
INFORMATION FOR MLA
Red Deer County Meeting – Solar Farms Issues

ISSUE

- Minister Dreeshen will be meeting with the Red Deer County on February 14, 2023. One of the topics that the County would like to discuss is solar farms.

CONSIDERATIONS

Issues of Concern

- Concerns have been raised by individuals and municipalities regarding the installation of renewable energy projects. Recent news articles from the Red Deer Advocate are included in the Attachments.
- Loss of agricultural lands:
 - The Alberta Utility Commission (AUC) considers local and municipal impacts, including the loss of agricultural land, when they evaluate whether projects are in the public interest.
 - The emerging field of “agrivoltaics” allows agricultural activities to continue in harmony and coexistence with the solar panels.
 - Individuals and municipalities can intervene in the AUC process to express their concerns.
 - Respecting private land owners rights are a foundational principle of Alberta policy.
- Lack of reclamation standards and security bonds:
 - The AUC approval process requires a decommissioning plan be included in renewable project applications.
 - Alberta’s Conservation and Reclamation Regulation requires that renewable projects be returned to equivalent land capability.
 - The AUC and local municipality can require a security bond be posted to ensure the facility is reclaimed when it is decommissioned.
- AUC overriding municipal governments:
 - The AUC is exempt from the requirement to align decisions with municipal statutory plans, per the *Municipal Government Act*.
 - Municipalities have a significant role in both encouraging economic development and balancing the needs of community members.
 - In conjunction with the AUC, Alberta Energy Regulator, and Environment and Protected Areas, there can be healthy municipal oversight.
 - Municipalities can intervene in AUC hearings on renewable facility applications to express their views and concerns.

Regulatory Process

- Alberta’s *Electric and Utilities Act* requires any electricity generator, including utility scale renewable projects, to obtain an approval from the AUC.
- Electricity projects are subject to AUC’s Rule 007, which defines the requirements that must be met before the AUC grants approvals. All generation projects in Alberta are commercially developed and, if developed on private land, can only advance with the permission of private landowners.
- The AUC determines whether the facility application is in the public interest or not. The commission focuses on environmental, economic, and social factors while ensuring opportunities for public input. AUC considerations may include:
 - environmental impacts,

- wildlife impacts,
- property values,
- noise impacts,
- visual impacts,
- land-use considerations,
- local and municipal economic benefits,
- decommission and salvage plans, and
- other issues raised by participants.
- The project proponent must develop a "Participant Involvement Program" that details how they will ensure opportunities for public input that includes:
 - Personal notification to occupants, residents, landowners, First Nation reserves, and Metis Settlements within 800 metres measured from the edge of the proposed site.
 - Provide these individuals details of the project.
 - Undertake public consultation regarding the project.
- The AUC also enables landowner participation in the hearing process before a decision is made that may directly and adversely affect them. Funding may be available to directly and adversely affected people to hire lawyers and experts to help represent their views during an AUC proceeding.

29(1)(a)

Renewable Energy Reclamation Requirements

- Plans for the decommissioning of a renewable energy project must be submitted for review and approval by the AUC as part of the overall facility application process.
- In June 2018, the Government of Alberta amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation to include renewable energy operations under the definition of specified land activities and outline an operator's obligation to reclaim specified land to equivalent capability. This obligation is intended to ensure renewable energy projects are properly reclaimed upon their decommissioning.
- Solar panels have an expected life span of 25 to 30 years before they need to be replaced.
- Replacing the expired solar panel is the norm as the use of the existing infrastructure and transmission connections dramatically reduce the cost compared to installing new facilities.

BACKGROUND

- Information regarding specific project descriptions, geographic location and development stage is available on the AESO Connection Project Map here:

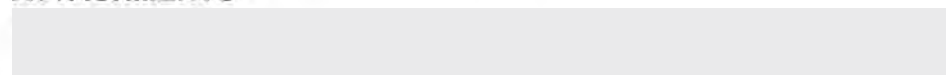


29(1)(a)

- Statistics on Alberta solar farm developments:

<u>Status</u>	<u>Facility Numbers</u>	<u>Combined Capacity (MW)</u>
Existing	30	1,165
Under Construction	17	1,187
With Approvals	16	1,309
Applications in process	76	10,529

ATTACHMENTS



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Utilities