Clean Energy Advisory Group (CEAG) Meeting Notes

October 9, 2026 from 9-noon

Skagit Public Utility District Aqua Room, 1415 Freeway Drive, Mount Vernon

Purpose: *To provide policy guidance to County staff in drafting a recommended Clean Energy Code. Code amendments will include siting criteria and create a more efficient permitting process for clean-energy projects and will assess impacts, mitigation, identify suitable areas for development and result in predictable permitting for the community and clean energy developers alike.*

Remaining CEAG Meeting Dates (9-noon at Skagit PUD)

Oct. 30; Nov. 20 (tentative); Dec. 11 (tentative)

Advisory Group Members Present

Matthew Phillips	Stewards of Skagit (Non-Profit Land Use Group)
Denby Lloyd	Skagit Land Trust (Non-Profit Environmental Group)
Chuck Messinger	United Way Skagit (Non-Profit Vulnerable Communities)
MaryLee Chamberlain	Western County (District 1)
James Karlsgodt	Central County (District 2)
Craig Hansen	Central County (District 3)
Brian Heinrich	Puget Sound Energy
Ken Huste	Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County
Sara Young	Port of Skagit
Betty Carteret	Climate Impact Advisory Committee
Terry Sapp	Agricultural Advisory Board

Other Attendees

Jeanne Aungst	Planning and Development Services (Skagit County)
Allen Rozema	Planning and Development Services (Skagit County)
Clay White	Kimley-Horn
Lyn Wiltse, Facilitator, Notetaker	PDSA Consulting, Inc.

Action Items

- All Check County website weekly for updates / contact Jeanne with questions. https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/applicants.htm
- All By Tuesday, Oct. 13 send your input on Code Outline for Fusion SMRs to Jeanne.
- Jeanne Email James' and Betty's Input on Code Outlines to Terry. (Done.)
- Jeanne Check with Robby re background/explanation for the 3 MW tier.
- Jeanne Ensure all of these documents are posted to the County Website, along with any "read-ahead" documents for CEAG meetings.
- Jeanne By Oct. 23 email out preparatory meeting materials, meeting notes, and agenda.

Welcome / Introductions

Lyn began by reviewing the purpose of this group, operating norms, the meeting agenda and action items (all completed) from the prior meeting.

Jeanne welcomed everyone and said how Planning and Development Services staff were looking forward to developing clean energy facility siting and mitigation code based on this group's recommendations. She thanked everyone for submitting input on the code outline for Solar, BESS, and Renewables in accordance with the Action Item deadlines. She then reminded everyone of the fact sheet on Fusion SMRs and asked them to keep it handy for reference during today's discussions.

Fusion Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

County Staff will prepare code for nuclear facilities that produce energy through nuclear fusion (Fusion SMRs). Nuclear facilities that produce energy through nuclear fission must go through EFSEC permitting, regardless of facility size.

SMR facilities are smaller than conventional nuclear power facilities and are modular. This means they can be factory assembled and transported for installation. Microreactors have even smaller footprints than SMRs and can serve as a backup power supply in emergency situations or replace power generators that are often fueled by diesel, for example, in rural communities or remote businesses.

The county understands that this technology is about a decade away from being commercially viable. After consultation with PSE and reviewing publicly available research, they have decided it makes sense to consider it proactively given the area's emerging energy needs. We are in a position to take a leadership role in the state in looking at this now.

What do you see as the Pros of allowing Fusion SMRs in Skagit County?

- They tend to be compact land footprints.
- Provide good energy reliability
- Can complement wind, solar, and BESS
- Very low combustion-related air emissions – low impact to air quality
- Generally considered very safe
- Fusion generally avoids some of the spent fuel that fission reactors have – less waste production which makes them more manageable.
- Job market
- It's coming and its clean
- Not yet scaled up for commercial use yet – Helion is working on this. It is still quite a ways off.
- Provides support for more urban, dense populations.
- It is a firm dispatchable resource – giving the ability to create and distribute energy in times of high demand.
- Need to be thinking about additional cross-Cascades transmission.

- It is typically more expensive on the front end, but more affordable in the long run.
- Chernobyl memories remain – creating negative public perception.
- Small and modular are an essential set of positives about this type of facility – easy to fit with ag zones/uses.
- Depends on siting.
- Started with Virginia class submarines – this is where the modular tech began. Small is defined as 100 MW. Small means different things in the industry. Small weighed 600 tons built at the factory. Decreases in upfront costs.
- If we have four of the units lined up together, we would be able to shut down one of them and service it while the others keep working.
- Relatively clean – no melt down concern.
- Energy sources are plentiful with low waste streams – endless energy.
- Economic development – Altrusion is located in Skagit County. There is also Helion in Chelan County.
- We have to have power to attract industry here.
- Aviation – short regional flights may move to electric – also the ferry market is going electric. There are big power requirements to meet this opportunity.
- Need sources of power that come in in a significant way.
- There is a need for a source of firm baseload power 24/7.
- The Helion facility in Chelan County has already been through a permitting process and has received a SEPA determination of non-significance. This provides us a good, fairly local case study for how this can be.
- Talking about it now will prep the public for further discussion as the tech is developed.

What do you see as the Cons of allowing Fusion SMRs in Skagit County?

- There is no existing facility currently, even in prototype. Only lots of demonstrations so it is somewhat speculative.
- There are lots of tech issues to overcome.
- Radioactive waste streams would have to be accounted for.
- Cooling – water requirement is a concern.
- There is potential for tritium contamination.
- Public perception is very negative.
- Size issue: Depending on how much distribution there might be a need for a larger plant.
- The industry is perhaps overly optimistic (gets them funding).
- Long way off from being commercially viable.
- This is a corridor for that type of technology. Might be worthwhile to have some labs and experimental facilities sited.
- Tritium is hard to contain – it is extraordinarily slippery (as it is a very small atom).

- Operates at temperature 10X that of the core of the sun. It has to be suspended in air and cannot touch anything.
- Have to develop an infrastructure for decommissioning byproducts and steady stream of low radioactive biproducts.
- The infrastructure is in place, but I-5 is congested, rails are congested. Trying to make a new power source with already strained grid in the county. Very power hungry for getting started.
- From an ag perspective, more power will be needed, but probably not in this dimension. It would not be a driving force for more energy. Energy matters, but mostly for moving things around as tractors and construction equipment shifts to electric.
- Ag – concern re water needs and usage.
- Public perception would lean negatively for this type of tech. Much dissent was expressed for BESS.
- What will it really look like for local workers?
- Where will up-front costs come from?
- Overall reputation and confidence – putting in anything that sounds like nuclear will meet resistance.
- Water requirements and waste concerns.
- Cost and infancy of tech and viability along with siting concerns
- It is still theoretical and conceptual with negative public perception.
- There are still many questions. With advancing technologies, if we step back from AI… BESS would have gone with a different tech, and we wouldn't have had the disasters.
- Be mindful of how many of these new technologies have water consumption as a requirement. Best to start out restrictive – for tech and for public perception.
- Seismic and flood hazards
- Decommissioning costs as well as start-up costs are concerning.
- Tons of regulatory uncertainty – something to watch
- Lots of competing new technology is out there – confusing to determine the best technology that fits our area.
- There is concern that corporate gain/profit is being valued over consumer good.
- What part of Skagit County could accomplish something like what is being done in Chelan?
- Concern re all the official enthusiasm and the promotional attitude may be making this run too fast. It seems like WA's Governor is on board for what is a very theoretical tech – could be dangerous. Not as practical as the other three clean energy types being considered. Would hate to see that type of enthusiasm go unchecked.
- Don't understand enough re the safety hazards and the amount of energy required to start these things up.

- Once up and running, are they plugging into the grid or into an end user such as Data Centers?
- With the County spending time developing code on this, we are missing an opportunity to develop code on things like geothermal tech. AI is identifying where those resources can be tapped.
- Water – all systems have a secondary system now that stop contaminated water from being released.
- The volume of water being used matters. We are the premier state in doing nuclear. We do it very well. The question for Skagit County is: Can we? And do we want to participate in that? Cooling towers allow you to recycle water.
- Regulatory uncertainty: The NRC currently has agreements with nearly 40 states, including WA) for regulating fusion reactors. The consequences of a fusion accident are much less than a Chernobyl type accident.
- Promotion is actually reality. As we are forced to get off of coal, there is the reality of needing more sources of energy. Utilities have to decide what to say yes to exploring this as existing technologies fall short.

Where in unincorporated Skagit County does it make sense to allow Fusion SMRs?

- Where the Fredonia power plant is located
- Possibly the Port of Skagit?
- Where they suit the resource demands (vs. any particular zone).
- Areas that already benefit from an intensive industrial use.
- Proximity to need and emergency services and job-related industry
- Where there are no issues with seismic, flood, ag and forest NRL.
- Setbacks form critical areas and proximity to transportation port, proximity to water. Water use is a real issue. Need to discuss caps – the max we can handle without negatively impacting the people who live here.
- Consider adding a third “micro” tier to the sizes in siting considerations. Bayview Ridge, light industrial, urban reserve light industrial. Maybe even add a fourth tier?
- In already industrialized areas that have access to energy
- What is generated needs to be able to go into the grid – or maybe a single customer (Data center).
- Don’t want this on ag land.
- In light or heavy industrial areas near transmission infrastructure.
- Heavy industrial with a distinction between major and minor.
- Add setbacks.

- With AI materials tech is advancing at a very rapid pace – this leads to broader siting capability. We need three or four different levels.
- Marblemount could benefit from a smaller relatively safe energy source.
- Big plants should be sited in industrial areas.
- What happens to code permitting requirements in emergency situations (flooding, earthquakes, eruptions)? Exceptions can be made to provide power.

Allen reported Skagit County has a large healthcare/medical industrial cluster that is already bringing radioactive materials in and out of the County related to imaging and similar medical procedures. He also noted that most of our hospitals and other related medical buildings exist in or near residential zones and it seems that the medical industry has figured out a safe way to bring in, handle and dispose of these radioactive materials. Allen asked how that is the same or different than what would need to be considered and/or done for SMRs. Craig clarified that the materials used by medical facilities is a different kind of low-level radioactive material and does not include tritium. Tritium is used in the nuclear weapons at our naval stations.

Where do you think Fusion SMRs should be prohibited?

- Ag NRL
- Where there are opportunities to put in affordable housing – workforce considerations.
- Residential, commercial, ag
- Flood plains, critical areas, next to fish streams
- Anything outside the industrial/light industrial zones
- If we get into micro facilities, we might want to consider some exemptions… Farms
- Anything outside of industrial
- Key parcels with workforce opportunities – long-term workforce considerations
- As tech develops, set the stage. This will help to shift public perception. It depends on how we break it down in terms of size.
- The town of Diablo
- Where there are closed basins for water.
- Base vs. flexible power for fusion facilities? Most need to maintain a certain energy level to reach the required temperature. They are modular and small, so typically a few are placed together. They don't all have to be running at the same time to produce power.
- Being able to interconnect with PSE is important – in industrial zones (how many connection points are there?). Interconnection needs to be a consideration. Railroads in the county don't exist outside of Burlington or up valley. Only Hwy 20 gets you beyond Sedro Woolley.

- Where did the 3 MW tier come from? Might 5 or 10 be more appropriate? The Port is looking at 10 MG systems. That moves the needle in their world. (Jeanne took the action item to follow up with Robby on this.)

Looking at the Cons identified, can any of those be addressed through Mitigation? If yes, then what would Mitigation look like?

- Have a dedicated BESS system on site to help with start-up.
- Water use – ability to require close loop systems or systems that can bank water in advance to eliminate need for a sudden big water draw.
- Make sure you site it appropriately.
- Tech mitigation measures
- Have educational programs and info put out so the public doesn't develop erroneous perceptions. Involve schools. Take advantage of existing infrastructure.
- Promote closed water systems.
- Education is key for all the clean energy sources! There is a need for true and honest knowledge out there.
- Address the water issue – ag concern. Identify reservoir possibilities that don't now exist to ensure water is available during low-flow time in the summer.
- Have a Community Engagement Plan – engage affected communities. Facts and data matter.
- Setback / plantings
- Emergency management - additional training and review
- Through a Decommissioning Plan
- Alot is covered already through NRC and Dept of Energy. We don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- Through Emergency Management, Waste Management, and Decommissioning Plans.
- Include a financial commitment bond with these plans.
- A Plan for a "spontaneous disassembly event" – a combination of setbacks and safety measures.
- Back-up generation capability
- Make sure plasma can't escape the walls!

Jeanne thanked everyone for their input on Fusion SMRs, with appreciation for Craig sharing his considerable background and experience with the group. As County staff review the recommendations per the Code Outline from CEAG members, they have noticed that some recommendations are very similar, while others are not. The focus of our next meeting on October 30 will be looking at coming to consensus recommendations from this group. To that

end, staff review will be captured and sent out a week in advance of the next meeting. The focus will be seeking consensus on definitions, tiers, etc. The various proposals will be presented, and we will discuss them in an effort to find common ground (indicated by thumbs up/down/ or sideways). Staff will take those recommendations into consideration for drafting the code.

The formal legislative process will begin in February, with a public hearing, notice, and comment period. CEAG recommendations needs to fit within the framework of the County's three categories of uses:

- Permitted Uses
- Administrative Permitted Uses and
- Hearing Examiner Permitted Uses

It was noted the Utility Development code will need to be changed to mirror these different sections.

Next CEAG Meeting Date/Topics

October 30 from 9-noon at the PUD

Topics to include:

- Review of these meeting notes / Action Items
- Come to consensus on outstanding items as identified by County Staff of your recommendations for each of the four energy types.