

# CITY OF WASHINGTON

## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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### MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Manier and Committee of the Whole  
FROM: Jon R. Oliphant, AICP, Planning & Development Director  
SUBJECT: Possible Roof-Mount Solar Zoning Code Amendment  
DATE: September 6, 2019

Staff has experienced increasing demand for solar energy projects. This is due in large part to the federal and state incentives available that allow for a relatively short payback on the upfront cost of the installation. The City's solar energy regulations were adopted in April 2018 and staff has issued 11 building permits for roof-mount solar systems since then.

One of the conditions in the ordinance is that a special use must be approved for any roof-mount solar array on an accessory structure. The third such special use request was just heard at Wednesday's Planning and Zoning Commission meeting and a fourth application has been processed for a public hearing at the October PZC meeting. Other inquiries have been received asking for possible future projects as well.

Staff would recommend waiving the requirement to obtain a special use permit for an accessory structure. Residents that are seeking to place the solar array on an accessory structure are trying to take advantage of the south-facing roof face on the property. While some panels have also been installed on east- or west-facing roofs, the south-facing roof is the most important for maximizing the energy generation. Any concern about the ability of the accessory structure to handle the gravity and wind loads of the panels is addressed through the building permit issuance by requiring the certification from a design professional attesting that the roof can suitably handle the loads. The special use process adds about 45-60 days of extra time before the installation could occur.

Additionally, staff would also recommend increasing the allowable roof coverage or eliminating the maximum 50% roof coverage altogether. While this was originally drafted to reduce the aesthetic impact of the panels, the installation of solar energy systems has become more widespread and the evolving technology will likely allow for them to be integrated directly into the roof in the near future. The NFPA Code also requires that there be a 3' setback from the edge of the roof on each side, so 100% coverage is not feasible.

Staff seeks feedback on a possible zoning code text amendment to address both of these items. If there is interest, a public hearing would be scheduled for the November PZC meeting prior to bringing it to the City Council for a first reading ordinance.