

Clean Energy Advisory Group (CEAG) Meeting Notes

September 11, 2026 from 9-noon

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

Purpose: *To provide policy guidance to County staff in drafting 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.*

Remaining CEAG Meeting Dates (9-noon at Skagit PUD)

Oct. 9, 30; Nov. 20 (tentative); Dec. 11 (tentative)

Advisory Group Members Present

Connie Krier	Stewards of Skagit (Non-Profit Land Use Group)
Denby Lloyd	Skagit Land Trust (Non-Profit Environmental Group)
Chuck Messinger	United Way Skagit (Non-Profit Vulnerable Communities)
MaryLee Chamberlain	Western County (District 1)
James Karlsgodt	Central County (District 2)
Craig Hansen	Central County (District 3)
Emily Hagin	Puget Sound Energy
Ken Huste	Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County
Betty Carteret	Climate Impact Advisory Committee
Steve Wright	Agricultural Advisory Board

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.

Observers

Terry Sapp (Agricultural Advisory Board)

Action Items

- All Check County website weekly for updates / contact Jeanne with questions.
<https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/applicants.htm>
- Jeanne Email out the tiers/thresholds sent to her by James.
- Jeanne Ensure all of these documents are posted to the County Website, along with any “read-ahead” documents for CEAG meetings.

- Jeanne By Oct. 2 email out preparatory meeting materials, these meeting notes, and Oct. 9 agenda.
- All By Tuesday, Sept. 15 please send your input on the Code Outline for Solar and BESS by Sept. 15. And do the same for Renewables by Sept. 18.

Welcome / Introductions

Lyn began by reviewing the purpose of this group, operating norms, the meeting agenda and action items from the prior meeting. She also asked everyone to keep those meeting notes handy as we will be reviewing the input on the Solar/DERs and BESS questions from the last meeting to see if there are any additions before moving to the Renewables.

Jeanne welcomed everyone and said how Planning and Development Services staff were looking forward to developing clean energy facility siting and mitigation code based on this group's recommendations. On September 4, she emailed the fact sheet for Renewables prepared by Kimley-Horn, the Ag Natural Resource Lands code, and August 28 CEAG meeting notes, along with the agenda for this meeting. Per protocols, all have been posted to the County website.

She called everyone's attention to the meeting notes from the last meeting. In reviewing the lists of Pros, Cons, locations, and potential mitigation strategies for Solar/DERs and BESS, she asked for any additional thoughts.

Denby noted Section 14.18.870 states the limitations of major energy facilities be constructed on Ag land.

Continuation of Clean Energy Siting and Permitting Discussion: Solar/DERs and BESS

James reported the current WA State energy code calls out for all buildings to have solar-ready rooftops. Robby assured everyone the County has adopted this WAC code. There were some questions about the enforcement mechanism.

Emily noted the following thresholds used by PSE:

- Less than 1 MW
- 1-10 MG within distributed energy resources range
- Greater than 10 MW is considered utility scale

Craig suggested that in addition to minor and major, there is also a micro threshold. That is important for Skagit County as we want to encourage small-scale uses.

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

- As a non-wire alternative, it allows us increase capacity without requiring new lines. It stays within the same footprint.
- Provides resilience to reduce power demand and back-up for Community resilience and public safety.

- It makes sense to use output AND acreage (behind the meter, under certain MW and under certain acreage).
- Solar has become the cheapest source of energy these days.

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

- Large land requirements.
- Potential issues with glare re scenic and wildlife (It was noted that the glare issue has largely been resolved through recent technological improvements.)
- Cannot be used as a back-up source unless it has the correct inverter with it. Even if it's daytime, if the power is out, the system will be down.
- Remove "or a study that shows..."

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

- Where there is already established non-permeable surfaces.
- To provide more coverage to parking areas.
- If zoned ag, it would have to have a ground mount.

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

- Conservation lands, Category 1 Aquifer recharge areas, etc.
- In areas prone to flooding. Consider using "high risk" instead of FEMA's outdated 100-year flood maps.
- Avoid seismic areas.

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

- Expedited permitting for pre-approved projects on a micro scale.
- If attached to a BESS system, there may be a need to mitigate per those prescribed mitigation measures.

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting Discussion: BESS

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

- Provides community resilience for power outages and provides community safety and emergency back-ups.
- When paired with solar can provide significant energy resources to support places using it as well as the grid.
- Can store wind and solar for later usage.

- Can provide generator back-up for crops (e.g., potatoes).
- Adds resiliency.
- Can reduce the need to utilize new fossil fuels.

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

- If utility scale, unless it's blackstart capable, and we lose power, it's a dead system.
- Operational noise.
- May require establishing a recycling center (could also be a type of mitigation).
- No local jobs other than one year of construction work.
- No requirement for bonds, etc.
- Environmental damage if a fire were to occur (not just the fire, but the firefighting)
- For profit only.

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

- On Ag NRL Land – generating 15 MW on ag industrial sites should be allowed.
- Not attached to Natural Gas generators (unless they will be transitioned).
- Look at potential for being able to use well water for micro systems.
- Co-located with solar facilities to support expanding DERs in Skagit County.
- Co-location with renewable generation.

Where do you think BESS should be prohibited?

- Any critical ordinance areas.
- Designated areas around schools, hospitals, senior centers – citizen safety areas (It was noted these are all places where we need resilience).
- Make exceptions for micro-scale.
- Where farmers' use of water is restricted.

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

- Make them blackstart capable.
- By establish a recycling center.
- Noise mitigation through screening, plantings, etc.
- Require bonds, etc.
- Require onsite representation who can be available in case of emergency (for large systems).
- Require a robust damage recovery plan.
- Address how to safely dispose of any chemicals used to fight a fire.
- Damage recovery plan should include any diesel generators on the sites.

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting Discussion: Renewable Fuels

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

- Reduction of existing waste streams (allowing them to be used).
- Are we looking at fuel cells? No.
- Bio-fuel digestive system should be allowed to be done on ag land (e.g., dairy farms).
- Bark wood chips, etc. could produce more local jobs.
- Allows a pathway to transition to lower carbon emission fuels.
- Provides another way to address the capacity gap and bolster the reliability of the system.
- Taking waste and converting it to energy is beneficial with a wide inventory of options in terms of what people can access for energy.
- Provides a way to mobilize farming waste stream into energy.
- Good supplement to what we already have existing – another tool in the toolbox.
- Many small options are preferable to only a few large options.
- Supports the state goals and our goals to transition away from fossil fuels.
- Allows us to reuse facilities that might otherwise be shut down.

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

- Many waste streams are small and trying to consolidate them would be a challenge.
- Would have to be large scale to be cost effective.
- Add incentives to help bring the cost down.
- It's hard to create code for emerging technology. Code needs to keep up with this.
- Location matters – flood plains are risky for runoff and contamination.
- Strict zoning of land use and what can be used in those spaces is important.
- Effluent gases are produced and need to be regulated. Typically, these are used with industrial processes, and the industrial users are required to pay for the processing of their waste products.
- If co-located with a burning plant, it would be important to require the plant to address issues with odor.
- Not all green fuels are truly “green.” Make sure the source of renewable fuel is actually a clean source.
- Source of incentive - want to incentivize housing solutions.
- The rates PSE pays for the energy from digestors are so low (or other things behind the meter).

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow renewable fuel sources for producing energy?

- Adjacent to where the materials are generated.
- Be sure to honor flood plain restrictions.
- Where it makes sense from a supply chain standpoint – production through transmission.
- Look at existing generation sites and facilities.
- Natural gas generation should be in industrial areas. Biofuels should be near the medium used.
- Non-residential areas.
- Larger-scale operations with co-located sites are best for commercially zoned areas
- Smaller plants that are synergistic to a farm along with the fuel source (micro use).
- Co-locate with T&D hubs for easy hook-up to the grid.
- Brownfield sites?

Where do you think renewable fuel sources for producing energy should be prohibited?

- Keep in mind the high potential for Skagit County to become a premier tourist destination. Need to take that into consideration.
- Take into consideration also viable affordable housing locations.
- We don't want landfills, large gaseous plants in areas where we want tourism.
- Don't allow them in physical proximity to critical areas, alluvial fans, etc. (Per prior lists).
- Be cognizant of co-locations – try to stick to industrial zoning.

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

- Nothing additional was added.

Threshold Concept / Code Outline

Robby reviewed possible ways to separate utility scale vs, BESS as an accessory use: minor vs. major. After discussion, there was general agreement (no thumbs down) that a three-tier system is preferred.

Discussion Highlights:

- Pre-approval by PSE or other acceptable entity would have to also be on board with the three-tier system.
- If we want to be leaders in the green energy movement, we need a system that embraces a multi-tiered system and that there is a clearly defined permit process.
- Maybe create a different level for systems on ag facilities that are larger, but not at an industrial scale – residential/commercial/utility.
- Small BESS system could be in a garage or a container. Moving forward, the idea of embracing this would feed the system better than one single large facility.

- Consider a hybrid functional model that is a three-tier system (Betty provided examples evaluating function and capacity – with a focus on what supports community resilience).
- Keep in mind: Anywhere we can get more options that are distributed, we are taking care of the people here. That matters.
- Consider offering a self-permitting process using one of the County’s trusted providers.

Next CEAG Meeting Date/Topics

October 11 from 9-noon at the PUD

Topics to include:

- Review of these meeting notes / Action Items
- Fusion SMRs / Group recommendations per list of framing questions