



Solar Energy Policy

Purpose and Intent

This Solar Energy Policy establishes comprehensive standards for the development of utility-scale (5 megawatt or 50 acres or greater) solar energy facilities in Westmoreland County, Virginia. The policy aims to balance renewable energy development with the preservation of the County's agricultural lands, natural resources, historic sites, and rural character.

It is the goal of the County to allow solar facilities where they can't be seen and on soil that is not designated as prime or other important farmland by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

I. Siting Requirements

- A. Location and Size Constraints** - The project area, including perimeter fencing of Solar facilities shall be located at minimum distances of up to:
 - 1. 1,000 feet from primary roads (measured from center line of road)
 - 2. 500 feet from secondary roads (measured from center line of road)
 - 3. 1,000 feet from historic sites designated on local, state, or national registers
 - 4. 250 feet from property lines of non-consenting landowners
 - 5. 1,000 feet from non-consenting residential dwellings
 - 6. 0.75 miles (3,960 feet) from tidal waters
- B. Maximum size** – the maximum size of any single solar facility shall not exceed 100 acres
- C. Land Quality and Environmental Considerations**
 - 1. Preference given to projects sited on lands with marginal soil productivity as defined by USDA soil classification (websoilsurvey).
 - 2. Projects shall avoid lands with existing slopes exceeding 15% to the extent practicable.
 - 3. Projects shall not be located within floodplains, wetlands, or critical habitat areas with the exception of necessary road and utility crossings and with approval from all appropriate agencies having jurisdiction of these resources.

4. During construction, proper erosion and sediment control barriers shall be maintained to prevent runoff and outflows of sediment to neighboring watersheds.

D. Screening and Visual Impact

1. Solar facilities shall maintain and preserve existing vegetation and mature trees of at least 6 inches in diameter where possible and establish new vegetation to create an effective visual buffer.
2. A vegetative buffer of at least 50 feet in width and within 50 feet of the solar panels so that the panels cannot be seen shall be established within the setback area and maintained around the perimeter of the facility until decommissioning is complete.
3. Screening shall include a mix of native and other fast-growing trees and shrubs that provide year-round visual screening.
4. Planted vegetation shall comply with Article 6 Landscaping of the Zoning Ordinance, with staggered rows and a mixture of deciduous and evergreen vegetation.
5. Project owners shall post a vegetation maintenance bond for a minimum period of three (3) years following installation. The bond amount shall be sufficient to ensure the replacement of any failed plantings and proper maintenance of the vegetative buffer. The bond shall be renewed if the screening vegetation has not achieved 80% survival rate and the expected height and opacity after three (3) years.

E. Historic Preservation

1. Solar facilities shall not be permitted within designated historic districts.
2. Projects must include a historic resources survey conducted by qualified professionals.
3. Projects located within 1 mile or a lesser amount approved by Department of Historic Resources (DHR) of a historic resource shall include a viewshed analysis demonstrating minimal visual impact.
4. The County may require additional setbacks or screening for projects near historic resources it deems to be of particular significance.

F. Environmental Controls

1. Lighting

- a. Lighting shall be limited to that required for safety and operational purposes.
- b. Motion-sensor lighting is preferred over constant illumination, and all lighting shall be shielded and directed downward to the extent practicable to minimize light pollution.

2. Noise

- a. Inverters and transformers shall be located at least 500 feet from the property line of any non-consenting landowner.

- b. Operational noise shall not exceed 50 dBA at the property line of any non-consenting landowner. Construction noise shall not exceed 65 dBA.
- c. Construction activity shall be limited to 7 am to 7 pm Monday through Saturday.

3. Vegetation Management

- a. Native, pollinator-friendly vegetation shall be established around solar arrays where practicable.
- b. A vegetation management plan must be submitted and approved that:
 - I. Minimizes use of herbicides and pesticides
 - II. Promotes native species diversity
 - III. Prevents erosion
 - IV. Details mowing schedules and methods
- c. Grazing for vegetation management is encouraged where appropriate.

II. Decommissioning

- A. Prior to construction, the applicant shall provide a detailed decommissioning plan that includes:
 - 1. Removal of all above-ground and below-ground equipment and structures
 - 2. Revegetation with native species or other as requested by the landowner
 - 3. Recycling of materials where possible
- B. A surety bond (or other acceptable form of security) in the amount required for full decommissioning of the solar facility shall be provided and is subject to approval by the Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors.
- C. The decommissioning cost estimate and surety bond shall be updated every 5 years.
- D. Decommissioning shall be required if the facility ceases operation for a continuous period of 12 months.

III. Application Requirements

- A. Applications for solar facilities shall include:
 - 1. Detailed site plans showing panel locations, buffers, and setbacks
 - 2. Environmental inventory and impact statement regarding:
 - a. All site and viewshed impacts
 - b. Impacts to forests, parks, conservation easements, recreational areas, or historic or cultural resources within 1 mile of the proposed project

- c. Detailed assessment of flora, fauna, and ecosystems potentially affected
 - d. Mitigation strategies for identified environmental impacts
- 3. Historic resources survey
- 4. Traffic impact analysis
- 5. Economic impact analysis including effects on adjacent property values
- 6. Viewshed analysis from public roads and nearby historic sites
- 7. Glare analysis
- 8. Emergency management plan
- 9. Construction management plan

IV. Compliance and Enforcement

- A. Approved projects are subject to annual inspections to ensure compliance with approved plans.
- B. The County reserves the right to require remedial action for non-compliance.
- C. Repeated violations may result in revocation of permits.

This policy shall be effective immediately upon adoption by the Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors.