

September 8, 2021

Here in Indiana, Hoosiers have very little influence over the sources of electricity that power their homes. This impacts their pocketbook and quality of life - including the air they breathe, the water they drink, and an increasingly challenging climate with which they must contend.

Before the pandemic, Hoosiers were at least able to have direct conversations with their electric utility during Integrated Resource Planning. This allowed everyday Hoosier voices to be heard in the process of determining their energy future. Though public access was already limited — as meetings are held all day, during the work week, and are highly technical — over the past year-plus, that access has been further restricted.

Duke's handling of its 2021 IRP process is a prime example. Duke has shut off web cameras, microphones and the public chat feature since its current stakeholder process began. Only Duke sees what is being said in the chat and by whom. Questions are read and answered by Duke staff only. These are not participatory stakeholder meetings so much as they are Duke-controlled presentations with little opportunity for customer input.

During the pandemic, many organizations have figured out how to improve online meeting spaces. There are plenty of resources for facilitating meaningful online conversations, the creative use of technologies, and preventing "Zoom bombers" for example. Utilities can easily adopt these best practices to truly engage stakeholders in their Integrated Resource Planning processes and ensure they are being heard. Instead, Duke set up a facade of engagement that actually shuts the public out.

Indiana-Michigan Power and NIPSCO's meetings similarly lack elements of transparency, but Duke's process is the most egregious. Utilities are exploiting the fact that the COVID-19 crisis requires remote-only stakeholder participation, and in Duke's case it is transparently an effort to squelch stakeholder questions and comments.

In the interest of transparency and engagement as Duke's 2021 IRP process continues, we ask that Duke allow stakeholders to:

1. View the participants list within the online platform;
2. See all comments and questions in the chat feature;
3. Have the option to be seen on camera;
4. Ask questions aloud if they so choose.

We also note that Duke has throughout this process ignored the IRP rule that states utilities should "develop and publish to [their] website agendas and relevant material for those meetings at least seven (7) calendar days prior to the meeting." As of today (September 8, 2021) we are two days from Duke's next announced meeting and no materials have been posted. And the link to register on the website is for August's meeting.

Moving forward, we also ask that utilities increase transparency and stakeholder participation, and all Integrated Resources Planning meetings apply the following guiding values:

Access: Meetings should be scheduled at times when everyday Hoosier customers can access them, and accommodations should be made for people of all abilities.

Engagement: Meetings should allow plenty of time for stakeholders and customers to ask questions, aloud if they so choose, and receive meaningful answers.

Transparency: Meetings should be announced at least a month in advance so people can have adequate notice and time to prepare. Agendas and materials should be posted at least seven days in advance in line with the IRP rule.

Sincerely,

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