



Carroll County Environmental Advisory Council (EAC)

Karen Leatherwood, Chair

eac@ccg.carr.org

Brenda Dinne, Staff Liaison

SOLAR SURFACE AREA REQUIREMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS **SUMMARY: EAC Decision Re: Amendments to Recommendations**

Background:

The Board of County Commissioners requested that the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) review the maximum size requirements for solar energy conversion facilities in the residential zoning districts and provide a recommendation for amendments if warranted. The EAC's recommendations were forwarded to the Board in April 2016 and the Board briefed in May 2016. At the June 29, 2016, Planning Commission meeting, representatives of the EAC gave an informational presentation summarizing these recommendations.

Issues:

The Planning Commission requested a follow-up meeting with the EAC to discuss issues raised during the June 29 meeting. These issues were primarily as follows:

1. Are the setbacks for ground-mounted systems sufficient to help protect the neighbors? (*The EAC recommendation was not to change the existing setback requirements, which follow the setback requirements for the underlying zoning district.*)
2. Should requirements be added to address aesthetics of ground-mounted systems? (*The EAC recommendation was not to amend its recommendation. Currently, the EAC recommends adding a provision regarding glare to require certification that glare is mitigated away from adjoining property or adjacent roads. The Code currently also addresses color, manufacturer signage, view of or from a significant public interest, and flush-mounting of roof systems.*)

EAC Decision:

At their July 20 meeting, the EAC discussed for consideration these issues and potential amendments to the EAC's existing recommendations. The EAC members elected not to amend their existing recommendations.

Setbacks: The EAC felt that most homeowners will opt for roof-mounted systems in residential districts where possible. The members were concerned that adding to the existing, fixed setback could make it impossible for some property owners to install solar panels. They also agreed that they did not want to make the requirements more complicated than they are by adding a variable component to the setback requirements. The County has had experience with neighbors requesting the panels be located closer to their house and to the side yard, as this obstructed their view less.

Aesthetics: The Code currently requires a maximum height of 10 feet from grade for ground-mounted systems. The EAC has not recommended a change to this requirement. The Code currently allows many other items and structures, such as sheds and fences, to be higher than 10 feet. The EAC did not feel that the solar panels were any more visually intrusive than many of these other structures. In addition, members were concerned that screening requirements might interfere with solar access.

Next Steps:

The EAC encourages the Planning Commission to either endorse the EAC recommendations or submit a recommendation of its own to the Board. The EAC will be proceeding with shepherding the proposed amendments through the adoption process. Time will be requested on the Board's agenda in mid-August to request approval to schedule a public hearing. Pending Board approval, a public hearing will be scheduled.