



CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS City Council Agenda Communication

Meeting Date: November 18, 2024

Prepared By: Jon Oliphant, AICP, Planning & Development Director

Agenda Item: First Reading Ordinance – Ground-Mount Solar Zoning Code Text Amendment

Explanation: The City's solar energy regulations were first adopted in April 2018 and have been amended in 2019 and 2023. Chapter 6, Article III (formerly Chapter 154.727) allows for ground-mount solar energy systems on any property with a residential or non-residential use provided that it meets certain locational regulations. The draft ordinance would include the AG-1 (Agriculture) district among those that would be permissible to have a ground-mount solar array that also has a residential use.

The zoning code was amended last year to allow for ground-mount solar arrays as a permitted use. Properties with a non-residential use must have a lot size of at least 0.75 acres while properties with a residential use must be at least two acres in size provided they are zoned R-1, R-2, R-1A, or CE. AG-1 is not currently included among the zoning districts that could be considered for a ground-mount solar array if the various locational regulations are met. All other city zoning districts have the opportunity to have a ground-mount solar array constructed.

The AG-1 district has a minimum lot size of two acres, so most of those lots would meet the minimum threshold for consideration of the construction of an array. Only 55 (0.81%) of the properties in the city limits are zoned AG-1, but this would potentially open other ground-mount opportunities for those parcels provided there is a residential use.

Fiscal Impact: As noted, there are relatively few properties zoned AG-1 in the city limits. However, this would allow for more properties to potentially have ground-mount solar arrays where applicable.

Action Requested: Staff recommends approval of the zoning code text amendment to insert the AG-1 district into those in which a ground-mount solar array would be allowed if a residential use is on the property. The Planning and Zoning Commission held a public hearing on this item at its meeting on November 13 and unanimously recommended approval. A first reading ordinance is scheduled for the November 18 City Council meeting and a second reading ordinance will be scheduled for the December 2 meeting.

ORDINANCE NO. _____

(Approval of this ordinance would allow for the consideration of properties in the city limits zoned AG-1 that have residential uses to have ground mount solar energy systems)

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE SOLAR ENERGY PROVISIONS TO ALLOW FOR GROUND MOUNT SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS ON REAL PROPERTIES THAT HAVE RESIDENTIAL USES AND ARE ZONED AG-1

WHEREAS, the City of Washington, Tazewell County, Illinois (the “City”), is a home rule unit of government; and

WHEREAS, the City previously established Solar Energy provisions, which provides for solar energy regulations; and

WHEREAS, greater allowance of ground mount solar energy systems would likely increase the number of properties to obtain solar energy systems, particularly those that do not have strong south-facing roofs or those that have other nearby structures or vegetation that interfere with roof sun angles; and

WHEREAS, the allowance of certain ground mount solar energy systems would offer advantages to citizens, as it could reduce utility costs for those that install such systems; and

WHEREAS, in light of the benefits provided by ground mount solar energy systems, the City believes that ground mount solar energy systems should be further allowed, with restrictions, on real properties located in the City limits that have residential uses; and

WHEREAS, the City desires to amend the Solar Energy provisions to further allow for such ground mount solar energy systems and the corporate authorities of the City, in the interest of the public health, safety and welfare have determined that it is appropriate to regulate ground mount solar energy systems due to their impact, both from an economical and a public welfare standpoint; and

WHEREAS, a public hearing on the proposed textual amendment to the Solar Energy provisions regarding the regulation of ground mount solar energy systems was held before the Planning and Zoning Commission on November 13, 2024, in the manner prescribed by the City’s Municipal Code and by Illinois law; and

WHEREAS, after holding such public hearing, the Planning and Zoning Commission has recommended approval/denial of the textual amendment; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has determined it is necessary and in the best interests of the City that the textual amendment to the Solar Energy provisions be passed to allow for certain ground mount solar energy systems in residential areas that are zoned AG-1 (Agriculture).

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of the City of Washington, Illinois as follows:

Section 1: The recitals; as set forth above, are incorporated herein as though fully set forth and shall be considered the express findings of the City Council.

Section 2: That the minutes of the Planning and Zoning Commission made at the public hearing held on November 6, 2024, and the recommendation of staff contained in its Memorandum to the Planning and Zoning Commission dated October 25, 2024, are hereby incorporated by reference as additional findings of the City Council, as completely as if fully recited herein at length. All exhibits, if any, submitted at the public hearing are hereby incorporated by reference as fully as if attached hereto.

Section 3: That Chapter 6, Article III, Sec. 6-59(2)(c) of the City Code of the City of Washington, Tazewell County, Illinois, be, and the same hereby is amended as follows:

“Allowance. Subject to the requirements set forth herein, ground mount solar energy systems are allowed on real property that has a residential use, so long as the property is in an **AG-1**, R-1, R-2, R-1A, or CE district in the city.”

Section 4: All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this Ordinance are hereby repealed insofar as they are in conflict with this Ordinance.

Section 5: If any provision of this Ordinance is adjudged invalid, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the ordinance as a whole or of any portion not adjudged invalid.

Section 6: This Ordinance shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage, approval and publication as required by law.

PASSED AND APPROVED this _____ day of _____ 2024.

AYES: _____

NAYS: _____

ATTEST:

MAYOR

CITY CLERK