

Preston Rutherford

Comments on Clean Energy Siting Council 2026 Draft Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Clean Energy Siting Council's draft recommendations.

I support Washington's clean energy goals, including renewable energy generation, transmission improvements, and energy storage. Energy storage will play an important role in maintaining grid reliability and integrating renewable energy resources. However, public confidence in clean energy infrastructure depends on transparent siting processes, meaningful community engagement, and clear safety standards.

I encourage the Council to consider the following recommendations:

1. Require Comprehensive Project Review

Environmental review should evaluate the entire proposed project and associated infrastructure rather than allowing review of individual permit components in isolation.

Communities and decision-makers need a complete understanding of cumulative impacts before major project approvals are granted.

2. Strengthen Emergency Planning Requirements.

Large energy facilities should be evaluated in coordination with local fire districts, emergency managers, hospitals, school districts, and local governments early in the permitting process.

Emergency planning should address evacuation routes, vulnerable populations, smoke and air-quality impacts, medical response capabilities, and long-duration incidents before permits are issued.

3. Improve Community Notification and Engagement.

Residents often become aware of major energy projects only after significant permitting work has already occurred. The Council should recommend stronger notification requirements and earlier public engagement so communities can provide meaningful input before key decisions are made.

4. Encourage Independent Technical Review.

For complex projects involving emerging technologies like BESS facilities, independent technical review can improve public trust and help decision-makers better understand project risks, benefits, and mitigation measures. Independent review should be encouraged for projects with significant public interest or potential community impacts.

5. Consider Community Compatibility During Siting.

The Council should encourage siting processes that carefully evaluate proximity to residential neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, parks, and other sensitive land uses. While clean energy infrastructure is necessary, projects should be located in areas where risks and potential conflicts can be minimized whenever practical alternatives exist.

6. Maintain a Balanced Approach.

Washington can continue to lead in clean energy development while also maintaining strong environmental review, public participation, and safety standards. These goals are not mutually exclusive. A transparent and thoughtful siting process will help ensure that clean energy projects receive long-term public support and can be developed successfully.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Very Respectfully,

Preston Rutherford