



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

OFFICE OF ENERGY RESOURCES

May 3, 2022

Chairperson Ronald T. Gerwatowski
Commissioner Abigail Anthony
Commissioner John C. Revens, Jr.
Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, Rhode Island 02888

Re: Docket #5244 – Block Island Utility District 2022 Demand Side Management Plan

Dear Commissioners:

The Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) respectfully submits these comments in support of Block Island Utility District's (BIUD or District) 2022 Demand Side Management Plan (2022 DSM Plan) that was filed with the Commission on March 31, 2022 under Docket #5244, and finds it consistent with the spirit and intent of the 2021 Act on Climate.

BIUD's proposed 2022 DSM Plan maintains the structure and proposed investments laid out in their two prior approved energy efficiency plans, at a scale and scope appropriate for the District's goals and available resources. OER supports BIUD's proposed continuation of energy assessments, weatherization, HVAC, and lighting incentives for residential and business customers. These incentives will facilitate customer investments in cost-effective energy efficiency projects that help reduce local customer energy costs and foster a cleaner, more affordable, and reliable energy system consistent with state energy policy goals and BIUD's mission.

OER recognizes that BIUD's energy efficiency programming has not scaled up as quickly as originally anticipated when the program was designed. The District has faced a number of challenges since the launch of their first formal, island-wide efficiency program in 2020 that has contributed to the slower than anticipated growth. Launching the efficiency program during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic provided strong initial headwinds to customer participation and limited the achievement in the initial program year of 2020. Staff turnover and vacancies with the efficiency vendor during the 2021 program year hindered outreach and scheduling. Moreover, limited availability and interest of contractors to perform weatherization and other services on the island has made implementation of recommended efficiency measures difficult for customers who have received home energy assessments.

Despite these challenges, BIUD has worked hard to address and overcome them. Traction for home energy assessments has increased significantly and a strong pipeline of work is being developed. Virtual energy assessments have been offered to provide flexibility, convenience, and assuage health and safety concerns. The efficiency vendor has hired new staff and they have been engaged and supportive, including providing increased in-person service on the island to



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boost program visibility and recruit customers. The vendor is also establishing a referral program to further incentivize BIUD customers to tell friends and neighbors about the efficiency offerings, as word of mouth referrals are a strong means of generating additional participants. Finally, the efficiency vendor and BIUD's consultant have been developing strategies to engage with and inform mainland contractors about the developing pipeline of work on Block Island, which is making inroads. Because of these continuing efforts, OER remains committed to and supportive of the proposed program, and is confident that the coming program year will build on the incremental success demonstrated to date.

As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to lessen, BIUD and its team of vendors is well positioned to support residents and businesses with the identification and implementation of cost-saving efficiency projects. Through the implementation of a customer referral program, increased utilization of in-person outreach, and continued efforts to engage with contractors and local philanthropic efforts, the number of assessments performed and pipeline of work will continue to grow.

OER remains committed to its collaboration with BIUD and applauds the utility's commitment to sustain a strong DSM program for its customers despite the initial challenges faced. We are confident that New Shoreham residents and businesses will realize substantial economic, energy, and environmental benefits as a result of the initiatives proposed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicholas S. Ucci
Commissioner