

Alexander, Powell, Allen Elected at 2025 Annual Meeting

Meeting Themes Include Flood Response, Emerging Technology, and Potential Impacts of National Policy Uncertainty

Susan Alexander and Board Secretary Betsy Allen, both one-term incumbents, were re-elected to Washington Electric Co-op's Board of Directors. They were joined by first-time candidate Bill Powell, who retired from WEC staff in late 2024 before declaring his candidacy. Two-term incumbent Steven Farnham and candidate Ian Buchanan finished fourth and fifth. Every year, three of the Board's nine seats are open for election; all candidates run at-large.

President Stephen Knowlton announced the results midway through the Annual Meeting. Before congratulating the three elected Directors, he said, "I want to offer heartfelt appreciation to Steve and Ian," noting their thoughtful contributions and appreciating Farnham's six years of service on the Board.

2025 Annual Meeting

May 1 was a warm and beautiful day during a late and rainy spring. That may be the reason Annual Meeting attendance was lighter than its RSVPs – but the 2025 vote count was higher than in 2024, which also had a five-way contested election.

As members streamed into the Barre Auditorium, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist David Young started the program with a Safety Moment. Building off featured speaker Mike Kline's topic, Young

focused on flood safety: preparing for floods, understanding risk terms (like "watch," which means conditions for the weather event are possible, and "warning," which means the event is happening or likely to happen very soon). Most importantly, Young described the dangerous power of moving water and its ability, at different depths, to move a person or a car.

Mike Kline, retired State Rivers Program Manager, followed with his presentation on rethinking flood recovery with the watershed in mind. Members responded favorably. Gwenna Peters of Duxbury, attending her first-ever Annual Meeting, appreciated Kline's ideas and remarked, "If only we could get people to apply it!"

Officers' Remarks

Members and guests visited and enjoyed a buffet dinner before President Knowlton called the meeting to order. After the meeting formalities, Knowlton welcomed members and special guests from law firm Tarrant, Gillies & Shems; sister co-op Vermont Electric Co-op; VELCO; and Efficiency Vermont. General Manager Louis Porter acknowledged four staff celebrating milestone anniversaries with the Co-op—a combined total of 75 years of loyal service.

Knowlton began his remarks by observing, "I really like these meetings.

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May 1, the date of WEC's 86th Annual Meeting, was Sandra and David Batchelder's lucky day: each drew a door prize (a quart of maple syrup from Farnham Farm Sugaring and a Walmart gift card). "The last time my name came up in a lottery, it was the draft," quipped David.

Why Streams Flood—and What We Can Do About It

Mike Kline, retired State Rivers Program Manager and WEC member from the Bear Swamp area of Middlesex, was the Annual Meeting's featured speaker. He discussed flooding causes and potential mitigation strategies, drawing from past flood events and stream management practices in Vermont.

Kline pointed out WEC is a "headwater utility," with a service area of steep, narrow valleys in the upland headwaters of seven major Vermont watersheds. Reflecting on flood events over the last 15 years, from Tropical Storm Irene to the consecutive July 10 storms in 2023 and 2024, Kline described the emotional

We're fighting against a process we haven't dealt with much before: a valley reforming process. I'm proposing we need to have a different response in recovery.

— Mike Kline

experience of a flood like a bereavement: shock, overwhelm, heartbreak. Flood damage to private property and public property and infrastructure is hard to bear, and expensive to fix. Rebuild infrastructure in more or less the same mold and in the same location, and the next flood will wash it away. Kline proposed breaking this cycle by reconsidering the space streams and rivers need for floodplain and water storage.

Over the course of human history, people have put enormous effort and energy into straightening and channeling waterways in order to

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651


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Lineworker appreciation at the Statehouse. P. 8



WEC members enter the Barre Auditorium for the Co-op's 86th Annual Meeting.

President's and General Manager's Message

New Staff Support WEC's Mission

Recap of Annual Meeting Election Results and Mike Kline Presentation on Waterways, Grant Funding Increases

Annual Meeting

Louis: Our members re-elected Susan Alexander and Betsy Allen to their second terms on our Board of Directors. Both of them contributed tremendous wisdom and expertise to our Co-op leadership in their first terms. Members also elected Bill Powell, whom many know from his 33 years as a staff member of Washington Electric, before he retired this past fall. I'm glad to be working again with Bill in this new capacity and pleased to welcome back Susan and Betsy.

I say this a lot: Washington Electric is lucky it's had contested elections and people interested in serving on the Board. That's not always the case for other civic organizations and nonprofits. We're fortunate to have strong candidates and more people interested in running than there are seats available. Our voting numbers are strong for an organization of our size, and we have a lot of members willing to fill out a ballot. This past election, there was not a candidate running who wouldn't have brought value and knowledge to Washington Electric.

Steve: I agree with Louis. Having a number of candidates running for the three open seats is ultimately useful to the Co-op. Board turnover is important—getting new voices, educating more regular members like myself about what their Co-op does and how it works so that we can better

serve the entire membership as we come to better understand the energy environment in Vermont. That said, it's bittersweet to have five people run and tell two of them they weren't elected. It's different from a political election. I'm proud that Co-op members put their names forward in good faith. I think of the Board as an opportunity for service, and I appreciate that we're able to fill our seats with qualified and diverse candidates.

At the Annual Meeting, I thought members asked some interesting questions, many of which were framed as: "What can the Co-op do for its members?" While it's hard to give one answer that fits all situations, my general response is that the Co-op tries to use member resources in the best interests of all members. We're always seeking solutions that benefit as many people as equitably as possible. In my opinion, that's a fundamental difference between a co-op and an investor-owned utility.

Louis: I loved that he referred to Washington Electric as a "headwaters utility." Given my background, I should've thought of that—and he's exactly right. We serve some of the most remote, rural, and mountainous parts of our towns, connected by the headwaters of streams and rivers. It's also an interesting way of looking at our service map and not just seeing village centers and paved roads or dirt roads, but rivers and streams. It's a fascinating perspective on our territory and areas we serve.

It also has practical implications. After the 2023 flood, we thought we'd escaped much of the damage. But in 2024, we saw serious erosion along those headwater streams, and that erosion caused infrastructure damage. His presentation really drove home the connection between our natural geography and the utility infrastructure that follows those same valleys.


Steve: I had a similar reaction. When Mike emphasized WEC as a headwaters utility, it reminded me that every rural electric utility has unique characteristics. Serving the slopes of a headwaters region presents very different challenges from serving valley towns or flatlands. I've learned as a Board member that utilities are not one-size-fits-all. Each utility has to develop targeted and sometimes unique approaches based on its own terrain and demographics of the residents it serves.

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Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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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 us, at 224-2332, or visit wec.coop/board.

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Got something to say?

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





Welcome New Staff

Louis: We have five new WEC employees I want to introduce.

First, Jeff Boisvert is our new Substation Technician, replacing Ed Schunk. We're very happy to have him on board—he's already doing good work, making sure our substations are up to date, and working with David Young, who you know from the Safety Minute column on page 8, on safety and environmental compliance. Jeff is also responsible for inspecting poles. He's very qualified and a field pro, having worked all over the world in some really remote and fascinating locations. We're grateful Ed left things in good shape and grateful to have Jeff taking over.

Second, we've hired Pat Davis as our new Right-of-Way Coordinator. Pat has a lot of experience in forestry and working with the public. He and his wife recently moved up from North Carolina and are now living in Calais. He's from the Northeast, so he knows our trees. Pat is working on new and improved approaches to our right-of-way coordination and management—he's updating our RFPs for right-of-way contractors, revising our vegetation management plan, and overseeing a pilot project with a company called AiDASH.

AiDASH uses satellite photos to create 3D renderings of tree coverage along our lines. They help identify where we can reduce outages most effectively through right-of-way clearing. They also offer tools for managing right-of-way crews and contractor bids. Pat will work with Dave Kresock, Director of Engineering and Operations, and me to evaluate the pilot and decide whether to expand AiDash's services at the end of the year.

Steve: Some members have expressed to us an interest in seeing more attention paid to right-of-way management. Louis just described the attention we're giving it. I've asked the Board's Power and Operations



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– Stephen Knowlton

Committee to focus attention on the right-of-way and vegetation management programs in the near future. We know it's important—and our members know it's important.

Louis: It's a big budget item. We spend over a million dollars a year on right-of-way clearing—both regular and storm-related. That's a lot of money.

We've also added an Apprentice Lineworker to the line crew, Parker Perron. That position was approved by the Board as an expansion of our line crew, so we're excited to have Parker on board. Parker joined us in the past couple of weeks. He trained at the

Southeast Lineman Training Center in Georgia. He's also worked with VPPSA and works in electrical systems as a member of the Air National Guard.

Adam Forant joins us as a Utility Field Technician. He has already proven to be a valuable member of the WEC team and an asset for our members. Field technicians play a vital role at WEC as they work with members on line extensions and upgrades and help our engineering and operations folks build and maintain WEC's 1,300 miles of power lines. They also serve as important connections between WEC and our members as well as partners like towns and electrical contractors. Adam is already doing a terrific job and our members are lucky to have him.

Finally, Brian Callnan is a new addition to our Management Team as our Director of Regulatory and Power Supply. Brian grew up in Middlesex and graduated from U-32. He worked for the Burlington Electric Department and Vermont Public Power Supply Authority [VPPSA], was head of power supply for the New Hampshire Electric Co-op, and most recently led the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire. He brings more than 22 years of public power experience, primarily in power supply and regulatory affairs, but also

in developing innovative energy solutions. We're excited he's joined the team to help WEC meet its regulatory compliance and power supply planning needs.

The complexity of state and federal regulations has grown, and our obligations have grown along with it. We need a more coordinated approach. Brian's position is new, but it's really a reworking of senior staff focusing on what WEC needs. While most of our power is secured through long-term contracts, those begin to expire in the early 2030s. We need to do the day-to-day work well and prepare strategically for what comes next. We're maintaining our contract with VPPSA for daily power supply operations and Brian will be working closely with them to think long-term—how much power we'll need, where it will come from, how we'll secure it at a reasonable price, and how to match it to what members want.



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– Louis Porter

Grant Money

Louis: Talking about grant funding is a little tricky because the details can change quickly, but as of now, Washington Electric has four different grants that are either awarded or very likely to be awarded.

We've been awarded \$2.25 million in state money toward upgrading our advanced meter system upgrade. There's also \$2.5 million in congressionally directed spending through Senator Sanders' office—we're still working on the grant agreement for that. We have \$1.3 million in federal grid grant funding administered by the state.

We're also collaborating with VPPSA and Burlington Electric Department on a grant-funded pilot project, called the Energy Storage Access Project to scale battery storage to benefit income-qualified members and municipal systems. Funding includes battery systems and a demand-side energy management system; WEC's portion is unknown at this point, but we anticipate it will be about \$600,000. We'll discuss this more in future issues of *Co-op Currents*.

All told, we're looking at several million in confirmed or highly likely grants. That's work that would

otherwise be delayed, would not occur at all, or would need to be funded through loans that WEC members would be responsible for repaying. We're grateful for this support and excited to do the work it represents, because it will improve service and reliability.

That said, every dollar of grant money comes with accountability—reporting, planning, compliance—and with a required match. WEC members will be responsible for part of that match. This is probably the most grant money we've worked with at one time, and it's a real operational and management task to keep it organized and meet all the requirements.

There are a few reasons we've been so successful in securing this money. First, there's just a lot of federal infrastructure funding out there right now. Second, Steve and I have made it a priority—from the time he became President and I became

General Manager—to make sure WEC members are getting their share of that money. Third, both state and federal officials recognize that Washington Electric serves a physically and financially challenging territory, and that strengthens our case when we're in line for competitive funding.

We also recognized that in order to get and manage these grants, we needed someone in a dedicated position. That's why we created JJ's role [JJ Vandette, Director of Special Projects and Innovation]. Some of these grants were already in the pipeline, but acquiring them and then managing them properly are two separate things—and JJ has the capacity to do both.

Steve: The investment in a whole-utility approach and focused expertise at this level of management is something the Board had been seeking. Louis' insight to recognize the strategic need and seize the opportunity, to bring in team members with the skills and knowledge to make it happen is a credit to his leadership. Having that capability is having a positive impact on the Co-op going forward. We'll monitor our progress, and evolve our decisions and actions accordingly. 🐸

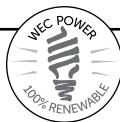
Don's Chronicles

Co-op Currents highlights from
Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair

"In his Annual Meeting presentation, Mike Kline talked about how WEC is a headwaters utility. We're actually the headwaters for several different watersheds: over in Plainfield, they drain into the Winooski and Lake Champlain; over where I am in Orange, we drain into the Connecticut River. As someone who previously thought we should just ditch the rivers, I really got something out of Mike's talk—well, I guess we shouldn't! If you missed hearing him in person, read the story on page 1."



**Go Green. Go Electric.
Go WEC!**

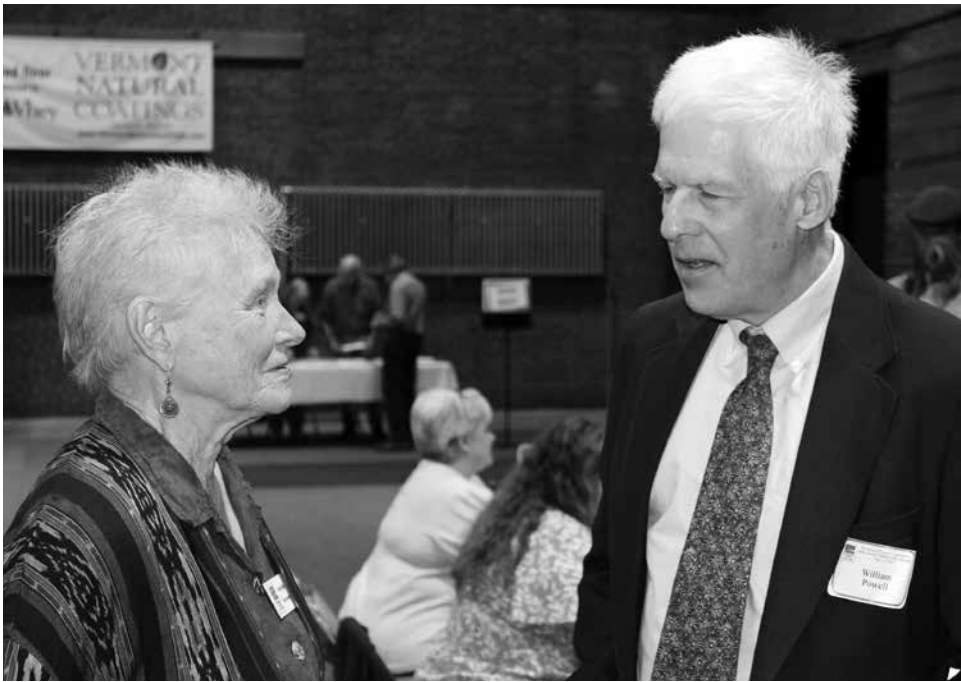


Getting to Know WEC Director Bill Powell

Co-op Currents invites new WEC Directors to talk about the values and experience they bring to the role, how they'll balance vision and fiscal responsibility, and what drives them to serve fellow members. Profiles do not necessarily represent the values and policy decisions set by WEC's Board as a whole, but rather the individual perspectives of Board members. In 2025, Bill Powell was elected to his first term.

Getting to know Bill Powell as a member of WEC's Board of Directors is both familiar and new. After a 33 year career at WEC in a member-facing role, he's well known to many members. At the same time, the vision and fiscal responsibility of a volunteer, elected Director is a pretty different role from working as a staff member. Powell has long hoped to transfer his skills and experience to the Board after retiring, he said, and doesn't expect onboarding to be a challenge. "I have a multidisciplinary background. I've had a lot of retail exposure to members—I think I have my finger on the pulse. I have a strength in listening. I want to bring that to the Board in my new role there," he explained. He's participated in Board proceedings "forever," he said, "so I think I can get into synch fairly quickly, looking forward to being a positive contributor to the group."

Powell lives in Calais with his wife Donna Jerry, and enjoys keeping active cycling and playing hockey. He



L-R: Annie Reed talks with Bill Powell, elected to his first term on the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting. Reed is a former Board Secretary; Powell retired as a WEC staff member in 2024.

has served on the Central Vermont Solid Waste District board for two decades, and is treasurer of the Maple Corner Community Center, so he's well versed in Board processes outside WEC's. His motivation for running for WEC's Board is pretty simple, he explained. He has a "need to serve," and he has a specific skill set that benefits the Co-op and its members. He understands regulatory rules and complexities, and long relationships with others in the industry. "That's what I want to leverage," he said. "I want to be a good worker bee and deliver effective

fiduciary responsibilities as and when needed."

He doesn't have a platform, Powell emphasized. Rather than suggesting the Co-op should move in one particular direction or another, or even using his role to raise specific issues, Powell sees his Board role as more of a well of institutional knowledge about WEC's system, Vermont's electrical grid and regulations, and federal processes. He can summon up that expertise to help the Board illuminate the background, complexities, and likely consequences of the decisions it faces. That's not to say he'll withhold

his opinion about topics, but he doesn't expect to substantially shift the direction of the Board. "To me there are nine people [on the Board] who have equal value in their role. The view of Powell is not necessarily what the group may come to," he noted.

One topic Powell is particularly interested in discussing is affordability. "One of the more pressing regulatory obligations is to protect your income eligible members," he said. Affordability is a corner of WEC's mission, and concern about affordability in an economically uncertain era is appropriate, he said, but "I in no way would advocate that utilities should be on their own subsidizing income eligible consumption of electric service. I think that's a statewide need and needs to be done on a statewide basis," and should probably be regulated through the tax department instead of the Public Utility Commission, he added.

He's speculating as to what shape the conversation might take, Powell pointed out, but he knows that keeping rates affordable, and what if any role an individual utility has to subsidize its income eligible members, is a topic of great interest to WEC's membership.

He's looking forward to putting his knowledge and experience to work on the Board. "I want to reiterate to the membership my gratitude for picking me," he concluded. "And I accept the responsibility that the vote brings with it."

Annual Meeting

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They're like a birthday party." There's great food, entertainment, and "we even have presents," he said, noting the popular door prize part of the evening. Most of all, he said, he enjoys connecting with fellow members in person.

While WEC faces challenges from weather and other impacts from climate and a rapidly changing

world, members don't always see the adaptations happening behind the scenes: the improvements WEC makes to protect its grid, Knowlton said. With the intent to share some positive news about "what's going on under the hood," he described streamlining management and outage operations, increasing infrastructure resilience, better cybersecurity, improving right-of-way management, increasing state and federal grants, hiring good staff, and improving members' experience by providing more participation and control in their own electric use.

Treasurer Don Douglas followed Knowlton, leading with one of his characteristically salty jokes (this one tickling divisions both in national identity and in the AL East). Despite some surprises, WEC was within half a percent of its original budget for 2024, Douglas said. WEC returned less money in the form of capital credit retirements to members than in previous years, in part because it had to draw down \$2 million in short term borrowing to cover process delays. It was able

to quickly pay back the short term borrowing, and satisfied all its lender requirements. Property taxes rose steeply in 2024, and Douglas noted

that WEC also went over its budget for outages. However, a half million increase in sales helped offset costs.

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L-R: Board Secretary Betsy Allen and Susan Alexander were each re-elected to the Board of Directors for a second term.

Election Results

Vote totals for the Board of Directors election:

*Susan Alexander	587
*William Powell	479
*Betsy Allen	478
Steven Farnham	385
Ian Buchanan	380
Write-ins	6

**elected to the Board of Directors*

Total valid ballots cast	829
Blank votes	148

Annual Meeting

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Member Q&A

After the election results, the floor opened for member questions. William Tarkulich of Tunbridge asked whether power from Hydro-Québec would be subject to new federal tariffs, if that would impact rates, and if any of WEC's federal grants were at risk. Porter responded that nobody knows yet, but Hydro-Québec risk is shared among multiple utilities, and that while no clawbacks had been announced impacting any of WEC's grants, it's still an anxious time. Another member asked about new meters (which are expected to be largely paid for by state and federal grants). Porter briefly described the change from meters that communicate through the copper wires that distribute electricity to radio frequency mesh meters, which will give better outage data and inform time-of-use rates and other system information (read more about advanced meters in the October-November 2023 issue of *Co-op Currents*).

Paul Cate of East Montpelier asked why the Co-op planned to sell Wrightsville, WEC's hydro generation plant, when it was an owned and local generation source. Knowlton responded that the Board's decision to sell was difficult to come to. Because regulations prevent the dam from discharging water at will, its maximum power is "during spring runoff, when power prices are not particularly high," he said. Porter added that Wrightsville is WEC's "most expensive source of power we choose to accept, that we are not obligated to accept."

Barry Bernstein of Calais—aware, as WEC's former President, that net metering is a source of high-cost power that the Co-op is obligated to accept—requested that Knowlton and Porter clarify the Co-op's position on net metering. Knowlton confirmed that net metering is established by the legislature, and that WEC is required to follow the law. But, he added, "incentives come at a cost," and as a



L-R: General Manager Louis Porter and featured speaker Mike Kline, old friends and fellow members, reconnected at the Annual Meeting for Kline's presentation.

result members who do not net meter pay to incentivize net metering, and do not realize the benefits of the program. "Pairing solar to local battery storage is a way to make it work," he suggested.

Eric Andersen of East Montpelier picked up the topic, urging WEC to take action on battery storage incentives. "What I would like to see is easy for WEC to make battery storage more affordable for members," he said, suggesting WEC could do this in partnership with other cooperatives. Andersen also recommended fellow members listen to Board meetings (Andersen's spouse, Olivia Campbell Andersen, is a Board Director).

Knowlton thanked Andersen and reframed the question as how to make battery storage accessible to members, without creating a cost impact to other members. Porter added, "We are doing exactly as you suggest as a pilot and will expand as possible." (WEC is part of the Energy Storage Access Program now being developed and already has the ACRE pilot uses community solar to benefit income-qualified members of WEC and Vermont Electric Co-op; learn more in the August-September 2024 issue of *Co-op Currents*.)

Michael Duane of East Montpelier addressed newish online outage tracking and restoration timing estimates provided by the Co-op: "It's terrific." The tech had improved a lot since the 1990s, when he served on the Board, he reflected: "If I looked across the valley to Plainfield and the lights were on, it wasn't too bad of an outage. If the lights were off in Plainfield village, it was a bad outage." Angela Manning of Orange also noted that outages had improved in 2024.

To applause, Porter credited Dave Kresock, Engineering and Operations Director, for the improvements, and added that outage severity was still increasing year over year. "It's a full sprint to stay where we are," he said.

Turning the conversation back to net metering, Steven Farnham of Plainfield commented that about 10% of members net meter and he believes that many would like to achieve energy independence and see net metering as a way to be able to afford it. "Why is the Co-op's parent position to rather be rid of net metering than to put more pressure on changing the incentive?" he asked. Knowlton responded that net metering tariffs are set by the

legislature and approved by the Public Utility Commission, and WEC can't engage in overt political activity but can raise issues. Changing the incentives is a good idea, he said "but at the same point, we have to deal with the law as it stands."

Porter added that one of his responsibilities is to be WEC's lobbyist. "I say excess generation should benefit the rest of the membership," he explained, taking the position that net metering should not be eliminated but paid for at avoided cost—or the cost WEC avoids by not having to source electricity elsewhere. He invited members to get in touch if they thought he should take a different position on their behalf.

Dan Wing, a former Director from Corinth, asked if new meters could look at the time power was produced to ascertain avoided cost. Porter thought an annual average made sense, but noted that would be up to the Public Utility Commission.

The meeting concluded with distribution of door prizes donated from local businesses and vendors, and gift cards purchased with points accrued on the Co-op's credit cards.

Special Guests

WEC was honored to welcome these special guests to the 2025 Annual Meeting:

Tarrant, Gillies & Shems
Ron Shems, Legal Counsel
Sarah Buxton
David Mears

Vermont Electric Co-op
Rebecca Towne, General Manager
Paul Lambert
Carol Maroni
Charlie Van Winkle

VELCO
Betsy Bloomer

Efficiency Vermont
Paul Lambert



L-R: Vermont Electric Co-op GM Rebecca Towne, WEC Board Treasurer Don Douglas, and WEC Vice President Mary Just Skinner enjoyed catching up before the Annual Meeting.

Annual Meeting Vendors and Sponsors

WEC appreciates local businesses and vendors who supported the Annual Meeting with their services and donated door prizes:

Barre Auditorium
Cabot Creamery
Caledonia Spirits
Farnham Farm Sugaring
Green Mountain Rentals
Hunger Mountain Co-op
Sugarsnap Catering
VEIC
Wayside Restaurant



Members Write

Barry Bernstein: A Vision For How to Live

I have been getting electricity from Washington Electric Co-op for over five decades, starting in 1971. I have lived in my home on Bliss Road, East Calais, Vermont two-thirds of my life now.

I first got involved actively at the end of 1973 during the oil embargo, when Vermonters and folks all over the country were waiting in lines at gas stations. I began working with other Co-op owner-members, who wanted to see our Co-op move away from nuclear power and invest in renewable energy, efficiency/conservation, and be more transparent with our members.

Unfortunately, the Co-op Board and General Manager at that time took owner-member input as a threat. We were partially successful in stopping the Co-op from increasing their purchase in the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant, and our Co-op built their first hydro plant, Wrightsville. However, it was not until 1990 when a new majority was elected by WEC owner-members, who supported a major change in direction, resulting in WEC becoming a leader in Vermont, a yardstick to measure other electric utilities.

WEC divested its ownership in Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, became the first Vermont electric utility to have a 100% renewable power supply (generated primarily in state), and was an early supporter of the net metering legislation in 1998. Some WEC members have said our Co-op can not rest on its past laurels. My response to that is: leadership on issues of value, community, and fairness for our members and Vermont ratepayers is never out of date—and as a member-owned cooperative, is as important to our 41-town community as is providing electricity from sources that are renewable, affordable, as close to home as possible, and with environmentally sound practices.

WEC and the nearly 1,000 electric rural coops and public power companies in the US have had a century plus of looking out for the interests of the people they serve and not the private equity of their stockholders. A few stories I recently read and would like to share illustrate community interest over self interest:

- In Zambia, in Southern Africa, of 20 million people, only 8% of their rural population have electricity. This is not so different than rural America in

1935 when 10% of rural America had electricity, before the creation of the Rural Electric Administration (REA) under President Roosevelt. The National Rural Electric Association (NRECA) (of which WEC is a member and WEC Director Don Douglas is a Board member) has an international arm, worked with two Zambian rural villages to set up their own electric co-ops, and string wires and set poles, with solar generation and batteries, so those two villages have electricity for the first time. Ironically, these two projects were funded by grants from the USAID (United States Agency of International Aid), which was recently closed down by Elon Musk.

- Former President Jimmy Carter, who just passed away at 100, remembered getting electricity as an early teenager, at his parents' farm in rural Georgia, as one of the biggest changes of his early life. His father Earl and their minister signed up folks to become members of their co-op and Earl served on the co-op's board.
- Frances Perkins, from 1933 to 1945, served as President Franklin

Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, becoming the first female US Cabinet member. She was born in Massachusetts but considered herself a Mainer. A major force in the New Deal, she spearheaded the creation of Social Security, the 40 hour work week, a national minimum wage, and unemployment insurance. She was as committed to ending child labor. These are things most Americans take for granted, but Elon Musk's DOGE may cause havoc with them, jeopardizing the livelihood of tens of millions of seniors.

I found that these three stories of present and past, along with the true value and benefits of WEC to our 41-town community, are about what is never to be taken lightly. We didn't get involved in the Co-op just to turn it around financially. We got involved because we had a vision for how to live.

Barry Bernstein
East Calais

Barry Bernstein is a former Board member and President of WEC.

Why Streams Flood

continued from page 1

keep that water from inundating the surrounding land. But as Kline pointed out, that channeling creates fast, powerful water that in a flood is capable of increasingly damaging erosion, landslides, and infrastructure damage. A meandering stream, within a corridor that gives the stream plenty of room to oxbow and spill over the land, is far less erosive.

Kline discussed the historical preference for straight, channeled streams rather than meandering ones, tracing this approach back to early New England settlement. "If you didn't like the way your neighbor was ditching their land," he said, "you could go and do it for them."

Coarse sediment acts like speed bumps in river systems, Kline said. Preserving that sediment, he said, is a cost-effective method for preventing stream erosion and bank failure. But whereas a meandering stream can move coarse gravel, "a particle the size of a baseball," a channel can move "a boulder the size of this lectern," stripping sediment from streambeds and depositing it downstream in unwanted locations.

In glacial lake areas with fine silt soils, like many of Vermont's valleys, Kline explained that water can "down-cut" the streambed, or force its way deeper, in high-velocity flow

or when flow is obstructed. He said channeling streams encourages this down-cutting process, and that once a stream down-cuts, it becomes more erosive and no longer accesses its own floodplain.

Kline pulled examples from local streams and roads particularly impacted by recent flooding, especially Great Brook and Great Brook Road in Middlesex. Three factors contribute to a stream's erosive power, said Kline: depth, slope, and roughness. All three of these stream characteristics have been intensified by historic decisions made "in the honest intent to reduce inundation of our land," but noted that during flood events, it makes inundation more severe, less predictable, and more harmful.

"We're fighting against a process we haven't dealt with much before: a valley reforming process," and added, "I'm proposing we need to have a different response in recovery."

A key shift in thinking, Kline explained, was considering flooding within the context of the whole watershed. "All efforts to protect one section of stream will have effects downriver," he said. Just like WEC members on rural hillsides are impacted by flood damage in villages and downtown areas, where they may work and shop and recreate, efforts to protect village or downtown areas will impact river systems up- and downstream.

Among the approaches he

described were: limiting new development in valley areas, giving streams time and space to "re-arm" themselves with sediment and debris, restoring floodplains and wooded buffers, preparing debris management plans, and working with private landowners to create corridor easements.

To build a corridor easement costs in the \$50,000 range, Kline said, as opposed to the "\$2.5 million for Middlesex to put its road back together."

Kline concluded with an image of a flooded floodplain, a wet valley, but with no infrastructure or infrastructure damage in sight.

Goddard Graves asked Kline how to get his message to the people responsible for repair. There's a program called Rivers and Roads, designed for road crews, who are usually the first on the scene after water recedes, Kline responded. "Mostly, we get their hands dirty," he said. They run models of different road rebuilds and crank water to see how flooding would impact each design. Approximately 600 road workers have taken the two-day course.

Angela Manning commented that in her experience, flooding exposed properties to other forms of damage; and Lindy Biggs asked if Vermont had a program for paying landowners for ecosystem services to their community. Kline pounced on this concept: paying for that service is something we should

consider, he said: "We don't think about the service landowners give us all when they allow their land to flood —especially if it's going to flood anyway." 

Volunteer Appreciation

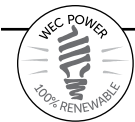
During his remarks, President Stephen Knowlton acknowledged the member volunteers on WEC's Committee on Candidates and Ballot Committee for their diligent work and dedication to upholding WEC's democratic election process. They are:

Committee on Candidates:

Robin Arnel
Barry Bernstein
Bud Haas
Steve Hatch
Carla Payne
Yvette Tomlinson

Ballot Committee:

Nancy Fuller, Co-Chair
Cort Richardson, Co-Chair
Barbara Bendix
Michael Duane
Gail Falk
Jackie Folsom
Roy Folsom
Cathy Frey
Scott Frey
Jamie Shanley



Members Write

Ellen Seeger: Cold Climate Heat Pump

I had a Mitsubishi cold-climate heat pump installed in August of 2021 by a reputable local HVAC retail and repair service. I live in a very well-insulated 17 year-old house with two floors, each of area about 670 square feet. I live mainly on the upper floor which has hot water heating baseboard along one wall, and the basement has radiant floor heating

The indoor part of the heat pump consists of only one head, located on the wall inside the largest room on the first floor. I purchased the heat pump mainly to provide cooling in the summer, as I have large south-facing plate glass windows that allow the house to really heat up on a sunny day. But I've come to use it to supplement the baseboard heating in the winter as well, as I've found it heats up the first floor faster than the baseboard heating does.

I found the instruction manual to be complicated and somewhat daunting, and have settled on finding an appropriate setting and leaving it there, turning it off at bedtime and on again in the morning. When using it as an air conditioner in the summer, I am careful to turn the fan mode on for about 20 minutes after turning off the cooling in order to dry out the inside of the unit. Otherwise, mold may build up inside it, requiring an annual cleaning.

But if you don't let the mold grow, my experience is that you just have to take out the dust filters and clean them off a few times a year. I haven't had any problems with it over my 3.5 years of using it. Because my house is well insulated, it doesn't have to work very hard, and my electric bills are reasonable.

My brother is knowledgeable of heat pump performance and what would best suit my house, so I did not use Efficiency Vermont for consultation. I did receive a discount on the wholesale price of the unit. Keep in mind that an electrician must run the wiring to the heat pump; for me that amounted to \$670 beyond the cost of the heat pump installation.

After 3.5 years, I am still very happy with my decision to purchase my heat pump. I have not had to pay for repairs or maintenance in that time. While I have used it to augment the heat provided by a wood pellet boiler, which is relatively clean, the ability to both heat and cool over the whole year is a big plus for me.

Ellen Seeger
East Montpelier

Employee Celebrations

WEC staff celebrating milestone employment anniversaries in 2025:

5 years

Richard Pateta,
Second Class Lineman

20 years

Kevin Lanphear,
First Class Lineman

Jason Smith,
Construction Foreman

25 years

Teia Greenslit,
Director of Finance,

Manager's Award:
Kayla Dunbar

Thank you for your service!

Amy Lepage: Hot Water Heat Pump

I recently had a hot water heat pump installed in my house which is shared with a family of two, and a friend who is staying with me after she lost her house in the Montpelier flood and my kids when they are home from college. The hot water heat pump replaced a rooftop solar hot water system that was becoming more and more unreliable.

Currently, the community I live in receives hot water from a central wood pellet boiler system that pipes hot water underground to each of the six houses. It provides domestic hot water and heat in winter and cooler months when the pellet boiler is running. I had rooftop solar hot water panels for the 5-6 months a year when the wood pellet boiler was turned off.

For the past few years my solar hot water system has had some issues and wasn't viable anymore. After researching what was involved in replacing the solar hot water system, I decided to shift to a hot water heat pump instead. I had just enough space to accommodate it.

Efficiency Vermont had a rebate/grant program that helped make this project doable for me and I now enjoy very reliable hot water whenever needed. The installer I worked with was very knowledgeable and once we had a plan in place, the work was completed in a day.

One difference, besides having reliable hot water, is that I sometimes notice when the condenser turns on. It's in a basement area so it's not annoying—it's just different. Another perk in addition to the reliable hot water is that the condenser cools the space the hot water tank is located in. Come summer this will come in handy because I'll be able to open the door to another space in the basement and use it as "air conditioning."

I am happy with the new setup, and we have plenty of hot water for all of us.

Amy Lepage
East Montpelier

Puzzle by Betsy Allen

Annual Meeting

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G F S T P J Q L N E A D I R E C T O R S
L O M S I G B X S P E A K E R H H P A X

conversations	cooperative	information	free
entertainment	equitable	neighbors	speaker
directors	finances	president	dinner
results	ballots	reports	votes

Share Your Story:
Seeking Members' Experiences with
EVs and New Electric Appliances

When making a big decision, many of us seek advice from friends and neighbors who have already been through the same process. Co-op Currents invites members to write in with their honest experiences buying and installing hot water heat pumps, cold climate heat pumps, electric vehicles, and other new electric tech. Your tips and advice are valuable to fellow members considering similar purchases.

Submit your stories to currents@wec.coop. Stories will be published as time and space allow. Co-op Currents will contact you to confirm before publication. Please keep stories to 500 words or less. If you have a longer story you'd like to share, please email first to inquire.

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-WEC-5245.



Safety Minute: Turn Around! Staying Safe in Floods

By David Young

At Annual Meeting this year, I knew our featured speaker, Mike Kline, was giving a presentation on flooding and erosion, and why streams and rivers move the way they do during flood situations. I decided to build on that for the Safety Moment that kicked off the meeting, and spoke to members about flood safety.

After last year's flood I visited Brook Road in Plainfield. The hazards included washouts where wires were in the road, homes and vehicles washed away, and missing and undermined portions of the road. In one of the missing portions of roadway, erosion caused a pole to wash downstream and broke the wires, leaving them on the ground, which a member picked up and pushed aside. (A Safety Minute aside: never touch wires, even if you think they're not energized! Wire safety is always a Safety Minute topic).

One thing that's interesting in Vermont is the maxim that you should head to higher ground doesn't



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

necessarily apply. Tame streams become threats during a major flood. And it's very hard to tell what condition a road is in after a flood: it might look okay on the surface, but be affected by erosion. In 2024, I witnessed a road that looked fine, but when the road crew came through, they discovered it was completely undermined and it was a miracle nobody had fallen into the hole the floodwaters created underneath the road surface.

Flood safety is critically important because when water is in your path, you are already in a fight-or-flight situation, operating on animal instinct, and you have to get your prefrontal cortex involved. Another way of saying that is, you have a primary objective, which is to get to safety: from point A to point B. So when water is moving rapidly across your path to point B, you have to override your instinct to keep going, and turn around.

Turning around is hard to do, but it's essential. More than half of flood-related deaths could be prevented if the individual just turned

around instead of attempting to cross the floodwater.

Water is powerful. Six inches of moving water can knock an adult off their feet and carry them; 12 inches can carry off a small car, and 18-24 inches can move trucks and vans.

If you come to an area that is covered with water, you don't know the depth of the water or the condition of the road underneath. This is especially true at night, when your vision is limited.

So it's good to be prepared: start by paying attention to weather updates. Flood watch means a flood is possible; flash flood watch means a flash flood is possible. Flood warning means flooding is happening or likely to happen soon—be ready to evacuate—and flash flood warning means a flash flood is occurring; stay away from moving water!

Also, have an emergency kit and an evacuation route that avoids roads prone to flooding, and stay in touch with others. If flooding is anticipated, make sure your basement is prepared and objects and devices are stored high up and safe, anchor any fuel tanks, and know how to safely shut off power, gas, and water before you evacuate.

Here's what you need to know:

- Turn around. It's not safe to cross moving water.
- Pay attention to weather updates and have an evacuation plan and route.
- When mountain streams are flooding, higher doesn't necessarily mean safer: you don't know what condition a road is in after a flood.

We decide to take safety measures based on hearing stories, unfortunate personal experience, or through research—what we read or learn. My goal with Safety Minute is to help you take the best safety measures by sharing stories and vetted research. I also aim to be a direct resource for you: contact me with questions, to share a story or concern you think would make a good Safety Minute topic, or to inquire about a safety presentation for a group or organization you belong to.

Members can recommend Safety Minute topics and request safety presentations from David Young for their school, organization, or community group. Contact him at 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop.



WEC crew members were honored at the Statehouse for Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 18. L-R: Sean Kidder, Apprentice Lineworker; Tucker Bullard, Apprentice Lineworker; David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist; Louis Porter, General Manager; Lt. Gov. John Rodgers; Richard Pateta, Second Class Lineworker.

