

Energizing Equity: Transforming Communities Through Partnership and Innovation

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Energizing Equity: Transforming Communities Through Partnership & Innovation Wednesday, 1/22/2025 – 9:30AM-3:30PM – Arrival Time: 9AM

[Energizing Equity Conference v1 | Videos & Movies on Vimeo](#)

University of Michigan - Flint, Riverfront Conference Center
1 Riverfront Plaza, Flint, MI 48502

Agenda:

Time	Activity	Contact
9:00 AM	Event Registration Opens/Breakfast	
9:30 AM	Program Begins Safety Tailboard	Safety Tailboard - Kyle McCree, Jordan Walker (2 min) Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley welcome (2 min) Angela Thompkins, Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President, Community Affairs, Consumers Energy (6 min)
9:40 AM	Keynote Remarks	Carla Walker-Miller, CEO Walker-Miller Energy Services (20 min)
10:00 AM	Meaningful Engagement to Reduce Adverse Reliability Impacts	Consumers Energy Moderator: Rafael Turner, Community Affairs Manager, Flint and Genesee County Panelists: 1. Kerry Duggan, Sustainability 2. Dr. Brandy Brown, Chief Innovation Officer at Walker-Miller Energy Services (former) 3. Valerie Brader, Michigan's Agency for Energy 4. Dr. Beverly Brown, Genesee County Commissioner
10:45 AM	BREAK	

11:00 AM	Meaningful Engagement to Create Thriving Communities for Sustainable Prosperity	Consumers Energy Moderator: Angela Henderson, Vice President Supply Chain Panelists: 1. Jody Kerbyson, Genesee Shiawassee Thumb Michigan Works! 2. David McGhee, Community Foundation of Greater Flint 3. Essence Wilson, Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Communities First, Inc. 4. Robert Matthews, Mott Community College
12:00 PM	Networking lunch	Booths open: - Consumers Energy (customer programs, supplier diversity, careers, IRP, Flint Gas City, EWR, etc.) - Mott Community College (apprenticeship) - CLEAResult (Home Energy Analysis) - Walker-Miller Energy Services - Genesee County
1:15 PM	Breakouts Round 1	Sandra Etherly-Johnson, Genesee County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission Jerome Threlkeld, Genesee County Diversity Equity and Inclusion Commission Maryum Rasool, President/CEO Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village <u>Title:</u> Building Community Prosperity Together (Room 1) Rafael Turner, Community Affairs Manager at Consumers Energy City Council Members: Judy Priestley, 4th Ward; Candice Mushatt, 7th Ward; Ladel Lewis, 2nd Ward <u>Title:</u> Clean Energy Transformation (IRP feedback) (Room 2)
2:10 PM	Change Rooms	
2:15 PM	Breakouts Round 2	See above
3:00 PM	Main Session Closing Remarks	Angela Thompkins, Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President, Community Affairs, Consumers Energy (10 min)
3:30 PM	Event Concludes/Clean up	

Panel One: Meaningful Engagement to Reduce Adverse Reliability Impacts

SUBJECT: equitable energy reliability

Prepared for: moderator and panelists

Date: January 22, 2025

Panel Overview:

The goal of this panel segment is to discuss and share examples of collaborative partnerships and approaches that help to mitigate or prevent adverse reliability impacts for communities.

Moderator will start the panel introducing themselves and setting context for the panel discussion. After context, the moderator will reference panelist bios to be displayed on screen throughout the discussion.

Roles

Moderator: Rafael Turner, Community Affairs Manager - Flint and Genesee County, Consumers Energy

Panelists:

- **Kerry Duggan**, sustainability expert, CEO, and former climate advisor to President Joe Biden, known as the "climate MacGyver." She founded SustainabiliD, a global advisory firm focused on innovative climate tech solutions, partnering with major corporations, universities, and investment firms. Duggan holds several board and advisory roles, including with Perma-Fix and Michigan LCV, and serves as a senior advisor at RockCreek Global Investment. She is on the faculty at the University of Michigan and has served in key political appointments under Presidents Biden and Obama. Duggan has been recognized by Crain's Detroit Business as a "40 Under 40" and a leader in sustainability. [community partnerships]
- **Dr. Brandy Brown**, an energy expert known for driving equitable advanced energy projects, workforce development, and mobility solutions. She previously served as Chief Innovation Officer at Walker-Miller Energy Services, focusing on equity in clean energy, and was the inaugural Climate & Energy Advisor for Michigan, where she led statewide decarbonization strategies and climate initiatives. Dr. Brown also serves on Michigan's Natural Resources Trust Fund Board and the boards of the Michigan Climate Action Network (MiCAN) and Oji. [electric reliability]
- **Valerie Brader**, head of Michigan's Agency for Energy, she played a key role in drafting significant energy law reforms from 2011-2017, including Michigan's 2016 comprehensive energy reform and legislation on ratemaking, performance contracting, and energy security. Engaged in MISO, PJM, and FERC processes and provided legislative testimony at both state and federal levels. Also guided the launch of a new chemical manufacturing facility in Michigan, handling brownfield documentation, securing environmental permits, and training employees on compliance. [gas reliability]
- **Dr. Beverly Brown**, Genesee County Commissioner [local collaboration]

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Discussion Outline (45 minutes)

- Opening remarks (moderator) [5 minutes]
 - Introduce self, reference panelist bios (on screen)
 - Panel title: Meaningful Engagement to Reduce Adverse Reliability Impacts
 - Purpose of our discussion today is to better understand the range of reliability impacts communities face, and through the examples shared, explore collaborative partnerships and approaches that could help to mitigate or prevent adverse impacts as we move toward a clean energy future
 - Share equality v. equity slide for context definition, then return to panelist bios
- Panel questions [30 minutes]
 - From your perspective, what is the greatest reliability challenge facing the state of Michigan? How does equity factor into this challenge (12 min/3 minutes each)
 - Dr. BB – electric reliability perspective?
 - VB – gas reliability perspective? UP/northern Michigan challenges v. urban populations?
 - KD – community partnerships/accessibility perspective?
 - Commissioner B – local challenges, specific Flint barriers for reliability/connections to affordability, weatherization, etc.
 - What success, or progress, have you seen in Michigan's approach to the clean energy transformation that is helping to embed equity and collaboration? (9 min/3 min each)
 - Dr. BB – ties to federal or state funding and projects?
 - KD – tech solutions/role of digital?
 - VB – UP early transition to renewables?
 - On a local level, how is the city of Flint approaching its unique reliability barriers? How is the city collaborating to make progress or what could be done differently to build and sustain progress? (3 min)
 - Commissioner B - streetlights/converting to LEDs mitigate increases over time, reliability/system upgrades, forestry problem-solving, timing for infrastructure enhancements, etc.
 - For all customers and communities to experience clean energy benefits equitably, what actions can be taken collectively? Where do we start? (6 minutes/1.5 min each)
 - All
- Audience Q&A [10 minutes]

Key Themes/Stories:

- From a holistic perspective, understand the variety of impacts customers and communities face when considering energy reliability and clean energy transition
- Learn how societal equity factors uniquely impact the energy experience across different geographical regions and customer demographics
- Explore future-focused ideas and approaches that center the voice of customers and lived experience to help build a system all communities can benefit from equitably

Panel Two: Meaningful Engagement to Create Thriving Communities for Sustainable Prosperity

SUBJECT – equitable energy system community benefits

Prepared for: moderator and panelists

Date: January 22, 2025

Panel Overview:

The goal of this panel segment is to discuss and share examples of collaborative partnerships and approaches to build holistic community prosperity including benefits through the lens of economic impact, infrastructure investment, affordability, environmental exposure, job creation, philanthropic investment and volunteerism, amongst other benefits.

Moderator will start the panel introducing themselves and setting context for the panel discussion. After context, the moderator will reference panelist bios to be displayed on screen throughout the discussion.

Roles

Moderator: **Angela Henderson**, Vice President Supply Chain, Consumers Energy

Panelists:

- **Jody Kerbyson**, Genesee Shiawassee Thumb Michigan Works!. Programs in include Jobs for Michigan, amongst others, and Jody's perspective includes the full county which incorporates pathways for community members who may fall under Assest-Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) designation. Involvement within the Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium (MEWDC) for jobseekers, Mott Community College as a partner in Flint.
- **David McGhee**, Community Foundation of Greater Flint. Consumers Energy Foundation has supported through DEI Grants support which contributed to the gun violence prevention grant. In addition, grant support has incorporated the Flint promise scholarships, wrap around services for student grant, and water crisis recovery support.
- **Essence Wilson**, President & CEO, Communities First, Inc. Communities First, a nonprofit based in Flint, received a \$250,000 Prosperity Award from the Consumers Energy Foundation in 2021 to restore the historic Flint Masonic Temple.
- **Robert Matthews**, Ruth Mott Foundation/Applewood. Foundation focuses on neighborhood empowerment, job creation, and economic impact.

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Discussion Outline (1 hour)

- Opening remarks (moderator) [5 minutes]
 - Introduce self, reference panelist bios (on screen)
 - Panel title: Meaningful Engagement to Create Thriving Communities for Sustainable Prosperity
 - Purpose of this panel discussion is to better understand the variety of factors that contribute to community prosperity and explore collaborative approaches for equitable progress
- Panel questions [40 minutes]
 - What does community prosperity mean to you and how does your work contribute to building prosperity, pathways to thrive, for the people of Flint? (15 min/2-3 min each)
 - All panelists respond
 - Moderator adds ties to economic impact from supply chain relationships and small businesses, etc.
 - Affordability, and cost of living, is one key component necessary for community prosperity. How can corporations, small businesses, non-profits, and other community entities better collaborate to address affordability barriers? (15 min/3 min each)
 - All panelists
 - JK – employment pathways perspective to create jobs, build sustainable, in-demand careers that pay well
 - DM – community safety, scholarships for education, etc.
 - EW – affordable housing, affordability programs, energy waste reduction, etc.
 - RM – apprenticeships, career prosperity
 - Health and environmental safety factors are additional components necessary for community prosperity. What collaborative, or innovative, progress has been made in Flint since the water crisis in 2014, and looking forward, how can community entities work together differently for greater safety, health, and environmental progress? (10 min/5 min each)
 - DM – community foundation role, examples of what has worked, what is a focus area moving forward, what support is needed, etc.
 - EW – affordable housing, etc.
- Audience Q&A [15 minutes]

Key Themes/Stories:

- Holistically understand the variety of ways community entities can positively impact livelihood and invest in people and partnerships for greater community prosperity
- Learn how societal equity factors uniquely impact community prosperity and explore future collaboration opportunities for progress

Breakout Room Two: Clean Energy Transformation

SUBJECT – Integrated Resource Plan, gather feedback

Prepared for: Rafael Turner, Community Affairs Manager at Consumers Energy

City Council Members: Judy Priestley, 4th Ward; Candice Mushatt, 7th Ward; Ladel Lewis, 2nd Ward

Date: January 22, 2025

Overview:

Breakout session segments to be based on interaction, facilitated to gather inputs on a prompt and/or problem statement connected to community energy needs, including community prosperity. Goal is to facilitate an interactive session to build upon concepts introduced in the morning portion of the day.

Room two – gather input and feedback from a cross-sectional set of stakeholders to understand biggest concerns and greatest areas of interest. Consumers Energy, and other key stakeholders, can utilize inputs to help inform ongoing efforts such as the integrated resource plan (IRP), collaborative EEJ strategy, etc.

Session Outline:

- 1) Share meeting norms to set ground rules and tone for dialogue
- 2) Set context – emphasize scope of conversation to focus on clean energy supply; clean can include both renewable and non-renewable sources. Any change can prompt uncertainties, questions, or fear. Goal of the conversation today is to not only capture potential concerns but ideate possibilities together that can inform energy provider plans and next steps.
 - a. Display on screen during the discussion a slide (Consumers Energy to provide) which shows visuals to support the scope: EV, renewable sources, gas carbon capture, etc.
 - b. Approach conversation at foundational level; assume room knowledge is at baseline for the average person. Actual expertise may vary.
- 3) Discussion questions (sample)
 - What comes to mind when you think of the electric supply of the future?
 - Hopes, desires, what excites you
 - Fears, uncertainties, concerns
 - What would you like to see to help address these uncertainties?
 - How do you envision staying informed or collaborating with utilities as we work toward future clean energy vision? i.e. communication methods and mediums, frequency, partnerships across silos in a community, etc.
 - What does good collaboration look like?
 - What does good communication look like?
 - How could digital solutions support?
 - What needs to be true to make future state a beneficial reality for all?

DEBRIEF AND FEEDBACK THEMES

Purpose: Conference to welcome feedback on how we can improve and focus on what's important for community members. Better understand what reliability and accessibility means to the audience and what the priorities are from the community's eyes.

Attendees: 75 community leaders, grass "tops"

Notes:

- How can we reach those in most need?
 - Multilingual messaging / notices – for many, English isn't their first language
 - Grass roots community meetings to launch and share awareness
 - Meet them where they are at:
 - More likely to reach = **"Be Creative & Relentless"**
 - Door knocking
 - Partnering with neighborhood associations, municipalities
 - Join townhalls
 - Non-emergency events to share information (they referenced seeing us in communities during outages to give water and food, and recommended to do something similar on blue sky days)
 - Podcast sharing stories – good/bad/best practices, be relatable, showcase local community projects and lessons learned.
 - People are getting information on social media.
 - Texting
 - Netflix & YouTube adds – many choose to pay the \$7.99 Netflix subscription with adds versus the \$17 add free subscription.
 - Less likely to reach =
 - Bill inserts are less valuable as people get them online and only look for the total bill amount not what else is printed.
 - News outlets only pick what they want to report and only share the headline without the detail.
 - How can you make it easier to convert to enroll in a program? The emails I get require me to take multiple steps like scheduling a visit. How can you make it more streamlined? At events can we make it a seamless interaction? There are too many layers.
 - Today we are battling misinformation. Does it make sense for CE to do a podcast to share energy stories? Show pros, cons, risks, collaboration? Create positive success stories.
 - Interests voiced:
 - Better awareness to energy career paths
 - Be upfront with communications "these are the risks; this is the solution"
 - Education on energy topics like how to flip breakers in your home if the power goes out, how to operate emergency medical equipment, etc.
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- **What comes to mind when you think of the electric supply of the future? Hopes, desires, what excites you; Fears, uncertainties, concerns**
 - Economic development and job creation
 - Power outages – when we lose power, I'm in panic mode. Father needs oxygen and we need to have a plan B for people with health conditions.
 - Excited for clean energy and impact on community health like asthma
 - A need to work out the kinks in new technologies
 - Rehabilitation of old industrial sites that don't have redevelopment opportunity with solar
 - Like hydro and solar – don't like wind
 - Conflicting goals between utilities and residents on who owns the energy – **community solar** position
 - General mood was optimistic and hopeful about the future of energy
 - Apprehensive about ensuring reliability and affordability
 - Mentions of the large 2003 blackout and with the new resources we are bringing on are we ensuring that does not happen again
 - What's our Plan B if certain resources are not available?
 - *thinking this implies when the sun doesn't shine or the wind doesn't blow, along with distribution reliability*
 - Noted priorities being reliable and safe, affordable, and sustainable/environment
 - There are a lot of options with new technology, how do we know we are making the best choice for us? Can't do something for us without us. How are we going to educate along the way vs making the decision and convincing people we are right?
 - Netflix example was used. If given the option of cheaper monthly Netflix bill but have to put up with ads or paying more for no ads, people want the least cost option.
 - *How do we tell a wider story of environmental and/or economic benefits that won't directly show up in a rate but can make a customer's life more prosperous?*
 - Acknowledged that interest between community and the utility may not always be aligned. Provided the example of community solar and how enabling this to help the community and the traditional utility is hard.

How to address uncertainties?

- Change is hard, many would like to “deal with the devil they know vs the unknown”
 - Consistent and visible communication to educate can help with change
 - Allows the community to be ready for the change when it actually comes
- Ask: Educate and be transparent about new technology we are considering. What are the pros and cons and for the cons, what barriers exist and what are we doing to solve (even if we don't have a solution yet)
- Ask: Educate on the process
 - *High level how we develop a plan but then there is a piece on development and how we choose locations for different technologies that could be educational*

What does good collaboration look like?

- Continue showing up in the community and providing education and transparency
 - *Leverage our community affairs partners*

- Utilize local associations and neighborhood groups for townhalls
- Less on-air media and more social media / podcasts -> stories of positive experiences or how we solved a problem with the community (provide examples communities can relate to) and show our work
 - *How do we make sure community leaders are engaged in this communication such that they share with their community?*
- Meet residents where they are (simplify the message) and be relentless with communication
- Ask: What jobs and skillsets do you need and when by? Organizations want to be able to help ensure workforce is ready

Reflections:

Relationships are Powerful

- The mayor, Sheldon Neeley, shared that when he had an issue, he knew who to call. He made the call, and we responded quickly.
 - Relationships affirm our brand of "Count on Us" and being part of the local community.
 - This is a very common story whether it's referencing a leader, community affairs manager, or energy solutions manager.
 - How might we support and leverage existing relationships to get direct feedback and support?

Multiple community members referenced asking community what they want to see and then integrating and acting upon that feedback, follow through is critical

CE is looked at as experts

- How can we build simple education materials and use them with conversations to increase awareness?
 - There seems to be great interest in learning about the resources we are considering for the future – maybe some simplified educational material around the advantages and disadvantages of each -> there is no one resource that solves it all
 - Education on our business and why we are thinking of the choices we are is crucial for customers; consider leveraging site tours and allow questions with SMEs to help customers get a peak behind the scenes and have space to ask the expert

Priorities

- Total bill cost and reliability were popular themes.
- Another customer theme was self-sufficiency and maintaining dignity for customers; if "surviving" customers need basic needs met first before anything else; break down stigmas and reinforcing it is okay to apply for/use help from resources available. "Affordability is a symptom – David McGhee, Community Foundation Greater Flint
- Accessibility vs. availability was another key theme; just being out there is not enough, emphasis and accountability to get the information to the people where *they* are
- Make it Simple - too many steps or questions results in less engagement