

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting (CESP) Small Group Meeting Notes

September 11, 2026 from 1-3 pm

Skagit Public Utility District Aqua Room, 1415 Freeway Drive, Mount Vernon

Purpose: *To provide input to County staff regarding a recommended Clean Energy Code. Code amendments will include siting criteria and create a more efficient permitting process for clean-energy projects and will assess impacts, mitigation, identify suitable areas for development and result in predictable permitting for the community and clean energy developers alike.*

Members Present

Brenda Cunningham	Indivisible Skagit
Tim Knue	Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Sarah Roberts	Evergreen Islands
Ellen Bynum	Friends of Skagit County

Invited but unable to attend

Mikala Staples Hughes	Western Washington Agricultural Association
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Other Attendees

Jeanne Aungst	Planning and Development Services (Skagit County)
Lavelle Pilon	Planning and Development Services (Skagit County)
Robby Eckroth	Planning and Development Services (Skagit County)
Clay White	Kimley-Horn
Lyn Wiltse, Facilitator, Notetaker	PDSA Consulting, Inc.

Action Items

- All Check County website weekly for updates / contact Jeanne with questions.
<https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/applicants.htm>
- All Please contact Jeanne et al, with additional input on this meeting's topics.
- Robby, et al: Consider who might be an appropriate expert in BESS systems for Evergreen Island's Community forum on clean energy (October/November timeframe) in the Mount Vernon area. Reach out to Sarah with suggestions.
- Jeanne Ensure CEAP Small Group agendas and meeting notes are posted to the County Website.

Welcome / Introductions

Lyn began by reviewing the purpose of this group, the meeting agenda invited everyone to do introductions.

Jeanne welcomed everyone and explained the grant the County received from the Dept. of Commerce. In addition to meeting with small groups such as this, they have established a Clean Energy Advisory Group which is meeting regularly to also provide input on these four energy types selected within the scope of the grant. The County will take this feedback and draft code to share with this group by the end of the year.

The draft EIS is scheduled to be issued in November with Open Houses in early December. There will be a 30-day public comment period. The County's deadline to submit a draft code to the Planning Commission is February 2027. An updated clean energy code must be adopted for Skagit County by May 2027. They will be gathering policy guidance from the CEAG while reaching out to gather additional public and agency input. The Board of County Commissioners has already initiated government-to-government talks with the four federally recognized Tribes.

The Planning and Development Services staff looks forward to receiving input from this group on the four energy types the County is evaluating as part of this project. On September 4th, Jeanne emailed the framing questions for today's discussion. These have also been posted to the County website, as will be these meeting notes.

One of the goals of this initiative is to make the County's permitting process more transparent and efficient to allow more local control of the process vs. developers seeking approval from the EFSEC. Small group meetings will all be listed on the website and information from these groups will be shared with the Clean Energy Advisory Group (CEAG).

Discussions at this meeting will focus on the four energy types listed in the agenda. Wind doesn't pencil out for Skagit County according to PSE. For that reason, it wasn't among the four clean energy types selected to review for code development as part of the grant.

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting Discussion: Solar/DERs

What do you see as the Pros of allowing Solar and Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) in Skagit County?

- Need to have them on every rooftop and parking garage before putting them anywhere else. Utilize every public building (follow the German model).
- Can provide individual independence from the market and sustainability.
- Possible to make the permitting process easy to encourage this clean energy source.
- Can break it down into smaller stations to enhance resilience, which is a priority.
- Clean with low impact.
- Helps build resiliency for flooding, etc.
- Can lead to net zero energy use.
- People need to understand current technology lets you produce solar energy without sun.
- A distributed energy model matters.
- Overlay on top of parking lots before farm land.

- Can provide another source of income – can work to the farmers’ advantage. Shouldn’t be totally forbidden.
- Can provide security in terms of having more diversified energy sources available to us.
- Is something others in the community can tap into.

What do you see as the Cons of allowing Solar and Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) in Skagit County?

- Equity – not everyone would have access, and they end up paying more per unit.
- Not appropriate for many large-scale projects.

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow Solar and Distributed Energy Resources (DERs)?

- Responses are included in the “Pros” list above.
- Use an overlay map for solar. That way we don’t need to completely restructure through current zones.
- Can’t just do it by zone. Must consider the siting and use.

Where do you think Solar and Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) should be prohibited?

- Where it would interfere with community open space / farmland / ecologically vulnerable, protected areas.

Looking at the Cons identified, can any of those be addressed through Mitigation? If yes, then what would Mitigation look like?

- Perhaps require screening if there are visual impacts.
- We never charge for externalities post hoc. Who cleans up after it is done? We don’t want to subsidize bad behavior.
- The scale has to be appropriate. We need to be thinking of 50 years of use.
- Note: Patchwork quilting doesn’t work in the valley as far as farmland goes.

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting Discussion: BESS

What do you see as the Pros of allowing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in Skagit County?

- At a small scale, BESS could go hand in hand with solar.
- The challenge is public perception has been shaped by old technology and hasn’t kept up with the state-of-the-art technology that exists today.
- It is possible to do small distributed battery systems in different areas to improve resilience. (The Town of La Connor is a good example.) The pressure point is the economics of it.
- Maintain focus on safety and external cost issues.

What do you see as the Cons of allowing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in Skagit County?

- They are political – negative public perception looms large.
- Concerns about chemicals used to fight fires.
- Noise from cooling systems.
- It takes a lot of power to cool them. How much of that is water?
- Need structural safety guard rails that are comprehensive.
- It is easier to deal with safety and environmental concerns with a small system.

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow BESS?

- Many different areas, depending on the size of the system. Lots of flexibility.
- Where it doesn't interfere with ag practices.

Where do you think BESS should be prohibited?

- The flood plain, lake streams, rivers, fish habitat, etc.
- Energy buffers like we have around riparian areas.

Looking at the Cons identified, can any of those be addressed through Mitigation? If yes, then what would Mitigation look like?

- How far downstream is enough to mitigate? Critical areas is not 300 ft.

Renewable Fuels (apart from the infrastructure)

What do you see as the Pros of allowing renewable fuel sources for producing energy in Skagit County?

- Economics should be geared toward what benefits the county. We need energy projects and we don't want to be hostile to projects that can help us to be resilient.
- Start with what we know now, and we can adapt and change from there.
- Efficient in that it uses bioproducts that are being produced anyway.
- Reduces greenhouse gases.
- Size and scale matter.
- Anything we can do to support ag and farm lands is important.
- Biomass and organic waste - depends on where it comes from.
- There is a need to do something with sewage.
- Consider planting grasses for biomass. There are examples in other areas where they use that as a farmed crop to support biomass.
- Sierra Pacific burns their biomass to generate the energy they need. Win-win!
- There is a lot of trash and recycling – can we use some of it for energy.
- Landfills that are capped – the scale would determine whether can use it...

What do you see as the Cons of allowing renewable fuel sources for producing energy in Skagit County?

- Horribly expensive. Will never compete against Solar and BESS. Would be good for the County to consider how to make this easier.

Background / Discussion:

18 years ago, the County permitted a manure digester on a farm next to another farm (Kevin – Farm Power NW). They produce just under a megawatt. They need 1,000 cows for their digester. Skagit County is down to six dairies now. How is this sustainable?

Whatcom County code may be a good guide. They are using Renewables to provide heat for condos in Bellingham.

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow renewable fuel sources for producing energy? Responses included in other discussion of this clean energy type. Where do you think renewable fuel sources for producing energy should be prohibited? Possible mitigation measures?

- We need to consider the aesthetics of the plant.
- Focus should be to blend in vs. stand out!
- Promote a healthier environment for all of us! And our future generations.
- Social justice matters.

Community Presentation on Clean Energy:

Sarah announced that Evergreen Islands has received a small grant to do a community presentation on clean energy. They would love BESS to be a component of that. They are planning to hold the event in the October/November timeframe and are seeking suggestions for experts who could be on the panel for a community presentation and discussion.

Fusion (not Fission) SMRs

What do you see as the Pros/Cons of allowing Fusion Small Modular Reactors in Skagit County?

- Would be cleaner than what we've got now.
- The radio active materials break down much faster than fission (a decade).
- We do have a plan for it. It is happening on a global scale.
- How best do we keep them cool?
- Externalities of no matter where it's located and how large it is.
- How best to ensure its safety and the externalities such as pollution?
- Not sure we even understand what scale they need to be at.
- Technology is changing so rapidly. Computer desktop fusion reactors are being developed.

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow Fusion Small Modular Reactors?

- Similar areas as listed for all of the other clean energy types.
- Be sure to look at scale from the community's point of view.
- The perception from the County is the scale will match the environment we are going to drop it in as it exists, not as it might one day be.

Where do you think Fusion Small Modular Reactors should be prohibited?

- Similar areas as listed for all of the other clean energy types.
- Consider more than FEMA flood guidelines (outdated).
- Keep in mind first responders are nearly all volunteers.
- Away from geohazards, potential lahar flows.

Looking at the Cons identified, can any of those be addressed through Mitigation? If yes, then what would Mitigation look like?

- Discussion included in points above.

Next Steps on the CESP Process

Jeanne thanked everyone for their input, making this such an informative and energizing discussion. She will send the draft notes from this meeting to those in attendance for review before posting to the County's website.

Just before this meeting, Mikala emailed everyone on the distribution list apologies that she wasn't able to attend due to being in the midst of harvest and that she will send her responses to the framing questions in written format. Those will be appended to these meeting notes when they are posted to the website.

In closing, Jeanne invited all to reach out directly to her, or any of the other County members here with any questions and/or any additional input.