

June 7, 2021
STEPS for Solar Development

NOTICE OF PROCEEDING, SCOPING MEETING AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The State of Connecticut has longstanding policy commitments to deploying renewable energy sources to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the electric power sector. Through a variety of programs and policies, the State has advanced the deployment of over 779 megawatts (MW) of in-state solar generation, which is contributing to clean energy jobs, economic development, and helping participating ratepayers lower their energy bills. The State is a leader in environmental protection and land preservation, through regulations and programs intended to preserve open space, core forests and prime agricultural soils, protect threatened and endangered species, remediate brownfields, and preserve the quantity and quality of our water and wetland resources.

To address the climate crisis and meet the State's various decarbonization and clean energy goals, Connecticut will need to deploy significant amounts of renewable generation of various types. According to analysis in the Integrated Resources Plan (IRP) draft issued by DEEP in December 2020, between 2,200 and 3,500 MW of additional solar resources could be developed throughout New England to help meet Connecticut's goal of 100% zero-carbon electricity supply needs by 2040.¹ Not all of this solar generation will be built in Connecticut, and some of it can be sited on buildings, parking canopies, and other structures. For larger, ground-mounted solar projects that will be developed in Connecticut, it is critical to ensure that efficient, cost-effective development is: consistent with the protection of our valuable natural resources such as core forests, farmlands, wetlands, water quality and quantity, and air quality; supports equitable, economic development and growth; and incorporates community input to promote equity and environmental justice.

The Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Phase 1 Report recommended, among several dozen near-term actions to address climate change, that the State "evaluate approaches and best practices for siting of renewable and non-renewable energy infrastructure to avoid loss of forests, farmland, and other sensitive lands."² Relatedly, DEEP's draft IRP released on December 16, 2020, analyzes strategies toward meeting a 100% zero-carbon target for electric generation. Strategy 10 of the draft IRP recommends that DEEP launch a stakeholder engagement process to improve the transparency, predictability, and efficiency of solar siting and permitting processes in Connecticut.

¹ Pursuant to Section 16a-3a of the General Statutes of Connecticut, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is required to review the state's energy and capacity resources every four years and develop an

Integrated Resources Plan (IRP) for the procurement of energy resources including but not limited to, the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals as established in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 22a-200a.

¹ See Recommendation 25, page 40, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3_Phase1_Report_Jan2021.pdf

To advance the GC3 and IRP recommendations, DEEP will convene a stakeholder engagement process on **Sustainable, Transparent and Efficient Practices (STEPS) for Solar Development** to identify policies, legislative actions, and best practices, particularly related to the procurement, siting, and permitting of ground-mounted solar systems in Connecticut, to achieve the following tentative objectives.

Tentative Objectives:

- Ensure that new solar generation projects can be sited and built in a predictable, efficient, and transparent manner;
- Include consideration of local laws concerning zoning, the environment or public health and safety;
- Avoid, or minimize and mitigate, to the maximum extent practicable, adverse impacts on the environment, agricultural, and natural resources;
- Promote equity and environmental justice through community engagement; and
- Ensure that state and/or ratepayer-supported procurements align with the objectives, above.

Tentative Facility Scope:

DEEP tentatively proposes to focus this stakeholder engagement process on practices and processes relevant to new solar photovoltaic facilities developed in Connecticut that are grid-scale projects in front of the meter and larger projects under the virtual net metering and/or LREC/ZREC programs.

Potential Topics:

The stakeholder engagement process will include the following potential topics:

1. Preferential solar siting criteria which will take into consideration factors including but not limited to natural resources and habitats, water quality and quantity, topography, equity, and degree of development;
2. Benefits and potential challenges associated with the location of the solar facility, including but not limited to core forest, prime agricultural land, wetlands, and environmental justice communities;
3. Types of design and construction practices available to both maximize the energy efficiency of solar projects and minimize detrimental impact to natural resources, community resources and the environment and implementation challenges such as the timing of the in-service date;
4. Opportunities to optimize regulatory and permitting requirements and processes depending upon the size of the solar project and siting considerations including sequential steps and opportunities to streamline the process;
5. Siting and permitting challenges specific to developing previously disturbed land such as brownfields and landfills;
6. Types of incentives, selection weighting factors, and timing of commitments relating to siting that may increase the effectiveness of a solicitation, including but not limited to DEEP-run procurements, LREC/ZREC, and shared clean energy facilities (SCEF).

Scoping Meeting: DEEP will conduct a scoping meeting on Wednesday, June 16, 2021 from 10:00am-12:00pm via ZOOM.

The purpose of the meeting is to brief stakeholders and receive public comment on the proposed scope of the process, including the objectives, types of facilities, and topics that will be considered as well as the proposed process and schedule for the stakeholder proceeding.

1. Do you agree with the Tentative Objectives? Should they be modified in any way?
2. Do you agree with the Tentative Facility Scope? Should it be broadened or narrowed? Should other renewable or non-renewable facility types be included, now or in the future?
3. Do you agree with the Proposed Topics? Should they be modified in any way?
4. How should the stakeholder engagement process be organized? What entities or stakeholders should be included or consulted?

Based on the comments received and discussion at the Scoping Meeting, DEEP will issue a proposed schedule for this proceeding subsequent to the Scoping Meeting.

Register in advance for this webinar:

https://ctdeep.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_S1vlu9RyT0ePKY_QrLhNPO

Written Comments: DEEP welcomes written comments on the solar siting and permitting process and scope. Written comments should be submitted directly to DEEP at DEEP.OPPD@ct.gov RE: STEPS on or before **Friday, June 25, 2021, by 4:00 p.m. EPT.**

Any materials and future updates associated with this proceeding will be posted on the DEEP website: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Planning/Steps-For-Solar-Development>

Any questions may be directed to (860) 424-3003 or preferably by e-mail at DEEP.OPPD@ct.gov.

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Notice filed with the Secretary of State on June 8, 2021.