulators are asking questions regarding rate regulation and rate design as well. WEC is attending these workshops and we will work with regulators on this important topic. WEC will factor in the regulatory work and outcomes as it explores rate design options. The proceeding is expected to span several months. We will keep you apprised.

Cyber Security

The risks of cyber threats and our duties of reliability and maintaining member data privacy are constantly on our minds. Occasionally we are asked questions about cyber risk from members. Recently a member called and asked about cyber security threats to our power system long term. We had a productive and inspiring discussion; I explained that yes, we are aware, and most importantly, we are prepared. Cyber threats not only include risks to technology, but also hacked access to WEC financial data or member data; damage to computer equipment, and more. This is a detailed and complex topic. We are planning a series of articles to address and explore cyber security threats and risks, and how WEC stays ahead of the tech curve to keep data and systems safe. Stay tuned to learn more about this important and multi-dimensional issue in future editions of Co-op Currents.

Integrated Resource Plan Public Hearing

Every three years WEC must complete and file an Integrated Resource Plan with state regulators. This document describes how WEC meets members’ electricity needs reliably, securely, and sustainably. It's a public document on where your power comes from—and for the next twenty years. The newest plan is on WEC's website and we welcome feedback.

Or, learn more and give WEC and state regulators feedback in person. A public hearing run by the Public Utility Commission (PUC) will be held on October 3rd at 7 p.m. at WEC’s office in East Montpelier.

If you are unable to attend the public hearing, you may submit written comments to the Public Utility Commission via email at puc.clerk@vermont.gov, through the ePUC electronic filing system, or via regular mail sent to Vermont Public Utility Commission, 112 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602-2701. Please include the case number, 17-3664-FET, when submitting written comments.
One of the ways WEC is different from other utilities is that as a cooperative, we return money to our members. This fall WEC will issue capital credit refunds to current and former members, as authorized by the Board of Directors. Under the 2017 Equity Distribution Plan, capital credits will be returned to creditworthy members Jan 1, 2017 and through 2016. An eligible member is one who has been a member of record in 2013 for Contribution in Aid of Construction (CIAOC). The Board of Directors aims to distribute approximately $270,000 in 2017, which is $260,000 more than the amount allocated for refunds in 2016.

Capital credits are allocated to Co-op members for those years in which WEC's revenues exceed its operating expenses. The credit receives a payment for any given year is determined by the amount of excess revenue received and the amount that member paid WEC for electricity.

WEC’s practice is to divide capital credit distribution between FIFO (first in, first out) and LIFO (last in, first out) plans. This pays out to both long-term or former (or “first”) members and current or (last)” members. FIFO distribution plans reach back to pay off historical capital credit accounts. Since WEC started distributing capital credits in 1998, it has retired allocations from 1939 through 1993. FIFO distribution plans pay the most recent allocations, so current members may enjoy the benefits of belonging to a cooperative.

Former Co-op members must have a minimum $20 capital credit distribution, and must submit an authorization to the Co-op by September 30 to be eligible for a refund. Eligible current members will receive refunds as a credit on their electric bills, regardless of the amount.

Any current or former member may donate their capital credit refunds to the Community Fund by contacting the Washington Electric Cooperative at 1-800-WEC-5245. Contributions made by members in 2017 will add to any unspent monies in the Fund. The Fund makes financial contributions to qualifying community causes, per WEC Policy 6. A year-end report on 2017 Community Fund activities will be published in Co-op Currents in 2018.

All individual retreats will be reduced by any uncollectible or delinquent amount(s) owed to the Cooperative, as permitted by the WEC Bylaws. No early retreats will be made to the estates of deceased members.

Earlier this summer WEC sent Capital Credit Patronage Refund Authorizations to eligible former members. Listed below are the names of people or accounts whose authorizations were returned as undeliverable. WEC asks friends, acquaintances, and relatives of the people listed here to contact those potential recipients or their rightful heirs, and have the former member or beneficiary contact Washington Electric Cooperative direct at 1-800-223-5245.

WEC will issue this year’s capital credit refunds in November, 2017.
Serving more than 10,800 member/owners in central Vermont. A rural electric cooperative since 1939.

www.washingtonelectric.coop

Steven

Sorrells & Rouselle, LLP

Swank, Todd

Swam, Wolcott

Sweat,645	

Sweetser, Clyde

Squires, Jeffrey

Squires, Peter

Squires, Stuart

Squires, Philip

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Electric vehicles are becoming mainstream. Washington Electric Co-op now has five EV charging stations, and recently partnered with Freedom Nissan to offer members a steep discount on the all-electric Leaf. But what’s it like to actually be behind the wheel every day?

We asked WEC board member Steve Knowlton of Montpelier, who with his wife Lindy Biggs, leased a Nissan Leaf in 2013. “We liked the idea of an electric vehicle for various reasons: the obvious benefit of reducing our fossil fuel usage, but also kind of an experiment,” Knowlton said. The couple already drove a pickup and a hybrid. “Maybe I was expecting a glorified golf cart, thinking it was a toy, not a real car,” he said. “But it was. It’s fun to drive and responsive.”

Knowlton and Biggs do most of their traveling locally, so “for us it was the perfect around-town car,” he said. They continued to use their hybrid for longer journeys, though. “I think everyone who’s driven an EV ultimately suffers from the disease of ‘range anxiety.’ Are you going to get where you want to go? That’s a real concern,” he said.

2017 Leafs are advertised to have a 107-mile range. It’s worth noting that range numbers are improving quickly, according to David Roberts, the Drive Electric Vermont Coordinator for Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC), and a 2015 Leaf driver himself. The most common reasons people hesitate to go electric, he says, are too-high cost, too-low range, and too few all-wheel drive options for rural drivers.

Manufacturers are listening. “Cost is continuing to come down and range is increasing,” Roberts said, pointing to an anticipated increase in range in the 2018 Leaf, the 238 mile range of the 2017 Chevrolet Bolt, and improved electric range in plug-in hybrids. All-wheel options tend to be offered by higher end brands, like Volvo and BMW, he said, but more options are coming soon, including a Mitsubishi Outlander hybrid, and Volkswagen’s just-announced electric Microbus.

So what about Vermont winter driving? Cold weather causes the defroster to drain the battery—Knowlton said one cold night, they realized they’d need to leave the defroster off to make it home. “So it was like we were driving in a 1960s VW Beetle,” he said, clearly familiar with the quirks of that other iconic vehicle.

But, he pointed out, newer EV models have more efficient heat pump defrosters. And their Leaf is a peach in the snow. It’s heavy, and Knowlton says it has higher clearance than a Prius. And for those of us with a different kind of anxiety—let’s call it Cold Start Anxiety, “If it’s 20 below and you’ve got a dicey carburetor or battery,” Knowlton said, those fears are gone. “No matter what the temperature, this thing will go.”

Usually, Knowlton and Biggs plugged in the Leaf at home and forgot about it—but once or twice, they arrived at an EV station needing a charge only to find it was in use, or the credit card machine didn’t work. Hunting out a charging station in an unfamiliar area is a little nerve-wracking, Knowlton said. But all you really need, he pointed out, is an outdoor socket. And the time it takes to charge the car. “I’ve been saving money on maintenance and gasoline,” said Roberts. The cost to charge is equivalent to about $1.50, he said, which is roughly $0.90 less than a gallon of gas these days. He’s been paying for annual inspections, tire rotations, battery checks, and nothing else.

Knowlton suggested the car is currently best for commuters, or people driving about 40 miles out and back each day. Or people, like Knowlton and Biggs, who are interested in trying something new: “It’s fun to pay attention, as you go downhill, the battery charges back up again,” said Knowlton. “You get some of that kinetic energy returned to you. You pay attention to the nuances of a road, whether you’re going down or uphill. It adds a little bit of curiosity to one’s driving experience.”

In sum:

**Pros:**
- Tight turning radius, quiet, needs no oil changes and virtually no other service. Charging is cheaper than gas. Plenty of torque, no trouble getting up steep hills or starting under any circumstances. Knowlton: “I just love the way it drives! It’s like putting on sneakers.”
- **Cons:** Range anxiety, range goes down in cold weather, long charge times (if you’re in a hurry). Good for: Around-town driving and commuting. Knowlton: “If you live within 30-40 miles of where you work, there should be no problem with range anxiety at all. If you live 60-70 miles, then you’ll just have to count on charging up wherever it is that you’re going.”

Co-op members who drive all-electric vehicles—we want to hear from you! Why did you go electric? What do you like? What needs fixing? Write to currents@wec.coop. And if you’re curious about range, cost, and availability of different electric vehicles, visit driveelectricvt.com.

WEC members and staff enjoy dinner before the 2016 Community Meeting in Cookeville. See p. 8 to register for this year’s meeting in Worcester on October 12.

To call the Co-op, dial 223-5245 Mon - Thu 7:30 am – 5 pm and Fri 7:30 am – 4 pm.; toll-free for reporting outages & emergencies, 1-800-WEC-5245.
An aerial view of the Coventry Landfill plant from 2009. The plant generates electric power from landfill methane, harnessing a greenhouse gas into a renewable energy resource and supplying WEC members with an environmentally and financially stable electric source.

Annual Open House at Coventry Landfill

Join Washington Electric Co-op for an open house and tours of our Coventry landfill methane generation facility in Coventry, Vermont.

Tuesday, October 17, 2017
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
184 Landfill Lane, Coventry
Reservations are not required for individual visits.
To join a carpool or book a specific tour time for a large group, please contact Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 or dawn.johnson@wec.coop.

What’s my incentive to Button Up?

If you’re looking to seal up your home, or are in the market for energy-efficient heating systems, WEC’s Button Up! home energy efficiency program offers cash incentives to members. In combination with Efficiency Vermont discounts and grants from the Clean Energy Development Fund, you could save a lot of money:

Before you buy any new energy-efficient appliance, call Bill Powell, WEC’s Energy Coach, to learn how you can take full advantage of this program:

802-224-2329
energycoach@wec.coop
Fare Thee Well, Will continued from page 1

works.

But the “hero of my life,” Lindner said, was his mother, Eleanor Lindner. Widowed young, she became a teacher and raised three kids by herself. Lindner remembers her as a courageous and hardworking woman, “conscientious and devoted” to her children and students.

With raw talent and values sculpted by those parents, Lindner began writing in college, so soon established himself as a journalist. He was hired by the Times Argus as a reporter, and in short order became the editorial page editor and a columnist.

It was around this time he began paying close attention to Vermont’s decision whether or not to deregulate utilities, and to the Co-op’s response. The leadership of then-General Manager Joe Bongiovanni and Board President Barry Bernstein showed “a real commitment to the cooperative way of doing things,” he recalled. It wasn’t so much about self-preservation, he remembered, but concern that a deregulated, for-profit utility landscape would have no incentive to serve WEC’s rural membership nearly so well as the Co-op did.

This drew him in. In 1995, Lindner became the editor of Co-op Currents. Since the deregulation debate, he said, the board and staff have shown “a commitment to the membership that’s played out in so many ways. Working for them has enabled me to feel like I’m part of a mission I really believe in.”

Lindner has covered some big stories during his tenure. His most memorable milestones include the Co-op leaving its contract with now-defunct nuclear plant Vermont Yankee; the 2011 May floods that swamped the Co-op offices; WEC’s advances in renewable energy, including the development of the Coventry landfill generator; and net metering.

“...the Co-op has been really great about taking stands I think are courageous,” he said with admiration, including supporting renewable energy sources early on, and standing up for every member along the power line. Perhaps it’s his journalist’s sense of curiosity, or his musician’s understanding of rhythm and harmony, but Lindner said he’s always enjoyed tackling the complex issues WEC faces—and is often first among utilities to address.

“His uniqueness is he was able to go into whatever story he covered, on any issue, and be receptive and be with the person he was interviewing and writing about. He’s got a realness to him that comes through in his stories,” said Bernstein. “He’s part of the Co-op fabric. He opened himself up to all of our employees, all of our history, all of our membership in an honest and forthright way. That’s a great trait to have for someone who’s writing about other people.”

Indeed, Lindner said more than anything, he loved working with the people of WEC. “I have always liked writing about what people do for their work,” he said. All Co-op staff, he said, are “really dedicated to the work they do. And dedicated to the cooperative aspect of the work they do, serving people, helping people out. You hear great stories from the line crew: they were working all night, got somebody’s power on, and that person comes out with coffee and cupcakes.”

—Will Lindner

Performing Arts Center. They’ve always played music together, and they always will, he said. And Lindner’s adult children, both graduates of Spaulding High School now far-flung, have been known to chime in. His daughter Shannon, now in Portland, Maine, and son Travis, now in Los Angeles, each contributed a tune to Lindner’s recent CD Life, Still, with Mandolin. Recently, driving home from visiting his daughter, Lindner stopped to walk his pup, Jameson, in Seyon Pond State Park in Groton. Attuned to the power landscape after 22 years on the beat, he could tell, out in the middle of the forest, that the poles were from the 1940s. It caused him to reflect on his time at the Co-op. Thinking about the crews that installed those poles 70-something years ago, he said, “That’s how hard it is to serve rural people. That’s the Co-op’s mission. And I think that’s great. The people at the ends of those lines are as important as the people close to the substations.”

Lindner exits the stage with a tip of his ball cap. “I really wish the Co-op luck. I believe so strongly in their values as an organization and the way they conduct themselves. It ain’t easy or simple.”

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## WEC Community Meeting

**Dinner Reservation**

(No charge for the dinner.)

2017 Community Meeting

Worcester Town Hall  •  October 12, 2017

Dinner meeting will begin with dinner at 6 p.m. followed by discussion on topics of interest to you and your community. While reservations are required for the dinner, it is not necessary to preregister for the discussion which will begin at approximately 7 p.m.

The dinner meeting, to benefit the Doty Local Foods Program, will be held at the Worcester Town Hall, 20 Worcester Village Road, Worcester, VT 05682. The menu for the evening includes: soup, salad, sandwiches, dessert and beverage, catered by the Post Office Café.

To make a reservation for the dinner meeting, please fill out the reservation form and return it to WEC, Attn: Dawn Johnson, PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651. There is no charge for the meal. Reservations must be received at the Co-op by the morning of October 4. Thank you.

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You Are Invited—Thursday, October 12, 2017

WEC Community Meeting

**Doors open at 5:30 p.m.**

**Dinner begins at 6 p.m.**

Please join WEC staff, directors, and members at a dinner meeting and informational discussion on Thursday, October 12, 2017. The meeting will begin with dinner at 6 p.m. followed by discussion on topics of interest to you and your community. While reservations are required for the dinner, it is not necessary to preregister for the discussion which will begin at approximately 7 p.m.

The dinner meeting, to benefit the Doty Local Foods Program, will be held at the Worcester Town Hall, 20 Worcester Village Road, Worcester, VT 05682. The menu for the evening includes: soup, salad, sandwiches, dessert and beverage, catered by the Post Office Café.

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