



Regional Technical Forum

RTF PAC Meeting Minutes September 5, 2024 9:30-11:15

Meeting Participants via Zoom Webinar

Debbie DePetrus, Clark PUD (Co-Chair)
Laura Thomas, RTF Manager
Juan Serpa Muñoz, EWEB
Alan Zelinka, Oregon Dept of Energy
Jennifer Langdon, Cowlitz PUD
Mary Moerlins, NW Natural
Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light
Dan Adams, Avista Corp
Taylor Thomas, Idaho PUC
Jennifer Light, RTF Chair
Rachel Clark, Tacoma Power
Jim White, Chelan PUD
Spencer Moersfelder, Energy Trust of Oregon

Cory Scott, PacifiCorp
Kary Burin, Cascade Natural Gas Corp
Jamae Hillard Creecy, BPA
Jeff Harris, NEEA
Sofya Atitsogbe, WA UTC
Wesley Franks, WA UTC
Landon Snyder, Snohomish PUD
Craig Patterson, independent
Jisong Wu, WA UTC
Suzanne Frew, Snohomish PUD
Kevin Smit, NWPCC
Alexa Bouvier, Idaho OER

Key Outcomes:

At the Q3 RTF Policy Advisory Committee Meeting members discussed the following:

- Due to uncertainty around one funder, the PAC discussed what the work plan would look like with and without those funds. PAC members supporting allocating surplus funds from past budgets to fill that gap.
- PAC members reviewed the 2025 work plan, discussing what an RTF research convener role would look like. The PAC approved the work and business plan for recommendation to the Council, understanding that there will be more discussion once funding is finalized.

Discussion

RTF PAC Co-Chair Debbie DePetrus welcomed attendees at 9:30 and asked Laura Thomas, RTF Manager to call for attendance. Following roll, the minutes from the May Q2 RTF PAC were acknowledged and accepted without change.

RTF Policy Advisory Committee Meeting: Management Update Laura Thomas, RTF Manager

Slide 3

Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light, was pleased to hear that the RTF was on track and under budget. She expressed the desire to see RTF work be fully supported long term and asked to hear more about organization that were interested in RTF RFPs but didn't have enough bandwidth to take on new tasks.

Thomas relayed that organizations are telling her there is a lot of work going on at present, including kicking off the Council's 9th Plan. She said this overlapped with the RTF looking at some big projects. Thomas assured Finnigan that this seemed like a temporary situation, adding that she has made good progress on expanding the contractor list

2025 RTF Work Plan, Business Plan, and Funding Agreements

Slide 2

Dan Adams, Avista Corp, asked for a reminder email to funders that have not yet sent back a signed agreement. Thomas said she will re-send that out.

Slide 6

Alan Zelinka, Oregon Dept of Energy, called the amended work plan reasonable but unfortunate, asking about the three measures that would be cut due to losing a funder. Thomas was not yet sure but pointed to chillers, commercial ERV and HRV. She said this work might be replaced with a smaller measure that comes out of the Small/Rural subcommittee.

DePetrus referenced the \$167,000 electric fund surplus. She suggested considering having the RTF keep those funds to fill the gap and called for discussion. Finnigan supported that recommendation, stressing that because the region needs Demand Response and more measures, she was also open to increasing the amount from remaining funders.

Jennifer Langdon, Cowlitz PUD, supported reallocating the \$167,000.

Suzanne Frew, Snohomish PUD, also supported reallocation of the \$167,000, however thought that raising contributions at this point would be difficult as her utility is in a budget crunch.

Frew then referenced EV Market Characterization on [Slide 4] asking for more information. She added that there is presently a lot of work being done on this that could provide more information. Thomas explained that characterization work around developing measures was completed last year. She assured her that staff are always looking for other organizations' output.

Rachel Clark, Tacoma Power, supported reallocating surplus funds towards the budget.

Adams also voiced support for reallocation but wondered about causing backend accounting problems. Jennifer Light, RTF Chair, explained that the funds came from well before 2020, perhaps all the way back to 2012, and were found after finishing the present

business plan. She said it would be impossible to trace the money back to the original electric funders at this point.

Spencer Moersfelder, Energy Trust of Oregon, asked for more information about data center plans. Thomas explained that the RTF is working on a small project this year to get a better sense of the complicated market. Moersfelder said Energy Trust doesn't not work on EVs are already heavily engaged in figuring out data centers, so it wouldn't be a big loss for them if they fell off the work plan.

Thomas said they were examples of past projects, and no one knows what may come up in the next five years. She noted that the 2021 Plan recommended the RTF do things like try to develop a methodology value resiliency. Thomas said there are different ways to scale the budget but was not sure what that would look like.

Upon hearing that the \$167,000 dated back to 2012, Clark strongly endorsed that the RTF keep the funds. Comments for support also came from Jamae Hillard Creecy, BPA and Jim White, Chelan PUD.

DePetrus wondered what the process of keeping the funds would look like. Light said if the PAC agrees, the money would just stay in the account.

Thomas stated that it sounds like the PAC agrees to apply the funds to the next cycle. She said she will keep members informed about final decisions from the undecided funder.

Cory Scott, PacifiCorp, asked about process, saying the undecided funder remains undecided yet the PAC is jumping ahead. He pointed to contractual obligations regarding refunds and already-signed contracts, asking if this is a PAC decision or recommendation.

Light said there's a mixing of funding streams: 2020-2024 gas money that will be mostly spent with a small surplus possibly returned and two sets of electric funds. She said there's one set from the 2020-2024 cycle and the \$167,000 from a previous source. Light said the PAC decided to keep and used that money five years ago, stressing that the PAC are the funders, so the decision lies with the group. She said they can dig back into the funding agreements from the 2020-2024 cycle to see if there is any more clarity.

Scott called that helpful but confusing, adding that it would make decisions easier if they knew where that money came from. Still, he was not too uncomfortable with the conversation, adding that he somewhat remembers this topic from five years ago and the PAC agreeing to set the funds forward. Scott said using this money to make up the difference of a funder possibly dropping out feels different but is probably fine. Light called that fair.

Creecy asked about a possible timeline from the funder in question. Light said they are not getting that information yet and need to follow up.

Clark said given the history of the funds and past decisions it seemed like the money should not be refunded regardless of NorthWestern Energy's status.

DePetrìs appreciated the comment and suggested keeping the funds available even if NorthWestern Energy agrees to fund this cycle. Light thought it important to track electric funding from the 2020-2024 cycle and keep that separate from the \$167,000 surplus. Thomas agreed.

Light said it would be best if the PAC could give a recommendation about the 2025 work plan to take to the Council, but the outstanding funding question could prevent that. She suggested talking about this during the next presentation as the Council has to make the final decision on 2025, probably in November.

Thomas said the upcoming slides demonstrate both paths, one with NorthWestern Energy funds and one without. Light stressed that the deficit and the surplus money do not add up to a perfect one-for-one match but may be close enough.

2025 Work Plan

Slide 14

Jeff Harris, NEEA, and Light had a conversation in the chat. (I don't remember what it was about and was hoping to use the chat notes)

Slide 23

Harris voiced full support of the RTF taking on a research convener role, noting that convening is the easy part, while raising funds to execute the work is hard. He felt the RTF needed to be deliberate about scoping a project and including fundraising. Thomas said the RTF was not talking about putting more budget behind projects but convening around coordination and consistency while making sure not to repeat work already going on in the region. She thought it would take about a year to fully scope a convener role.

Harris suggested reaching out to NEEA's Northwest Research Group. Thomas agreed.

Finnigan supported the RTF acting as a convener but cautioned that while she has full faith in RTF staff, she does have reservations about consultants/RTF membership leading the work. Thomas said she understood, noting that she heard the same from program implementers as well.

Zelinka also voiced confidence in RTF staff, but wondered how this could be accomplished after hearing earlier conversations about limited bandwidth and budget crunches. Thomas said she was not worried about completing a discrete project, adding that the Contract Analyst Team has been expanded for the next year. Thomas further explained that they had trouble finding support on very large projects like multiple, large, commercial HVAC development, or shape development.

Thomas continued, saying the “no’s” she is hearing about smaller projects was not due to lack of desire but from consultants being booked through the end of the year. She said in the future she will start the process earlier to ensure enough runway for projects to take off.

Thomas then agreed that being a convener will take effort, but she will not have to work on funding agreements next year, so there will be more time. Thomas also pointed to Contract Analyst skills that are well suited to this role. She concluded by saying there is a deeper well of outside contractor experience in this area than in other big projects like commercial HVAC.

Zelinka thanked her, saying he also agreed that she should reach out to the NEEA Northwest Research Group.

Clark asked for more information about what a convener role means. She pointed to other places where there is regional coordination and information sharing and was skeptical that the region needed another body/venue to discuss what is not being done. Clark said the challenge is some things always get researched while others are always skipped.

Clark was also skeptical that utilities will be persuaded to follow a consistent path with their research. Because of this she wasn’t sure of the value of convening versus actually doing research. Clark didn’t support the RTF getting into things like metering but still found it hard to give full support without learning more.

Thomas said she hears the PAC does not support convening without concrete steps to remove uncertainty and shift measures from Planning to Proven. She thought an RTF convener role would need to keep this objective at the top of mind. Thomas suggested picking a project and trying to make progress, calling this a balancing act. She asserted that no matter the role, the objective is reducing the burden for the region and the uncertainty around savings for the measures.

Chats came in from Harris and Zelinka.

Kary Burin, Cascade Natural Gas Corp, heard the ask for more time to flesh out a path forward. She called this a strong strategy, saying more discussion and detail are needed. Thomas thanked her saying she didn’t bring a proposal forward because it will require more thought and wanted PAC guidance first.

Slide 24

Light pointed to comments **in the chat** that supported the business plan. She said she heard general support for holding on to the pre-2024 money. Light said if the PAC is comfortable staff could move forward and then come back with final numbers.

DePetrìs said she still has questions around outstanding issues about funding and primary research. She said she was comfortable throwing out the motion as long as there is still time for final vetting.

Light said the PAC traditionally puts forward a recommendation of the work and business plan but agreed that the present situation makes things a bit less clear. She said she hears enough head nods to proceed and come back to a short meeting with specifics.

Light read Harris's chat asking, what would we bring to the Council? what would bring if we don't know about NorthWestern Energy? Light said they will bring the maximum budget: NorthWestern Energy plus the surplus and knowing what would be cut if NorthWestern pulls out.

Moersfelder **said something in the chat.**

DePetrus shared the motion: To approve for recommendation to the Council the 2025 work and business plan, asking if the PAC is comfortable to move, second, and vote.

Moersfelder made the motion. Frew seconded. There were unanimous verbal ayes and no opposition.

Thomas thanked the PAC and explained next steps. DePetrus noted that the next PAC will be in person in December and adjourned at 11:15.