



# GUIDE FOR INSTALLING SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY

## **LOCAL ZONING REGULATIONS FOR SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS**

In Albemarle County, property owners are able to install solar energy systems as an accessory use in all zoning districts without a special use permit. A special use permit is only required if the solar energy system is the primary use of the property (i.e. solar farm) and it occupies more than one-half acre of total land area. See relevant excerpts of zoning regulations below.

### **LOD2017-00011 Advisory Determination of Use: Accessory Uses-Solar Panels**

On March 27, 2017, this letter of determination clarified that “solar panels are an accessory use to a permitted primary use building or structure and permitted by right in all zoning districts.”

### **Chapter 18 Zoning, Section 3.1 Definitions**

*Accessory use, building or structure:* A subordinate use, building or structure customarily incidental to and located upon the same lot occupied by the primary use, building, or structure, and located upon land zoned to allow the primary use, building or structure; provided that a subordinate use, building or structure customarily incidental to a primary farm use, building or structure need not be located upon the same lot occupied by the primary farm use, building, or structure...

*Solar Energy Systems:* An energy conversion system consisting of photovoltaic panels, support structures, and associated control, conversion, and transmission hardware occupying one-half acre or more of total land area...

### **Chapter 18 Zoning, Section 10.2 Rural Areas District (RA)**

Section 18-10.2.2 The following uses shall be permitted by special use permit in the RA district, subject to the applicable requirements of this chapter: . . . 58. *Solar energy systems*...



## GUIDE FOR INSTALLING SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY

### PERMITTING CHECKLIST FOR SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC (PV) SYSTEMS

#### **Instructions:**

#### **1) Permit Application Paperwork:**

- a) Complete the [Building Permit](#) application form. In the *Work Description* field, indicate that you are installing a solar photovoltaic (PV) system and where it will be installed (roof-mounted or ground-mounted).
- b) Obtain 2 paper copies each of the line diagram of the installed system and the manual from the solar panel manufacturer.

#### **2) Permit Fee:** Payments can be made either in person at the office of the Community Development Department or [online using this link](#).

- a) **New Construction:** There is no additional permit fee for installing solar energy systems on new residential or new commercial buildings.
- b) **Existing Buildings:** Adding solar PV systems to existing buildings incurs an electrical permit fee under the category of *Alterations and Repairs of Structures in All Use Groups*. There is a minimum fee of \$75, which covers a system up to 1,875 sq. feet in size (approximately 100+ average-sized solar panels). Solar PV systems will incur an additional fee of \$.04 per sq. foot over 1,875 sq. feet.

#### **3) Permit Application Submission:** Submit your paperwork in person at the office of the Community Development Department in order to file the permit application. Call 434-296-5832 with questions about office location and hours.

#### **4) Permit Review:** Community Development will review the permit application and notify you of your permit status. A typical application requires 7-10 business days to review, but may vary depending on staff workload and complexity of your application. Go to the [Community Development website](#) and use the [County View](#) web tool to view the status of your building permit application. After the permit is issued, installation of the project can begin.

#### **5) Inspection:**

- a) Call the Building Inspections Hotline at (434) 972-4179 to schedule any rough-in and final inspections of the solar PV system.
- b) Use [County View](#) to review inspection status and check for issuance of approved final inspection/certificate of occupancy.



## GUIDE FOR INSTALLING SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY

### TAX ADVANTAGES FOR SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS

#### **Local Tax Exemption For Certified Solar Energy Systems**

Albemarle County offers a local tax exemption for certified solar energy equipment, facilities or devices. See below for excerpts from the Albemarle County Code. For the full details of the tax exemption, go to the [Chapter 15 Taxation](#), Article XVII in the [Albemarle County Code](#).

#### **Chapter 15 Taxation, Article XVII. Certified Solar Energy Equipment, Facilities or Devices....**

##### **Sec 15-1700 Definitions.**

*Certified solar energy equipment, facilities or devices.* The term "Certified solar energy equipment, facilities or devices" means any property, including real or personal property, equipment, facilities, or devices, certified by the local certifying authority [*the county's building official*] to be designed and used primarily for the purpose of providing for the collection and use of incident solar energy for water heating, space heating or cooling or other application which would otherwise require a conventional source of energy such as petroleum products, natural gas, or electricity...

##### **Section 15-1701 Tax Exemption of certified solar energy equipment and certified recycling equipment.**

Certified solar energy equipment facilities or devices and certified recycling equipment, facilities, or devices, as defined in this article, are hereby declared to be a separate class of property and shall constitute a classification for local taxation separate from other classifications of real or personal property. Such property is exempt from local taxation, as provided in this article...

##### **Sec 15-1704 Determination of Exemption.**

Upon receipt of the certificate from the local building department, the county assessor shall proceed to determine the value of such qualifying solar energy equipment, facilities or devices or certified recycling equipment, facilities, or devices. The exemption provided by this article shall be determined by applying the local tax rate to the value of such equipment, facilities or devices and subtracting such amount, wholly or partially, either (i) from the total real property tax due on the real property to which such equipment, facilities, or devices are attached or (ii) if such equipment, facilities, or devices are taxable as machinery and tools under *Virginia Code* § 58.1-3507, from the total machinery and tools tax due on such equipment, facilities, or devices, at the election of the taxpayer. This exemption shall be effective beginning in the next succeeding tax year after the date of approval by the county assessor, and shall remain in effect for the four (4) following tax years. In the event the qualifying equipment, facilities, or devices is part of a new building subject to assessment pursuant to § 15-1001, the exemption shall be first effective when such real estate is first assessed, but not prior to the date of such application for exemption.

#### **Federal Tax Credits for Solar Energy Systems**

Installed solar photovoltaic systems and solar water heaters are eligible for a federal tax credit of 30% of the cost (including installation cost) with no upper limit through tax year 2019. The credit decreases to 26% for tax year 2020 and to 22% for tax year 2021.

Visit [www.energystar.gov/taxcredits](http://www.energystar.gov/taxcredits) for more information.