

DOE Clean Energy to Communities – In-Depth Technical Partnerships

RFP-2024-10065

Advancing private sector investment in the community goal of reaching 100% clean energy by 2042 in Buncombe County

Land of Sky Regional Council

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## **Section 1- Proposal Background and Goals**

### **1.1 Community Challenges and Opportunity for Impact**

Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC), on behalf of the [Blue Horizons Project \(BHP\)](#), a community collaboration for clean energy in Buncombe County, NC, is pleased to offer this proposal for an in-depth partnership with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) through the Clean Energy to Communities Program (C2C). By partnering with NREL we will increase voluntary private sector adoption of more efficient technologies, electrification, and renewable energy, particularly in the commercial and industrial sectors. We seek NREL's support in three key areas: baseline analysis, technical modeling, and community engagement.

**Baseline Analysis:** NREL's technical abilities would enable us to build off of the previous study work of the region's current building stock in order to identify potential private sector partners for further in-depth analysis. Through a combination of by gathering public data, the existing ComStock Data, and utility data sets on heating, cooling, and water heating technologies. This analysis would identify key facilities or communities that are ready for efficiency improvements, distributed renewable energy development, and electrification. The project team has an analysis from 2017 that needs to be updated to reflect how population and industrial sector growth has changed.

**Technical Modeling:** In order to gain buy-in from our private sector, we need to be able to present them with a value proposition that makes the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficient and electric equipment desirable. With NREL's tools we hope to provide modeling for individual facilities on renewable energy production capacity, energy efficiency improvements, and electrification. We'd like this analysis to include how to best use peak demand cycles, virtual power plants, utility incentives and rate schedules, and available tax incentives to get the most for the investment in clean technologies and efficiency improvements.

**Community Engagement:** LOSRC, BHP, and Buncombe County currently do education and outreach events to the community and this effort will allow us to integrate commercial and industrial (C & I) energy users into our broader strategy, which already has programming for residential engagement. Part of this engagement will include leveraging existing C&I stakeholder networks to identify gaps in their energy usage understanding, and how current incentives can close funding gaps that will meet Buncombe County's clean energy goals.

As part of the in-depth partnership, NREL's technical expertise will identify impactful initiatives that offer positive financial returns for businesses, commercial enterprises, and industry while achieving our climate and equity goals. With modeling and ROI calculations, and education about incentives, and a connection to the financing opportunities, we think this in-depth partnership will spur private sector investment in renewable energy and increase connections with tradespeople involved in electrification. NREL's assistance would help identify projects ready for electrification, energy efficiency, and renewable energy investment and target our outreach efforts.

## 1.2 Technical Assistance Requested

a) Blue Horizons and other regional organizations offer programming for home energy use and rapid implementation of renewable energy adoption on the City of Asheville and Buncombe County facilities but have not been able to find many voluntary adopters from the commercial and industrial sectors. To expand participation in these sectors, the partner team needs to increase strategic outreach to demonstrate financial benefits, reduce waste, and help calculate incentives to businesses. To achieve results, we propose offering a technical analysis of their energy use and industrial processes and concrete action items, including an explanation of current incentives for these users.

A study conducted by RMI highlighted the impact and potential of commercial and industrial (C&I) efficiency and demand shifting. The research revealed that despite having 80% fewer customers than the residential sector, C&I customers consume more than half of the annual energy. This contrast underscores the energy demand within the commercial and industrial sector, emphasizing the critical need for efficiency improvements. It showed that within the commercial sector within the DE territory, lighting, ventilation, and heating are the primary drivers of peak energy usage. Defined as those with an average annual demand of less than 180 kW and possessing a commercial SIC code, small businesses comprise a whopping 90% of DE's commercial customer base. Notably, at the time of the RMI study only 2% of these businesses have opted out of Duke programs, indicating a substantial potential for engagement and efficiency improvements within this group.

Overall, the RMI study underscores the pivotal role that commercial and industrial sectors can play in energy efficiency and demand management. Focusing on these sectors, particularly small businesses and large industrial participants, offers a substantial opportunity to reduce energy consumption and achieve significant peak demand reductions. This benefits the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and offers economic advantages through cost savings and enhanced energy security. See the full report: [EITF Session Material\\_FINAL.pdf - Google Drive](#)

Barriers impede our community's progress towards decarbonization and addressing cross-sectoral clean energy issues. Outdated building codes and North Carolina's state-level policies severely limit local governments' autonomy to create and implement regulations and incentives for clean energy technology. Additionally, there is a significant knowledge gap among contractors and skilled trades in the region regarding energy efficiency and all-electric technologies, and knowledge about incentives for clean energy and efficiency.

b) Buncombe County and the City of Asheville have worked together to launch the work of the BHP, a committee composed of technicians in the renewable energy field, government representatives, a liaison for Duke Energy, and private citizens. The BHP developed a strategic plan that outlines desired actions across all sectors of the local economy. The plan includes

three interconnected components that can each be addressed in every sector - embrace efficiency, green the grid, and electrify everything. Similarly, the action strategy includes three interconnected components that can also be addressed in every sector - policy changes, community engagement, and specific initiatives.

Work of the BHP has created a weatherization assistance program that is largely supported by the utility provider and a solar program to provide no-cost small-scale solar to income-qualified households. The BHP, with its former title of Energy Innovation Taskforce (EITF), has created a pathway to avert the construction of a natural gas peaker plant through community engagement and deployment of demand response technology in the community. BHP, when combined with city and county planning for efficiency upgrades and rapid clean energy deployment, showcases the dedication of the local governments and communities to address climate change and create pathways to a cleaner future.

LOSRC houses the DOE Clean Cities and Communities program (focused on decarbonization of the transportation sector) and Waste Reduction Partners (helping with technical support on energy efficiency plans for buildings). These partners and others in the community host a multifaceted approach to clean energy program development.

c) As a climate haven, the Blue Ridge Mountains region is set for unprecedented growth and has already seen a significant population increase between 2010 and 2020. The ongoing 5-year Strategic Plan for Buncombe County and the Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan, which includes potential land use regulation changes and incentives for new electrified developments, are key upcoming decision points. The understanding we gain about the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies from NREL's analysis will inform potential revisions to these strategies.

Additionally, LOSRC's energy programming will leverage data to identify energy gaps and needs across Western North Carolina, supporting funding and political backing for economic development energy strategies. The Council will update the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in 2025, incorporating energy sector development in response to regional growth patterns.

d) BHP is dedicated to supporting underserved communities through a variety of targeted programs and initiatives. One such program is the Energy Savers Network, which provides weatherization assistance to income-qualified households. This initiative helps improve energy efficiency and reduce utility costs for those in need.

BHP has established an Equity Task Force. This task force works to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for BIPOC community members. BHP collaborates closely with advocacy groups to ensure the voices of Black and Latinx communities are represented and heard. By analyzing commercial and industrial facilities alongside housing statistics, we have identified a significant correlation between these facilities and low-income communities. Many disadvantaged neighborhoods are located near brownfield sites and other sources of pollution.

We will reduce this pollution by identifying clean energy and efficiency opportunities within the industrial and commercial sectors. Future planning for community clean energy generation and distribution will benefit neighborhoods that experience high energy burdens, turning industrial, and commercial spaces into assets rather than liabilities, and offer opportunities for workforce development.

Workforce development is another essential component of our work. In collaboration with the LOSRC and the Workforce Development Board, we address workforce issues by hosting roundtable discussions with local community colleges and incorporating clean energy jobs into regional job fairs. By recognizing the demand for skilled trades and encouraging inclusive hiring practices, BHP and LOSRC are building a pipeline for disadvantaged communities to engage in the clean energy economy. The NREL analysis will enable sophisticated engagement with high-energy users, increasing the adoption of efficiency measures and clean energy generation. Aligning this demand with community college trade programs will encourage local residents to pursue high-paying, reliable jobs in their communities.

Throughout this project, BHP and LOSRC are committed to increasing input from all communities during data gathering and modeling processes. They will share resources with community groups to inform members about opportunities for energy efficiency and clean energy generation. This commitment to equity and inclusion ensures that BHP's programs are designed to be reparative and beneficial to all communities.

e)This project is positioned to have a significant regional and national impact. LOSRC facilitates and supports projects across the region. It administers economic and community development programs, housing, aging, transportation, energy, and the environment. Many of LOSRC's programs are replicable and scalable, serving as models for successful community improvement efforts across the Appalachian Mountain region and beyond.

The partnership between NREL and its partners will enhance a community already engaged in the clean energy transition, enabling it to achieve improved outcomes. Communities at earlier stages of the transition will find this project a valuable case study and example to follow. Our programs intersect with state and regional agencies and organizations, and our boards are based on local elected officials. This cross-sectoral makeup encourages collaboration between organizations, utilities, and governments, leveraging the strengths of all parties to ensure the project's success and providing a blueprint for other communities.

## Section 2 Scope of Work

a)As our in-depth partner, the team looks forward to a significant and ongoing role of NREL in our efforts to move to 100% clean energy. With the help of the lab, we intend to generate an inventory of building stock, including heating and cooling systems, industrial processes, fleet suggestions, fuel types used, and any additional metrics to calculate efficiency. We would also like NREL to analyze all energy production capacity within the county limits, including rooftop solar, ground-mounted solar, wind, hydroelectric power and storage, and geothermal. Using this inventory and NREL's tools, we want the lab to model a variety of efficiency measures and energy production methods that could be employed within individual facilities to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels. We would like NREL to provide economic modeling that would help stakeholders understand the capital investments that would be required to update buildings and develop or procure the needed renewable energy to meet the 100% by 2042 goal. The economic analysis will provide the ROI for these investments while accounting for the available IRA tax credits and new financing opportunities. Combining the results from these analyses and NREL's review of our strategic plan, we want to use NREL's help to pursue actionable approaches that would accelerate the transition to clean energy in Buncombe County. Phase 1 will scope NREL's support performing the following tasks:

- Increase our understanding of baseline building stock by referencing data available from permits, public records, utility data (as it is available), and ComStock data to see what current heating, cooling, water heating, and industrial process technologies are being used and are likely ready for upgrades.
- Review and recommend improvements to our existing strategic plan, which focuses on specific initiatives. After an initial review, decide which initiatives warrant additional focus by NREL during this project and help to improve our implementation strategies.
- Identify large users and low-hanging fruit and work with our team to promote voluntary participation in energy audits with Waste Reduction Partners or NREL.
- Model the economic investment required to meet the 100% renewable energy goal
- Calculate the ROI for individual C&I facilities leveraging the opportunities created by the Inflation Reduction Act and other incentives that may be available. Provide the ROI for investments made by the private sector that include the ability to balance peak demand with storage and take advantage of net metering.
- Model energy production capacity within county limits, including wind, solar, geothermal, and hydroelectric, and identify locations on C&I facilities.
- Identify direct use of fossil fuels (natural gas, diesel, fuel oil) for heating of buildings and in industrial processes along with opportunities for electrification that would be financially feasible.
- Encourage energy audits to select and willing higher power users within the County.
- Develop energy transition plans for commercial or industrial facilities that seem responsive as part of our community engagement.

- To the extent possible, incorporate clean transportation for fleets into economic analysis.

b) The ideal outcome of our partnership will be a comprehensive approach that allows us to increase the voluntary adoption of renewable energy, electrification, and energy efficiency programs to meet our goal of decarbonizing all sectors by 2042. We especially want to hone in on the commercial and industrial sectors, where there is a gap in our current programming but also new opportunities with the direct financial incentives of the IRA and new financing opportunities. This data-driven approach to assess current heating, cooling, and industrial processes, will identify specific, actionable improvements that prioritize investments and optimize energy efficiency measures and renewable energy installations.

NREL's expertise will enhance our capacity to engage the community more effectively. We will develop compelling narratives that highlight the benefits of clean energy investments, fostering broader support among residents, businesses, and industry stakeholders. This increased engagement is crucial for mobilizing community action and achieving our climate and equity goals. By consistently convening program partners and participants, we will facilitate ongoing conversations about future energy planning for the region.

This strategic planning will facilitate the transition to clean energy, even within the constraints of state statutes. With better information about our buildings' energy use and production potential, we will be better positioned to advocate for and enact local policies that incentivize renewable energy adoption and energy efficiency measures. Leveraging new IRA incentives and other available opportunities, we can bring these communities on board, creating a unified regional approach to clean energy.

In addition, the Asheville Buncombe Chamber, through its sustainable business program, will engage and provide input on businesses and sectors for future growth. The information and community relationships built through this collaboration will have lasting impacts, making us a source of energy-related technical assistance for the future. This will include marketing future programs, conducting assessments with partners like Waste Reduction Partners, and building trust among community members.

Overall, NREL's technical assistance will provide the credibility, data, and strategic insights needed to make substantial progress toward our 100% renewable energy goal. By fostering collaboration, enhancing community engagement, and identifying actionable improvements, we will create a sustainable, equitable, and clean energy future for Buncombe County and beyond.

## **2.2 Community role**

This funding would allow us to support the grant's research work through targeted engagement in the business community and develop relationships to recruit commercial and industrial participants. This funding would provide for additional staff support and the budget for marketing materials, outreach events, and data management tools needed for the strategic deployment of a program targeted at C&I electrification and energy adoption.

### **Task 1: Convening and Coordination of Key Partners**

**Title:** Convening and Coordination of Key Partners

**Objective:** Ensure alignment and coordination on clean energy initiatives among the City, County, and Duke Energy through the Blue Horizons Project and LOSRC

**Potential Risks and Barriers:** Misalignment among stakeholders, inconsistent participation, and communication gaps. The project will be addressed by hosting monthly coordination meetings and quarterly strategic reviews to maintain focus and alignment.

**Subtask Activities:** 1.1 Schedule and organize monthly coordination meetings. 1.2 Prepare and distribute meeting agendas and minutes. 1.3 Facilitate quarterly strategic reviews. 1.4 Document and track action items and outcomes.

## **Task 2: Industry and Business Engagement**

**Title:** Engaging Industry and Business Leaders

**Objective:** Engage industry and business leaders to gather input and encourage participation in clean energy initiatives, leveraging existing networks and facilitating collaboration.

**Potential Risks and Barriers:** Low response rates, lack of engagement, misalignment of industry needs with project goals, and communication challenges. The project team will address these by surveying industry associations, leveraging business networks, developing joint communication strategies, and facilitating informational sessions and roundtables.

**Subtask Activities:** 2.1 Develop and distribute surveys to industry associations. 2.2 Analyze survey data and report findings. 2.3 Initiate meetings with key business networks. 2.4 Develop joint communication strategies and plan collaborative events. 2.5 Organize and host informational sessions and roundtables. 2.6 Evaluate and adjust engagement strategies.

## **Task 3: Community and Participant Engagement**

**Title:** Community and Participant Engagement for In-Depth Analysis

**The objective is to engage** the community and recruit voluntary participants for comprehensive energy use and capacity analysis.

**Potential Risks and Barriers:** Difficulty identifying participants, low participation rates, potential data sharing concerns, low community participation, communication challenges, and potential misinformation. The project team will address these by working with stakeholders to identify and recruit commercial users, conduct outreach, confirm participation, begin assessments, and ensure continuous community engagement through local events and marketing.

**Subtask Activities:** 3.1 Identify potential participants and conduct outreach. 3.2 Confirm participation and begin initial assessments. 3.3 Conduct detailed assessments and develop recommendations. 3.4 Implement recommendations and monitor progress. 3.5 Attend local events, distribute materials, and host community events. 3.6 Gather feedback and adjust engagement strategies.

## **Task 4: Educational Campaigns and Energy Audits**

**Title:** Conducting Educational Campaigns and Promoting Energy Audits

**Objective:** Share resources about energy efficiency and clean energy generation opportunities and promote voluntary participation in energy audits with NREL.

**Potential Risks and Barriers:** Low community awareness, communication challenges, low participation rates, scheduling challenges, potential reluctance from high-energy users. The



project team will address by developing and distributing educational materials, host informational workshops and support sessions, and encourage participation in the program.

**Quarterly Milestones and Deliverables:**

**Subtask Activities:** 4.1 Develop and distribute educational and promotional materials. 4.2 Conduct outreach and schedule audits. 4.3 Host informational workshops and support sessions. 4.4 Implement audits and gather results. 4.5 Review results and develop recommendations. 4.6 Evaluate and adjust educational and promotional strategies.

a) GBA will continue to convene the BHPCC, which will serve as a convening space and coordinate clean energy initiatives. These monthly coordination meetings, complemented by quarterly strategic reviews, will keep stakeholders focused and aligned toward our common goals. LOSRC will convene other regional stakeholders and specific working groups that are focused on engaging the business community. LOSRC will also attend and host events to inform and involve the community in conjunction with the BHP and the equity task force, ensuring that all voices are heard and everyone can participate in the clean energy transition.

Community engagement will be ongoing to recruit voluntary participants for our in-depth partnership program. We will engage industry associations like the Manufacturers Alliance, Brewers Alliance, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association, Asheville Area Food Guild, and Outdoor Business Alliance. This process will involve developing and distributing surveys, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings. By gathering input and encouraging their participation, we can tailor our efforts to meet these sectors' unique needs and opportunities. Leveraging existing business networks through the Chamber of Commerce, Tourism and Development Authority, and Mountain BizWorks, we will develop and implement a joint communication strategy that engages a wide range of businesses. As a strategic partner, Mountain BizWorks can finance renewable energy and energy efficiency investments at C&I sites based on these audits, and it represents a significant incentive for participation. Promoting energy audits will be another essential activity. We will encourage voluntary participation in energy audits with WRP or NREL, focusing on selected high-energy users.

Educational campaigns will play a significant role in our outreach. By sharing resources with community groups about energy efficiency and clean energy generation opportunities, we will ensure that all community members are informed and empowered to take action. This will involve developing educational materials, distributing them through various channels, and hosting informational workshops and support sessions.

By executing these outreach and engagement activities we aim to build a robust and inclusive clean energy strategy and position Buncombe County to achieve its goal of 100% renewable energy by 2042. We will establish a model of effective community engagement and clean energy transition that can be replicated in other regions.

b) The 100% Renewable Energy Strategic Plan used a combination of state data and utility data from 2019 to estimate overall energy use. This breakdown includes electric power provided by

Duke Energy, natural gas supplied by Dominion Energy, and transportation fuels, which together form the bulk of our energy consumption profile. Previous RMI and Cadmus, and the 2011 WNC Clean Energy Cluster Analysis by Angelou Economics can all be made available.

Duke Energy (DE) has been an active participant in the BHP and supports our in-depth partnership with NREL through sharing aggregated data as allowable within the scope of privacy and confidentiality guidelines. Unless required by law, DE's regulated utilities are unable to disclose individual customer information to any person or company without the customer's consent and then only to the extent specified by the customer. Once participating entities have been identified through our C&I and business engagement, DE will provide a customer data release form that will enable specific data about energy to be shared with the parties named on the form.

Local grants and financing tools may be available from, Mountain Bizworks and the NCCCF for qualified recipients. LOSRC has access to a wealth of community data through Community Analyst and mapping tools. The project team has a diverse network and is happy to help get NREL the information needed to make the best recommendations.

c) The community team is aware of the various risks that could impact the success of this project. Gaining access to detailed energy consumption data from utilities is a limitation of our ability to identify large energy users. The release form process outlined above reflects collaborative conversations with DE to work within their framework of data sharing. Our plan is to have targeted community engagement and strong partnerships to identify energy users willing to sign a release form. The success of the project hinges on the active participation of large energy users and local businesses. To this end, the team is implementing a robust stakeholder engagement strategy. By leveraging existing relationships from established networks such as the Chamber of Commerce and Mountain BizWorks and fostering new ones through regular updates and clear communication of benefits. This includes consistent convening of meetings, outreach through, and targeted surveys. Community support and buy-in are essential for the success of the clean energy initiatives. To cultivate this support, the team is conducting extensive community outreach and education campaigns through the BHP and LOSRC. They are hosting events, webinars, and presentations to inform and involve the community, using monthly newsletters and social media to keep everyone engaged and informed. Highlighting success stories and tangible benefits of clean energy will further bolster community support.

Technical feasibility and integration of new clean energy technologies present another set of challenges. Leveraging NREL's technical expertise, the team is conducting detailed feasibility studies and modeling of energy production and consumption. By identifying and addressing barriers early in the project and piloting new technologies in smaller environments before scaling up, they aim to ensure a smooth transition. Financial barriers and securing funding for clean energy projects are also concerns. The team is conducting economic modeling to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) for clean energy project by identifying and leveraging available tax credits, grants, and financing opportunities.

## **Section 3- Team Composition, Coordination, and Capabilities**

### **3.1 Lead Organization Capacity**

The LOSRC possesses significant technical capacity and institutional authority to effectively coordinate with community teams and manage project funding. With a professional staff skilled in regional planning, economic development, transportation, environmental planning, and community development, LOSRC can provide comprehensive technical assistance and project management. LOSRC hosts a designated coalition within the U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities and Communities partnership and has dedicated staff working in the clean energy space. The LOSRC team hosts convenings of partners from government, industry, and non-profit for common goals. The Land of Sky Energy and Economic Development team will lead and manage the community engagement strategies with other partners. Sara Nichols, the Energy and Economic Development Program Manager has 8 years of economic development experience and is well connected to the industrial community in the region. The funding from this project will hire additional staff for the team that will liaison between BHP, Buncombe County, NREL, the other partners, and the commercial industrial leaders. Through their work they already collaborate consistently with the project partners. Their role in planning, research, convening and partnership often puts them at the center of change for communities. This project will leverage their work in the community with business support, workforce development, and infrastructure. In addition to subawarding funding to other partners, they will handle community outreach, communications, education, attend meetings, create surveys, collect data, provide technical assistance that will help move the project forward.

As a recognized regional council of governments, LOSRC has the institutional authority to act as a fiscal agent and manage funds across multiple jurisdictions. This includes receiving, distributing, and reporting on project funds in compliance with all relevant regulations. Their established financial management systems and robust administrative capabilities enable them to serve as a reliable subcontractor, ensuring transparent and efficient use of project funds while maintaining accountability and fostering collaboration among the applying community team. In 2023, LOSRC directly handled more than \$14M in funding across four counties and numerous programs; coming from a variety of sources, including federal, state, private, and local grants as well as dues from our member governments and in-kind exchanges. During the course of the year, LOSRC was able to leverage a total of \$76.5M in funding for our partners and local governments. The council's experience in handling grants ensures that they can adeptly plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects, thereby supporting the successful achievement of community goals.

### 3.2 Offeror organization roles, relevance, capacity and previous experience

**Who we are:** Our community has identified the adoption of clean energy as one of its top priorities, best explained by quoting the preamble from our “100 Percent Renewable Strategic Plan” adopted in 2023:

“The leadership of Buncombe County, with strong support from the community, has committed to a county-wide goal of 100% renewable energy by 2042. The Blue Horizons Project Community Council’s (BHPCC’s) mission is to address the current climate crisis by supporting the community in achieving this goal, primarily through community engagement, program implementation support, and collaboration with Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, and Duke Energy. The BHPCC will promote and support these efforts in a way that ensures social justice and equity are at the forefront of all work undertaken”. (Download the plan at <https://bluehorizonsproject.com/renewableplan/> )

The Blue Horizons Project (BHP), a collaborative effort to achieve the 2042 community goal, is led by the Blue Horizons Project Community Council (BHPCC). The BHPCC includes a member of the City Council, a member of the County Board of Commissioners, and the senior local representative of Duke Energy (DE), LLC. Other members of the BHPCC include representatives of other organizations and individuals with expertise in areas such as energy planning, engineering, and community engagement. In addition to the members of the BHPCC, regular meetings include staff members of the City and County sustainability departments. The BHPCC represents the community team as envisioned in the C2C project.

BHPCC meetings are held monthly as are the meetings of the Initiatives and Community Engagement Committees. Other committees, including ones dedicated to energy justice and policy change meet as needed. The Green Built Alliance (GBA) is the community non-profit organization that provides support for BHPCC meetings and community engagement efforts along with running the day-to-day operations of our programs for low-income energy efficiency. Land of Sky brings additional capabilities to the team for this effort and will serve as the lead organization. The BHPCC will provide overall project guidance and individual BHPCC members (and others) will volunteer in specific community engagement and initiative development activities.

The C2C project represents an expansion of these ongoing activities of the BHPCC, not a new endeavor. The BHPCC is already chartered with a set of by-laws and a succession plan with a mission very much in line with NREL’s mission and the mission of the C2C program.

In 2016, a collaboration between DE and stakeholders began y to increase energy efficiency and local renewable energy through greater participation in Duke programs under the banner of the Energy Innovation Task Force (EITF). The utility commission’s order in the case established an initial goal for the collaboration of avoiding additional gas capacity at the Asheville plant along with generally moving to cleaner energy. Once the initial goal of avoiding the additional gas plant was achieved in 2018, the working group rebanded under the name the Blue Horizon’s

Project (BHP). In the meantime the City and County had passed resolutions to set targets for 100% clean energy, which the BHPCC adopted as their new mission.

While we have focused on actionable initiatives and community engagement, we have also continued to try to understand the magnitude of the 100% goal and what next steps make sense. Soon after the 100% goal was established, in 2019, the City and County commissioned a report titled “Moving to 100% Renewable Energy Transition Pathways Analysis for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville” . This report was based on extensive stakeholder engagement and developed a series of actionable items particularly focused on an interim 2030 goal for City and County facilities. Many of those items have been completed or are in progress.

The capacity of our community collaboration through the EITF and BHPCC is illustrated by our numerous initiatives and successes over these years including avoiding the construction of a gas peaker plant through demand-side management, running a successful Solarize campaign in 2022 with over 1.4 MW of solar installed, installing solar on several community non-profit buildings, helping over 1000 low income residents reduce energy use through the Energy Savers Network (ESN), installing multiple solar installations on city and county buildings, developing a website and social media presence for our efforts, and participating in many public events to encourage residents to take steps to move us toward the 100% renewable energy goal.

In 2023, the BHPCC along with stakeholders and community partners took another look, focusing on the community goal this time and expanding our analysis to include transportation. This new plan, quoted in the first paragraph , developed a roadmap to achieve 100% renewable through a combination of specific initiatives, community engagement, and policy change. Most of these initiatives are developed at a high level and are not informed by siting or financial modeling. Please download and review the plan for a greater understanding of our thinking.  
<https://bluehorizonsproject.com/renewableplan/>

In 2024, the City and County launched a new initiative of the BHP, “Electrify Asheville-Buncombe” (<https://www.letsgoelectric.com/electrify-asheville-buncombe/>), to encourage residential HVAC electrification, the adoption of heat pump hot water heaters and energy efficiency upgrades. This program also serves as a pilot for the North Carolina Clean Energy Fund, our newly formed Green Bank, working to remove the financing roadblock to residential energy upgrades, and plans to take this program to other parts of North and South Carolina. For this program we partner with Self - Help Credit Union to offer financing to people with limited credit. Buncombe County contributed \$100k to a loan loss reserve to make that financing even more beneficial for the borrowers.

One category of initiatives we identified in 2023 was “large energy users”, which means initiatives that can be taken with either specific industrial customers or with groups of customers having an affinity of some kind (e.g. breweries or hotels or apartment complexes). We hope that we can increase the voluntary adoption of efficient technologies, electrification, and renewable energy by partnering with NREL. With the historic investments and incentive of

the Inflation Reduction Act, it is even more important now that we spread the word and enlist these large energy users in achieving our community goals. While the plan outlines energy use in commercial buildings and industrial sites, it makes broad assumptions and is not actionable without more information and expertise.

a) The BHPCC is designed to be a place where experts in the industry and community members are able to use their knowledge to guide Buncombe County in their goal to reach 100% renewable energy. We have representatives that are deeply involved in the clean energy, energy efficiency, policy and financing of renewable energy on the council. Jamie Wine, staff to the BHPCC and GBA is an experienced energy leader in the region and beyond.

Our convening organization, GBA, maintains a network of contractors and builders who are invested in sustainable building design. We have connections with a broad spectrum of the community based upon these past associations in addition to the current and past BHPCC membership. Examples of these resources include a current state Senator, utility scale solar developers, the hospitality industry, the Chamber of Commerce, real estate developers, advocacy organizations and others – some of whom are offering a letter of support for this endeavor. In addition, we continue to strengthen our engagement to underserved communities through our Equity Task Force.

LOSRC, the lead organization, provides a broad range of community engagement connections as well. LOSRC is a multi-county, local government, planning and development organization. They reach county and municipal borders providing technical assistance to local governments and administer projects and programs which benefit our region's citizens. Land of Sky Energy and Economic Development Department hosts the Clean Air Campaign and Land of Sky Clean Vehicles Coalition, which convenes a group of non-profit and government partners that lead clean energy and clean transportation projects around Western North Carolina. This department is led by Sara Nichols, experienced regional community and economic developer and program director. Organizationally LOSRC works in aging, workforce development, and Economic and Community Development issues in the counties of Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania. LOSRC also hosts the regional Waste Reduction Partners program through North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality that supports energy assessments for organizations in the region including a recent pilot with the Sustainable Brewers. They are uniquely positioned to create relevant dialogues across sectors within the region.

b) The Green Built Alliance has been convening the BHPCC, with financing from the City of Asheville and Buncombe County and will continue to facilitate a space where NREL can engage with the relevant community stakeholders. LOSRC, is designed to facilitate participation of regional government entities and will also be able to convene any additional working groups and sessions with relevant government partners and NREL as needed. If awarded, the business engagement efforts would be bottom line and orchestrated by a staff person of LOSRC. GBA would continue to convene the BHPCC with support from the City and County, and the BHPCC would serve as the community advisory committee for the in-depth partnership. This would also allow us to recruit strategic partners from the business community to serve on the BHPCC

which appoints new members annually. This structure will allow for continued engagement and implementation after the NREL partnership has ended.

In addition to the membership and staffing of the BHPCC, additional community partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and Mountain BizWorks, who both work to promote economic development in the region, have offered letters of support and are willing to engage with NREL and as partners in our outreach & implementation efforts. We hope that through this partnership we can also encourage our industry leaders and organizations to focus their energies to make more strategic gains toward the 100% clean energy goal, and work through the channel they represent.

c) The representatives who will be directly supporting the grant within the LORSC, GBA, and BHP will have the authority to make decisions for those organizations. The program is designed to encourage the voluntary adoption of clean energy and energy efficiency within the private sector, so of course we cannot mandate those decisions. Our success at reaching the large energy users will be a much longer process which will be helped by the reputation, data, and expertise that NREL can hopefully bring to the table.

The representatives of organizations on the BHPCC have a great ability to inform their organizations and lobby for our recommendations. Political leaders and local government staff participate in our meetings, but different approvals have distinct processes within the government structure. Additionally, since our mission has been to achieve a goal that has been endorsed by the City and County, our recommendations are likely to be aligned with those goals.

### 3.3 Supporting disadvantaged communities

With funding support from the City and the County, to address systemic inequity in leadership and decision-making, the BHP has convened an Equity Task Force through with the staff of GBA. Members come from our Energy Savers Network clients, volunteers and community partners like Black Wall Street and [Poder Emma](#), a community development cooperative and neighborhood council focused on access to affordable housing. The role of the Equity Task Force is to address the historic weakness of the community in bringing all voices to the table. This forum is to amplify those voices. Leaders in this body and their network are the beginnings of a stronger community team among BIPOC and low-income communities, and the growth of BIPOC and low-income businesses in the clean energy sector.

Currently, BHPCC members are getting out into the community, listening and then bringing back those lessons to the full Council. This effort is leading the BHP Community Council: to push us to be more inclusive and support disadvantaged and underserved communities better. Our next effort is to diversify leadership. We hope some of these Task Force leaders will join the full council. We also had a BIPOC focus group review and provide feedback on the 100% Clean Energy Strategic Plan.

Mountain BizWorks is prepared to provide technical assistance and offer funding, as appropriate, to businesses from disadvantaged and underserved communities. This includes new programming as well as existing programs specifically focused on helping underserved entrepreneurs start and grow businesses, including specialized training & coaching, cohort-based learning programs, and low-cost financing paired with wraparound services.

GBA has added focus in recent years to climate justice and improving access to energy resources for all through the program Energy Savers Network (ESN). A majority of our staff and resources work is on residential energy improvements for low-income residents and working to collaboratively and equitably reach the 100% renewable energy goal. ESN serves 200 low income households per year with air sealing, lighting and water measures. We've learned that having a Spanish speaker on staff adds tremendously to client outreach. We also would like to get more of these clients into leadership positions and have offered stipends, transportation, translation and other accommodation to get them to join our boards and the BHP Community Council.

The Land of Sky Clean Cities and Communities program was selected as a pilot for the Clean Cities Environmental Justice Initiative. This program had extensive equity training and led to the position of Community Engagement Liaison for the department. The team selected a tribal community and hired a member of the tribe to lead the work. This program has been successful at providing extra capacity to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians that is leading to significant investment on the Qualla Boundary. Through this program the Land of Sky Energy and Economic Development team has been working to impact Justice40 communities across Western North Carolina.



## Section 4: Deliverables

Table 10-1				
	Deliverable Title	Deliverable Description	Due Date (months after project start)	Proposed Price
D.1	Stakeholder Mapping Exercise	Partners work with NREL to shape stakeholder mapping, leverage existing data, and previous studies to shape community needs	4	20000
D.2	Community Engagement Plan	Partners work with NREL to identify core industrial, commercial business leaders, and develop plan for engagement	6	50000
D.3	Monthly Meetings with NREL	Project staff will work with NREL to provide liaison between participating businesses, BHPCC, and partners sharing resources.	ongoing if moves to PHASE 2- 36	36000
D.4	Monthly Meetings with project team	LOSRC shares information with BHPCC and other organizations	ongoing if moves to PHASE 2- 36	49000
D.5	Annual presentation at the C2C Summit	Presentation at C2C summit	12, 24, 36	15000
D.6	Stakeholder Engagement	Ongoing outreach to stakeholders through events, meetings, and cross sectoral outreach strategies	30	250000
D.7	Educational Materials Generated	Take input from PHASE 1 into generating materials for program design, and built marketing materials	9	80000
				500000