

Best Practices in Zoning for Solar

Subject	Best Practice	Resources
Intent/purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage solar in the intent and purpose of a solar ordinance and identify how solar energy systems relate to comprehensive or other plan goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. 7-8 DVRPC Renewable Energy Ordinance Framework
Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include in the definition of a solar energy system: solar collectors or solar energy devices used for space heating, space cooling, electric generation, and water heating Define and distinguish between large-scale or primary use installations and secondary or accessory use installations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Massachusetts Model Zoning for the Regulation of Solar Energy Systems
Use-by-right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow small rooftop and ground mount solar installations as accessory uses or as a use-by-right (allowed without special review) in all major zoning districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Tables P. 3 MA Model Zoning
Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide rooftop solar an exemption from or allowance above building height restrictions Identify a maximum allowed ground mount solar height of 10'-15' or apply the accessory use height maximum if reasonable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. 7 MA Model Zoning
Lot coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt ground mount solar from lot coverage restrictions that apply to primary buildings, particularly if the area beneath the solar array will be vegetated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. 9 MA Model Zoning
Accessory use maximum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt solar from the maximum allowable number of accessory uses 	
Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt ground mount solar from setbacks required for primary use buildings, provide an adjustment, or apply accessory use setbacks to allow flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. 7, 8 MA Model Zoning
Aesthetic requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt solar from rooftop equipment screening requirements Allow PV installations to be seen from public roadways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P.19 DVRPC Renewable Energy Ordinance Framework
Historic district guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly explain the requirements and review process for solar in historic districts Write design guidelines that support the development of solar energy systems while being sensitive to historic preservation goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NREL's PV Projects on Historic Buildings Installing Solar Panels on Historic Buildings
Rooftop fire safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider setback requirements from roof ridges of 3' and 1.5' from valleys and headwalls to allow fire fighter access These restrictions may be amendments to the International Fire Code or part of the development regulations and building code requirements instead of the zoning code. Consider adopting the ICC 2015 International Solar Energy Provisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Francisco Solar PV System Safety and Fire Ground Procedures LA PV Fire Safety Section 304.9/p. 26 Oregon solar code
Glare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not require glare studies as they can be cost prohibitive. PV modules use non-reflective glass and are generally less reflective than windows. Municipalities can defer to the Federal Aviation Administration to regulate potential glare from solar installations on or near airports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAA guidance PV at airports
Ground mount solar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for small ground mount installations as accessory uses and large, primary use installations through a conditional or special use permit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P. 38 APA's Integrating Solar Energy into Local Development Regulations
Solar access, solar rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a mechanism to protect solar access for existing and planned solar energy systems (e.g. a solar easement for access to sunlight or a provision that new construction must address impacts to existing solar installations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wisconsin State Statute §66.0401. P. 8/1052 Perry, IA Subdivision Regulations

Solar-friendly design

- Include solar-friendly provisions in development and subdivision regulations such as lot orientation that maximizes active and passive solar benefits
- Consider incentives for solar-friendly design such as waiving permit fees, providing density bonuses, reducing minimum parking requirements
- Consider mandating solar ready construction

- P. 12-13 APA Essential Info Packet-30 (Solar Orientation and Siting and Solar-Ready Homes)
- P. 2 APA [Solar Briefing Papers](#) Creating Incentives

Regulate based on area or impact

- Define and regulate solar installations based on the area (e.g. square feet) or impact of the installation rather than the capacity (kW) as efficiencies and technologies change over time
- Do not regulate based on the use of the energy generated (e.g. requiring that accessory use solar electricity generation be consumed exclusively on-site), as this is often irrelevant to the impact

- P. 19 [Planning and Zoning for Solar in North Carolina](#)
- Example: [Fort Collins, CO](#)