

# South Dakota Public Utilities Commission Information Guide to Siting Energy Conversion & Electric Transmission Facilities

This guide is intended to offer a simple overview of the Public Utilities Commission’s process in making a decision to approve or deny the construction of an energy conversion facility, AC/DC conversion facility, wind energy facility, solar energy facility, or electric transmission facility in South Dakota. This guide is informational and does not address all situations, variations and exceptions in the siting process and proceedings of the PUC. For additional information, see South Dakota Codified Laws Chapter 49-41B and South Dakota Administrative Rules Chapter 20:10:22 (sdlegislature.gov).

## PUC Authority

The South Dakota Legislature gave the PUC authority to issue permits for energy conversion, AC/DC conversion, wind energy, solar energy and electric transmission facilities. An energy conversion facility is a generation facility, other than a wind or solar generation facility, capable of generating 100 megawatts or more of electricity. In considering applications, the commission’s primary duty is to ensure the location, construction and operation of the facilities will produce minimal adverse effects on the environment and the citizens. The commission determines these factors based on definitions, standards and references specified in South Dakota Codified Laws and Administrative Rules. For energy conversion facilities, AC/DC conversion facilities and transmission facilities, the PUC has one year from the date of application to make a decision; nine months for wind energy facilities and solar energy facilities.

The commission strives to issue a reasoned decision and conditions where appropriate that uphold the law and discourage a potentially expensive and lengthy appeal process.

In rendering its decision, the commission may grant the permit, deny the permit, or grant the permit with terms, conditions or modifications of the construction, operation or maintenance as the commission finds appropriate and legally within its jurisdiction. The commission does not have authority to change the route or location of a project. The decision of the commission can be appealed to the circuit court and, ultimately, to the South Dakota Supreme Court.

The PUC is not involved in the easement acquisition process that occurs between applicants and landowners. Likewise, the PUC does not have a role

in the eminent domain process, which is handled in the circuit court system. Landowners with concerns about these issues should seek advice from their personal attorney.

## Applicant Responsibility

The applicant that seeks the PUC’s approval must show its proposed project:

- will comply with all applicable laws and rules;
- will not pose a threat of serious injury to the environment nor to the social or economic condition of inhabitants or expected inhabitants in the siting area;
- will not substantially impair the health, safety or welfare of the inhabitants; and
- will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the views of the governing bodies of affected local units of government.

## PUC Staff Role

PUC staff members assigned to work on a siting case typically include one attorney and multiple analysts. Staff attorneys have educational and practical experience in administrative law, trial procedure and business management principles. Staff analysts have expertise in engineering, research and economics. Some of the work the staff does involves reviewing data and evidence submitted by the applicant and intervenors, requesting and analyzing opinions from experts, and questioning the parties. The staff considers the information relative to state laws and rules and presents recommendations to the Public Utilities Commissioners.

## Public Involvement

South Dakotans, as well as anyone else with a direct interest in a siting case, have a variety of ways to stay informed and involved. Read more on back.

**Review the electronic docket.** A docket is the continually updated collection of documents filed with the commission for a particular case. Dockets are accessible under the Commission Actions tab on the PUC website, [www.puc.sd.gov](http://www.puc.sd.gov). Dockets are labeled to correspond with their type and filing date. For example, the Meridian Wind Project docket is EL20-013; EL for electric, 20 for the year 2020 and 013 to indicate it was the 13th electric docket filed with the commission in 2020.

**Attend a public input meeting.** The PUC will hold a public input meeting on a siting case, with 30 days notice, as physically close as practical to the proposed facility site. At the meeting, the applicant describes its project and the public may ask questions and offer comment. PUC commissioners and staff attend this meeting.

**Submit comments.** Members of the public may submit written comments about an active siting case to the PUC. These ***informal*** public comments are reviewed and considered by the PUC commissioners and staff. Comments should include the docket number or siting project name, commenter's full name, mailing address, e-mail address and phone number. These comments should be emailed to [puc@state.sd.us](mailto:puc@state.sd.us) or mailed or hand-delivered to PUC, 500 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501. Comments are posted in the "Comments" section of the docket within a reasonable time after having been received. The commenter's name, city and state will be posted along with their comment. Comments from businesses, organizations or other commercial entities (on letterhead, for example) will include full contact information for such.

Please follow these guidelines when submitting written comments to the PUC:

- For comments sent by email, the maximum file size is 10 MB. If you have questions, please contact South Dakota PUC staff at 605-773-3201 (Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Central Time).
- For comments sent by U.S. mail or hand delivered, no more than twenty 8.5" x 11" pages, including attachments and support materials, should be submitted with a comment. Sheets with printing on both sides are counted as two pages.
- A reference document, article or other attachment not written by the person commenting should clearly identify the source of

the content and include permission from the author to reproduce the material. The inclusion of any copyrighted material without accompanying proof of the commenter's explicit right to redistribute that material will result in the material being rejected.

- In instances where individual comments are deemed to be a duplicate or near duplicate copies of a mass message campaign, the PUC will post only a representative sample and list the name, city and state of the commenter.
- Comments containing threatening language or profanity will be rejected.
- Multimedia submissions such as audio and video files will not be accepted as written comments.
- Electronic links will not be accepted.

**Become an intervenor.** Individuals with a direct interest who wish to be ***formal*** parties in a siting case may apply to the PUC for intervenor status. The intervention deadline is clearly indicated within the docket. Intervention is appropriate for people who intend to actively participate in the case through legal motions, discovery (requests for facts or documents), the written preparation and presentation of actual evidence, and in-person participation in a formal hearing. Intervenors are legally obligated to respond to discovery from other parties and to submit to cross-examination under oath at a formal hearing. Individuals seeking only to follow the progress of a siting case or to offer comments for the PUC's consideration need not become intervenors.

**Communicate on record.** Verbal communication between a commissioner and a person with an interest in a matter before the commission that does not occur in a public forum or as part of the official record should be avoided. Those who communicate in writing with a commissioner about an open or imminent docket matter should understand that their comments will become part of the docket and are subject to review by all parties and the public. Likewise, comments made at a PUC public proceeding or submitted to the commission relative to a docket matter become part of the docket, open to review by all parties and the public. Because commissioners have a decision-making role in docket matters, any discussion with a commissioner about an open or imminent docket must take place in an open forum, such as a public meeting, with notice given to all parties.