**State House Activity**

This week was scheduled to be spring legislative break week for the General Assembly. The Speaker’s office did state that the House Finance Committee hopes to convene “in the coming weeks” to discuss the budget situation as it continues to evolve. The Revenue Estimating Conference process may start in late April with the actual conference taking place on May 5th and May 8th. The exact schedule is still being finalized, but all proceedings will be available for remote public viewing via Capitol TV. (*obtained via an Ian Donnis report*) All of this planning depends upon the timing of the coronavirus peak, however. The Revenue Estimating Conference takes place each year and is the meeting where the Governor’s budget staff, the House Fiscal staff and the Senate Fiscal staff determine how much revenue is expected in the upcoming fiscal year as well as what fixed expenses look like. The three sides must reach a consensus on the numbers before the budget can be “built.” It is a crucial part of the state’s budget process.

**DEM Holds Heating Sector Decarbonization Meeting**

The RI Department of Environmental Management hosted a zoom meeting April 7th to continue the discussion of the possibility of decarbonizing the Rhode Island heating sector.  The heating sector accounts for 34% of total state carbon emissions.  The state’s consultant – The Brattle Group - also added that if renewable gas was available, it would likely only supply 13% of the U.S. national gas demand and would model at $20/MMBtu for those customers that get their hands on the limited supply.  Above $20/MMBtu, customers would have no incentive to use the renewable fuel.

To get a better handle on the price associated with Decarbonization, The Brattle Group suggested conducting a survey of Rhode Islanders to determine what heating equipment is currently being utilized in residential and commercial buildings, as well as the age of the equipment.  This would provide valuable information concerning the potential timeframe tied to changing fuel sources in buildings and allow for modeling surrounding the decreasing use of the natural gas infrastructure (the experts pointed out that as the number of natural gas customers decreases, the fixed natural gas infrastructure costs will be borne by fewer people, therefore making natural gas more expensive).

One interesting finding - if consumers purchase a variety of renewable energy for their heating needs (renewable gas, renewable oil, ground source heat pumps or air source heat pumps), the electric grid will still require double the current electricity generation to meet peak demand.  A doubling of the generation demand was already predicted as necessary if consumers chose all ground source electric heating pumps or all air source electric heating pumps for their heating needs.

When this research project started, a final report was scheduled to be released April 22, 2020.  DEM still hopes to meet that deadline.  The report will be posted on the DEM website once completed.