



Planning Commission

Code Barriers to Solar Energy Installations - Briefing

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Title

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Recommended Action

Information only. No action requested.

Report

Issue:

Discussion on the code standards that may be barriers to more widespread installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) installations.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

Inquiries and permit applications for the installation of solar energy systems, primarily in the form of rooftop solar PV systems, have been increasing over time as the costs for such systems is becoming more affordable.

The recently accepted Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan includes an Implementation Strategy to “Green our Grid” which includes an action step to make it easier to install renewables on homes and business.

The City continues to take steps to make the installation of rooftop solar easier from a permitting perspective. In many instances homeowners can apply for and obtain an “over the counter” permit to install rooftop solar on their residences at a permit fee of roughly \$300 or less. Additionally, in most cases only one inspection is required.

Other options the City is considering is pursuing a designation as a “SolSmart” jurisdiction. SolSmart is a national program funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office, with the goal to make it faster, easier, and more affordable to use solar energy.

One action the City took in 2020 was to review its zoning and subdivision codes to identify barriers or obstacles that may exist that could make installing solar energy systems more difficult or less attractive to community members. The result was a memo that outlines potential barriers (see Attachment 1). While no specific action is proposed to address these barriers at this time, it is information that will help shape the future amendments to the subdivision code and the Unified Development Code (zoning requirements).

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There are no known neighborhood or community interests at this time specifically related to the memo. The types of planning and zoning issues that are generally raised are related to:

- Balancing the desire for more renewable energy with the desire for more trees
- Concern of shading of solar panels from adjacent development, redevelopment, or maturing vegetation
- To a lesser degree, some people are concerned about seeing solar panels from the street
- Concerns about aesthetics on historic properties or in historic districts

Options:

None, information only.

Financial Impact:

No financial impact is anticipated at this time.

Attachments:

Code Barriers Memo