How much space do our energy needs take up in the world? It’s a bit of a strange question, but let’s imagine a drill pad extracting oil out of the ground, taking up a few acres. Not so big. Of course where there’s one there’s usually more nearby, and very soon we have an oil field of thousands of square miles. Then add access roads, pipelines and transport ships, giant refining facilities, storage tanks, and finally the gas stations where billions of people fuel up.

We can do the same calculations for coal, natural gas, and nuclear power. Renewables are no exceptions: hydraulic projects, wind farms, and industrial-scale solar also have significant footprints. This is energy sprawl: the ever-increasing area — on land and offshore — that is devoted to energy production.

When done right, renewable energy can help reduce energy sprawl. Wind turbines can be placed in small numbers just outside the communities they power, in agricultural areas where they won’t fragment wildlife habitat. Solar panels can be installed on rooftops and above parking lots, right in the neighborhoods where their electricity is needed.

The most effective strategy for fighting energy sprawl, however, is to reduce energy consumption. That’s something we can start today.

WE’RE READY for the end of outdated, oversized, centralized, and polluting corporate energy.

WE’RE READY for local renewable energy.

WE’RE READY for a new energy reality.