



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

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January 14, 2019

Ms. Jane Weidman, AICP
Town Planner
4540 South County Trail
Charlestown, RI 02813

Subject: Draft Comprehensive Plan Review – Energy Chapter

Dear Ms. Weidman,

Our office greatly appreciates the opportunity to work with our municipal partners in the drafting of community comprehensive plans. Our office has completed its review of the draft Energy chapter of the Charlestown Comprehensive Plan. I am very pleased to inform you that there were no issues or concerns that could be an impediment to State approval identified in the material provided and we note that this draft has one of the best sections on solar we've recently seen. However, there were some suggestions provided during the review that we would like to forward for your consideration. In addition to the comments provided below, we have included additional guidance in an attachment.

I would like to be clear that while the following are recommendations and are not required changes, inclusion of some or all of these recommendations would provide additional clarity and benefit the ability of the community to implement this chapter as Charlestown moves forward.

Comment 1: Page 8: The text mentions that the guiding principles that came out of the Renewable Energy Stakeholders group will be listed in Appendix E-1; please verify that the principles listed are the most recent version available (as found at www.energy.ri.gov/renewable-energy/solar/modelordinance.php) at the time of final adoption.

Comment 2: Consider mentioning and/or citing the products of the Renewable Energy Siting Stakeholder Group, as found in the *Comprehensive Plans & Solar Energy Systems* document.

Comment 3: On page 10, the discussion of nuclear fusion (which has been 15 years away from commercial viability for the past 45 years) seems irrelevant to the chapter. Additionally, the statement that, "Nuclear fusion requires seawater as a power source" is not quite accurate.

In this review, we have attempted to identify any issues regarding the material provided, but there are some items, such as requirements related to the plan's internal consistency and completeness, which cannot be evaluated until a full draft is furnished. At the appropriate time, we encourage the Town to provide us with the full final draft for review.

As always, please feel free to contact Kevin Nelson, Supervising Planner with any questions, concerns, or requests that you may have at 222-2093 or at kevin.nelson@doa.ri.gov.

Yours truly,



Meredith E. Brady
Associate Director

cc: Kevin Nelson

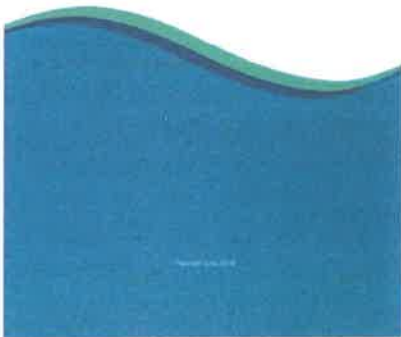
Promote Strategically Sited Renewable Energy Development through Municipal Comprehensive Planning & Zoning

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, R.I. General Law § [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(8\)](#) requires that comprehensive community plans must consider energy production and consumption. The [Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual](#), as adopted by the State Planning Council, sets forth that comprehensive community plans should embody the State's goals and policies. The manual recommends including actions within the Implementation Program that address:

- a. Conducting a baseline assessment of the amount of energy currently being used by municipal buildings, vehicles, and equipment or, if a baseline assessment has already been completed, conserving and efficiently using energy in public buildings, transportation, and equipment, and
- b. Adopting zoning policies and siting standards for renewable energy production facilities.

Guidance Handbooks #1 through #16 are an accompaniment to the Manual. [Handbook #9: Planning for Energy](#) provides additional information on the energy-related standards contained within the Manual, as well as general guidance on planning for energy. Other goals for renewable energy may also be included:

THE RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING STANDARDS
GUIDANCE HANDBOOK SERIES
GUIDANCE HANDBOOK #9
PLANNING FOR ENERGY



- Decrease dependence on non-renewable energy sources.
- Promote effective and efficient use of solar energy resources.
- Promote safe development of solar energy systems that minimize impacts to adjacent land uses, properties and environments.
- Promote the use of previously disturbed lands for renewable energy development.
- Minimize potential aesthetic, community-character and quality-of-life impacts.
- Promote economic development and building the tax base.
- Eliminate barriers to and incentivize small-scale, distributed renewable energy systems, such as rooftop solar, small-scale wind and or solar for on-farm use.

Additional goals to consider in comprehensive plans have been suggested by advisory stakeholders. These are:

- To promote the enhancement for a pollinator friendly environment and vegetative restoration upon decommissioning of solar energy systems.
- To promote the collaborative use of solar energy with current agricultural and farming uses, providing economical sustainability for the landowner.

The comprehensive planning process provides communities the opportunity to consider the future of energy in their city or town, to transition their community to sustainable, low-carbon energy sources in order to mitigate climate change, and to craft goals that exemplify the desired future condition. Municipalities are encouraged to consider policies and standards that encourage the use and production of renewable energy suitable to their land use and simultaneously preserving important natural resources. To determine the goals that may be appropriate for your municipality, consider the following guiding questions:

- How can the community’s land use decisions support energy conservation and efficiency?
- What benefits could the community realize by implementing greater energy efficiency and conservation measures?
- Is it important to the community that locally generated energy options be available for use by citizens, neighborhoods and businesses?
- What should be the future role of renewable energy in powering and heating the community, both in the public and private sectors?
- How can the communities land use decisions support energy conservation and efficiency?
- What benefits could the community realize by implementing greater energy efficiency and conservation measures?

Future land uses should consider the availability of energy infrastructure. The mix of uses on the Future Land Use Map also has implications for energy usage. The future siting of renewable energy facilities should be considered when determining appropriate future land uses. If considered as part of the land use discussion, the municipality can ensure the compatibility of such facilities with surrounding land uses. The benefits of developing clean, renewable energy are clear. In addition to providing climate change benefits, accepting and permitting local solar energy systems will help to:

- reduce emissions of air pollutants, as renewable energy sources replace fossil-fuel power plants,
- benefit public health by improving air quality,
- reduce impacts to finite natural resources which are used more intensively by fossil-fuel energy generation,
- increase reliability of the State’s energy supply,
- increase resiliency of the regional electricity supply, enhancing its ability to handle severe weather events, and
- create regional economic benefits—including manufacturing of renewable energy equipment, new jobs and municipal revenue creation.

[*Handbook #2: Planning for Natural Resources*](#) can help municipalities identify their natural resource assets so they can guide renewable energy siting away from areas with high conservation value, such as large intact forests. Additionally, communities can consider identifying and mapping in conjunction with the Future Land Use Map, areas where utility scale renewable energy developments should be encouraged and discouraged. Advisory stakeholders, suggest that specific areas in communities should be encouraged for solar energy systems, such as but not limited to; brownfields, closed landfills, defunct gravel banks, commercial and industrial districts, and parking lots. Conversely, communities should use their local land use authority to determine areas where development of renewable energy systems should be limited or discouraged, such as prime agricultural soils, large unfragmented forests, and or critical wildlife habitat. In doing so, communities can exercise their local land use authority to protect lands they’ve determined to be important to them, while providing predictable and easily permissible locations for renewable developers and homeowners, businesses, and farmers looking to pursue renewables for their respective properties.