



# MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

*Rely on us.*

TO: Commissioners McRae, Barofsky, Schlossberg, Brown, and Carlson

FROM: Aaron Orłowski, Sr. Communications Specialist; Brian Booth, Chief Energy Resources Officer; Ben Ulrich, Lead Energy Resource Analyst; Jonathan Hart, Power Planning Supervisor; Eli Volem, Resource Analyst

DATE: Nov. 5, 2024

SUBJECT: Community Table Session 1 Feedback

OBJECTIVE: Information

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## **Issue**

EWEB held the first session of the Community Table on Oct. 4, 2024. This memo describes the Community Table, the session itself and the feedback collected. It also contextualizes how the Community Table relates to EWEB’s overall community engagement strategy. The Appendix contains the full feedback.

## **Background**

As part of the public engagement for EWEB’s 2025 Energy Resource Study (ERS), EWEB has launched a focus group called the Community Table. EWEB invited 24 community representatives from diverse interest groups and backgrounds (including low-income representatives, affinity groups, environmental groups, business leaders and others) to journey with us as we plan our energy supply future.

The ERS is an analytical tool that will provide quantitative reference points that help EWEB management and the Board of Commissioners make choices about the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) contract options. The quantitative analysis in the ERS is just one factor in the BPA contract decision, however. EWEB will weigh other qualitative factors, too. The Community Table will help EWEB navigate these qualitative tradeoffs by illuminating how community values intersect with energy resource decisions.

## **Discussion**

### **Community Engagement Overview**

As a community-owned utility, EWEB prioritizes open, transparent governance that allows community members to participate in decision-making. Customers can vote in elections for EWEB’s Board of Commissioners, attend public meetings and contribute to discussions in various public forums. EWEB transparently makes information available for customers who seek to understand decision-making rationale via our Board materials, website and other communications channels.

But EWEB’s community engagement extends beyond transparent governance. We seek to actively engage the public in key decision-making processes because those decisions have ramifications that last years. We invite

and encourage our customers to go beyond merely observing EWEB's governance to participate in our engagement processes. As we encourage that participation, we are committed to seeking out diverse perspectives that reflect the wide range of lived experiences in our community.

There are various types of public engagement, with differing levels of influence. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) offers a [Public Participation Spectrum](#) that EWEB uses to guide these efforts. In the model, public involvement ranges from simply informing the community to enabling collaborative decision-making. Many of EWEB's engagements focus on informing and consulting customers through accessible communication channels, participatory public meetings, and feedback mechanisms.

EWEB designed the Community Table with the commitment that we **consult** them. The IAP2 defines "consult" as: "We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision."

It's essential to understand that requesting public input, while valuable, does not always imply that all suggestions will be incorporated into the final decision. Instead, EWEB considers each perspective as part of a comprehensive evaluation process, balancing public input with legal, financial, and operational considerations to arrive at decisions that responsibly serve the entire community. By clarifying expectations and showing how feedback influences our choices, we aim to maintain transparency and build trust, even when complex issues require nuanced solutions.

## Community Table Structure

### **What is the goal of the Community Table?**

EWEB designed the Community Table thoughtfully, with the goal of hearing from and understanding a wide range of community values and opinions as they relate to energy supply choices.

### **What will EWEB do with the feedback?**

EWEB's commitment to participants is to **consult** them. We will gather feedback and listen to and acknowledge their values and perspectives. We will share how their input shaped the final outcomes. The ultimate decision-makers are EWEB's publicly elected Board of Commissioners. Practically speaking, this means that EWEB will collect feedback from the Community Table, compile it and deliver it to the Board of Commissioners.

### **Why was the group designed the way it was?**

There are many ways to conduct meaningful community engagement, each with benefits and challenges. EWEB chose to invite representatives of nonprofit, for-profit, community and government organizations that serve and work with distinct segments of the community. EWEB reasoned that these representatives could devote the time to learning intricate subject matter and could incorporate the perspectives of the communities they serve.

This approach allows for deeper discussions, ultimately leading to more thoughtful input and better outcomes for the entire community. In contrast, inviting the general public could dilute the focus and depth of engagement, making it challenging to achieve the same level of nuanced understanding and representation.

### **How did EWEB choose the invitees?**

EWEB intentionally chose representatives of organizations that potentially hold diverse perspectives on which energy supply options should be prioritized. By gathering individuals with varied backgrounds and interests,

EWEB aimed to foster a rich exchange of ideas, allowing participants to hear from one another and recognize the multitude of differing opinions within our community. This collaborative environment is crucial for understanding the range of views that must be considered in the Board's decision-making process.

**How does the Community Table relate to EWEB’s DEI goals?**

Part of EWEB’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy (SD23) “directs the General Manager to facilitate productive, inclusive, and respectful Community engagement ... and Equitable opportunity to participate in our ... public processes.” The Community Table is an initiative for EWEB to more intentionally solicit community feedback from diverse perspectives, give more opportunity for under-represented groups to participate in public processes and create a welcoming environment for them to do so. Future iterations of the Community Table will improve on this one.

**When was the first session and how many sessions will EWEB hold?**

EWEB hosted the first session of the Community Table on Oct. 4, 2024. EWEB will hold at least one more session of the Community Table to gather additional feedback about the BPA product choice. Additional sessions on that, or other topics, may be planned.

**What was the content of the first session?**

During the first session of the Community Table, EWEB staff focused on collecting feedback about values that are relevant to EWEB’s energy supply decisions. This was intentional, and a way to lay the groundwork for future discussions. For the most part, staff refrained from discussing details of the Bonneville Power Administration contract decision. Discussions of that topic will be the focus of a future Community Table session.

**Who was invited to and attended the Community Table?**

EWEB hosted the first session of the Community Table Oct. 4, 2024. EWEB invited representatives from a diverse cross section of local institutions, large customers, environmental groups, housing entities and affinity groups. Of the 24 invited, 16 responded that they could attend and 14 attended.

	<b>Attended?</b>
<b>350 Eugene</b>	Yes
<b>Asian Council of Oregon</b>	No
<b>Beyond Toxics</b>	Yes
<b>Breach Collective</b>	Yes
<b>Centro Latino Americano</b>	No
<b>Community Alliance of Lane County</b>	No
<b>Emerald Valley Electric Vehicle Association</b>	No
<b>Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce</b>	Yes
<b>City of Eugene</b>	Yes
<b>Homes for Good</b>	Yes
<b>International Paper</b>	Yes
<b>Lane County</b>	Yes
<b>Lane Small Business Development Center</b>	No
<b>Lane Transit District</b>	No
<b>Looking Glass Community Services</b>	No
<b>Rental Owners Association of Lane County</b>	Yes

<b>NAACP of Lane County</b>	No
<b>Oregon Just Transition Alliance</b>	No
<b>PakTech</b>	No
<b>Sierra Pacific Industries</b>	Yes
<b>Springfield Eugene Tenant Association</b>	No
<b>St. Vincent de Paul</b>	Yes
<b>Thermo Fisher Scientific</b>	Yes
<b>University of Oregon</b>	No

### **How will EWEB improve the Community Table in the future?**

EWEB embraces a culture of continuous improvement. This session marked the first time EWEB employed the Community Table format for gathering public input, and we are committed to learning and adapting as we go. Recognizing that each engagement experience is unique, future sessions may be structured differently based on the insights gained from this initial event. We are eager to refine our approach to better serve our community’s needs and develop deeper relationships with diverse community interests.

## Summary of the feedback collected during the first session

Several themes emerged from the feedback participants offered during the first session. This initial feedback reflects only one part of EWEB's broader public engagement strategy. EWEB will continue to seek input from a diverse range of community members to better understand customer needs and preferences for the Board's consideration alongside technical and operational insights provided by EWEB staff.

**Local Control and Autonomy:** The feedback shows a preference for local decision-making. Participants value EWEB’s role as a community utility, which allows for responsiveness to local needs and opportunities for community-specific initiatives like community solar and localized power generation.

**Reliability and Resilience in Transition:** Participants emphasize the importance of maintaining power reliability, even as we pursue carbon reduction goals. They recognize that while environmental targets are essential, reliability remains crucial for economic stability and community trust.

**Equity and Energy Justice:** The idea of energy justice resonates strongly, with calls to make greater renewable energy and efficiency incentives accessible to low-income and vulnerable populations. There’s also concern over energy burden, with participants noting that energy expenses disproportionately impact low-income households.

**Affordability:** Affordability remains a foundational concern, with a focus on balancing low costs with environmental and resilience goals.

**Community Engagement and Education:** Respondents want to be actively involved in EWEB’s energy decisions and envision a role for the utility in educating the community on sustainable options, like rooftop solar, batteries, and microgrids. This desire for engagement suggests a path for EWEB to build understanding and support for necessary tradeoffs and complex decisions.

## Second session planning

EWEB staff are planning the second session of the Community Table, which is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 13. Staff are planning to dive deeper on the concept of “local control.” Though participants in the first session broadly agreed about the value of local control, they likely have nuanced and possibly differing opinions about what local control means. For instance, does it include local power generation? What kind?

Staff welcome Commissioner input on what type of feedback would be most useful.

**Recommendation**

None.

**Requested Board Action**

None.

## Appendix

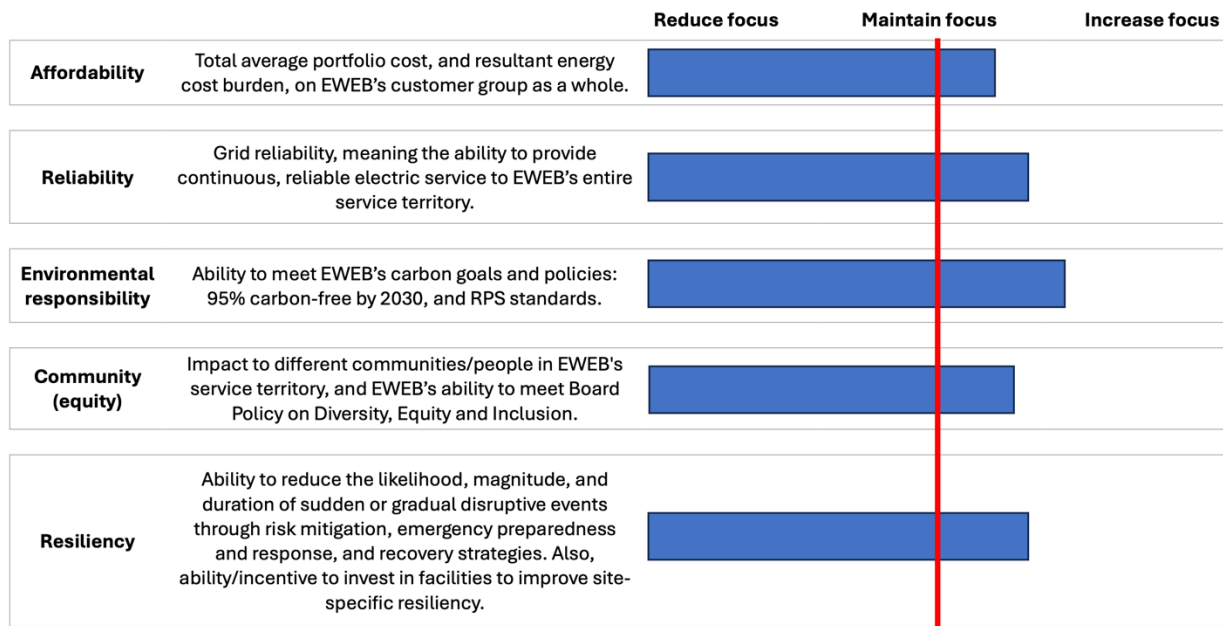
### Full feedback collected during the first session

During the first session, EWEB collected feedback during the session in several ways:

- Participants filled out a form that plotted EWEB's values pertaining to energy supply decisions on a continuum.
- They engaged in guided large and small group discussions.
- Participants identified their ideal carbon reduction percentage, factoring in cost considerations.

### Values continuum

Participants filled out a form indicating whether they would like to see EWEB decrease focus, maintain focus or increase focus on five key values that pertain to energy supply decisions: affordability, reliability, environmental responsibility, community (equity), and resiliency. The average results from the 14 participants are displayed in the chart below. On average, participants expressed a desire for EWEB to maintain or increase its focus on all five values.



This feedback indicates that EWEB is on the right track in prioritizing these values in its energy supply decision-making processes. However, this exercise did not compel participants to grapple with the tradeoffs inherent in energy supply planning, such as the cost implications of reducing carbon emissions or building reliable infrastructure.

Ongoing engagement and transparent communication about the challenges of balancing these values will be vital to understand the community's perspectives on these trade-offs, foster customer trust and confidence, and reinforce EWEB's commitment to thoughtful decision-making on behalf of the entire community.

## Large group discussion

EWEB conducted large group discussion at the beginning and end. During introductions participants were prompted to answer the question, "What is most important to you about the future of energy in Eugene?" Their responses included:

- Having the conversation about tradeoffs and being willing to have the discussion with each other and recognize we won't all be consistent.
- Reliability while transitioning to low carbon future that doesn't impact low-cost power.
- Resilient, reliable and responsible power.
- Addressing industrial properties on west side of the city.
- Energy justice, awareness and understanding of the ripple effect of choices we make.
- Including community solar and considering vulnerable populations.
- Affordability, reliability, access to solar.
- Exploring topics that have conflict within them and solving them with a justice model.
- Making sure lowest income families have access to power that's clean and renewable.
- Bringing awareness for renewable, sustainable energy in the community, such as rooftop solar, batteries and micro-grids.

## Small group discussion

Participants verbally answered questions during small group discussions led by EWEB staff. Some participants also wrote down and submitted answers to those questions. That feedback is below.

- 1. Of EWEB's five values that apply to energy supply choices – affordability, reliability, environmental responsibility, community equity and resiliency – which ones should EWEB focus on more and which ones should EWEB focus on less? Why?**

### Theme:

- All values matter and they are interrelated.
- EWEB should not reduce focus on any of the five values.
- Reliable, affordable power is important for economic development.

### Insights:

Participants said ...

- The values are interconnected.

- Reliability was especially important to participants focused on business development and economic development.
  - Electricity is vital to economic development goals.
  - EWEB is already quite reliable.
- The values can become expensive. EWEB needs to be realistic about affordability.
- EWEB's reliable, affordable power is a big local advantage.
- EWEB as a municipal utility – that model of governance is powerful. EWEB needs to continue to ramp up engagement.
- EWEB could increase focus on equity by doing more community education and ensuring a diversity of voices contributes to local discussions and decisions.
- EWEB should maintain and increase community engagement.
- EWEB already has low-carbon power. Affordability is a bigger concern.
- EWEB needs to level the playing field so low-income community members have the same access to programs and services as other community members.
- Sometimes energy efficiency incentives require too much investment to be cost-effective for low-income people.
- Rental owners can't afford to increase the efficiency of their properties. Landlords don't want to convert from cadet heaters.
  - Most owners have fewer than four properties.
  - In 60% to 70% of cases, landlords can't afford an overall heating upgrade.

Quotes:

- “Carbon reductions at the cost of reliability is risky. We've been able to boast about reliability.”
- “DEI stuff is less important. If compromise has to come, this is where.”
- “You can't invest in the hard work and not impact affordability. Deferring costs comes with costs eventually.”
- “Reliability that leads to predictability is important for businesses.”
- “Predictability is important. Realistic expectations on what is cost effective and how it impacts affordability. Actions might not be affordable up front, but they may pay off over time. Affordable and reliable are a competitive advantage.”

**2. Where do you see the biggest tension in tradeoffs (potential or real) across the values?**

Themes:

- Reliability and environmental values incur near-term costs, but investments provide long-term value.
- Some participants would accept lower reliability to achieve other goals.

Insights:

Participant said ...

- EWEB should be cautious about tradeoffs: chasing one value could lead to diminishing another value.
- There is a tension between the present and the future.



- At least one participant was willing to sacrifice reliability for the sake of other goals.
  - Maybe we need to have a place where medically vulnerable people can go when the power goes out, such as a hospital that has backup generation.
- The biggest tension is between the present and the future. Carbon reductions may be expensive now but achieving our Paris accord goals gets more expensive the longer we wait.
- We shouldn't be afraid of the future.
- The community probably can't afford to be 100% carbon free.

Quotes:

- "We're making things less affordable by chasing higher environmental."
- "Reliability is key, but we can't afford 100% reliability."
- "We need to feel comfortable changing the conversation. There are corporations that should be paying more because they haven't been thoughtful on how they scaled up. But they also have resources to push back on the higher costs."
- "While carbon reductions may be expensive now, if we wait it will just keep getting more expensive and harder to chase so we will continue to spiral down."
- "We need to get comfortable that climate change is chaotic. We need to get used to the idea that power will go out as opposed to always thinking it will be on."
- "We need to have hard conversations about tradeoffs."

**3. What does affordability mean to you?**

Theme:

- Affordability means energy burden, which is the percentage of income that a person spends on their energy bill.

Insights:

Participants said ...

- Affordability equates to energy burden, or the percentage of household income that someone spends on energy.
  - For the lowest income folks, that's at about 11%, compared to under 6% for the rest of the community.
- EWEB needs more incentives for renters.
- Energy justice is important.
- One participant asked if EWEB would support a directive that all buildings have solar, even parks and public bathrooms.

Quotes:

- "No matter what, we know that if we keep using fossil fuels, our carbon will increase and it will cost more."
- "How do we help vulnerable populations?"

- “We need to explore tradeoffs to ensure low-income homes have access to non-polluting power sources.”

**4. With the new Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) contract, EWEB has the option to simplify operations and streamline by giving more control to BPA. Doing so would reduce EWEB’s ability or incentive to determine our energy resource mix, invest in local energy generation or establish unique customer programs or rates. Is it more important to you for EWEB to have simpler operations focused on cost management or to have more local control?**

Theme:

- Yes. Keep decision-making local. And pursue local energy generation.

Insights:

Participants said ...

- Participants from a wide variety of backgrounds all concluded that local control was important. None wanted to cede more control to BPA, an agency with distant decision-making processes.
- Reducing local control might make sense for the sake of efficiency and possible financial savings associated with a larger pool of shared costs.
- However, local control, optionality, and local generation are preferable. Being solely a price taker comes with a tremendous amount of risk.
- Relying solely on BPA could cut down on local political maneuvering.
- Participants wanted more details about how the BPA decision would affect other factors, such as cost and reliability.
- If EWEB transfers control and risk to BPA, we reduce opportunity in our community.
- Local control is more important. Self-sustainability and the ability to do things here is important. Eugene should have local power plants.
- Local control is important to allow for better community feedback mechanisms.
- EWEB should generate electricity locally. If it’s not local solar, what is the local option?
- Local control with coordination with regional folks is ideal. Community solar is a great idea.
- Will the community lose jobs if we give more authority to BPA?
- Local generation is incredibly important for resiliency and reliability. It brings jobs and supports the economy.
- We need to increase local generation and create a safety net for the future.

Quotes:

- “More local control will pay off in the long run and increase our resilience.”
- “As a public utility, we stand for local control, so why would we want to give that up?”
- “The risk of simplifying is there is more distance between the community and less of our interests are reflected in the decisions.”
- “We need local control to manage our own community.”
- “Need to prioritize how we balance. Pushing service to BPA limits our community’s ability to be creative.”

**5. What role do you want your organization and the customers you represent to play in determining the future of EWEB's power supply? Do you want an active or passive role?**

Theme:

- Active. Maintain EWEB's public power community involvement.

Insights:

Participants said ...

- We want an active voice in EWEB's energy decisions.
- Agencies and companies want to partner with EWEB to maximize local resources, such as local roof space.
- If community solar isn't viable, is community geothermal a viable option?
- EWEB needs leadership that will listen to the community to take them seriously and reflect their ideas in the organization.

Quotes:

- To accomplish local control, "EWEB must have land and resources."
- Education is vital. "People want to be empowered."

## Cost vs carbon chart

Participants were asked to place a dot on the chart below (which comes from a regional study of the cost of carbon reductions for the region's grid) indicating their belief about the ideal tradeoff between carbon reductions and cost.

Representatives from environmental groups desired 100% carbon reductions (or nearly 100%). They disputed the assumptions and framing inherent in the chart, arguing that costs for higher reductions in carbon emissions would be lower with certain programs and technologies.

### E3 Cost & Emissions Impact Original PGP Study + Additional Carbon Cap Scenarios (2018)

