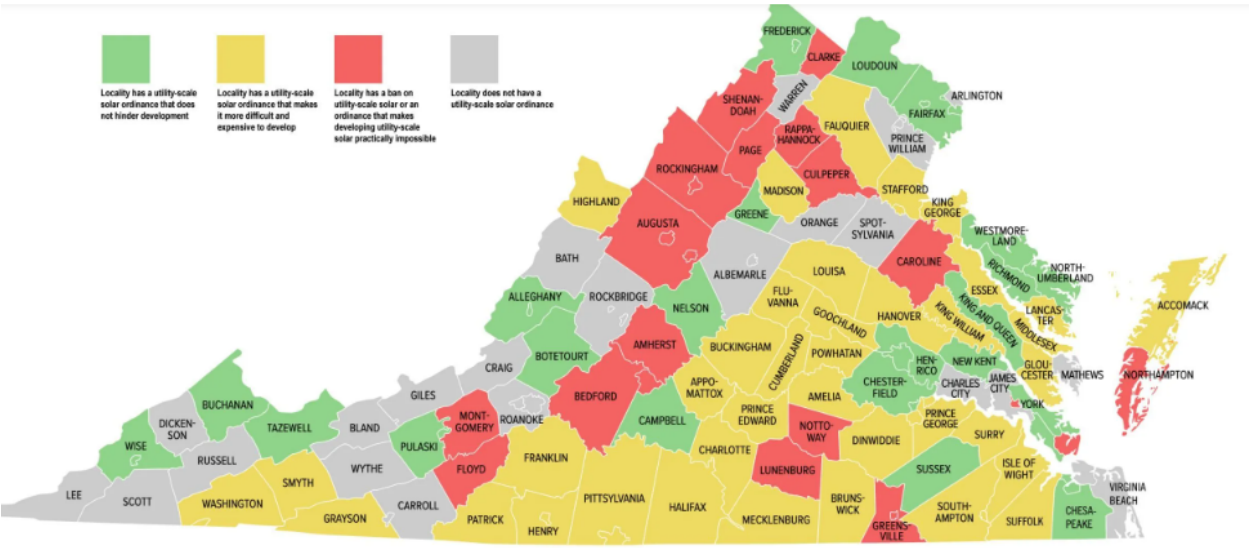
MAREC ACTION

Virginia's Patchwork Approach to Energy Project Siting Does Not Work

Localities across the Commonwealth have established a patchwork of local regulations significantly hindering renewable energy development. No matter how well-intentioned, restrictive regulations stymie many good projects. One locality may approve solar development, while an adjacent locality rejects a similar project because of unreasonably restrictive regulations that effectively ban renewable energy generation. This scenario is reflected in data from the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia indicating that in 2024 fewer solar development projects were proposed than during the previous three years and for the first time in a decade more projects were denied or withdrawn than were approved in Virginia.

Developers want to work with localities to bring jobs and economic development to rural communities. A common set of rules will foster collaboration on good projects and positive outcomes for all communities, eliminating the need for new gas pipelines.



Over half of Virginia's counties have signaled they are closed for business to solar. There are 57 counties and cities that have either banned or made it difficult to develop utility-scale solar projects. In many cases, local laws conflict making it

difficult for developers to efficiently site projects. Consider some of these contradicting local zoning regulations:

- **Accomack, Appomattox and Powhatan Counties** do not allow solar projects on agricultural land, while **Goochland County** limits solar projects to only agricultural lands.
- **Amherst County** limits projects to no more than 50 acres. **Augusta and Floyd Counties** place the limit at 200 acres. **Northampton County** has a 220-acre cap. **Grayson County** has a 500-acre cap.
- **Greenville County** mandates that utility-scale solar installations must be located on the property of a business or industry and that all generated electricity must be used on-site.
- **Highland County** regulations state that no more than 400 acres can be included in any utility-scale solar energy system; any project must be located within 1 mile of existing electric transmission line; and it must be a minimum of 2 miles from another utility-scale solar energy system.
- **Page County** has a 300-acre aggregate cap with no more than 30 acres per renewable facility, while **King William County** has a maximum area of 1,500 acres for projects, with minimum setbacks of 200 feet to other property lines and 500 feet to Virginia Primary & U.S. Highway rights-of-way.
- **Rockingham County** has an 1,800-acre aggregate cap on solar in the county, with individual projects limited to 50 or 150 acres each. **Henry County** has a 2,445-acre limit, **Buckingham County** has a 7,500-acre limit and **Brunswick County** has an 8,500-acre limit.
- **Rappahannock County** mandates parcels cannot be less than 500 acres, but panels must be contained in a 100-acre contiguous area. The parcel must have at least 200 feet of frontage along state-maintained roads and cannot be built on prime ag land.
- **Washington County** prohibits utility-scale solar on land that has been clear-cut or heavily timbered in 5 years preceding the date of application. Facilities may not be within 5 miles of an airport.

Local restrictions mean that good renewable energy projects aren’t being built in many parts of Virginia.