

New Jersey Energy Master Plan

Written Comments of

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Via electronic submission to emp.comments@bpu.nj.gov

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I. Introduction

Vote Solar, GRID Alternatives, Solar United Neighbors of New Jersey, Environment New Jersey, New Jersey Sustainable Business Council, and Isles, Inc. (“Commenting Parties”) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the New Jersey’s 2019 Energy Master Plan and commend Governor Murphy for his bold leadership in setting New Jersey on a path to 100% clean energy by 2050.

The Commenting Parties are a diverse group of organizations that support measures to increase access to clean energy opportunities for energy consumers in New Jersey. We strongly support the strategies laid out in the Draft Energy Master Plan which are:

- Strategy 1: Reduce Energy Consumption and Emissions from the Transportation Sector
- Strategy 2: Accelerate Deployment of Renewable Energy and Distributed Energy Resources
- Strategy 3: Maximize Energy Efficiency and Conservation and Reduce Peak Demand
- Strategy 4: Reduce Energy Use and Emissions from the Building Sector
- Strategy 5: Modernize the Grid and Utility Infrastructure
- Strategy 6: Support Community Energy Planning and Action in Low-and Moderate-Income and Environmental Justice Communities

We note that our comments below address mainly the New Jersey power sector. We recognize that transition to cleaner fuels in the transportation sector is equally critical in making significant progress toward greenhouse gas reductions and healthier air, particularly for communities of color.¹ Electrification of the transportation sector will necessitate that the power sector move toward zero emissions sources as swiftly as possible. This will require coordination and optimization across many sectors - transportation, energy efficiency, distributed generation, and storage. We trust our industry and clean transportation allies will address the transportation sector in their comments.

In particular, our comments provided commentary on the strategies 2, 5, 6. Given the risks to our communities from climate change, we do need to transition to clean energy as quickly and efficiently. We also underscore the need to ensure that low-income and EJ communities are not an after-thought in this planning process. Rather, we are deliberate, clear, and concise in our intent and goals to reduce emissions from low-income and EJ communities as well as ensure these communities benefit from the full range of the clean energy economy. These communities have borne the brunt of pollution for decades, so priority should be given to ensuring the

¹ See, e.g., Emily Badger, Pollution is segregated, too, Washington Post (April 15, 2014) (discussing study findings that reveal a disproportionate impact on minority communities from nitrogen dioxide pollution, a major transportation emission linked to asthma and heart disease), *available at* https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/04/15/pollution-is-substantially-worse-in-minority-neighborhoods-across-the-u-s/?utm_term=.1d664d96b025.

deployment of clean energy is done in a manner that reduces actual greenhouse gas emissions and pollution in these communities while providing access to other benefits clean energy provides.

II. Defining Energy Mix

We recommend the Energy Master Plan Committee consider energy resources that are renewable and result in zero emissions, such as solar, wind, and small or run-of-the-river hydro. We support energy sources that are clean and abundant, have zero fuel cost, are cost-competitive, capable of improving health, resilience, and well-being in communities and more importantly are easily accessible by all New Jersey residents, thereby allowing consumers to decide how they want to power themselves.

We especially advocate for solar energy because it is increasingly cost-competitive, scalable, and plentiful. It can be made easily available and accessible by everyone. Solar provides siting flexibility - solar arrays can be small or large-scale, depending on the needs. More importantly, solar is already at a price point that can scale in much of the country, and we are seeing numerous examples of solar competing with other energy sources without state subsidies in the Southwest and other regions. With the right policies in place, solar will continue to become cheaper and more affordable. Solar also facilitates energy democracy and empowers local communities and individuals to make their own energy decisions.

We strongly recommend that natural gas be not included in the energy mix for New Jersey's clean energy future. We need to eliminate the use of all fossil fuel energy sources to reverse the impacts of climate change.

III. Lack of synchrony in timeline between Energy Master Plan Comment Period and the Outcomes from the Integrated Energy Plan Study

We note the lack of a stakeholder process to understand the assumptions made in the Integrated Energy Plan process. Not knowing this prevents us from adequately responding to the Draft Energy Master Plan. The current Plan lacks the very details, which will be informed by the outcomes of the IEP, that stakeholders need to respond effectively to the draft Energy Master Plan. We also find it problematic that the IEP process is driven by "least-cost option" as the sole criteria and ignores other factors such as clean energy targets for LI and EJ communities, emissions reductions from LI and EJ communities, community resiliency, and any economic and job development aspects related to these communities. These factors should be inputs to a robust Integrated Energy Plan and should be considered in IEP discussion rather than addressed after

the IEP process is completed. Doing so will likely leave out specific policy goals for LI and EJ communities and also make the process of serving LI and EJ communities costly and inefficient.

IV. Defined and Measurable Targets to increase clean energy access in LI and EJ Communities

We acknowledge and appreciate the commitments made by the Governor's Office to ensure low-income and EJ communities benefit from the clean energy economy that New Jersey is poised to create. However, without concrete goals and timelines, we will be unable to achieve these goals. Therefore, we recommend the following targets to increase clean energy access to LI households:

- **250,000 Low-Income Solar Households by 2030**
- **400 MW of Storage for Low-Income and Environmental Justice Communities by 2030**

Our solar target is based on the projected 10 GW solar deployment goal laid out by the Solar Energy Industries Association. 10 GW of solar will serve approximately 800,000 new customers. Our goal of 250,000 households by 2030 represents 25% of the New Jersey's low-income population. While it may appear aggressive, New Jersey needs bold goals like this to ensure that a majority of low-income households have clean energy access by 2050.

We also strongly believe that solar deployment should be matched with storage deployment to build resilient and sustainable communities. Therefore, we recommend that 20% of all storage deployed in New Jersey be located in low-income and EJ communities. This represents 400 MW of storage in low-income and EJ communities by 2030.

In order to meet our 2030 targets, we must establish intermediate goals. New Jersey should increase solar access to 76,000 low-income households by 2026, both through rooftop and community solar, and deploy 200 MW of electricity storage in low-income communities by 2026. These actions will result in millions of dollar savings on electric bills, improve energy and housing affordability, enable resilient and sustainable communities, and make headway on building an equitable energy economy.

These goals should be matched with compensation that is fair, simple, and predictable. We highly encourage the NJ Board of Public Utilities to maintain the net-metering program at the retail rate for both rooftop and community solar. Net-metering program has worked well to make New Jersey a leading solar state. Without this simple, fair, and effective tool, households in New Jersey's most vulnerable communities will find it difficult to participate in the clean energy future. If New Jersey does plan to move towards a value of solar compensation mechanism, we

recommend BPU to create an inclusive and transparent process with multiple opportunities for public and industry input.

We also propose fair compensation for energy storage facilities. Storage provides wide array of benefits to the grid and to customers such as reduced peak loads, energy bill savings, reduced demand charges, grid stability, and other services. Therefore, utilities should provide a fair value, either through a rebate or bill credit to energy storage system owners. Vermont and New Hampshire are already offering storage credits through “bring your own device” tariff.

V. Community Energy Planning and Building Resilient and Sustainable Communities

As we push for clean energy targets for low-income and EJ communities, we should also ensure that these communities are central to their energy needs and the planning process. We ask BPU to make resiliency a key tenet of a community energy planning process. As supertstorm Sandy showed, low-income and EJ communities bore the brunt of the aftermath of the hurricane which was exacerbated with failure of the grid and the inability of the first responders to provide timely services.

A holistic community energy planning should combine existing energy efficiency efforts with behind-the-meter solar, community solar, and energy storage to transition from fossil fuel energy sources to clean energy sources should be the norm. This approach should be designed as a climate mitigation and adaptation strategy.

We strongly support equity-centered climate resilience by encouraging the development of Community Resilience Hubs that are clean energy powered, community-based and controlled, and prioritize the deployment of services and aid to local residents during disasters. These community hubs should be designed as microgrids that can sustain natural disasters and operate as independent grid units during disasters. Existing spaces such as hospitals, police departments, fire stations, and schools should be reconfigured to serve as Hubs. These Community Resilience Hubs must be directed by community members but supported, financed, and maintained by local and state governments.

In order to facilitate the reconfiguration of existing facilities as Community Resilience Hubs, we recommend a formation of a state Advisory Council that can advise, direct, and provide oversight of Community Resilience Hubs to ensure best practices and key tenets of these centers are replicated across the state. Membership in the Advisory Council should skew heavily toward representation from community-based organizations in low-income communities, environmental justice communities, and other underserved communities. The Advisory Council should establish the most transparent and inclusive processes possible, in order to fully integrate the needs and desires of New Jersey’s most vulnerable communities.

The state of Maryland is currently undertaking efforts to support community hub microgrids. In 2018, Maryland Energy Administration opened the FY19 Resiliency Hub Grant Program to fund solar and microgrid developers for the development and construction of resiliency hubs in high density and low-to-moderate income communities.

VI. Inclusive and Integrated Clean Energy Future Planning Process

Communities should be the primary source of information to identify needs, strengths and challenges. They are also best at providing what clean energy sector or technologies are most suited to meet their needs. Within the community, collecting feedback from private entities, governmental entities, as well as citizen-based associations and organizations will provide differing but valuable feedback.

It is critical to collaborate with environmental justice partners and communities of color in New Jersey to develop a comprehensive energy planning process that combines clean energy, energy efficiency, EV deployment and storage, as well as plans for reducing harmful power plant emissions in these communities. New Jersey must undertake thoughtful and respectful consultation with these communities in order to pursue an equitable clean energy future and to minimize the risk of a piecemeal transition. We note that meaningful engagement with these communities involve consultation on a variety of aspects, including logistics such as meeting locations that are convenient, times that do not conflict with work schedules, etc.

On the participatory side, BPU and other state agencies should consider holding regional meetings that are designed not only to gain ideas and input but to also disseminate information on New Jersey's clean energy vision as well as energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other programs and services offered by BPU and other agencies. These meetings should be advertised to residents of environmental justice communities and the public at large using communication mediums that work best for these communities and should be held in EJ communities at times that allow residents to attend and at locations that are convenient. Input from these meeting should inform priorities of EJ communities moving forward, including program definitions. Although not perfect, New York provides a good framework on ways to facilitate this.²

² New York: NY PSC set up a "Low-Income Customer Collaborative" with NYSERDA, low-income community organizers, utilities, and other interested stakeholders "on developing means for encouraging low-income customer participation in Community [Distributed Generation]," including the consideration of demonstration projects to encourage low-income customer participation. NY PSC staff are to report on the outcome of the collaborative. N.Y. Public Service Commission, Case 15-E-0082, Order Establishing a Community Distributed Generation Program and Making Other Findings, at 31 (July 17, 2015).

Similarly, we encourage the BPU to establish a long-term process to seek input from underserved communities. The regulatory process can be challenging and often times, the resources needed to participate are out of reach for many groups. We urge the BPU to establish recurring LMI/environmental justice stakeholder meetings, as recommended by the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) and other EJ partners to make it simpler to receive input from our partners representing low-income communities, communities of color, and environmental justice communities regarding their needs and requirements relating to clean energy solutions. These stakeholder meetings can be further organized in working groups that periodically reviews the targets for renewable energy in low-income and EJ communities and the Energy Master Plan process.

The Low-Income Solar Policy Guide developed by GRID Alternatives and Vote Solar provides a roadmap and toolbox for making solar energy affordable and accessible for low-income communities. The Guide includes relevant examples from all over the country. Please see www.lowincomesolar.org for comprehensive examples and suggestions. The observations and solutions offered in the Guide are, in many cases, applicable to other energy measures, as well.

At the outset, The Energy Master Plan Committee must fully understand the barriers to access that face various consumers. Barriers to solar for low-income families, for example, include:

- Cost sensitivity and access to financing
- Physical barriers and home ownership status
- Housing conditions
- Education and outreach
- Market forces³

Successful deployment of clean energy programs that are accessible and affordable for all will necessitate adherence to the Guiding Principles outlined in the Low-Income Solar Policy Guide:

- Accessibility and affordability
- Community engagement
- Consumer protection
- Sustainability and flexibility
- Compatibility and integration⁴

The ultimate participation of diverse consumers in clean energy products and services hinges on the value-add for them. Achieving that value-add may require various measures such as incentives, robust compensation mechanisms, financing, and others. Additionally, maximum value-add may involve the incorporation of job training and workforce development

³ GRID Alternatives, Vote Solar, Low-Income Solar Policy Guide, Unlocking Participation (2018) at <https://www.lowincomesolar.org/why-act/unlocking-participation/>.

⁴ Id, at Guiding Principles, at <https://www.lowincomesolar.org/guiding-principles/>.

opportunities, and ensuring that participation in clean energy programs meshes with other energy assistance programs, as well as housing programs.

Communicating the value-add of clean energy participation often requires consistent deployment of time, resources, and outreach. We have observed that, absent concrete plans and funding to work with trusted community-based organizations, participation especially among low-income customers and others in underserved communities will be difficult to achieve. To address this, we encourage BPU to provide technical assistance and training to community organizations and individuals to ensure they have full set of information to successfully participate in the clean energy planning and programs that emerge. This technical assistance and training should cater towards the unique customer needs in New Jersey. For example, multilingual training, both verbal and written, will ensure all potential customers are informed of the programs and ways they can benefit from it.

VII. Financing and Funding

Establishing a Green Bank

We appreciate BPU noting the need to create a New Jersey Green Bank as stated in Goal 7.3.1. We all recognize that leveraging public funds to attract private sector will result in increased deployment of clean energy, especially for low-income and EJ communities. New Jersey can look at New York and Connecticut for successful implementation of Green Banks.

The timing for this could not be better than this. We encourage BPU, EDA, and the Governor's Office to move swiftly in establishing the Green Bank. A number of stakeholder groups, including EDF and Vote Solar are already pushing for this effort and are available to lend resources and best practices from other states on how to enable a New Jersey Green Bank.

Clean Energy Program Allocation

We also appreciated BPU's allocation of \$3 million for Community Solar Program for FY'2020 Clean Energy Program budget. However, clarity around how this funding will be deployed is critical. As clean energy advocates, we would like this funding to be used to support projects developed by and participated in by low-income and EJ communities. Our calculations also show that we will need to deploy anywhere between \$5M to \$10M to have a significant dent in reaching out to LI customers for community solar.

Solar Incentives for Projects serving LI and EJ communities

One of the biggest reasons for New Jersey's thriving solar market has been due to its generous SREC program and customer friendly net-metering policies. As the BPU considers a replacement program for the current SREC program, it is important that New Jersey continue to

offer strong incentives to ensure continued deployment of clean energy. Without this, clean energy investments are likely to dry up.

We would especially like to emphasize funding for low-income customers, environmental justice communities, communities of color, and historically underserved communities. If New Jersey is committed to transitioning *all* New Jersey residents to the clean energy future - which is necessary to get to 100% clean energy by 2050 - significant funding and support will need to be deployed. The SREC successor program should drive access, ownership, and job opportunities for these communities.

We encourage BPU to follow the lead of states such as Massachusetts and Illinois, which provide financial support for LMI solar projects and customers that go beyond incentives available for non-LMI solar projects. The Massachusetts SREC II program offered a REC premium price for projects serving affordable housing, resulting in close to 100 projects by early 2018. Likewise, the BPU may wish to look to Illinois' approach to incentivize low-income solar projects. Like Massachusetts, Illinois will offer a higher incentive for solar projects that serve low-income communities.⁵

New Jersey is also primed to follow the lead of California, which has developed a comprehensive suite of low-income solar programs with robust funding and thoughtful administration. In California, funding for the Single-Family Affordable Solar Homes (SASH) program, the Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SOMAH) program, and new programs including community solar targeted to underserved communities, comes from ratepayer surcharges (not collected from low-income ratepayers) and from greenhouse gas emissions allowances.⁶

Funding non-energy benefits

There are many other benefits that can be achieved from solar systems, such as developing them as carports or placing them on brownfields and landfills. However, such applications have higher incremental costs. Just as other states have created incentives, through their REC programs or SREC successors, New Jersey should use the exploration of an SREC successor program to develop incentives for desirable non-energy benefits, such as particular siting locations.

Siting clean energy projects is an issue of importance to environmental justice communities and communities of color. We encourage the Energy Master Plan Committee to explore ways to support, prioritize, and incentivize projects that are constructed in underserved communities *and*

⁵ Illinois Power Agency, Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan, 156 et seq. (Dec. 4, 2017), available at <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/ipa/Documents/2018ProcurementPlan/LTRRPP-Filed-Long-Term-Renewable-Resources-Procurement-Plan.pdf>.

⁶ See Low-Income Solar Policy Guide, Enabling Long-Term Funding (2018) at <https://www.lowincomesolar.org/toolbox/enabling-long-term-funding/>.

incorporate job training and hiring of individuals in these communities so that the community members benefit from access to jobs and more direct engagement with the projects, in addition to access to new sources of clean energy. We believe tight coordination among agencies like BPU, EDA, and the Department of Community Affairs is required to ensure these benefits are linked to the rollout of more clean energy. New Jersey also should look to Illinois,⁷ which allocates 25% of incentive funds in the Illinois Solar for All Program for low-income solar projects to be located in environmental justice communities.

VIII. Addressing Municipality Barriers

At the municipality level, it is important to ensure that the soft costs that comprise a significant portion of the total installed cost of solar PV are addressed. This includes costs associated with topics such as permitting, siting, financing, as well as lack of information that can significantly expand the time from project initiation to completion. As we continue to see an increase in the deployment of clean energy technologies, local permitting and zoning laws need to be updated simultaneously to account for the addition of these new technologies. As noted previously, soft costs of solar that occur primarily at the local jurisdiction can unnecessarily add cost and elongate the project timeline. Additionally, onerous rules and regulations can frustrate potential consumers from pursuing clean energy options. These challenges are best addressed at the local level, therefore involvement of local jurisdictions in energy planning is a must.

The Energy Master Plan Committee should encourage municipalities and Authorities Having Jurisdictions to support consistent laws or requirements that facilitate the deployment of clean energy technologies necessary to reach the state's clean energy goals. For example, the state could create a model zoning ordinance and permitting process for local governments to create a streamlined approach to solar deployment throughout New Jersey.

By the same token, siting, permitting and zoning around land issues should be well thought-out. Any existing policies that stymie project approvals can drastically delay the timeline for clean energy deployment. We encourage BPU not to impose restrictions on the siting of clean energy projects but rather employ an incentive-based program where projects are encouraged to be developed in underserved communities, in consultation with environmental justice communities, and underutilized lands such as brownfields, grayfields, warehouses etc.

IX. Valuing DER and Net-Metering

We also encourage BPU to maintain the integrity of current net-metering policies in New

⁷ Illinois Power Agency, Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan, 172 *et seq.* (Dec. 4, 2017), available at <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/jpa/Documents/2018ProcurementPlan/LTRRPP-Filed-Long-Term-Renewable-Resources-Procurement-Plan.pdf>.

Jersey, with the exception of any net-metering policy that favors non-clean energy sources. Even though New Jersey is one of the strong solar markets, it still has a long way to go to make solar a commonplace for all consumers. The continuation of a robust net-metering arrangement will ensure that the investment of solar customers, who are generators of clean, local, and affordable power distributed all across the grid, is fair and cost-effective.

Should BPU decide to move in the direction of compensating DER for its full value stack, we encourage a transparent process with numerous opportunities for public input. Both Nevada and New York provide lessons that New Jersey should bear in mind. In Nevada's case, the Nevada Public Utilities Commission voted in favor of a tariff structure to address "cost shift" concerns that reduced net-metering value and also imposed a monthly service charge. This costed the state hundreds of solar jobs and thousands of dollars in solar investments before the Governor restored the state's net energy metering in 2017.

Under the New York's Value of Distributed Energy Sources issued by the New York Public Service Commission, solar advocates point to two major problems. One, individual utilities can value DERs differently resulting in some utilities valuing DERs lower than other utilities and second, lack of financial certainty on the value solar systems can receive under VDER, which can impact a project's financeability. Both are problematic and can significantly impact future solar investments in the state.

X. Workforce Development

We are pleased by BPU's emphasis on planning workforce needs for the changing energy landscape.

To ensure low-income New Jersey residents are part of the clean energy workforce, dedicated funding and programs to support a diverse and inclusive workforce are needed. We recommend robust funding and resources that support clean energy apprenticeship programs, apprentices, and apprenticeship sponsors beginning at the high school level and in some cases at the middle school level. New programs that provide entrepreneurial training, mentoring, investment capital, and loans to help launch new enterprises by residents of low-income and EJ communities should be developed, preferably in partnerships with county colleges, workforce investment boards, local economic development entities, and state government. For low-income and EJ communities to be part of the solution, exposure to not only the technologies but different components of the industry such as people, companies, career tracks etc. is needed and this should begin at formative years.

We underscore the need to address the entire value chain of solar industry in any workforce discourse. The Interstate Renewable Energy Council Solar Career Map explores 40 jobs across four solar industry sectors, demonstrating the spread of solar jobs over hundreds of skill set and educational training.⁸

As BPU considers the development of a workforce needs assessment for the clean energy economy, including but not limited to support for renewable energy generation and distributed energy resources; grid modernization; energy efficiency services; transport system electrification as noted in 7.2.1, we encourage BPU and other agencies to solicit industry feedback to inform on workforce needs, creating mechanisms to connect job seekers with job providers, and tracking job trends to assure training programs are in line with the future industry needs.

About us:

Vote Solar is a national, non-profit, non-partisan grassroots organization with a mission to make solar a mainstream energy source. We aim to foster economic opportunity and support a cleaner, healthier environment by bringing solar energy into the mainstream. Vote Solar is not a trade group and does not have corporate members. Since 2002, Vote Solar has worked in states all across the country to remove market barriers and implement key policies needed to bring solar to scale.

Formed over 15 years ago, **GRID Alternatives** is a national leader in making clean, affordable solar power and solar jobs accessible to low-income communities and communities of color. GRID's mission is to make renewable energy technology and job training accessible to underserved communities. GRID has completed over 10,600 commercial and residential solar projects for low-income families throughout the country, totaling over 44 megawatts. It has provided 37,700 job trainees and community members with hands-on training to build the skills and experience necessary to secure jobs in today's rapidly growing solar industry. GRID is also a leader in low-income solar policy and partners with utilities, state agencies and other stakeholders across the country to increase solar access and equity.

Solar United Neighbors of New Jersey envisions a clean, equitable energy system that directs control and benefits back to local communities, with solar on every roof and money in every pocket. NJ-SUN is a community of people building a new energy system. They help people go solar, join together, and fight for their energy rights. Partner organizations range from nonprofits

⁸ <https://www.irecsolarcareermap.org/about-this-map>

to municipal governments, universities to community organizations, and individual “super volunteers” to houses of worship.

Environment New Jersey is a citizen-based environmental advocacy project of the non-profit Environment America. Environment New Jersey researches the challenges confronting our environment and educate the public about what’s at stake. Through research reports, news conferences, interviews with reporters, op-ed pieces, letters to the editor and more, Environment New Jersey raises awareness of environmental issues and promote sensible solutions.

New Jersey Sustainable Business Council is where like-minded businesses are joining together for the purpose of creating a new and dynamic 21st century economy for the Garden State based on the “triple bottom line”: people, profit, and planet. As a state affiliate of the American Sustainable Business Council ([ASBC](#)), NJSBC and its members are working together to: 1. Constructively influence and shape relevant public policy and legislation at the state level. 2. Amplify the voice of sustainable businesses at the national level, and 3. Serve as inspirational models, collaborators and educators for all New Jersey businesses and organizations that wish to adopt or improve their own triple bottom line strategies and results.

Founded in 1981, **Isles, Inc.** is a community development and environmental organization based in Trenton, New Jersey. With a mission to foster self-reliant families and healthy, sustainable communities, we design and develop effective services that support this mission and share what we learn with others who can make a difference.