

**DRAFT OP-ED COLUMN**  
**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CRUCIAL TO VERMONT'S ELECTRIC SYSTEM**  
*[whose name?]*

Vermonters interested in community service on a large scale have a great opportunity to affect Vermont through a recently created state committee.

From lessons learned during the permitting and approval of VELCO's Northwest Vermont Reliability Project, the recently completed 63-mile transmission upgrade from West Rutland to South Burlington, the Vermont Public Service Board required the state's electric utilities to develop a new planning process. The goal of the process is to ensure the utilities fully consider alternatives to upgrading and building new transmission lines to address issues of electric reliability. Alternatives include reducing power use at times of peak demand or strategically placing local generation to take pressure off the transmission grid.

The Vermont System Planning Committee (VSPC) is the main component of the new process, developed collaboratively by the utilities and other parties. The VSPC is a unique-in-the-nation entity intended to provide the wide representation and transparency Vermonters expect. Its comprehensive framework, along with membership that includes the Vermont Department of Public Service, Efficiency Vermont, three public members, VELCO, and Vermont's electric distribution utilities, assures collaboration and public outreach in planning Vermont's electric grid.

The VSPC includes three public members and three alternates appointed by the Public Service Board to represent residential customers, commercial customers and the environmental community. Two alternate positions are currently unfilled. The committee also is working to build a group of interested and informed individuals who can serve as regular public participants at VSPC subcommittee meetings, and who could serve as alternates or step into the primary public member slots in the future.

Virtually all the big electric power supply issues we confront today have a transmission dimension. Developing locally generated renewable energy, determining the future of Vermont Yankee, bringing power into the region from Quebec or elsewhere and the development of a so-called "smart grid" all have transmission implications.

Transmission planning tends to occur in a world of hard-to-understand technical detail, analyses and industry jargon. Nevertheless, experience has shown that public members improve the level of collaboration and communication on these complex issues. VSPC service is an opportunity to make an impact on the important foundation of Vermont's electric system, its high-voltage transmission grid.

If you are interested in electric system issues and helping to constructively shape Vermont's energy future, and would like to learn more about potential service on the

VSPC, please contact [contact info here]. Together, we can ensure a safe, reliable and well-planned system for the benefit of all Vermonters.