



Diane Butorac
Department of Ecology
Clean Energy Section Manager
P.O. Box 47709
Olympia, WA 98504-7709

**Re: Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council's 2024 Clean Energy Project
Siting Report to the Legislature**

August 15, 2025

Dear Diane Butorac and Ecology Program Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council's annual legislative report. The comments are submitted on behalf of Duwamish River Community Coalition and Front and Centered. We are environmental, climate, environmental justice, and community-led social justice organizations representing the interests of members and supporters across Washington State who want to ensure that the development of new siting processes are equitable and accessible for frontline communities.

We recognize the need to develop clean energy in Washington to comply with the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA), reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect public health. However, if decisions about the siting and development of new facilities are made without centering the concerns of impacted communities, we risk perpetuating the same harms that are unavoidable in an extractive, fossil fuel-reliant economy.

For many frontline communities, existing permitting processes are already inaccessible. Public comment periods are often too short to review and provide meaningful comments, with materials typically being long and technical depending on the type of project. Since mitigation plans are developed in response to identified environmental risks and harms that could result from a project, community feedback is an invaluable part of permitting. Expediting this process could make it less feasible to conduct equitable engagement and exacerbate environmental, climate, and social inequities.

In this letter, we seek to emphasize the importance of allowing frontline communities to participate in the creation of siting recommendations from the outset, the need for more

information around transmission capacity, cumulative impacts, and best practices for developing Community Benefit Agreements prior to creating processes that can help expedite siting.

I. The Draft Siting Report should have been developed with community input to allow recommendations to be co-created with those who will be most impacted.

The Draft Siting Report was created by the Interagency Siting Council whose membership is entirely composed of various state agencies and advisory bodies. Their expertise is undoubtedly an integral part of clean energy siting and permitting process development. But in order to truly achieve many of the Council's goals, including supporting an *equitable* clean energy transition, improving awareness, and improving engagement with tribes and overburdened communities (OBCs), any recommendations put forth to the legislature must be co-created with frontline communities across the state.¹

There is a significant difference between providing pre-developed recommendations to the public to receive feedback, and including community members in decision-making spaces to allow their perspectives to shape the recommendations from the beginning. This is particularly true for the recommendations developed to create community benefits, improve tribal engagement and consultation, and improve permitting processes through pre-application discussions. Not only is this the more equitable approach, but it also benefits the Council by increasing efficiency through the creation of direct lines of communication which allow for more specific insight into the concerns and priorities of frontline communities at the outset.

II. The Council should clearly identify the type of mitigation guidance that is still needed before the feasibility of a Build-Ready Clean Energy Program can be assessed.

The Council recommends that a Build-Ready Clean Energy Program (BRCEP) be explored to get input from stakeholders and interested parties.² The Council also recommends that mitigation guidance for clean energy continue to be developed by agencies.³ To allow for engagement that is as informed as possible, the Council should make the recommendations for BRCEP predicated on the completion of more robust mitigation guidance, and provide more specificity about the types of mitigation guidance still needed.

For example, the BRCEP would “identify underutilized locations and pre-permit them” through community engagement.⁴ Yet potential host communities cannot “identify issues and concerns, help select sites”, or even articulate potential benefits through a CBA without a better understanding of potential mitigation measures.⁵ The development of mitigation guidance that is necessary for this type of meaningful engagement is further dependent on information and

¹ Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council, *Clean Energy Project Siting – Report to the Legislature* (2024) at 6.

² *Id.* at 22.

³ *Id.* at 31.

⁴ *Id.* at 22.

⁵ *Id.*

resources that have yet to be curated by the state. This is acknowledged in the Draft Siting Report, which states that “impacts from a utility-scale clean energy project may not be adequately analyzed due to missing baseline information.”⁶ Missing information includes “inadequate scientific understanding, lack of guidelines or inconsistent assessment methods, consolidated data sources for environmental review and permitting processes, and best practices for engaging overburdened communities” including considerations for environmental justice and equity issues.⁷

The Siting Draft is clear about how this missing information “limits a full understanding of community-level impacts and benefits”⁸ but then fails to identify how future mitigation guidances can help fill these gaps outside of identifying other clean energy sectors that do not have a finalized Programmatic Environmental Impact Statements (PEIS).⁹ Even for energy types that do have a PEIS, many of the types of information still needed, particularly best practices for engaging overburdened communities, information about community-level impacts, and potential benefits are not assessed as part of the mitigation measures identified.

The Council should recommend more specific mitigation guidance documents that must be developed, including for types of energy such as green hydrogen, utility-scale onshore wind, and utility-scale solar that already have PEISs. *These documents must include a comprehensive analysis of potential localized pollution impacts, climate justice considerations, and more detailed assessments of cumulative impacts determined with more consolidated data sources, which we need to better understand permitting processes and projects within areas for potential clean energy facilities.* Once this information is available, impacted communities will be better equipped to participate in the creation of a BRCEP.

III. The Council should recommend that more information regarding community impacts, best practices for engagement, and potential mitigation measures be collected and assessed before developing methodology for designating Clean Energy Preferred Zones.

Similar to concerns raised for the BRCEP, the same information gaps identified in the previous section limit the ability of developers and state agencies to consider environmental justice and equity issues, community-level impacts, and potential local benefits. These factors must be a central part of how Clean Energy Preferred Zones (CEPZs) are identified and designated. Even if communities and tribes are engaged early in the designation process,¹⁰ insufficient information on potential impacts will make it so host communities will be unable to provide input that could ultimately minimize experienced harms.

⁶ *Id.* at 19.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at 21.

¹⁰ *Id.*

Front and Centered has identified many issues with the way the Final PEIS is used to determine potential significant impacts for green hydrogen. We are concerned with the way that the PEIS assumes that permit compliance will indicate minimal impacts from wastewater and air pollution, lacks a realistic assessment of how these facilities could impact water availability and energy supply, climate and warming impacts are overlooked in GHG emission evaluations, and does not include a comprehensive, integrated cumulative impacts assessment. Given these shortcomings, the PEIS for green hydrogen does not include adequate information to serve as part of the basis for CEPZ designation. The Council should recommend that these types of analysis be done thoroughly before proceeding with identifying potential areas for CEPZs.

IV. Recommendations related to community engagement and benefits should require consideration of best practices to inform necessary policy changes.

We are supportive of the recommendation that the state continue providing funding for agencies, local governments, and especially tribes and communities to participate in processes related to clean energy siting. We also support exploring conflict resolution tools early in the process to ensure that there are available options once conversations with community members begin.

However, the Council should recommend that Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) tools and pre-application discussions be a required part of the expedited permitting process. One of the most concerning impacts of an expedited permitting process is the potential to limit meaningful feedback by further excluding those most impacted from spaces and decisions that have systematically been used to marginalize them. Not only will this address other goals related to efficiency by requiring that information sharing start early, but it will also ensure that frontline communities have a say in how projects in their spaces happen. This will center their concerns, allow for better harm mitigation, and detail which benefits would be impactful for their specific communities.

The Council should also recommend best practices for meaningful community engagement and benefits. Notable principles include, but are not limited to, early and transparent conversations about impacts and potential benefits; broad-based outreach to any impacted community members, groups, or organizations; technical and legal support by trusted community contacts; translation and interpretation services; compensation for time and childcare; specificity of binding accountability measures; and the prioritization of community considerations.

Limiting the recommendation to developing templates and guidance for CBAs and support for pre-application outreach is insufficient. While these CBA tools will be needed, it makes these tools optional to a developer, who could choose to forgo it in the interest of time and cost savings. The same is true for pre-application conversations. The Council should recommend that if pre-application discussions are not required by a particular permitting process, it should be required of developers if part of the expedited permitting program.

V. The Council should explicitly recommend that the state provide resources to assess recommendations related to transmission prior to the development of CEPZs and a BRCE Program.

The state still lacks information related to utility scale clean energy projects that is necessary to make siting more transparent and equitable. While this report did not cover transmission because it was within the scope of the legislative directive¹¹, it is unclear how CEPZs or a BRCE Program can be developed without this critical information. As the Draft Plan states, if the state cannot increase current transmission capacity by 38% or tap into out-of-state sources, there will be higher costs and risks associated with building more generation in-state.¹²

Transmission needs and impacts must be considered within the specific context of clean energy siting. While resources like the Transmission Corridors Work Group can serve as a useful supplemental tool, it has a minimal assessment of transmission impacts on OBCs and therefore has a limited application.¹³ Not only is it unclear how Washington can build clean energy facilities on the scale that is necessary to meet state decarbonization goals, but potential harms that could arise from siting processes are highly dependent on the state's transmission capacity because this is what ultimately determines what facilities can be built and where they can be located. Creating CEPZs and a BRCE Program without this information will prevent us from comprehensively assessing impacts, which will then limit potential mitigation options and potentially worsen the impacts from environmental harms in frontline communities.

Front and Centered and DRCC recognize the need for increased transmission capacity in Washington State and are hopeful about the ways Washington's clean energy future can give our communities access to more affordable energy, reduce pollution, and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, if the processes that we create to achieve this future are not holistic, well-informed, and community-centered, we risk exacerbating existing injustices.

Siting processes should be transparent and accessible, and for these reasons we are supportive of the recommendations to develop a statewide dashboard for clean energy development and broader integration of clean energy development into local government planning. Yet we reiterate that the development of CEPZs and a BRCE Program should not begin without more information on transmission needs and a more complete assessment of risks to frontline communities.

VI. Conclusion

When environmental justice principles and community leadership are at the core of decisions made when siting new clean energy facilities, there is potential for positive local impacts and technological advances in energy generation that are necessary to achieve a carbon-free

¹¹ *Id.* at 5.

¹² *Id.* at 7.

¹³ Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, *Transmission Corridors Work Group – Final Report* (2022) at 2.

energy future. Washington state has been a national leader of environmental justice through groundbreaking initiatives like the Clean Energy Transformation Act and the Healthy Environment for All Act and has the opportunity to build upon this legacy by creating equitable and comprehensive frameworks for clean energy siting.

Given that there are significant information gaps on topics that are foundational to clean energy siting and development, the Clean Energy Siting Council should: (1) ensure that community voices are incorporated into all stages of the siting development process, including during the formation of recommendations for the legislature rather than after these recommendations are already drafted, (2) recommend that “missing baseline information” including clearer guidelines and assessment methods, consolidated data sources for environmental review, and best practices for engaging overburdened communities¹⁴ be collected and analyzed prior to creating the BRCEP, (3) recommend that more resources and time be given to fully understand community-level impacts, environmental justice and equity concerns, and potential local benefits before developing CEPZ designation processes, (4) recommend that best practices for community engagement and CBA development be a requirement rather than a guidance, and (5) explicitly recommend that more information on transmission capacity and upgrade needs be collected prior to developing CEPZs and the BRCEP. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jamie Hearn, Climate and Community Planning Lead
Front and Centered
jamie@frontandcentered.org



Cameron Steinback, Climate Justice Program Manager
Front and Centered
cameron@frontandcentered.org



Aurora Martin, Executive Director
Front and Centered
aurora@frontandcentered.org



Alexandra Johnson, Senior Climate & Environmental
Policy Analyst
Duwamish River Community Coalition
alexandra@drcc.org



Mia Ayala-Marshall, Clean Air
Program Manager
Duwamish River Community
Coalition
mia@drcc.org

¹⁴ *Id.* at 19.