



## CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

### Committee of the Whole Agenda Communication

**Meeting Date:** April 10, 2023

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

**Agenda Item:** Possible Ground-Mount Solar Array Amendment Discussion

**Explanation:** The City's solar energy regulations were first adopted in April 2018 and were twice amended in 2019. Chapter 154.727 specifically prohibits ground mount solar energy systems. A ground mount solar energy system is defined in City Code as "a solar energy system that is directly installed onto the ground and is not attached or affixed to an existing structure." A solar energy contractor spoke at the April 3 City Council meeting expressing interest in a code amendment that would allow for the placement of ground mount arrays.

Most of the City's solar energy regulations are based on the State model ordinance and generally mirror numerous similar ordinances in Illinois. Each of the nearby jurisdictions that regulate solar energy—East Peoria, Eureka, Germantown Hills, Morton, Pekin, Peoria, Peoria County, Peoria Heights, and Tazewell County—allow for ground mount arrays, though Eureka only permits them in non-residential areas. The original Washington draft ordinance contained the allowance of ground mount arrays but the desire of the Council at that time was to prohibit them and they were subsequently prohibited in the adopted version of the ordinance.

Should there be interest in allowing ground mount arrays, staff would recommend the following regulations:

- Only allow for placement in the side and rear yards (not in the front yard);
- A principal structure must be on the lot prior to the placement of a ground mount array;
- The height in rear yards cannot exceed 10' above grade when oriented at maximum tilt;
- The height in side yards cannot exceed 30" in height above grade;
- Ground mount arrays should be setback a minimum of 5' or the applicable setbacks for the zoning district in which the array is located, whichever is greater. Consideration could be given to a larger setback. All property owners are allowed to plant trees unless specifically prohibited by an easement and any future trees on adjacent properties may interfere with the intended solar collection. An additional setback could reduce any future neighbor disputes. Peoria Heights has a 50' setback from adjacent residential principal structures unless the owner of the adjacent property approves of the application; and
- Ground mount systems cannot exceed half the building footprint of the principal structure and would be exempt from impervious surface calculations if the soil under the collector is not compacted and maintained in vegetation. Foundations, gravel, or compacted soils are considered impervious.

Additionally, only one of the regional entities with adopted solar ordinances has a minimum lot size for the placement of ground mount arrays: Germantown Hills has a one-acre minimum requirement. Consideration could be given to establishing such a regulation if the desire is to only allow ground mount arrays on larger properties with adequate greenspace.

**Fiscal Impact:** The allowance of ground mount arrays would likely allow additional properties the ability to contain solar energy systems, particularly those that do not have strong south-facing roofs or those that have other nearby structures that interfere with roof sun angles.

**Action Requested:** Staff requests feedback on whether a zoning code text amendment should be drafted to allow for ground mount solar arrays. Should there be consensus to proceed with that, a public hearing would be scheduled for an upcoming Planning and Zoning Commission meeting prior to the eventual scheduling of a first reading ordinance.