

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

In addition to “triple bottom line” considerations, communities must address various other areas of inquiry in their assessment of renewable energy generation opportunities. The following checklist introduces six key topics that communities should consider as part of an assessment process.

1. Public Policy

Many communities have some policies in place to guide renewable energy project decision-making. For example, development should be aligned with the community’s comprehensive plan and zoning code. Federal, state and local policies may provide regulations as well as incentives for renewable energy projects.

1. Does your community want a renewable energy project?
2. Has your community developed renewable energy policies?
3. Do you have a comprehensive energy plan?
4. Does your comprehensive plan address energy?
5. Does your community understand existing policies that may influence renewable energy development?
6. Has your community audited its permitting process to see if there are contradictions and inconsistencies? Could an “outsider” understand the rules?
7. Have you engaged the environmental and business communities?
Raised awareness and understanding?
8. Have you taken steps to get different interest groups involved?
9. Do your current policies address long-term sustainability issues? Equity issues?
10. Are there policies in place to ensure a viable long-term supply of feedstocks for bioenergy?
11. Are adequate resource protection, preservation, and effective conservation measures in place?

2. Organizational Capacity

Whether a project is proposed by a community or a developer, the success of proposed renewable energy projects is often contingent on sufficient organizational capacity at the local level. Communities that are engaged in discussions around appropriate renewable energy options are better prepared to address project proposals or to identify potential community-owned projects.

1. Is there a task force, committee, or other network actively looking at renewable energy opportunities in your community?
2. Are resources available to make this a priority? To take an aggressive stance?
3. Is there an interdisciplinary group working on renewable energy opportunities across your county, region, and state? Are they actively networking with decision-makers?
4. Have you inventoried human assets available in your community?
5. Is local expertise available? What needs to be brought in?
6. Is there a planning process in place?

3. Cooperative Development and Leadership

Recognizing that energy projects can be complex, and that a range of regulatory agencies are involved, it is important to engage representatives of various agencies in discussions about the project from an early stage of development.

1. From the development side, are there one or more people who are an active liaison with higher levels of government?
2. Are the state departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation, Natural Resources, and Workforce Development involved in discussions about the project?
3. Are decision-makers aware of programs such as grants, incentives, etc.?
4. Are decision-makers working with regulatory agencies?
5. Are economic development directors and local officials joining networks and attending seminars and workshops to learn about renewable energy developments?

4. Developer and Technology History

A number of new and promising biomass process technologies are developing; many are in the pilot stages while others, such as corn grain ethanol, are more mature and efficient. The developer should provide a history of the process technology to be used, as well as a list of existing facilities of the proposed project size using the proposed technology.

1. How mature is the technology being used to process the biomass into fuel?
2. What are the environmental impacts of these processes (odor, particulates, noise, etc.)?
3. Who is the management team? What is their experience?
4. Who will actually own the facility after construction?
5. Will the owner be operating the facility or will this be contracted to another party?
6. Does the technology vendor(s) provide performance guarantees? If so, do they have the financial strength to back these up?

5. Community Support

Community opposition can sink a renewable energy project. Opposition can be based on any number of factors, from concern about environmental, economic, and social impacts to philosophical rejection of a technology or process. Community leaders can benefit from engaging community residents in the assessment of proposed renewable energy developments, and from understanding concerns and seeking to mitigate concerns.

1. Is there community support for the project?
2. Who will own and operate the facility?
3. What has the developer done to build community support for the project?
4. What impacts or problems have occurred in other projects of the same type and how will the developer address these issues?
5. Does the developer need or want community investment in the facility?
6. Is the developer depending on local investment capital to fund the project?
7. Is this a one-time project for the developer or does the developer have multiple projects in a number of locations?
8. What is the financial condition of the developer?

9. Where will the facility be located in relation to the community's population?
Will this create problems?

6. Siting, Infrastructure, and Operational Considerations

Establishing a bioenergy facility can have long-term positive and/or negative consequences for the community. Carefully siting the project can mitigate problems and build community support for the process. Appropriate infrastructure must be available, or the community must commit to developing the necessary infrastructure.

1. Where will the bioenergy facility be located, and does zoning allow that location?
2. Will the facility employ workers from within the community or rely on workers coming into the community? Is there adequate housing in the community if workers come in? Are schools, libraries, and parks adequate?
3. Will the facility pay local taxes?
4. Will the facility require additional infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, rail, emergency response capability, etc.)?
5. Will the facility contribute to local infrastructure development, quality of life, or community charities?
6. How will the facility change the quality of life?
7. Will the facility support existing businesses and industries?
8. What is the potential for long-term economic viability?
9. What types of risks might the facility present to the community?

THIS CHECKLIST WAS DERIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES:

Dane, A. et al., *Preparing for the Bio-Economy*. UW-Extension.

Walsh, P. *Proposed Community Bio-Fuels Projects in Wisconsin – How to Gauge Their Chance for Success*. UW-Extension.

Liebl, D. *Siting Industrial Facilities – A Community Checklist*. UW-Extension, Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center.