



**Audubon Society
of Rhode Island**

**The Nature
Conservancy** 
Rhode Island

February 8, 2022

Chairman Gerwatowski
Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission
Warwick RI 02888

Re: The Nature Conservancy supports inclusion of a carport adder for the Renewable Energy Growth program

Dear Chairman Gerwatowski and PUC Commissioners,

The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island fully support the inclusion of a carport adder in the 2022 program year for the Renewable Energy Growth program (REG).

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI) support aggressive action to address climate change – including scaling up the transition to renewable energy to power our electric sector.

However, the expansion of Rhode Island’s renewable energy sector (mostly through the virtual net metering program) has had the unintended consequence of triggering significant clearing of Rhode Island forests. There is an urgent need to address the siting and environmental conflicts associated with large net metered projects.

The state needs to send clear signals to the market that previously disturbed sites, like areas that would be used for carports, are a place to preferentially site solar. The Renewable Energy Growth program was specifically created to drive in-state renewables development that reflects that actual cost to build – and to drive the market by developing specific types of projects: carports fit squarely within the bill as it is currently written.

However, while this work is in motion, TNC and ASRI recognize that we need a more holistic solution to the siting issues associated with our renewable energy programs. We are actively working with legislators to create and support legislation that would comprehensively address the solar siting issue – disallowing development in our most important conservation areas, while driving development to preferred siting locations. We are also advocating for a comprehensive leveraging of federal funds for necessary grid upgrades and site remediation, so that preferred sites can be utilized and also have funding streams outside of ratepayer funds.

We respectfully ask that you include carports in this current year of the Renewable Energy Growth program. We are actively working to build a more comprehensive solution. However, the urgency of the climate crisis compels us to not wait for a full solution in order to go forward and implement pieces we know will be part of the equation.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide comments on this important decision. It is a small, but important step in growing our clean energy economy in a way that preserves the value of our forested and open space.

Sincerely,



Sue AnderBois
Climate and Energy Program Manager
The Nature Conservancy



Priscilla De La Cruz
Senior Director of Government Affairs
Audubon Society of Rhode Island