
**Indicators in
Community
Energy
Planning:**

An Evaluation of Ontario's
Green Energy and Green
Economy Act of 2009



Source: Vlado (freedigitalimages.net)

Author
Ana Stuermer

School of Urban and Regional Planning,
Queen's University
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With increasing public concern over environmental degradation and Climate Change, community energy planning is now emerging as a new task for planners. Community energy planning are practices that foster energy sustainability, protect or restore the natural environment, avoid harm in relation to social and health indicators, result in a more equitable distribution of benefits, are economic to maintain over the long-term, and do not impede the emergence of other sustainable approaches at the local level (FCM, 2009; Neves and Leal, 2010). More specifically, planning how a community generates, receives, utilizes and conserves energy can greatly contribute to the goal of stabilizing green house gas (GHG) emissions, reducing air pollution, diversifying energy resources and fostering a secure, accessible and stable energy supply that supports the local municipal economy.

As the role of energy planning is closely tied with supportive provincial Legislation, this research study aimed at analyzing the effectiveness of Ontario's *Green Energy and Green Economy Act* (GEGEA) to local municipal planners. The overall goal of this Legislation is to foster the growth of renewable energy projects, promote energy conservation and energy efficiency while strengthening Ontario's economy. This Act also has significant implications for municipalities across the Province, as it amends the *Planning Act* and removes barriers to the development of renewable energy undertakings in the overall planning process. Therefore, this research aims at answering the following question:

❖ **To what extent are the instruments currently used by energy planners encouraged by the Green Energy and Green Economy Act?**

In order to answer this research question, this study employed a qualitative, multi-method approach, consisting of two parts:

(1) Developing a comprehensive set of indicators that represents the instruments used in energy planning practices in Ontario and Canada. This method was previously developed and published by researchers Neves and Leal, 2010; and

(2) Using these indicators to evaluate Ontario's GEGEA. This evaluation method was previously used by Streimikiene and Sivickas, 2008, and adapted for this report.

Based on the methodology described above, five indicators were developed and used to evaluate the GEGEA. The indicators are found under Table 1 below. The analysis shows that although the instruments provided in the Act are mostly representative of the tools used by planners when developing community energy plans, they are limited in scope and not promoted to their full potential. Table 1 summarizes the key considerations made by the GEGEA in regards to each indicator.

Table 1: Summary of the assessment of Ontario’s GEGEA, evaluating the extent to which this Act utilizes the instruments currently used to develop Community Energy Plans. Source: report author.

INDICATOR	ABSENCE IN GEGEA	PRESENCE IN GEGEA	POINTS ALLOCATED	SUMMARY OF REMARKS
1. Public Consultation and Engagement in Energy-Related Projects		✓	2	- Required public consultation (including First Nations and community groups) prior to any planning, development or procurement of electricity supply, capacity, transmission and distribution.
2. Locally Available Financial Instruments		✓	1	- OPA to develop and manage the FIT, encouraging the participation of Aboriginal, local communities and other groups in generating renewable energy.
3. Community Energy Mapping, Reporting and Labeling		✓	1	- Mandatory disclosure of household and institutional energy intensity, via detailed mapping and reporting. - No energy labeling of the built-environment required.
4. Supportive Energy Policies and Strategies at the Local Level	✓		0	- Public agencies are required to develop Energy Demand and Management Plans, but not local municipalities. - Local policy and/or by-laws must not result in barriers to the development of renewable energy undertakings.
5. Public Transit Ridership	✓		0	- No mention throughout the Act.

Legend:

- 0 – The indicator is not present nor cannot be inferred from the text of the GEGEA.
- 1 – The indicator is somewhat present or it can be inferred from the text of the GEGEA.
- 2 – The indicator is present and the GEGEA provides further information on it.

Five key recommendations are made based on the results from the analysis of the GEGEA. Each one is intended to strengthen the ability of the Act to become more effective at the local planning level.

- 1. CONTINUE TO PROMOTE ENERGY MAPPING AND REPORTING, AND EXTEND ENERGY LABELING REQUIREMENTS TO THE BUILT-ENVIRONMENT**

Despite extensively discussing energy mapping and reporting of household and institutional facilities, the GEGEA should encourage labeling practices beyond its narrow scope. Performance label schemes represent one of the best practices in community energy planning (CEA, 2010) and are extremely helpful in displaying reliable and standard energy information that can inform decision-making.

- 2. UTILIZE PUBLIC TRANSIT RIDERSHIP AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ENCOURAGE ENERGY CONSERVATION AND EFFICIENCY**

Public transit ridership is an important indicator because it helps to assess the physical state of the local energy system (Neves and Leal, 2010). In other words, this indicator reflects the need to develop urban patterns that support compact, mixed use developments, optimizing efficient use of energy.

- 3. CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENERGY-RELATED PROJECTS**

One of the Act's main objectives is to foster the growth of renewable energy projects, while ensuring that communities, local groups and aboriginal peoples have an opportunity to express their concerns and participate in the decision-making process. The GEGEA clearly states the government's vision for an inclusive and transparent energy consultation process.

- 4. EXTEND THE REQUIREMENTS TO DEVELOP ENERGY PLANS, OR MAKE ENERGY CONSIDERATIONS, TO THE LOCAL MUNICIPAL LEVEL**

As the development of a dedicated energy plan attests to a community's leadership in energy sustainability and willingness to look at opportunities to include greener and cleaner energy generation technologies (FCM, 2009), the GEGEA should extend the provincial requirements to develop energy plans to municipalities. Furthermore, the promotion of supportive energy policies can provide important and foundational elements to encourage the development of energy conservation and efficiency in a community (CEA, 2010).

- 5. USE FIT COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHER LOCALLY AVAILABLE FINANCIAL MECHANISMS**

Locally available financial incentives, administered by municipal employees, should be encouraged by the Act and implemented collaboratively with Feed-In-Tariffs (FIT) in order to achieve significant energy conservation and encourage the development of renewable-energy undertakings.