

Meeting Notes
Q1 2026 Natural Gas Advisory Committee
March 3, 2026
9:30am-2:00pm
Online Only



Committee Attendees:

Kevin Duell – NW Natural

Carlos Limon – Avista

Kenji Spielman – Energy Trust

Michelle Wildie – Puget Sound Energy

Laney Ralph – NW Natural

Jodie Albert – Cascade Natural Gas

Paul Koenig – Washington UTC

NEEA Staff: Alisyn Maggiora (amaggiora@neea.org), Brandon Lindquist (blindquist@neea.org), Emily Moore (emoore@neea.org), Mark Rehley (mrehley@neea.org), Chuck Karras (ckarras@neea.org), Noe Contreras (ncontreras@neea.org), Neil Grigsby (ngrigsby@neea.org), Melissa Mejía (mmejia@neea.org), Emily Rosenbloom (erosenbloom@neea.org), Stephanie Quinn (squinn@neea.org), Chris Wolgamott (cwolgamott@neea.org), Deborah Sunada (dsunada@neea.org)

Other Attendees: Mehmud Iqbal, Fortis BC

Resources

- **Agenda packet on NEEA.org:** [Here](#)
- **Master slide deck on NEEA.org:** [Here](#)

Welcome and Introductions

Alisyn Maggiora opened the meeting by welcoming the committee and introducing Paul Koenig, the new representative for the Washington UTC, stepping into the role previously held by Joshua Dennis.

Housekeeping and Looking Ahead ([Slides 10-19](#) | [Packet p. 2](#))

Alisyn reviewed informational updates, including the Northwest Online Marketplace pilot with Enervee. NEEA is finalizing the contract for a three-year pilot, and several funding utilities (including Idaho Power, Tacoma Power, Clark PUD, Energy Trust, Pacific Power, and NW Natural) will launch their own branded subsites targeting the end of Q1. She also noted that the Efficient Rooftop Units (ERTU) program is officially changing its name to Advanced Performance RTUs to align with the commercial High-Performance HVAC program and reduce market confusion. High-Performance HVAC program is also changing its name to Advanced Performance DOAS (Dedicated Outside Air Systems) to ensure the two programs sound like a matched set in the market. Emily Moore clarified that this is currently a "soft launch" with external market actors, and internal NEEA systems will reflect the change later in the year. Upcoming events were discussed, including an MT 101 webinar on March 31 that will feature an Emerging Tech segment by Mark Rehley, and the Efficiency Exchange scheduled for May 5-6 in Boise, Idaho.

Noe Contreras provided an update on the Product Council, highlighting the updated website features and a recent session on Navien's residential dual-fuel water heater. He announced an upcoming session on March 10 regarding Residential HVAC Dual-Fuel Systems Analysis by Ben Larson.

Portfolio Update: Look Back, Look Ahead ([Slides 24-26](#) | [Packet p. 3](#))

Emily Moore reviewed market progress highlights from 2025 and goals for 2026. Key 2025 accomplishments included the Efficient RTU program working with major manufacturers like Carrier, Greenheck, and CaptiveAire to bring new products with whole-box features (like double-wall construction and R8 insulation) to the light commercial market. The program also successfully engaged with manufacturer reps like Johnson Barrow and Johnson Air to identify projects for qualified products in schools and sports facilities. The Advanced Commercial Water Heating program successfully recruited and installed a dual-fuel system pilot in a multifamily building and is wrapping up installation of a commercial gas heat pump system this quarter. Additionally, the Dual-Fuel Residential HVAC program advanced into the portfolio and is beginning critical market characterization work to inform intervention strategies. National collaboration expanded through the North American Gas Heat Pump Collaborative and co-funding of a GTI project for commercial water heating design tools.

For 2026, the portfolio focus will be on advancing existing programs and developing non-residential dual-fuel and fuel-neutral opportunities. A planned program advancement vote is targeted for Q4 to add gas High-Efficiency DOAS (Dedicated Outside Air Systems) to the existing electric High-Performance HVAC program. Additionally, NEEA is accelerating efforts to leverage the electric Luminaire Level Lighting Controls (LLLC) program to deliver HVAC savings, aiming to expedite this fuel-neutral opportunity within the year.

Quarterly Highlights ([Slides 30-39](#) | [Packet p. 4-14](#))

NEEA debuted a new presentation format for quarterly highlights, streamlining the content into high-level slides while keeping the full market progress report in the packet to avoid redundancy.

Stephanie Quinn, in absence of Program Manager Jason Jones, presented for the Advanced Performance RTUs program, noting that Carrier is exploring double-wall construction and insulation options based on distributor feedback to meet the basis of design on equipment schedules. She also mentioned a collaboration opportunity, noting the program is seeking field study sites to validate national ERTU energy modeling for gas-fired or hybrid heating RTUs.

Melissa Mejia shared an update on the Advanced Commercial Water Heating program's dual-fuel pilot at the River Haven multi-family building in Portland, which contains 64 units across four stories. The system uses an electric heat pump coupled with existing gas water tanks due to outdoor space constraints and window proximity. The pilot is fully installed, metered, and will test six different load variations over the next year, followed by control optimizations, to find the optimal intersection of performance and savings.

Deborah Sunada noted that the Dual-Fuel Res HVAC market characterization contractor has been selected and will kick off soon. The 13-site Clark PUD/NW Natural demonstration is concluding its heating season and preliminary insights will be shared at the Hot Water/Hot Air Forum and Efficiency Exchange. Noe Contreras provided an Emerging Tech scanning update, highlighting that manufacturers like Rinnai and Napoleon have recently released products that add hydronic coils to electric air-source heat pumps, successfully converting them into dual-fuel systems.

Chuck Karras shared that GTI Energy is conducting lab testing on the Navien 50-gallon 120V dual-fuel heat pump water heater to validate its UEF claims (in the upper threes) across multiple operating modes. Following this, data modeling will help identify how to optimize user performance, and independent field testing in volunteer homes in Vancouver and Puget Sound (managed by Energy 350) is slated to begin in Q2.

Mark Rehley gave an update on Codes & Standards, explaining that Washington's 2024 commercial and residential energy codes face analysis bottlenecks and have been delayed to late 2026. Oregon's code is advancing

toward a July 1, 2027 effective date , while Idaho recently voted down the adoption of the 2024 IECC, delaying state adoption until the next legislative session. Mark clarified in the discussion that the Washington code delay (now Nov 2026) is largely due to the SBCC (State Building Code Council) dealing with a backlog of legal and technical analyses.

Discussion:

Carlos Limon - Avista: What type of sites are you looking for regarding the collaboration opportunity for Advanced Performance RTUs?

Stephanie Quinn - NEEA: We are looking for any commercial or light commercial project, but I will check with Jason Jones to see if there are more specific parameters we can give you.

Carlos Limon - Avista: Is the GTI lab testing for the Navien unit looking at the combined UEF, or is there going to be a standard developed for that?

Chuck Karras - NEEA: They are looking at a combined UEF, but I don't know if they are developing standards as part of this specific contract. NEEA is just a participant in a consortium of funders on this research.

Carlos Limon - Avista: As far as the field testing for the Navien unit, is that something NEEA is doing independently or in collaboration with others?

Chuck Karras - NEEA: That one is independent. We are conducting it in the Pacific Northwest. We have negotiations underway with Energy 350 to conduct that field research on our behalf.

Carlos Limon - Avista: I know IECC is far down the road, but are there any key proposal changes to the current ones under development that could have a big impact down the road for the region?

Mark Rehley - NEEA: There are no monumental changes at the IECC level right now. In the 2024 round, there was an effort to include 'solar ready' to move beyond efficiency into load flex, but a lot got stripped out. Efficiency is ratcheting at a normal pace and it is still dual-fuel, so they haven't gone down the Washington path of changing the value proposition for gas versus electric. Kevin Rose is close to the work, and I will have him get you more information on major proposals.

Carlos Limon - Avista: Regarding the new presentation format, I really liked the simplicity. However, if you include the supplemental at the end, I'd recommend still calling out things that are at risk of not meeting certain goals or tasks directly on the slides.

Alisyn Maggiora - NEEA: Good catch. We will add a piece on the slide going forward if there's anything slipping on targets and thresholds from a strike zone standpoint.

Paul Koenig - UTC: As a new person, I appreciate the open conversation on the format. I assume we can just come to you guys with thoughts as we have them going forward?

Alisyn Maggiora - NEEA: Absolutely. It's an open process, and we invite your feedback on what's working and what's not as we get into a routine.

Dual-Fuel Work Group Updates ([Slides 42-45](#) | [Packet p. 15-17](#))

Deborah Sunada led a discussion to review and affirm the Dual-Fuel Work Group Charter as the program shifts into program development. A new objective was added regarding awareness of policy and regulatory developments affecting dual-fuel work. The objective to "develop an initial vision for Alliance engagement" was removed to keep the work group focused on tactical, operational coordination, as higher-level visioning is being

handled by the Natural Gas Board Committee. The group discussed the meeting cadence and agreed that hosting the Work Group meetings on the same day as the NGAC meetings (adding an hour to the end of the day) makes sense to limit the number of separate calendar events. The next meeting is scheduled to align with the June 2 NGAC meeting.

Discussion:

Laney Ralph - NW Natural: Regarding the removal of the objective 'developing initial vision for Alliance engagement in dual fuel', do we feel we've already achieved that, or does it wrap up into the other four objectives?

Deborah Sunada - NEEA: It wraps up into the other four, but there are also other levels across the board, like the Natural Gas Board Committee (NGC), helping to develop that initial vision. We wanted to focus the work group strictly on operationalizing the vision, while maintaining a bottom-up feedback approach.

Emily Moore - NEEA: There are planned conversations at the NEEA board level regarding dual-fuel strategy, so it's not the scope of this work group to develop the vision per se. However, this work group will be a critical input into those board-level conversations.

Alisyn Maggiora - NEEA: What do you hope to get out of the work group in the coming year, and how can this support your dual-fuel objectives?

Laney Ralph - NW Natural: From a gas-only perspective, we value the space for collaborating with electric utilities. We are interested in dual-fuel for new construction and retrofits, and we want to hear about best practices, pilot findings, and how other gas utilities are thinking about financial justifications, like capacity payments.

Mehmud Iqbal - Fortis BC: We have done extensive residential pilots, but a critical factor is the switchover temperature. Sharing data on switchover temperatures among regions would really help. Also, we are piloting dual-fuel for commercial hydronic space heating, which presents different challenges than forced-air systems, so more pilot data would be helpful.

Michelle Wildie - PSE: We are interested in how things work between switch-offs for gas and electric, as well as fuel-neutral opportunities, to ensure we are being as efficient as possible on all fronts.

Committee Round Robin

Laney Ralph (NW Natural): The team is currently immersed in biennial reporting requirements for their Washington-based programs. A significant recent development is the filing of a new custom industrial energy efficiency tariff. This tariff is specifically designed to include "transportation rate schedule customers" who are large industrial users who purchase their natural gas wholesale on the open market but utilize NW Natural's infrastructure for delivery. Additionally, the utility is in the final stages of the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) comment period; currently anticipating that the final IRP will contain specific action items mandating further exploration of dual-fuel strategies. NW Natural are working on streamlining automated data uploads to the Energy Star Portfolio Manager to assist commercial customers with building benchmarking requirements.

Kevin Duell (NW Natural): There has been a strategic pivot regarding the utility's heat pump pilot programs. Due to current market limitations and equipment availability in the residential sector, NW Natural is shifting its primary focus from a residential gas heat pump pilot toward a commercial-scale application. There is a strong desire to collaborate with NEEA on the data coming out of the River Haven commercial water heating pilot to help inform their own program design. Tools like the AO Smith hot water sizing calculator are being used to reverse-engineer building needs (e.g., identifying how many units a 60-70 room building requires) to find ideal sites for future field studies.

Michelle Wildie (Puget Sound Energy): PSE is currently managing a heavy regulatory load, including the filing of their annual conservation report and updates to their Implementation Strategy Plan (ISP). The utility is also preparing for its next General Rate Case (GRC). On the program side, PSE has successfully onboarded a new third-party evaluator to oversee program efficacy. A major focus for PSE this year is community-based outreach; the utility is utilizing "boots on the ground" at local events like farmers' markets to reach rural and hard-to-reach customer segments. PSE has hired a dedicated lead for Thermal Energy Networks (TENs) to explore neighborhood-scale decarbonization opportunities.

Carlos Limon (Avista): Avista gas efficiency programs are at risk of being suspended. This is due to a lack of cost-effectiveness caused by a combination of low natural gas prices, low avoided costs, and ongoing disputes regarding the Regional Technical Forum (RTF) Unit Energy Savings (UES) values used to calculate benefits. In Washington, however, their dual-fuel pilot is yielding strong qualitative data. Customer satisfaction surveys show a 4.8 out of 5 rating regarding home comfort. However, "perceived" financial savings are mixed among participants because recent rate increases have largely masked the energy savings on customers' monthly bills, making it difficult for homeowners to see the direct economic benefit of the high-efficiency equipment.

Kenji Spielman (Energy Trust): The first draft of the Energy Trust dual-fuel heating pilot report is nearing completion and will soon be available for review. There is a new partnership with NW Natural on a targeted load management project. This initiative aims to see if aggressive, localized outreach combined with different avoided-cost calculations can effectively reduce demand in specific high-load "nodes" or geographic areas of the gas network that are nearing capacity.

Paul Koenig (Washington UTC): Currently focused on the massive influx of filings related to the HB 1589 rulemaking (a major Washington state bill concerning large combination utilities' transition to clean energy).

Jodie Albert (Cascade Natural Gas): There will be a major refresh of Cascade's incentive portfolio effective March 15. To drive higher participation, the utility is doubling or even tripling incentive amounts for several measures. A notable policy shift includes changing window eligibility requirements; now, both single-pane and double-pane windows qualify for upgrades to high-performance models. Cascade is also wrapping up a low-income Evaluation, Measurement, and Verification (EM&V) study and is in the second round of its Home Energy Report (HER) pilot, which uses behavioral data to encourage conservation.

Mehmud Iqbal (Fortis BC): Fortis BC has completed extensive residential pilots, and the primary technical takeaway is the critical importance of the switchover temperature. Interested in regional data sharing on these setpoints. Additionally, Fortis BC is moving into the commercial sector with a pilot for dual-fuel hydronic (water-based) space heating, which presents unique engineering challenges compared to standard forced-air systems.

Emerging Opportunity: LLLC + HVAC ([Slides 50-59](#) | [Packet p. 18](#))

Chris Wolgamott presented a fuel-neutral opportunity combining the mature electric Luminaire Level Lighting Controls (LLLC) program with HVAC controls. The concept leverages the highly granular occupancy sensors inside LLLC fixtures (which cover roughly every eight square feet) to act as a proxy for people counting. These fixtures communicate directly with a smart thermostat via Bluetooth to dynamically adjust the HVAC deadband based on real-time 15-minute occupancy averages.

The logic dictates that if seven or more fixtures show active occupancy, the thermostat operates normally; if 4-6 fixtures are active, the deadband floats by 1 degree; if 1-3 fixtures are active, it floats by 2 degrees; and if zero occupancy is detected, the system enters a 4-degree setback mode. The initial focus is on single-zone rooftop units, which comprise 50-55% of commercial square footage in the US, deliberately avoiding complex Building Management Systems (BMS) to target smaller businesses. EnergyPlus AI modeling across multiple Northwest climates (Seattle, Portland, Boise, Missoula) and building types shows significant potential: electric savings of 5-11% and natural gas savings of 9-21%. The higher gas savings are attributed to the Northwest's 80/20 split between heating and cooling loads. An initial pilot in a 10,000 sq. ft. office building is already validating these ranges, and CLEAResult is running approximately 30 similar pilot sites outside the Northwest (including Baltimore and Illinois). Chris also mentioned that while the logic is currently cloud-based, they are looking to move it to "the edge" (on-device) to reduce latency and reliance on Wi-Fi.

Discussion:

Carlos Limon - Avista: Is all the data already embedded into the hardware, software, or cloud system that these LLLC systems utilize, or is there additional hardware or software needed?

Chris Wolgamott - NEEA: There is no additional hardware needed between the lighting system and the thermostat. It is all cloud-based or embedded in the system natively. The boolean logic is inside the lighting controls, but we can see it in the thermostat too.

Carlos Limon - Avista: Is this something that is currently being done on the electric portfolio?

Chris Wolgamott - NEEA: The lighting control is an existing electric program, but the HVAC control is not. We are going to bolt the HVAC control onto the current lighting program to move as quickly as possible.

Emily Moore - NEEA: We expect to begin with a focus on gas-heated locations due to the significant opportunity size, which would ultimately result in a dual-fuel funded program.

Carlos Limon - Avista: Was the 20-year technical potential based off the 50% DOE market for single-zone RTUs? Will that be refined to Northwest building stock?

Chris Wolgamott - NEEA: This is based on the CBSA (Commercial Building Stock Assessment), though it used the last one, not the latest. We will refine those numbers further once it is in a program phase to provide a number you can be confident in for deemed savings.

Emily Moore - NEEA: You mentioned 30 pilots outside the Northwest. Can you tell me a little bit about them?

Chris Wolgamott - NEEA: CLEAResult runs the small business lighting program for Energy Trust, and they pitched the idea to other customers outside the NW. They have about 30 sites in places like Baltimore, Illinois, and the Northeast, and we have an agreement to share findings.

Commercial Water Heat Modeling Update ([Slides 62-101](#) | [Packet p. 19](#))

Noe Contreras shared results from an EnergyPlus modeling study evaluating hybrid commercial service water heating (SWH) systems across three building types: full-service restaurants (approx. 5,000 sq. ft.), multifamily buildings (approx. 33,000 sq. ft.), and hotels (approx. 122,000 sq. ft.). The study utilized high-resolution, minute-by-minute draw patterns from real-world applications to inform load profiles and realistic system sizing, focusing on designs that size the heat pump to meet 30% to 60% of peak demand alongside conventional backup equipment (like 80% AFUE boilers or storage tanks).

Key findings revealed that modulating gas absorption heat pumps (GHPs) like those from SMTI, and electric heat pump water heaters (HPWHs), consistently deliver higher seasonal efficiencies than non-modulating GHPs (like Robur). However, operating cost savings are highly sensitive to local electricity-to-gas price ratios. In regions with low gas prices like Boise, GHPs offer significant operational cost advantages. Proper buffer storage sizing is critical to prevent inefficient short-cycling, as GHPs suffer greater cycling penalties than boilers due to their thermal inertia, requiring them to "create" energy before they "pump" it. A sensitivity analysis determined that these hybrid systems are most viable in buildings with specific minimum daily water demands: 4,000 gal/day for restaurants, 2,000 for multifamily, and 1,500 for hotels.

Discussion:

Emily Moore - NEEA: What surprised you about the modeling? Was there something in the findings you didn't expect?

Noe Contreras - NEEA: The emissions between the two fuels was surprising. We leveraged minute-by-minute data instead of hourly, and some of the emission peaks from that data set were higher than I would have thought during those intense peak draws.

Carlos Limon - Avista: For the sensitivity analysis and finding field sites, how do you translate 2,000 gallons per day to a building size for multifamily? Like a 60-unit building?

Noe Contreras - NEEA: It depends on how long people take showers, so there is noise. But 60 to 70 rooms doesn't sound unreasonable. You can also overcome a lot by oversizing the indirect storage tank to act as a thermal battery, having the products run longer based on storage capacity rather than direct usage.

Kevin Duell - NW Natural: AO Smith has a hot water sizing tool you could use to reverse engineer how many units are needed to get to that demand for prospecting field sites.

Kevin Duell - NW Natural: Are all the results modeled, and will they be tuned with what Mel Mejia is doing in the field?

Noe Contreras - NEEA: Yes, they are modeled. The efficiency is great, but the cost is a hard sell. We will tune it to see if we can use the cheaper fuel more, reduce operating costs, and still maintain a higher efficiency than the non-efficient base case. We are measuring exactly how much electric vs. gas is being used in the pilot to find that perfect balance lever.

Feedback, Wrap-Up, & Adjourn

A. Action Items and Feedback

- 1) NEEA Staff: Include "at-risk" Strike Zone updates in future quarterly highlight slides.
- 2) Jason Jones: Follow up with Carlos Limon on RTU field study parameters.
- 3) Mark Rehley: Provide a briefing for the committee on national IECC development trends.
- 4) Alisyn Maggiora: Distribute the full Commercial Water Heat Modeling slide deck and follow up with Paul Koenig on MT 101 training for UTC staff.
- 5) Committee Members: Provide feedback on the Dual-Fuel Work Group charter by March 20.
- 6) Committee Members: Notify Alisyn by March 30 for inclusion in the March 31 MT 101 webinar