



Laramie/Albany County Environmental Advisory Committee

January 2, 2021

RE: Position statement on newest proposed amendments to Wyoming's net-metering bill

Dear Laramie City Councilors and Albany County Commissioners,

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) wrote to you in November expressing our concerns about proposed amendments to Wyoming's current net-metering statutes. This letter serves as an update on the status of net-metering legislation and a request that Laramie City Councilors and Albany County Commissioners contact state legislators to oppose proposed changes to net-metering. There will be a committee-approved bill up for discussion in 2021 that would repeal net-metering and has the potential to severely impact our plans for carbon neutrality and local job growth. A joint letter from counties and municipalities across Wyoming would be even more powerful, and EAC would be happy to work with you to make contacts with interested parties (e.g., Jackson, Teton County, Sheridan, Lander) and craft such a letter.

On Nov. 11, 2020, the Joint Corporations, Elections, and Political Subdivisions Interim Committee passed a net-metering bill as the very last agenda item, without opportunity for stakeholders affected by the bill to provide input on the amendment that was ultimately passed. This bill, assigned number 21LSO-0219, will repeal net-metering entirely and task the Public Services Commission with determining rates, terms, and conditions for customers with net-metering systems operational before July 1, 2021. Discussion of the bill will begin in the Senate, although it is not yet known when this will occur.

EAC adamantly opposes this bill. Net-metering is the policy that allows owners of small, on-site renewable energy systems to get credit for the extra power that they supply to the grid. The guarantee of fair payback for excess energy produced is essential to encourage investment in renewable energy systems, particularly rooftop solar, that will help Laramie/Albany County become carbon neutral, provide long-term cost savings, and support job growth. Our previous position statements have elaborated upon the importance of net-metering for our citizens. Here, we briefly recap key points.

- (1) Rooftop solar is an integral component of Laramie's plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and net-metering legislation makes rooftop solar financially viable. Future municipal solar installations (e.g. on the waste management facility, police building, municipal operations center, city hall) will require financial backing from the city, which is much more likely with the guarantee of fair payback for excess energy produced.
- (2) In times of economic transition for Wyoming, we need to be doing everything we can to provide employment opportunities for future generations. The rooftop solar industry itself provides stable, well-paying jobs for Wyoming citizens. But more importantly, major corporations like Amazon,

Walmart, and Facebook are committed to utilizing renewable energy to power their warehouses, data centers, and even fleet vehicles. Furthermore, during the last legislative session, Wyoming became the first state to pass laws aimed at encouraging development of the blockchain industry. There will be big energy demands for this industry, and the potential for renewable energy will be an important incentive for companies to relocate to Wyoming.

- (3) Net-metering legislation provides opportunities for communities to return “Brownfield” land, like the 4.6 acres of the Midwest Refinery on N. Cedar Street, to the tax rolls through renewable energy projects. The Center for Creative Land Recycling rebrands rehabilitated “Brownfields” with solar power as “Brightfields” and provides opportunity to invest in renewable energy without potential downsides. Further, property values adjacent to these sites will increase, providing additional tax revenues.
- (4) The assumption that those with rooftop solar are not paying their full share is controversial and has not been adequately documented. Further, such subsidization language does not recognize the environmental and social benefits of solar. Climate change, caused by humans burning fossil fuels, has and will continue to affect water resources and wildfire frequency and intensity in Albany County. The Mullen Fire decimated over 175,000 acres in our beloved Snowy Mountains, threatened 40% of our water supply, and severely impacted air quality for weeks as the fire burned.

Legislation that supports growth of renewable energy makes our communities more resilient. The proposed repeal of net-metering gives more power to the three big utility companies that operate in Wyoming, at the expense of the individual. This is the antithesis of the “Cowboy Way” that is the pride of Wyoming. Rather than repealing net metering, we advocate that the energy generation cap be increased and net-metering customers be guaranteed fair payback for excess energy generated.

We appreciate the attention to renewable energy and thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

The Laramie/Albany County Environmental Advisory Committee