Briefing Paper
Strategic Utility Roundtable

March 7, 2012

Summary

The board will hear a status report on whether to extend the strategic utility roundtable process the board initiated in 2009 on a two-year trial basis.

Background

- The OPUC-Energy Trust grant agreement calls for the board to have the skills and demographics to be effective, the diversity necessary to support its mission, to be "as broadly representative of electrical users in the Service Areas as possible," and to avoid direct financial conflicts of interest (Grant Agreement, section 5.k).
- In 2009, representatives from three investor-owned utilities whose customers are served by Energy Trust expressed interest in having representation on the Energy Trust board.
- After extensive conversations with the utilities and other interested parties, the board proposed instead that the board, utilities and key stakeholders (the Citizens Utility Board, Renewable Northwest Project and Industrial Customers of NW Utilities) convene a "strategic utility roundtable" on a two-year trial basis.
- In December, 2009, the board adopted operating principles for the process, Attachment A.
- In 2010, roundtables were convened in February and April, and the utilities led a discussion at the board's June 2010 retreat on industry drivers that could significantly influence utility and Energy Trust collaborations. In 2011, roundtables were convened in February, August and October to discuss the effects of changes in Oregon's energy tax credits.

Discussion

- A subset of the board policy committee is discussing with the utilities and interested parties whether to continue the roundtable and if so, whether there should be changes in it.
- At this meeting, Jason Eisdorfer will report on these discussions.

ATTACHMENT A

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The Utility Strategic Roundtable is a two-year trial designed to facilitate the utilities' expressed interest in communicating with the Energy Trust Board on a strategic level.

1. The Utility Strategic Roundtable would be composed of the Energy Trust Board and Executive Director, and representatives of the electric and gas utilities served by the Energy Trust: Cascade Natural Gas, NW Natural, PacifiCorp and PGE. Members of the public and other stakeholders, including representatives of customer groups, the environment, workers, and efficiency and renewable energy trade groups, would be invited to attend and participate in the discussions.

2. The Roundtable would meet in the first quarter of 2010. At that meeting, and the first meeting in 2011, the roundtable will schedule further meetings for that year. There will be at least two meetings annually. If possible, meetings should be timed with regular Energy Trust Board meetings so all Board members can attend.

3. Roundtable participants are encouraged to appoint decision-level representatives to the roundtable, ensure that the appointed person attend all meetings, and try not to vary representation from meeting to meeting.

4. Each roundtable agenda would be determined by the Energy Trust Board President in consultation with the full Board, the utilities and interested parties. Agendas will be organized to allow the utilities to engage in a dialogue on matters of interest to them, and may include suitable agenda items suggested by others. In general, the agenda would focus on strategic and longer-term ideas, opportunities and concerns, with the goal to ensure the entities are working well together to pursue energy efficiency and renewable energy in the most effective and coordinated way possible. The following process will be followed:

    - Energy Trust will propose meeting date(s) and solicit agenda items from utilities, board members and interest groups;
    - Candidate topics will be reviewed by staff and discussed with the policy committee, which will recommend an agenda to the board President; and
    - The committee will consider whether issues that are not included on the roundtable agenda may be suitable for other forums, e.g., CAC, RAC, or regular board meetings.

5. Each agenda item will have a sponsoring entity, which will be responsible for providing background material on the issue at least 10 days before the roundtable meeting.

6. All meetings will be open except for any portions of meetings that the Energy Trust President determines would involve trade secrets, proprietary or other confidential commercial or financial information. Energy Trust will provide public notice of meetings.

7. Roundtables will discuss issues and may make recommendations to the Energy Trust board or others. No votes will be taken. Roundtables are not authorized to take action on behalf of the Energy Trust board.

8. Minutes will be kept and a roster of potential action items would be brought back for full Energy Trust Board discussion and staff consideration before commitments to pursue the actions were made.

9. The parties would try this approach for a two-year period to determine if it is an effective way to promote strategic communications before deciding whether to make it a permanent feature or pursue some other course.