

Young, Matthew

Good morning, everyone.

My name is Matthew Young and I'm the Department Hearing Examiner for this Public Comment Hearing related to the Department's LMI solar rebate program.

This meeting is being held virtually via Microsoft Teams, which also does provide an opportunity for participants to phone in if unable to access the computer.

I don't see any phone. Oh, here we go. As I say that there's one right now.

The agenda and meeting access info was included on the notice for this Public Comment Hearing, which was posted on the Department's website and distributed on October 5th, 2023.

During this Public Comment Hearing, we will be receiving comments only, any programmatic questions could be directed to Tanya Wayland that is our Department staff and I know that this was listed on the agenda as item 6, but I thought it might just be helpful to mention at the start that there will be a five day written comment period following this Public Comment Hearing. For clarification purposes that's five business days.

So, on the agenda there were mainly 3 items that I think we were hoping to receive comments on today.

Thank you everybody for taking the time to be here.

The first of which was in discussion of utilizing the competitive grant process for the program until further notice by the Department and what that means is that moving forward, the Department is considering using the RFP process and what we are contemplating would be not having to have a hearing on that issue alone every year.

Obviously, if there are other changes, programmatic changes, we would have to have a hearing, but I'm just seeking feedback on having the RFP process moving forward.

The next item was utilizing a 3 month bidding period and then finally the cross eligibility issue listed on the agenda between projects for the SB 270 EAP LMI Community solar process and this program.

So I would just also request that for transcription purposes if before anybody does provide comment on any of these items, just state your name.

And with that, I think we'll start with the continuation of the RFP approach.

If anybody does wish to provide comment on that item, if you're on teams, you can feel free to use the raise hand feature and I can go around and then there is somebody on the line.

So if you do wish to do wish to comment, please just let us know.

Mark Zankel

Can I just ask a question, Matt, this is Mark Zankel.

Sorry, do I need to say anything more other than my name?

Young, Matthew
No, that's fine.

Mark Zankel

I guess in terms of providing comment, is there any more context other than continuation of RFP approach that could be provided?

I mean, essentially does that mean status quo?

The RFP, you know, sort of everything is the same in terms of what's asked for other than the timeline, which we'll be talking about next?

Young, Matthew

Sure. I think our thought is that with utilizing the RFP approach, I think we would keep procedurally the same.

But what we're hoping to do is streamline the process a bit by not having to have a hearing every year just to approve the RFP approach.

So statutorily, we would have to have a hearing every year to approve how the program operates, right?

So the order this year could provide staff the opportunity to have an RFP approach for this program unless otherwise changed.

I don't want to say in perpetuity, but that's sort of the idea if that's helpful.

Mark Zankel
Thank you.

Young, Matthew

I don't see anybody else wishing to provide comment on that item?

Young, Matthew

Anybody on the phone wish to comment?

Young, Matthew

Hearing none I suppose we can move to the utilizing the three month bidding period. And I think just for some explanation this item is really soliciting feedback on the three month bidding period, if anybody has questions, concerns about that, really just feedback in general.

Jeannie Oliver

My name is Jeannie Oliver for the record. And so with the three month bidding period, three months is I think an appropriate length of time and I will just note and consistent with what I've noted in the past that the November December period is kind of like dead time to us in terms of getting developer requests for proposals and community organizing done because it's the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

And so oftentimes people are not available and so effectively, if an RFP is issued, say in November, we really only end up with one month of workable time.

And that said, I know getting bids in in January is great because we might have a response by the construction season and be able to start the project by the April May time period.

But I just wanted to put that out there for folks that we really struggle with the November December community organizing and getting developer bids.

Young, Matthew
Thank you for that.

Are there any other participants?

Mark Zankel
This is Mark Zankel.

We also talked about this and my colleague Jude is on the phone as well.

We've had a lot of experience at Revision working with all my partners to submit proposals and we also like the idea of a 12 week or three month bidding process, because if I understand previously, it's been a little shorter than that and it does take time to just echo what Jeannie said, you know the community organizing which others do more of than we do, and just the project and proposal development does take some real time.

So, we support the idea of a three month bidding period, we're somewhat agnostic at Revision about the time of year and not in any way to suggest contrary to what Jeannie said, just from our perspective, we're somewhat agnostic on the timing. I think the one thing that we do appreciate is as much advance notice as possible of when the RFP will open up because there is the time before the RFP opens up when some of that collaboration, community organizing and conversations can happen.

And so if we have more advanced notice, I think it's helpful for the communities that you're trying to reach with this program.

Jeannie Oliver
I echo that this is Jenny Oliver again.

For the record, the advanced notice I think goes a long way to overcoming that November, December difficulty. And with that advance notice, just having a sense of what the maximum amount will be per project would be really helpful for getting that project development and community organizing work done ahead of the RFP coming out.

Young, Matthew
OK. Thank you both.

Seeing no other participants wishing to comment on that I think we could move to the next item on the agenda restricted eligibility for the EAP LMI projects.

Is there anyone that would like to comment on this this item specifically?

Hazlewood, Isabelle M
Hi, Isabelle Hazelwood with Eversource?

Not really to comment, but I guess it's just a question.

Is that a statutory prohibition between allowing or some sort of regulatory prohibition, or is that just the suggestion?

And if so, could you guys kind of explain the rationale behind that?

Young, Matthew

So, it is not a statutory provision. As the hearings examiner, I believe that and I'm not as familiar with this as maybe Tanya and Deandra but I believe it is due to process issues with applications and things of that nature, so it is just something that the Department is considering for this program moving forward.

And Tanya and Deandra, if you're if you're able to provide more context, feel free.

Perruccio, Deandra

Yeah, I think for this year, I believe and Tanya if you want to share as well, but it's the current scoring criteria for the grant program aligning with projects that would be eligible for SB-270.

We would like time and probably input on reevaluating the scoring criteria so that they can sort of be compared on a level playing field just because they're structured so differently.

So, I think for this year it's sort of a timing process issue, but we do also want feedback, you know just moving forward on positions on that.

Wayland, Tanya

I just wanted to point out that as far as this particular meeting about the LMI solar program, by statute for the LMI grant solar program that we're running through the Renewable Energy Fund, is simply that 15% of our budget that goes to these projects.

Young, Matthew

Next, it looks like Sam.

Sam Evans-Brown

So for the record Sam Brown with Clean Energy, New Hampshire.

I understand the need to sort of separate the programs and have them sort of run on separate tracks. And so I don't necessarily have a an objection to that, that proposal.

I do have some concern generally, that there are going to be a large number of low income community solar programs that are getting stood up and I know that we're not here to give comment on the SB-270 program, but I just wondered the degree to which we are giving thought to how those programs will all interact.

So just as an example, if there are EAP recipients that are, you know, residents of a resident owned community that are receiving off take as one of Jeannie's projects, so the solar for all application was just submitted and there might be EAP recipients that are residents of some of New Hampshire Housing portfolio of projects.

And so their community solar projects that are envisioned through that program, obviously the Department's running your own grant program and so will some of those folks be participants?

And so just this question of sorting out the groups and making sure that there's coordination between all of those just feels like a very complicated question and it's not to say that it's not manageable, but it

does feel to me that there might be a space for some sort of centralized clearinghouse of low income off takers that are eligible through, you know, different means testing from these different programs. So that we could keep it all straight.

I don't necessarily have a proposal for how to do that, but it does feel like the kind of thing you know, I know the Department is stretched thin, but it does feel like the kind of thing that it might make sense for the Department to house.

Perhaps just putting that out there.

Young, Matthew

And Mark looks like your hand's raised as well.

Mark Zankel

Thank you Mark Zankel with Revision Energy.

So, we don't have so much of a comment or a particular objection around the cross eligibility one way or another.

But at this point I guess I do if it's OK if you allow me to just make a comment that's related to EAP, which is that I think our understanding was that it was supposed to come online in June. It's not online, it's six megawatts a year.

It's October 20, October 19th, and so we're curious any update on when do we expect that to come online?

Will there be an opportunity before the end of this year, or if not, will that six megawatts be carried over and added to what's available in 2024?

It could influence if there is not cross eligibility, I guess it would be particularly helpful to understand that.

But even if there is, I think just getting an update on that because as Sam said, there's so many different programs now scrolling around and those of us working with these communities wanted to try to do the best we can with them and for them.

And so the potential, I guess loss of a year of the six megawatts from SB270 is worrying to us. So we would welcome an update.

Young, Matthew

Thank you. We'll take that back.

I don't see anybody else indicating they'd like to provide comment.

So that was everything on our agenda here today.

As I said, there's a 5 business day period after this hearing for the Department to receive written comments.

And those can be sent to Tanya Wayland as well on the Department staff.

And it is 10:22, I guess I would open it up. Are there any other comments not on the agenda that any participants would like to would like to voice regarding the LMI rebate program?

Sam Evans-Brown

Do you mind if I jump in?

Young, Matthew

Sure.

Sam Evans-Brown

Sorry, I should raise my hand, sorry.

Young, Matthew

No, that's fine.

Sam Evans-Brown

And this is sort of maybe to reiterate what I just said that when I look at the LMI space and when I talk to folks who are working in that space, it feels like one of the key problems is customer acquisition and knowing how to know where the communities are and how to keep track of them.

And I personally think that this is an area that's really ripe for some sort of collaboration between the state and the service providers.

This and so I again just with the proliferation of programs that are coming down the pike, I would love to have a broader conversation about how it is that all these programs are integrated.

So that I think what I'm worried about is if there's this sort of flood of programs that are being offered to the same community of folks that that could just be very confusing to that community and that there would be different offerings that are structured in different ways and I think trying to have a holistic conversation about how do we ensure that people are, you know, not viewing these programs in a negative light because they're just confused about the communication they're getting.

It would be really valuable and I think one way to do that might be might be by a more holistic look at these three programs or more programs that we're standing up and how they work together.

Young, Matthew

Alright, thank you.

And Mark, I see your hands up as well.

Mark Zankel

Yes, Mark Zankel just uh, maybe also building off a past comment around the advanced notice it would be, but we would welcome an update on the amount of funding that will be available through this grant round.

It was previously commented on, you know, the need for additional funding and it was great to have a larger pot of money last year enabled more good projects to move forward and so the sooner we all can have a sense of the scale of funding available for the next grant round it I think helps everyone who's working on these projects to hone in on the right scale of project and the right number of partners.

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Young, Matthew

Tanya did you have your hand up?

Wayland, Tanya

Well, I believe that was in the budget memo wasn't that allocation in the budget memo?

I guess I would suggest that everybody make sure that they're on our circulation list so that they can receive the notifications for the LMI program.

So I can send you the link if you'd like to sign up for the notifications.

Young, Matthew

That'd be great. Thanks, Tanya.

Young, Matthew

So seeing no other indications that anybody would like to provide comment, I think this will close this public comment hearing as previously mentioned, there will be a public written comment period of five business days and then the Department will issue an order shortly thereafter.

Thank you all for your time and we appreciate all your comments today.

Sam Evans-Brown

Thanks for having it.

Jeannie Oliver

Thank you everyone.

Mark Zankel

Thank you very much.

Wayland, Tanya

Thanks everybody. Bye.

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