

City of Columbia, Illinois  
Agenda for Plan Commission Meeting  
Monday, January 12, 2026 – 6:30 p.m.  
City Hall, 208 South Rapp Avenue



- A. Call Meeting to Order
- B. Roll Call & Establish Quorum
- C. Approval of Minutes
  - 1. December 8, 2025 Regular Meeting\*
- D. Public Input
- E. Public Hearings
  - 1. Amendment to Special Use Permit Ordinance #3529 to allow ancillary entertainment in conjunction with a restaurant in the at 11604 Bluff Road, in the C-1 Neighborhood Business District and the HP Historic Preservation Overlay District. \*
  - 2. Amendment to Chapter 17.42.070, Additional Regulations for Solar Energy Systems, of the Zoning Code to amend the regulations for solar installations.\*
- F. Unfinished Business
- G. New Business
- H. Committee Reports
- I. Staff Reports & Communications
- J. Adjournment

\* Denotes supporting document(s) in agenda packet

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLAN COMMISSION  
OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA, ILLINOIS  
HELD MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025

A. CALL TO ORDER

The Plan Commission meeting of the City of Columbia, Illinois held Monday, December 8, 2025 was called to order by Chairperson Trowbridge at 6:30 P.M.

B. ROLL CALL & ESTABLISH QUORUM

Upon roll call, the following members were:

Present: Commissioners Pete Ingold, Tony Murphy, Will Trowbridge, Abby Wiese, Dave Hardin, Mike Macik

Absent: Beth Kutterer-Sanchez, Matt Klopmeier

Quorum Present

Administrative Staff Present: John Brancaglione – Land Use & Planning Coordinator, Kelly Mathews – Deputy City Clerk

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Minutes of the Monday, November 10, 2025 Plan Commission Meeting were submitted for approval.

MOTION:

It was moved by Commissioner Wiese and seconded by Chairperson Trowbridge to approve the minutes of the Monday, November 10, 2025 Plan Commission Meeting as presented. The roll call vote was as follows: Ingold – yes; Murphy – yes; Trowbridge – yes; Wiese – yes, Hardin – yes; Macik – yes. MOTION CARRIED.

D. PUBLIC INPUT

None.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Request for consideration of a Special Use Permit to allow a ground-mounted solar energy system on a property at 9 Seminole Drive, in the R-3 One-Family Dwelling District.

Mr. Brancaglione presented the staff report.

The following individuals testified for the applicant:

Heidi Schoen  
John Csik

The following individual testified regarding the request:

Richard Schlemmer

The Commission discussed the item.

MOTION:

Motion was made by Commissioner Macik and seconded by Chairperson Trowbridge that the Plan Commission recommend disapproval of the Special Use Permit.

The roll call vote was as follows: Ingold – abstained; Murphy – yes; Trowbridge – yes; Wiese – no; Hardin – yes; Macik – yes. MOTION CARRIED 4-1.

2. Request for consideration of an amendment to Chapter 17.52, Non-conforming Land, Buildings and Uses, of the Zoning Code to Amend the Regulations for Non-Conforming Uses.

Mr. Brancaglione presented the staff report.

The Commission discussed the item.

MOTION:

Motion was made by Secretary Hardin and seconded by Commissioner Macik that the Plan Commission recommend that the amendment be approved.

The roll call vote was as follows: Ingold – yes; Murphy – yes; Trowbridge – yes; Wiese – yes; Hardin – yes; Macik – yes. MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

**F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None

**G. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Request for approval of the Preliminary Plat for Walnut Ridge Phase II, a Residential Subdivision of 23.88 acres Consisting of 27 Single-Family Lots in the R-2 One-Family Dwelling District.

Mr. Brancaglione presented the staff report.

The following individuals testified for the applicant:

Mark Morris

MOTION:

Motion was made by Commissioner Wiese and seconded by Commissioner Ingold that the Plan Commission recommend that the Preliminary Plat be approved. The roll call vote was as follows: Ingold – yes; Murphy – yes; Trowbridge – yes; Wiese – yes; Hardin – yes; Macik – yes. MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

**H. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

None

**I. STAFF REPORTS & COMMUNICATIONS**

Mr. Brancaglione announced that Municode has given us the proof of the entire new Municipal Code and the proof will be returned to them with comments. Once they address the comments it will come back after the first of the year for review by the Commission.

**J. ADJOURN**

With no further business, Chairperson Trowbridge entertained a motion to adjourn.

MOTION:

Motion was made by Commissioner Macik and seconded by Commissioner Ingold to adjourn the meeting. On a voice vote, all Commissioners present voted yes. MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting adjourned at 7:19 P.M.



# Plan Commission Staff Report

Date of Meeting: January 12, 2026

Agenda Item: Public Hearing for Special Use Permit Amendment:  
Ancillary entertainment in conjunction with a restaurant at 11604 Bluff Road  
(C-1 Neighborhood Business District with an HP Historic Preservation  
Overlay)

Submitted By: John Brancaglione, Land Use and Planning Coordinator

## BACKGROUND

The 5.19-acre property is located at 11604 Bluff Road and is in the C-1 Neighborhood Business District with a Historic Preservation Overlay. The property has an existing special use permit approved by Ordinance #3529 on August 3, 2020. The special use permit ordinance includes the following stipulations related to ancillary entertainment:

- A. Ancillary entertainment shall be restricted to indoor locations per Section 17.40.010 of the Columbia Zoning Code.*
- B. All live musical performances shall conclude by 8:00 p.m. Sunday – Thursday and by 10:00 p.m. Friday – Saturday.*
- C. No temporary signs or banners advertising entertainment events or sales promotions shall be allowed without first receiving an approved sign permit.*
- D. Sound amplification (use of speakers, P.A. systems, amplifiers, etc.) shall take place only within the primary structure, and may not take place on the front porch, on patio areas, or in locations elsewhere on the subject property.”*

Chapter 17.26, C-1 Neighborhood Business District, of the Zoning Code only allows ancillary entertainment with the issuance of a special use permit. Ancillary entertainment is defined as “*those uses where the entertainment function typically consists of background listening music, either live or programmed, at eating, drinking, or other establishments*”. Chapter 17.40, Special Uses, of the Zoning Code restricts ancillary entertainment in the C-1 District to “*Activity totally within building*.” The applicant has requested an amendment to the existing special use permit to allow ancillary entertainment to be conducted outdoors on the front porch.

## ANALYSIS

The property is currently occupied by a 2,173 square foot structure that is occupied by Sunset Overlook Restaurant and Bar. Behind the primary structure is a storage shed and two pergolas. The property is located north of the intersection of Old Bluff Road and Valmeyer Road. The properties to the west are vacant, with the airport being to the southwest. These are not in the city limits. The

properties to the north, east and south are occupied by single-family dwellings zoned R-3 One-Family Dwelling District and R-2 One-Family Dwelling District. The properties to the east are of a higher elevation. The single-family homes to the north and the south are not visible from the primary structure due to natural buffers.

The proposed amendment contains the following language to aid in mitigating negative impacts to neighboring properties:

- A. *Any exterior signs displayed shall comply with the city sign code.*
- B. *All live musical performances shall conclude by 9:00 PM Sunday through Thursday and by 9:30 PM Friday and Saturday.*
- C. *Performances may be conducted outdoors on the front porch wherein the location of all performers must be on the front porch with the building wall behind them and facing Bluff Road as shown on Exhibit A attached hereto.*
- D. *Speakers, guitar amplifiers, or other amplification equipment shall be located so as to be only facing Bluff Road.*
- E. *Seating for patrons may be positioned as shown on Exhibit B attached hereto.*
- F. *No sound may be "piped" to exterior speakers located at any other outdoor location on the property.*
- G. *Volume levels shall be suitable for customers and not excessively amplified.*
- H. *Formal valid noise complaints properly filed with the City that clearly demonstrate a violation of the conditions of this permit such as excessive sound levels or use of profanity by performers, result in citations based on said complaints, and that are filed on more than three occasions will void the special use permit.*

NOTE: If adopted this Amended Special Use Permit will apply only to this property and this use. This will not alter the provisions of Chapter 17.26 as applies to any other location in the City with C-1 Zoning.

#### STAFF FINDINGS

- The Land Use Plan of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan identifies the property as Single Family Residential, however the use is an existing use and appropriate for the parcel.
- Ancillary entertainment in this location may be appropriate if it is subject to the above conditions.

#### SAMPLE MOTIONS

1. Motion to Recommend Approval as Submitted: I move that the Plan Commission recommend that the Special Use Permit Amendment be approved.

2. Motion to Recommend Approval with Conditions: I move that the Plan Commission recommend that the Special Use Permit Amendment be approved, subject to the following conditions: *State the recommended conditions of approval.*
3. Motion to Recommend Disapproval: I move that the Plan Commission recommend disapproval of the Special Use Permit Amendment, based upon the following findings of fact: *State the findings in support of disapproval.*

**EXHIBIT A**

Area Where Performers and Sound Equipment May be Located



**EXHIBIT B**

Seating Areas



# Plan Commission Staff Report

Date of Meeting: January 12, 2026

Agenda Item: Public Hearing for Zoning Code Amendment:  
Chapter 17.42.070, Additional Regulations for Solar Energy Systems, of the  
Zoning Code to amend the regulations for solar installations.

Submitted By: John Brancaglione, Land Use and Planning Coordinator

## BACKGROUND

Due to federal tax credits and other incentives for the installation of solar energy systems, the City has seen a substantial increase in these applications. Although the federal tax credit has ended, there are still various incentives for the installation of solar energy systems. With the abundance of applications received, staff has been able to identify parts of the solar energy regulations that should be amended to better represent the City's vision.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

The public notice for this request was published in the Republic-Times on December 24, 2025, which is 19 days prior to the scheduled public hearing. Therefore, the 15 – 30 days advance public notice requirement has been satisfied.

## ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The current section of the Municipal Code on solar energy systems does not contain adequate language to regulate solar installations in a way to provide protections to the City and surrounding property owners from negative impacts. Additionally, the electrical requirements for solar installations have been revised by Ameren and need to be clarified. The electrical code will also be amended to incorporate the current requirements.

## SAMPLE MOTIONS

1) Motion to Recommend Approval as Submitted:

I move that the Plan Commission recommend that the amendment be approved.

2) Motion to Recommend Approval with Amendments:

I move that the Plan Commission recommend that the amendment be approved with the following amendments: *State the recommended amendments.*

3) Motion to Recommend Disapproval:

I move that the Plan Commission recommend disapproval of the amendment, based upon the following findings of fact: *State the findings in support of disapproval.*

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

**Section 17.42.070 Additional Regulations for Solar Energy Systems**

- A.** **Purpose.** The purpose of these regulations is to preserve the health, safety, welfare, and harmonious development of the community by providing opportunities for the installation and use of safe and effective solar energy systems.
- B.** **Applicability.** This Section applies to all solar energy system installations within the City of Columbia's zoning jurisdiction.
- C.** **Definitions.** As used in this Section, the following terms shall be defined as indicated.

**AGRIVOLTAICS:** A solar energy system co-located on the same parcel of land as agricultural production, including crop production, grazing, apiaries, or other agricultural products or services.

**BUILDING-INTEGRATED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A solar energy system that is an integral part of a principal or accessory building, rather than a separate mechanical device, replacing or substituting for an architectural or structural component of the building. Building-integrated systems include, but are not limited to, photovoltaic or hot water solar energy systems that are contained within roofing materials, windows, skylights, and awnings.

**BUILDING OFFICIAL:** The City of Columbia's appointed staff positions in the Engineering & Inspection and Public Works Departments responsible for administering the City's Building Code, Property Maintenance Code, and other municipal codes related to building or accessory structure construction, systems installation, alteration, or demolition.

**COMMUNITY SCALE SOLAR.** Often ground mounted and typically serving multiple buildings (i.e., servicing an apartment complex, office complex, industrial building or subdivision), but is also sited on large rooftops (shopping centers, hospitals, office or industrial buildings)

**CORPORATE AUTHORITIES:** The Mayor and City Council of the City of Columbia.

**GRID-INTERTIE SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A photovoltaic solar energy system that is electrically connected to an electric circuit served by an electric utility company.

**GROUND-MOUNTED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A solar energy system mounted on a rack or pole that rests on or is attached to the ground.

**LARGE OR UTILITY-SCALE SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A ground-mounted photovoltaic solar energy system that generates electricity primarily to serve off-site demand. This may include retail sale direct to end users, wholesale sale to one or more electric utility, or generation by an electric utility for sale to its own retail or wholesale customers. Such a system is considered the primary use of the site on which it is located.

**NET METERING:** The measurement of the net amount of electricity supplied to an eligible customer by an electric provider/utility during a given billing period, after accounting for the amount of solar-generated electricity supplied to the provider/utility by said customer.

**PASSIVE SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A solar energy system that captures solar light or heat without transforming it to another form of energy or transferring the energy via a heat exchanger.

**PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A solar energy system that converts solar energy directly into electricity.

**OFF-GRID SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A photovoltaic solar energy system that is not electrically connected to electric circuits served by an electric utility company.

**QUALIFIED DESIGN PROFESSIONAL:** An individual licensed and authorized by the State of Illinois to practice as a design professional, such as engineer or architect, according to the scope of practice and standards established by the State for a specific design profession.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

**ROOF (FLAT):** A roof that slopes at an angle less than 10 degrees, relative to the horizon. This angle may also be expressed as a 1:6 grade ratio or a 17.633% grade.

**ROOF (PITCHED):** A roof that slopes at an angle of 10 degrees or greater, relative to the horizon. This angle may also be expressed as a 1:6 grade ratio or a 17.633% grade.

**ROOF-MOUNTED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A solar energy system mounted on a rack that is fastened to or ballasted on a structure roof.

**SMALL-SCALE SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A roof-mounted or building integrated solar energy system that generates electricity primarily to serve on-site demand. This shall include such systems connected to an electric utility solely for net-metering purposes.

**SOLAR ACCESS:** Unobstructed access to direct sunlight on a lot or building through the entire year, including access across adjacent parcel air rights, for the purpose of capturing direct sunlight to operate a solar energy system.

**SOLAR COLLECTOR:** A device, structure or a part of a device or structure for which the primary purpose is to transform solar radiant energy into thermal, mechanical, chemical, or electrical energy. The collector does not include frames, supports, or mounting hardware.

**SOLAR DAYLIGHTING:** Capturing and directing the visible light spectrum for use in illuminating interior building spaces in lieu of artificial lighting, usually by adding a device or design element to the building envelope.

**SOLAR ENERGY:** Radiant energy received from the sun that can be collected in the form of heat or light by a solar collector.

**SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A device, array of devices, or structural design feature, the purpose of which is to provide for generation or storage of electricity from sunlight, or the collection, storage and distribution of solar energy for space heating or cooling, daylight for interior lighting, or water heating.

**SOLAR HOT AIR SYSTEM:** A solar energy system that includes a solar collector to provide direct supplemental space heating by heating and re-circulating conditioned building air. The most efficient performance includes a solar collector to preheat air or supplement building space heating, typically using a vertically mounted collector on a south-facing wall.

**SOLAR HOT WATER SYSTEM:** A system that includes a solar collector and a heat exchanger that heats or preheats water for building heating systems or other hot water needs, including residential domestic hot water and hot water for commercial processes.

**SOLAR MOUNTING DEVICES:** Racking, frames, or other devices that allow the mounting of a solar collector onto a roof surface or the ground.

**SOLAR READY DESIGN:** The design and construction of a building that facilitates and makes feasible the installation of rooftop solar.

**SOLAR RESOURCE:** A view of the sun from a specific point on a lot or building that is not obscured by any vegetation, building, or object for a minimum of four hours between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM Standard time on all days of the year, and can be measured in annual watts per square meter.

**TILT ANGLE:** The angle of orientation of a solar collector at a given time, with 0 degrees being parallel to the horizon (flat) and 90 degrees being perpendicular to the horizon (upright). Design tilt refers to the minimum and maximum tilt angles a specific collector is designed to achieve.

**ZONING ADMINISTRATOR:** The City of Columbia's Land Use & Planning Coordinator, who is responsible for administering the City's Zoning Code and provisions of other municipal code related to land use or zoning.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

**D. Summary of Solar System Types**

The table below summarizes the types of solar energy systems as defined above based on data from various sources at the U.S. Department of Energy and a publication entitled *Solar @ Scale* jointly developed by the U.S. Department of Energy, Solar Energy Technologies Office, International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and the American Planning Association (APA).

Characteristics	Small Scale Solar	Community Scale Solar	Large or Utility Scale Solar
Relationship to the Grid	Connects to the building's service line either behind or in front of the meter	Connects to service line of a building (or building group) either behind or in front of the meter	Typically connects to the distribution grid
Relationship to the Site	Roof Mounted and serves the electrical needs of the building and its use. Typically serves an existing residential home or apartment building	Typically serving a single, large building (shopping centers, hospitals, industrial or office buildings), or multiple buildings (an office complex, or industrial building)	Ground mounted and typically the principal land use. Generates electricity primarily to serve off-site demand.
Relationship to Existing Land Use and Development Pattern	Fits into established lot or block pattern of the surrounding area (may require HOA or tenant association approval)	Fits into established lot	May span multiple existing lots or require new roads for site access
Site Area	Located on the roof of a house or commercial building	5-25 acres (no min. area for building-integrated solar energy systems)	Greater than 25 acres
Typical Rated Capacity*	Up to 25 KW	250 KW to 5MW	Greater than 5 MW

\* The rated capacity will vary depending on the residential, commercial, or industrial roof or ground mounted installation, the site location and the electrical output that is desired.

**E. Reference Table of Zoning Permissions by District & System Type**

Zoning District	System Type			
	Ground Mounted Systems*		Roof Mounted Systems	
	Community Scale	Large or Utility Scale	Small Scale**	Community Scale
A-1	S	S	P	S
R 1- 7	X	X	P	X
C-1	X	X	P	X
C-2	S	X	P	S
C-2 MXD	S	X	P	S
C-3	S	X	P	S
CP	S	X	P	S
BP-1	S	X	P	S
BP-2	S	X	P	S
I-1	P	S	P	P

\* Ground mounted installations shall be prohibited on a development site adjacent to existing residential districts.

\*\*Small scale systems in compliance with 17.42.070.G.2.a.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

S=Special Use Permit Required; P=Permitted Use; X=Not Permitted

**F. General Provisions.** All solar energy systems shall comply with applicable requirements of this Subsection, except as otherwise provided in this Section.

1. No solar energy system or component thereof shall be installed without the applicable building, electrical, plumbing and other required permit(s) issued by the Building Official.
2. Solar energy systems, including all componentry and utility system connections, shall fully comply with all applicable provisions of the Building Code in effect at the time of application. (including all regulated trade components, such as plumbing, electrical, etc). Section 15.32.130.K, *Solar*, of the Building Code contains specific requirements for electrical components of solar installations.
3. No building permit shall be issued for a solar energy system without an approved sealed site plan prepared and submitted in accordance with Building Code Section 15.04.032 *Site Plan Requirements*.
4. In addition to the required site plan, colored elevation drawings shall be submitted with the building permit application which depict each building elevation upon which system components will be installed. All drawings shall be sealed by a qualified design professional.
5. The applicant shall be responsible for obtaining approval from their homeowners' association (HOA) or similar entity, if applicable. However, no HOA or similar entity shall be entitled to deny the installation of a City-approved solar energy system, unless said entity fully complies with the Homeowners' Energy Policy Statement Act (765 ILCS 165). In such circumstances, the HOA or other applicable entity shall, upon request of the applicant or City, furnish a copy of the duly enacted policy statement demonstrating compliance with the Act.
6. Where either ground or roof mounted systems of a scale larger than typical residential roof mounting are to be installed adjacent to other existing development in any zoning district, a Qualified Design Professional as defined herein in Section 17.42.070.C shall provide data certifying that such installation shall:
  - a. Use anti-reflective panels (anti-reflective coatings or stippled surfaces) and be mounted within or on rails or containment structures with anti-reflective matte or flat finishes.
  - b. Not cause reflections on to any adjoining property at any time of the year.
  - c. Not cause reflections to approaching or departing aircraft in designated FAA flight paths or common approach and departure zones in any zoning district within the City subject to analysis by the Qualified Design Professional as defined herein in Section 17.42.070.C and review and approval by the applicable airport operator or authority.
  - d. Not cause reflections onto roadways that could impair traffic.
7. Grid-intertie systems shall comply with the interconnection requirements of the applicable electric utility. Applicants shall notify the electric utility of the proposed interconnection and shall submit proof of notification to the Building Official prior to building permit issuance.
8. All electric solar energy system components shall have a UL or equivalent listing. Solar hot water systems must have an SRCC rating.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

9. All interconnection conduits, cables and wiring between a grid-intertie system and an electric utility system shall be installed underground.
10. All solar energy systems using a reflector to enhance solar production shall minimize glare from the reflector affecting adjacent or nearby properties.
11. A Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Columbia Heritage & Preservation Commission shall be required prior to building permit issuance for all installations on a structure or property designated as a local, state, or national historic landmark.

**G. Building-mounted & Building-integrated Systems.** Such systems mounted to, ballasted on, or integrated into an existing primary or accessory structure on any lot shall be considered a component of said building or structure when installed, maintained, and used in accordance with this Subsection.

1. Building-mounted or building-integrated installations shall only serve structures located on the same lot or parcel as the solar energy system. This shall not be construed as to prohibit net-metering connections.
2. No building permit for such system installations shall be issued without first verifying and receiving the required zoning approvals, as determined by the Zoning Administrator. Such determinations shall be made in accordance with the following provisions.
  - a. Such systems shall be allowed as indicated in the table in Section 17.42.070.E. and shall require no further zoning approvals when:
    - i. The subject property, including all land uses, structures, and site conditions existing on said property, fully complies with applicable zoning regulations.
    - ii. A valid special use permit has been issued for the subject property, if applicable, and the land uses, structures, and site conditions existing on said property are in full compliance thereof.
    - iii. The subject property, or any land use, structure, or site condition existing on said property, has legal noncompliant zoning status.
  - b. Such systems shall be allowed only by way of special use permit approved per Chapter 17.40 *Special Uses* when a valid special use permit has been issued for the subject property and the land uses, structures, or site conditions existing on said property are not fully compliant with the conditions of the issued permit.
  - c. No such systems shall be allowed and no building permit shall be issued when the subject property, or any land use, structure, or site condition existing on said property, has illegal or noncompliant zoning status.
3. All mounting surfaces, framing, and structural components of the primary building and all system structural components, frames, brackets, ballasting, fasteners, hardware, etc. shall be structurally sufficient, as determined by the Building Official.
  - a. This shall account for localized wind/ice/snow loading according to standard professional practices for structural design.
  - b. The Building Official may require submittal of any drawings, specifications, or other documentation necessary to demonstrate structural sufficiency, which shall be prepared and sealed by a qualified design professional.
4. The finished height of such systems shall not exceed the maximum allowed height of the applicable zoning district, when oriented at maximum tilt.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

5. Aesthetic considerations shall be provided as follows.
  - a. **Exterior Walls.** The following shall apply to system componentry installed on or integrated into exterior walls:
    - i. No components shall be allowed on the front façade of any building. For buildings on corner lots, no components shall be allowed on a side wall that faces a public street, except where determined by the Building Official to be the only feasible location.
    - ii. No component shall project more than 12 inches perpendicular from the wall surface, except awnings with integrated solar collectors may project no more than 4 feet 6 inches perpendicular from the wall surface.
    - iii. No component shall extend vertically above the wall's top edge or extend horizontally beyond the wall's side edge or corner.
  - b. **Pitched Roofs.** The following shall apply to system componentry installed on or integrated into pitched roofs:
    - i. Except as provided for herein, solar collectors and other components shall be allowed on the face of a roof, as needed to maximize solar access, but shall be mounted flush to the roof surface and at the same finished pitch.
    - ii. No component shall project more than 12 inches perpendicular from the roof surface.
    - iii. No component shall extend above the peak of the roof or overhang any edge of the roof.
  - c. **Flat Roofs.** The following shall apply to system componentry installed on or integrated into flat roofs:
    - i. Such components shall be exempt from any screening requirements applicable to rooftop equipment or mechanical systems. Solar collectors, including frames, racking, and other mounting components, may be used to screen other rooftop equipment when such screening is required.
    - ii. No component shall project more than 5 feet perpendicular from the finished roof surface.
    - iii. No component shall overhang any edge of the roof, except for conduits, cables, or wiring routed over a roof edge when determined by the Building Official to be the only feasible routing option.
    - iv. All roof installations are subject to the applicable provisions of 17.42.070.G.2.

**H. Ground-mounted Solar Energy Systems.** Two types of ground-mounted solar energy systems defined above in Subsection C *Definitions* are regulated herein: Community Scale and Large or Utility Scale Systems as described in 17.42.070.D and E. Such systems may require a special use permit (*See §17.42.070.E.*) approved per the process described in Chapter 17.40 *Special Uses* and shall be installed, maintained, and used in accordance with this Subsection in addition to any of the applicable provisions of 17.42.070.F.

1. **Requirements for All Ground-mounted Installations.** The following general provisions shall apply to both community-scale and large or utility-scale ground-mounted solar energy systems, except when in conflict with a more restrictive standard.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

- a. **Maximum Height at Maximum Design Tilt.** 15 feet, as measured from the adjacent finished grade.
- b. **Lot Coverage.** Lot coverage, where applicable, shall be calculated based on the area covered at the minimum design tilt angle.
- c. **Solar Access.** No system shall be approved that interferes with the solar access of an existing solar energy system installed on another property.
- d. **Aviation Protection.** All systems proposed within 500 feet of an airport or within an airport approach zone shall submit a glare analysis prepared by a qualified design professional, in accordance with current guidance adopted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
- e. **Conditions of Approval.** Special use approval may be conditioned upon additional improvements or actions, such as screening or landscaping, to mitigate negative impacts to adjacent properties.

2. **Community Scale Solar Energy Systems.** Such systems shall be considered accessory structures that are allowed as indicated in the table in Section 17.42.070.E. Approval may be granted in conjunction with any allowable primary use in the zoning districts, subject to applicable zoning district standards.
3. In addition to the above Subsection F *General Provisions* and Subsection H.1 *Requirements for All Ground-Mounted Installations*, the following provisions shall apply to community-scale systems:
  - a. **Minimum Setbacks at Minimum Design Tilt.** Where the applicable zoning district is less restrictive, the following minimum setbacks shall apply: 15 feet from any other structure; 80 feet from state or federal highway rights-of-way; 60 feet from other public street rights-of-way; 15 feet from any property boundary that is not a right-of-way line.
  - b. No such system shall be installed on a lot or parcel other than the same lot or parcel on which the primary structure (or structures) is located.
  - c. **Rear Yard Encroachments.** Special use approval for rear yard installations and encroachments may be granted in conjunction with any allowable use in any non-residential zoning district.
  - d. **Side Yard Encroachments.** Special use approval for side yard installations and encroachments may be granted in conjunction with any allowable use in accordance with the following provisions:
    - i. Such encroachments may be approved for lots in the A-1 agricultural zoning district.
    - ii. Where allowed as permitted or by Special Use Permit (See table in Section 17.42.070.E.), such encroachments may be approved for lots in non-agricultural zoning districts only if the rear yard has insufficient space or inadequate solar access, as documented in writing by a qualified design professional and submitted at the time of application and subject to approval of a special use permit.
  - e. No ground mounted system shall be located in the front yard of the property in any zoning district.
  - f. All ground-mounted equipment shall be installed in a single grouping within a clearly defined and delineated area, subject to the following provisions:

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

- i. The system shall be enclosed by a gated fence between 4 feet and 6 feet in height, encompassing the perimeter of the installation.
- ii. The enclosed installation area shall not be paved, graveled, or otherwise covered by an impervious surface material of any type, except in locations where such conditions existed prior to installation.
- g. Such systems shall not count against maximum lot/yard coverage requirements or limitations on the number of allowed accessory structures. However, the total enclosed installation area shall not exceed 50% of the area encompassed by the primary structure's footprint.

4. **Large-Scale Solar Energy Systems.** Such systems shall be considered primary land uses allowed only by special use permit in the A-1 Agricultural and I-1 Light Industrial zoning districts. In addition to the above Subsection F *General Provisions*, and the applicable provisions of Subsection H.1 and 2. *Requirements for All Ground-Mounted Installations*, the following provisions shall apply to large-scale systems:

- a. **Minimum Lot Size.** Greater than 25 acres.
- b. **Minimum Setbacks at Minimum Design Tilt.** A minimum front yard setback of 100 feet shall be required. Minimum side and rear yard setbacks shall be 75 feet from properties zoned for residential uses (R-1 through R-7) and 35 feet from properties zoned for non-residential uses.
- c. **Screening.** An opaque screening fence at least 6 feet in height shall be installed along all property boundaries shared with a residential zoning district (R-1 through R-7). Tight landscape screening may be approved in lieu of screening fence, subject to submittal of a landscape plan, when such affords equal screening. A finding of fact supporting the landscape screening shall accompany such special use approvals.
- d. **Fencing.** The entire project site shall be secured with a perimeter fence at least 6 feet in height. Barbed wire and woven wire fencing shall be prohibited. Where applicable adjacent to residential zoning, screening fencing may be used to satisfy this requirement.
- e. **Vegetation & Ground Cover.** Ground cover shall be installed and maintained consistent with the *Pollinator-Friendly Solar Site Act* (525 ILCS 55/1) and related guidance published by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).
  - i. The site plan shall include a vegetation management plan adhering to the pollinator-friendly scorecard published by IDNR.
  - ii. Pollinator-friendly standards and scorecard shall be maintained for the duration of facility operations, until the site is decommissioned.
  - iii. The City may require an inspection fee at the time of the initial permit application to support ongoing inspection activities.
  - iv. The applicant shall submit a financial guarantee in the form of a letter of credit, cash deposit or bond in favor of the City of Columbia equal to 125% of the costs of meeting the pollinator-friendly standards. The financial guarantee shall remain in effect until vegetation is sufficiently established, as determined by the Building Official. City of Columbia corporate authorities shall reserve the right to accept or reject the choice of financial institution providing said guarantee.

**City of Columbia, Illinois Solar Energy Systems Zoning Regulations**  
**Approved \_\_\_\_\_, 2026 per Ordinance No. \_\_\_\_\_**

- v. Plant materials shall not have been treated with systemic insecticides, particularly neonicotinoids.
- vi. Solar collectors that are constructed and maintained in compliance with these provisions shall not be considered impervious surfaces for the City's stormwater management regulations, erosion control provisions, or NPDES permit requirements.
- f. **Agricultural Protection.** Large or utility-scale systems shall comply with site assessment or soil identification standards that are intended to identify agricultural soils, including submitting an Agricultural Impact Mitigation Plan (AIMP) to the City and the Illinois Department of Agriculture, as required by the *Renewable Energy Facilities Agricultural Impact Mitigation Act* (505 ILCS 147/1, et seq.). The City may require mitigation of prime soils for solar projects, including the following:
  - i. Demonstrating co-location with agricultural uses on the project site.
  - ii. Approving the special use for a limited time to allow the site to be returned to agricultural use upon end of life or decommissioning.
  - iii. Protecting prime soils with agricultural conservation easements on an equivalent number of acres in the vicinity.
  - iv. Locating the project in a wellhead protection area to remove agricultural uses from high-risk recharge areas.
- g. **Decommissioning.** The decommissioning plan required as part of the AIMP shall be prepared and submitted as part of the AIMP, which shall:
  - i. Require system decommissioning in the event the project is not in use for 12 consecutive months.
  - ii. Include provisions for removal of all structures and foundations, restoration of soil and vegetation, and consistency with all standards of the AIMP.
  - iii. Disposal of structures and foundations shall meet applicable provisions of the Columbia Municipal Code for demolition and disposal.
  - iv. Provide assurances consistent with the Illinois Department of Agriculture's standard agricultural impact mitigation agreement.
  - v. The applicant shall submit a financial guarantee in the form of a letter of credit, cash deposit or bond in favor of the City of Columbia equal to 125% of the costs of decommissioning the site. The financial guarantee shall remain in effect until the site is fully decommissioned and restored in compliance with the approved AIMP. City of Columbia corporate authorities shall reserve the right to accept or reject the choice of financial institution providing said guarantee.