

Rhode Island Principles for Renewable Energy Siting

Rhode Island is facing an immediate challenge to accelerate the development of clean, renewable energy sources while protecting our natural resources and unique community character. The Rhode Island Renewable Energy Siting Stakeholder Committee has adopted the following principles as a holistic framework to integrate competing interests in drafting policies and practices to facilitate the development of renewable energy in the state.

These principles reflect the participation of state and local officials, renewable energy developers, residents, property owners, businesses and utilities, and non-governmental organizations. The primary purpose of the principles is to guide the Stakeholder Committee in developing recommendations which are responsive to Rhode Island's reality as a place with a small geographic area, high population density, and a diversity of environments, landscapes and community types. The recommendations should respect the commitments that Rhode Island has made as a jurisdiction to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, and enable people throughout the state to participate in and benefit from renewable energy programs.

1. Accelerate the pace toward achieving Rhode Island's renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals through thoughtful and strategic development of renewable energy projects of all sizes.
2. Build support for achieving Rhode Island's renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals by increasing public understanding of the multiple benefits of renewable energy including to the economy, the environment, to promote equity and to cultivate climate resiliency.
3. Provide predictability, consistency and fairness in state and local rules, regulations, zoning and ordinances to support development of renewable energy projects.
4. Promote proactive, comprehensive utility distribution system planning.
5. Ensure that regulations governing renewables are applied in a fair and balanced manner with those governing other land uses, while recognizing that local zoning is the authority of communities to establish public health and safety standards.
6. Honor commitments to keep permanently protected land free from development.
7. Encourage renewable energy development on commercial and industrial zoned land, on already developed land, and in other locations with environmental alterations such as closed landfills, brownfields, parking lots, commercial and residential rooftops, sand and gravel pits.
8. Support the economic viability of farms through appropriate renewable energy development as a complementary use in a manner which keeps farms in agricultural production while preserving agricultural soils.
9. Promote policies that recognize ecological services and sensitivity as well as habitat connectivity in the siting of renewable energy projects.
10. Respect landowner rights to realize value from their property within the context of established planning and zoning principles.
11. Ensure equitable access to renewable energy installations for all consumers, and recognize that delaying the transition to renewable energy disproportionately burdens environmental justice communities.
12. Provide local governments with guidance on smart renewable energy siting and to ensure consistency between the state guide plan and local ordinances and policies. Establish a timeline for all municipalities to adopt renewable energy siting ordinances and associated processes.
13. Provide opportunities for state and municipal governments to lead by example and use renewables to exercise more control over their energy use and production in meeting their energy needs.