

Chapter 43.394 RCW
INTERAGENCY CLEAN ENERGY SITING COORDINATING COUNCIL

Sections

- 43.394.010 Creation—Membership.
43.394.020 Duties—Reports.

RCW 43.394.010 Creation—Membership. (1) The interagency clean energy siting coordinating council is created. The coordinating council is cochaired by the department of commerce and the department of ecology with participation from the following:

- (a) The office of the governor;
- (b) The energy facility site evaluation council;
- (c) The department of fish and wildlife;
- (d) The department of agriculture;
- (e) The governor's office of Indian affairs;
- (f) The department of archaeology and historic preservation;
- (g) The department of natural resources;
- (h) The department of transportation;
- (i) The utilities and transportation commission;
- (j) The governor's office for regulatory innovation and assistance;
- (k) Staff from the environmental justice council; and
- (l) Other state and federal agencies invited by the department of commerce and the department of ecology with key roles in siting clean energy to participate on an ongoing or ad hoc basis.

(2) The department of commerce and department of ecology shall assign staff in each agency to lead the coordinating council's work and provide ongoing updates to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature, including those with jurisdiction over the environment, energy, or economic development policy.

(3) For purposes of this section and RCW 43.394.020, "coordinating council" means the interagency clean energy siting coordinating council created in this section. [2023 c 230 § 101.]

Findings—Intent—2023 c 230: "(1) The legislature finds that efficient and effective siting and permitting of new clean energy projects throughout Washington is necessary to: Fight climate change and achieve the state's greenhouse gas emission limits; improve air quality; grow family-wage clean energy jobs and innovative clean energy businesses that provide economic benefits across the state; and make available secure domestic sources of the clean energy products needed to transition off fossil fuels.

(2) The legislature intends to: Enable more efficient and effective siting and permitting of clean energy projects with policies and investments that protect the environment, overburdened communities, and tribal rights, interests, and resources, including cultural resources; bring benefits to the communities that host clean energy projects; and facilitate the rapid transition to clean energy that is required to avoid the worst impacts of climate change on Washington's people and places. There is no single solution for improved siting and permitting processes. Rather, a variety of efforts and investments will help bring together state, local, tribal, and federal governments, communities, workers, clean energy project developers, and others to succeed in this essential task. The

legislature intends to make biennial appropriations to support tribal review of clean energy project proposals, permit applications, and environmental reviews, as well as tribal participation in up-front planning for clean energy projects, such as nonproject environmental impact statements for clean energy projects as described in this act.

(3) Efficient and effective siting and permitting will benefit from early and meaningful community and tribal engagement, and from up-front planning including identification of areas of higher and lower levels of impact, and nonproject environmental review that identifies measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate project impacts.

(4) Incorporating the principles and strategies identified in subsections (1), (2), and (3) of this section, the legislature intends to invest in, facilitate, and require better coordinated, faster environmental review and permitting decisions by state and local governments.

(5) Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to support efficient, effective siting and permitting of clean energy projects through a variety of interventions, including:

(a) Establishing an interagency clean energy siting coordinating council to improve siting and permitting of clean energy projects;

(b) Creating a designation for clean energy projects of statewide significance;

(c) Creating a fully coordinated permit process for clean energy projects;

(d) Improving processes for review of clean energy projects under the state environmental policy act;

(e) Requiring preparation of separate nonproject environmental impact statements for green electrolytic and renewable hydrogen projects and colocated battery energy storage facilities, onshore utility-scale wind energy projects and colocated battery energy storage facilities, and for solar energy projects and colocated battery energy storage facilities, with the goal of preparing these nonproject reviews by June 30, 2025; and

(f) Requiring the Washington State University energy program to complete by June 30, 2025, a siting information process for pumped storage projects in Washington." [2023 c 230 § 1.]

RCW 43.394.020 Duties—Reports. (1) The responsibilities of the coordinating council include, but are not limited to:

(a) Identifying actions to improve siting and permitting of clean energy projects as defined in RCW 43.158.010, including through review of the recommendations of the department of ecology and department of commerce's 2022 *Low Carbon Energy Facility Siting Improvement Report*, creating implementation plans and timelines, and making recommendations for needed funding or policy changes;

(b) Tracking federal government efforts to improve clean energy project siting and permitting, including potential federal funding sources, and identifying state agency actions to improve coordination across state, local, and federal processes or to pursue supportive funding;

(c) Conducting outreach to parties with interests in clean energy siting and permitting for ongoing input on how to improve state agency processes and actions;

(d) Establishing work groups as needed to focus on specific energy types such as solar, wind, battery storage, or emerging technologies, or specific geographies for clean energy project siting;

(e) The creation of advisory committees deemed necessary to inform the development of items identified in (a) through (d) of this subsection;

(f) Supporting the governor's office of Indian affairs in creating and updating annually, or when requested by a federally recognized Indian tribe, a list of contacts at federally recognized Indian tribes, applicable tribal laws on consultation from federally recognized Indian tribes, and tribal preferences regarding outreach about clean energy project siting and permitting, such as outreach by developers directly, by state government in the government-to-government relationship, or both;

(g) Supporting the department of archaeology and historic preservation, the governor's office of Indian affairs, the department of commerce, and the energy facility site evaluation council in developing and providing to clean energy project developers a training on consultation and engagement processes for federally recognized Indian tribes. The governor's office of Indian affairs must collaborate with federally recognized Indian tribes in the development of the training;

(h) Supporting the department of archaeology and historic preservation in updating the statewide predictive archaeological model to provide clean energy project developers information about where archaeological resources are likely to be found and the potential need for archaeological investigations; and

(i) Supporting and promptly providing information to the department of ecology in support of the nonproject reviews required under RCW 43.21C.538.

(2) The coordinating council shall provide an annual report beginning October 1, 2024, to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature summarizing: Progress on efficient, effective, and responsible siting and permitting of clean energy projects; areas of additional work, including where clean energy project siting and permitting outcomes are not broadly recognized as efficient, effective, or responsible; resource needs; recommendations for future nonproject environmental impact statements for categories of clean energy projects; and any needed policy changes to help achieve the deployment of clean energy necessary to meet the state's statutory greenhouse gas emissions limits, chapter 70A.45 RCW, and the clean energy transformation act requirements, chapter 19.405 RCW, and to support achieving the state energy strategy adopted by the department of commerce.

(3) The coordinating council shall:

(a) Advise the department of commerce in:

(i) Contracting with an external, independent third party to:

(A) Carry out an evaluation of state agency siting and permitting processes for clean energy projects and related federal and state regulatory requirements, including the energy facility site evaluation council permitting process authorized in chapter 80.50 RCW;

(B) Identify successful models used in other states for the siting and permitting of projects similar to clean energy projects, including local and state government programs to prepare build ready clean energy sites; and

(C) Develop recommendations for improving these processes, including potential policy changes and funding, with the goal of more efficient, effective siting of clean energy projects; and

(ii) Reporting on the evaluation and recommendations in (a)(i) of this subsection to the governor and the legislature by July 1, 2024;

(b) Pursue development of a consolidated clean energy application similar to the joint aquatic resources permit application for, at a minimum, state permits needed for clean energy projects. The department of ecology shall lead this effort and engage with federal agencies and local governments to explore inclusion of federal and local permit applications as part of the consolidated application. The department may design a single consolidated application for multiple clean energy project types, may design separate applications for individual clean energy technologies, or may design an application for related resources. The department of ecology shall provide an update on its development of consolidated permit applications for clean energy projects to the governor and legislature by December 31, 2024. The consolidated permit application process must be available, but not required, for clean energy projects;

(c) Explore development of a consolidated permit for clean energy projects. The department of ecology shall lead this effort and, in consultation with federally recognized Indian tribes, explore options including a clean energy project permit that consolidates department of ecology permits only, or that consolidates permits from multiple state and local agencies. The permit structure must identify criteria or conditions that must be met for projects to use the consolidated permit. The department of ecology may analyze criteria or conditions as part of a nonproject review under chapter 43.21C RCW. The department of ecology shall update the legislature on its evaluation of consolidated permit options and make recommendations by October 1, 2024;

(d) Determine priorities for categories of clean energy projects to be the focus of new nonproject environmental impact statements under chapter 43.21C RCW for the legislature to fund subsequent to the nonproject environmental impact statements specified in RCW 43.21C.535; and

(e) Consider and provide recommendations to the legislature on additional benefits that could be provided to projects designated as clean energy projects of statewide significance under RCW 43.158.030. [2023 c 230 § 102.]

Findings—Intent—2023 c 230: See note following RCW 43.394.010.