



September 15, 2025

To: Klickitat County Planning Commissioners

From: Adam Capage, Outreach & Communications Director, Renewable Northwest
Casey MacLean, Washington Policy Manager, Renewable Northwest

RE: Consideration of the adoption of a Solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Ordinance as recommended by the Project Advisory Committee Amendment to the Klickitat County Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 19 of the Klickitat County Code.

Klickitat County Planning Commissioners:

Renewable Northwest (RNW) greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on Klickitat County's draft Solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Ordinance. RNW is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that advocates for affordable, reliable, and carbon-free energy infrastructure across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Our membership includes clean energy developers, manufacturers, consultants, law firms, and other nonprofit organizations including rate payer advocates and environmental NGOs. **RNW's intention with this testimony is to provide context as to why this draft ordinance requires broader review and revision to ensure that solar and BESS projects are permitted through the county rather than EFSEC.** Individual RNW members may provide separate testimony with their own views on this draft ordinance. RNW and our diverse membership have a deep bench of expertise that we hope Commissioners bring into this conversation.

Klickitat County has historically been an attractive place in Washington State to develop clean energy projects given its rich resources and access to transmission. **This has provided significant financial revenues for the county: between 2011 and 2024, nine clean energy projects, mostly in eastern Klickitat County, have generated \$111,000,000 in local tax revenue.** Property tax revenue from renewable energy projects have been substantial¹ and new projects will continue to yield millions of dollars in county taxes to the benefit of the county and its residents. These projects also bring local jobs, as well as the cheapest new energy available today.

It is our understanding that Klickitat County wants to encourage developers to use the county permitting process and/or the expedited option of the state's Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) process, *without pre-empting county rules*. Solar and BESS developers share this goal: everyone benefits when a county government is supportive of a large project. Unfortunately, we are concerned that this ordinance as drafted encourages the opposite; specifically, the restrictive proposals in this draft would likely push projects to the EFSEC

¹ RNW is aware of how property tax assessments for these projects have resulted in declining property tax revenue, and we're actively working in the state legislature to levelize these payments going forward.

process and trigger requests to pre-empt these county rules. We are concerned that **given the restrictive nature of this draft, EFSEC would very likely find pre-emption of local zoning code appropriate and justifiable**. The EFSEC option – including county pre-emption – will be viewed as less expensive, less complicated, and less time consuming with the end result of the county having less say and oversight of project permitting.

We would like to see an ordinance that balances both the county's desire for ensuring projects meet the needs of the county with requirements that won't drive projects to circumvent county ordinances. **As such, we request the County re-open the drafting process, and allow the developers who create these projects to participate and collaborate to find agreeable solutions.** RNW and developers would be able to provide ideas and case studies from other areas of Washington where clean energy projects have avoided or mitigated community concerns and offer insights to help avoid unintended consequences. We are confident there are options to ensure Klickitat County achieves all its goals, including encouraging development that works within reasonable county rules. As an industry, clean energy developers uphold strict environmental and health standards and work with local governments regularly to get to positive outcomes; this relies on local ordinances that are not prohibitive to development as a foundation.

Today, we would like to offer feedback on some of the most concerning elements of the draft ordinance, while also offering suggestions that have been proven successful in other counties. At this stage, we do not have redline edits to the ordinance as our primary request is to re-open the drafting, but would be happy to do so as the ordinance progresses.

The following is not a comprehensive list of concerning provisions, but some of the **provisions of highest concern** as they are prohibitive for developers. Our concerns center around unclear language and **excessive requirements that far exceed state standards**.

- **Excessive and Unclear Setback Requirements:** Section B.7.i.15 on "Setback Requirements" states that BESS setbacks will be "5280 ft from the view of any residential property unless otherwise agreed with residential property owners". Solar setbacks are to "not be in view of any residential property unless otherwise agreed to with property owners." These distances are unreasonable and far outside norms. The language "not in view" is extremely confusing and ignores the possibility of appropriate screening.
- **Unrealistic noise exceedance requirements:** Section B.7.i.20 on noise information says the [1- hour] average noise from BESS and associated equipment shall not exceed 40 dBA, as measured at the project property line. This is stricter than the state level noise requirements, and is less than the average decibel level of conversation in a room (typically around 60 dBA) or a refrigerator running (typically around 42 dBA).
- **Effectively mandated Agrivoltaics:** Language in section B.7.j effectively requires Agrivoltaics or dual use for projects by putting strict 20% land coverage requirements on

projects not using agrivoltaics. Not all sites are appropriate for agrivoltaics and requiring this defeats the purpose of finding the most appropriate use for land under consideration. This is particularly true in arid locations with few opportunities for dual use applications. In all cases, this requirement will raise project costs significantly.

- **Cost-prohibitive pre-application surveys and reports** - All of the surveys and reports required to submit an application are time consuming and expensive to produce. This includes an ALTA survey, lighting plan, vegetative screening plan and visual impacts assessment, safety feasibility assessment, draft Agricultural Land Mitigation Report, commissioning plan, hazard identification and assessment plan, risk mitigation plan, and emergency operations plan. These costs would be borne *even before an application is filed*. RNW understands and appreciates that the County wants to address residents' concerns, and studies of this general nature should **and do** occur before breaking ground on any project. But requiring these studies ahead of an application gives the applicant no assurance that their project is viable, while placing a heavy administrative burden on them. The applicant will have received no feedback from the County, so the final configurations and other decisions may differ from what was studied pre-application. Sequencing is important to ensuring any important studies are completed with the most accurate understanding of the project.
- **Unforeseen impacts:** One example: The draft ordinance restrictions apply to all battery energy storage systems over 1 MW, including those designed to support a single project. This would impede development beyond utility scale BESS sites themselves and could inadvertently capture hospitals (which increasingly have BESS onsite for emergency power), telecom and digital infrastructure, manufacturing plants, warehouses and distribution centers, universities, and other large facilities that are increasingly using this technology onsite. There may be other unintentional impacts in this ordinance, which we are still evaluating.

As a general comment, it should be noted that **additional cost burdens placed on energy developers are ultimately recovered by increasing electricity prices**. Extensive studies are expensive, as are delayed timelines from EFSEC processes. Overly burdensome requirements, such as those outlined here, raise energy utility bills for ratepayers. We urge the Commissioners to keep affordability in mind when evaluating this draft ordinance.

RNW, our membership, and broader networks have deep benches of expertise in siting, permitting, safety, environmental impacts, and more. **We are happy to share additional connections to technical experts who could contribute to this draft.** While we recognize the PAC conducted very thorough research on this ordinance, we would point to these resources as a starting point to understand more workable standards. We believe all parties desire an ordinance that will keep permitting local, allow responsible development, and increase benefits to Klickitat communities.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide inputs on the draft ordinance under consideration and reiterate our view that the drafting needs re-opened for broader collaboration with industry to find a workable solution. We stand ready to offer support to the county as needed.

Sincerely,

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