

Public Involvement, Outreach & Education



NARUC Energy Regulatory Partnership Program

*The Energy Regulatory Commission of the Republic of Macedonia
and
The Vermont Public Service Board*

by

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October 27, 2004



Overview of Presentation

- ❖ Principles of public involvement
- ❖ Public involvement strategies and considerations
- ❖ Public information and outreach



Why involve the public?

- ❖ Public consent is fundamental to American system, guaranteed by Vermont constitution
 - *“Officers are servants of the people.* That all power being originally inherent in and consequently derived from the people, therefore, all officers of government, whether legislative or executive, are their trustees and servants; and at all times, in a legal way, accountable to them.”
 - *“Right to assemble, instruct and petition.* That the people have a right to assemble together to consult for their common good - to instruct their Representatives - and to apply to the Legislature for redress of grievances, by address, petition or remonstrance.”

More.....



Why involve the public? (continued)

- ❖ The public has information essential to evaluating policy options.
 - *Contrasting views of bureaucrats as experts vs. government role in developing public consensus.*
 - *Need to ensure a voice for those who are not parties but who will be affected.*
- ❖ Many energy policy issues have no “right” answer; public support and consensus determines, in part, what is the right answer for the time and place.
- ❖ Failure to involve public may have political consequences.
 - *Current Vermont examples: energy plan, NRP.*



Public hearings required in certain areas of public policy

- ❖ Rule making
- ❖ Environmental permitting, water quality and waste management
- ❖ Development of state agency plans
- ❖ Airport zoning
- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Dairy industry policy
- ❖ Land use planning and community development
- ❖ Endangered species list
- ❖ Health facility planning
- ❖ Urban renewal



Legal requirements for public hearings in utility matters

- ❖ Public hearings required for:
 - Rule making
 - Certificates of Public Good for gas and electric facilities
 - Hydro dam construction
 - Development of state Energy and Telecommunications Plans
- ❖ No legal requirement for public hearings in rate making and other cases but PSB has always included such hearings as part of case process.



Many “publics” in energy regulation

- ❖ Various groups concerned with energy issues
 - Individual citizens: *rates, plant licensing, transmission siting*
 - Environmental advocates: *siting, nuclear, energy planning, plant licensing, dams, energy efficiency*
 - Consumer advocates for low income, elderly: *rates, energy efficiency*
 - Industry organizations: *policy cases*
- ❖ Effective public involvement requires different approaches for different groups
 - Differing levels of sophistication, time, expert resources
 - Groups with less resources may need for flexibility and more help to participate



Forms of public involvement in utility matters

- ❖ Dockets:
 - Formal party status
 - Interested person status
- ❖ Technical hearings
 - Hearings open to the public but participation available only to parties
 - Deliberations by PSB are closed to public
- ❖ Consumer complaints
- ❖ Public hearings convened by PSB or DPS
- ❖ Other public involvement processes
 - Community needs assessment
 - Focus groups
 - Deliberative polling
 - Workshops
 - Public dialogue projects
 - Web-based processes
- ❖ Advisory boards required by law

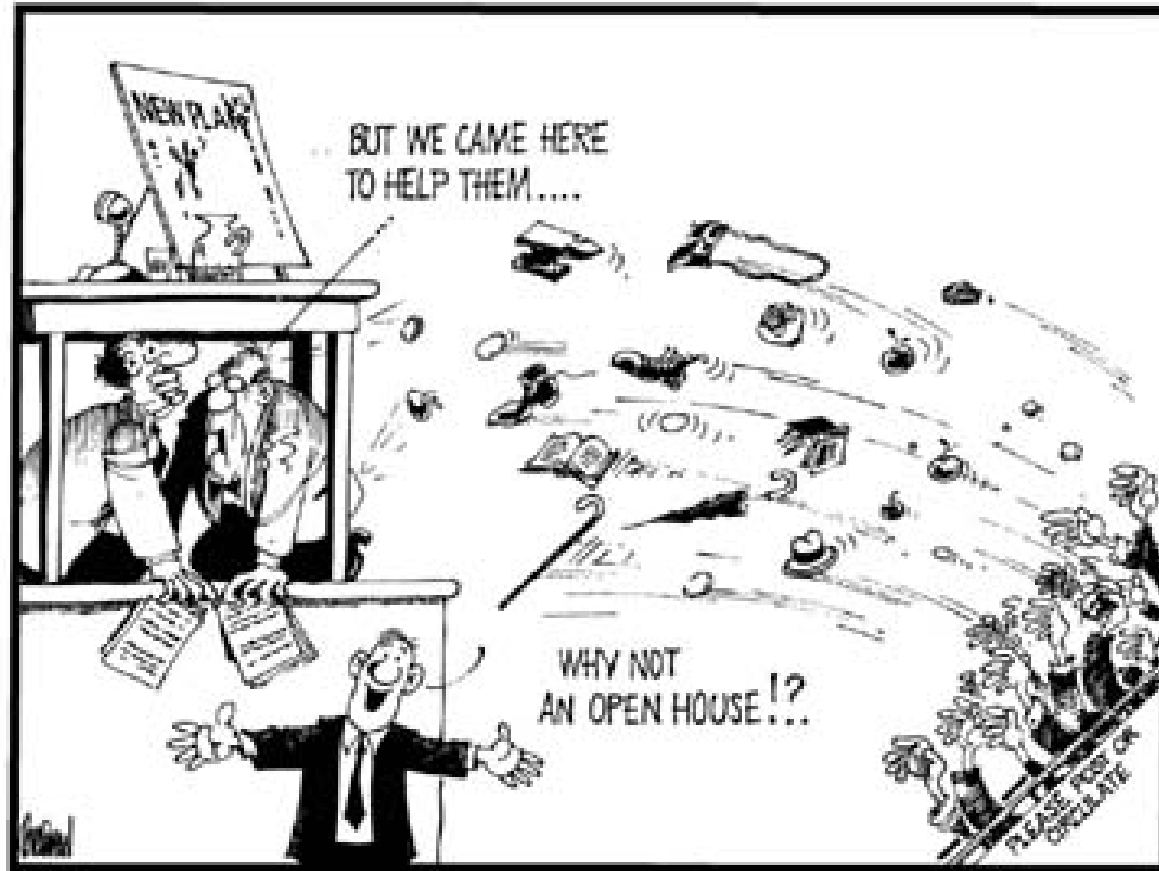


The “average” public hearing...





When the topic is "hot" ...



PUBLIC MEETINGSTHE LAST OF THE BLOOD SPORTS

THE CONNOR COLLECTION, NO 3



Recent examples of cases and issues with extensive public involvement processes

- ❖ Northwest Reliability Project
 - Transmission upgrade affecting many communities
 - Extensive public hearings
 - Many “non-traditional” parties
- ❖ Adelphia Cable license renewal
 - Extensive community needs assessment process
- ❖ Vermont Energy Plan
 - Public hearings
 - Workshop processes
- ❖ Agency of Natural Resources
 - Public dialogue project on siting of wind towers on public lands



Considerations for making public meetings effective

- ❖ Geographical accessibility to effected people
 - Vermont Interactive Television
- ❖ Convenient times
 - Evenings, avoid holidays
- ❖ Effective notice
 - Media that people actually read, adequate frequency
 - Sufficient size of notices and type
 - Low enough reading level for ready understanding
 - Bill stuffers target those actually affected in rate cases
 - Sufficient notice
 - Ready availability of background information (internet and print)



Accessibility of public meetings to people with disabilities

- ❖ Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): public facilities must be accessible to people with physical disabilities
- ❖ Vermont law: sign language interpreters required upon request for people with hearing disabilities



Consumer information & outreach

- ❖ Commissions devoting increased resources to outreach
 - Increase is driven by decreased regulation, increased competition, greater market complexity
- ❖ Markets require good consumer information
 - Perfect market requires perfect information
- ❖ Consumers can protect themselves if armed with information
 - Reduced reliance on enforcement and solving problems after the fact



Information resources

- ❖ Brochures and publications
 - Direct mailed, internet, libraries, town offices, social services offices, etc.
- ❖ Reports and plans
 - Dissemination through internet, libraries, planning commissions
- ❖ Public presentations, speakers bureau
- ❖ Radio and television news and talk shows



Information resources: websites

- ❖ State commission web sites
 - All states link from www.naruc.org
 - A few examples: California, New York, Michigan
- ❖ Elements of a comprehensive consumer site
 - User-driven organizational structure
 - On-line complaint forms
 - Public input possible via website
 - Proceedings of commission well-documented
 - Clear guidance on how public can participate in Commission processes
 - Schedules of meetings
 - Consumer alerts, bulletins, publications