



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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July 30, 2024

Board of Yakima County Commissioners
128 North Second Street, Room #232
Yakima, Washington 98901

RE: Guidance on Renewable Energy Siting in Resource Areas

Dear Commissioners:

We received your correspondence by mail on May 21, 2024 outlining the complexity of issues that Yakima County is confronting amidst the increased demand for new energy facilities. We recognize the inherent tension between replacing fossil fuels with alternative energy sources and sustaining local resource-based industries.

Conserving resource areas alongside other land use priorities is most challenging where local decision-making is concerned. Your letter demonstrates your commitment to maintaining a thriving agricultural sector and desire for supportive state partnership to help address the challenges of a growing energy industry. We appreciate the opportunity to engage collaboratively with you on this important subject.

We acknowledge that Yakima's efforts to designate and conserve resource lands of long-term commercial significance uphold what the Growth Management Act (GMA) requires of jurisdictions planning under [RCW 36.70A.040](#). This includes adopting criteria by which Yakima must undertake a countywide process to identify the highest-value agricultural lands upon which resource-based industries depend, as affirmed by state rules and guidelines.¹ Yakima County must designate these areas of *long-term commercial significance* under [RCW 36.70A.170](#). Development regulations must also *assure their conservation* for continued agricultural use in accordance with *best management practices*, per [RCW 36.70A.060](#).

The GMA also establishes local authority to exclude, limit, or explore innovative approaches to allow development on or adjacent to agricultural resource lands of long-term commercial significance, provided agricultural production is not limited as a result.² Appropriate standards for a local siting option depend upon the specific qualities which sustain agricultural activities common to the area. This conservation framework forms the foundation of our published guidelines for adopting comprehensive plan policies on siting energy facilities on or adjacent to natural resource lands.³

We encourage counties to adopt locally-defined policies for appropriate siting of energy facilities on or adjacent to resource lands, such as directing development toward poor-quality soils or specifying dual-uses that support productive agriculture.⁴ The GMA allows local regulations that permit agricultural and nonagricultural

¹ [WAC 365-190-050](#); [WAC 365-196-480](#)

² [RCW 36.70A.177](#)

³ [WAC 365-196-480](#)

⁴ [WAC 365-196-480\(h\)](#)

accessory uses on designated resource lands where they *support, promote, or sustain* production.⁵ Considerations for suitable energy siting may also be factored into local review and designation criteria to establish acceptable permitting standards for agrivoltaics or other forms of co-location of energy facilities that conserve or enhance agricultural operations.⁶

We recommend integrating goals such as these within the 2026 periodic update to your comprehensive plan. However, we also grasp the difficulty involved in establishing goals and practices that balance diverse interests and will continue to explore ways to offer more specific and effective guidance. In the meantime, we offer our technical assistance and encourage Yakima County to apply to Commerce funding opportunities that are relevant to your periodic update as well as energy development needs:

- **Open now:** Yakima County is currently eligible to receive a non-competitive Periodic Update Grant of \$700,000. These funds support the review and, as needed, revision of the County's comprehensive plan and development regulations as part of your 2026 periodic update. Please contact Deanah Watson, Sr. Planner at deanah.watson@Commerce.wa.gov if you have questions about this funding and other Growth Management Services grants⁷ or receiving technical assistance for your update.
- **Future funding:** Yakima County may be eligible to receive a competitive grant in 2025 to help the local government address challenges associated with siting and permitting energy projects.⁸ Eligible activities include land use studies that may also support your GMA-related planning needs or contribute to adopting future regulations to help implement updated planning policies. Please contact Larry Mattson, Renewable Energy Manager-Energy Programs in Communities at larry.mattson@commerce.wa.gov if you have questions about this grant program.

Sincerely,



Dave Andersen, AICP
Managing Director, Growth Management Services

cc: Governor Jay Inslee
Senator Andy Billig, Majority Leader
Senator John Braun, Minority Leader
Attorney General Bob Ferguson
Mike Fong, Director, Washington State Department of Commerce
Mark Barkley, Assistant Director, Local Government Division
Valerie Smith, AICP, Deputy Managing Director, Growth Management Services
Ben Serr, AICP, Eastern Regional Manager, Growth Management Services
Deanah Watson, Senior Planner, Growth Management Services
Michael Furze, Assistant Director, Energy Division
Glenn Blackmon, Energy Policy Director, Energy Division
Larry Mattson, Renewable Energy Manager, Energy Programs in Communities
Kathleen Drew, EFSEC Chair
Sonia Bumpus, EFSEC Director

⁵ [RCW 36.70A.177](#)

⁶ [WAC 365-190-050\(3c\)](#)

⁷ [Growth Management Grants - Washington State Department of Commerce](#)

⁸ [Clean Energy Grant Programs - Washington State Department of Commerce](#)