

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: LESSONS LEARNED

The following strategies designed to encourage community involvement in decision-making concerning renewable energy development were derived from conversations with people who have researched the social components of renewable energy development, and with individuals who have opposed renewable energy projects and those who have supported renewable energy projects.

Hold community conversations about energy use, conservation, and renewable energy generation prior to making decisions about a specific project.

- ▶ Information sessions can provide a context to learn about and discuss issues for the community, including:
 - what is renewable energy/bioenergy,
 - what are energy conservation and/or generation goals for this community, and
 - what are the pros and cons for various forms of renewable energy?
- ▶ Information sessions, public dialogue forums, and other discussion settings provide opportunities for community members to propose specific activities to conserve or generate energy, such as:
 - how can our community make progress toward energy conservation and/or energy generation,
 - what consequences would specific types of energy generation have on our community (social, economic, environmental), and
 - what types of initiatives or projects would fit with community goals and plans?

Share information about specific proposals using an open and transparent process; solicit and respond to feedback.

- ▶ Develop a process to engage the community in discussion about specific proposals.
 - Early opportunities for discussion provide a safe context for issues to be aired and can help identify areas where further studies are needed (e.g., feasibility, engineering, environmental impact, etc.).
 - Government-level hearings are for permitting, and that's too late in the process for effective public participation.
- ▶ Conflict of interest (real or perceived) must be dealt with openly (individuals should excuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest).

Public meetings should be well organized and offer a systematic and comfortable way for people to comment.

- ▶ Well-organized public comment process/protocol allows community residents to participate in ways that are recognized and understood.
- ▶ Plan a formal process to take comment, and follow it in an organized and consistent manner.
- ▶ Have comment cards for those who do not want to make oral comments.
- ▶ Develop a process to look at social and environmental impacts.

Conduct the business of project proposal review with professionalism and due diligence.

- ▶ Decision-makers should conduct business and interactions with professional demeanor.
- ▶ Opposition comments or organizations should be listened to and taken seriously.

Existing zoning plans are a pre-requisite for an open decision-making process.

- ▶ Does the community have a zoning plan? Does a particular proposal fit with the existing zoning plan? If a plan is already in place, new facilities should meet the specifications of that plan.
- ▶ What is the rezoning process, if this is necessary?

Allow for negotiation around difficult issues.

- ▶ The community is an equal partner in negotiation with a developer; community leaders should demand that community concerns be addressed.
- ▶ Provide means to assure community about points of concern.
 - Specify important community concerns and negotiate to assure that potentially negative impacts are mitigated.
 - Community Benefits Agreements can be established to provide assurances.