Zoning Code Text Amendments to Permit Solar Energy Systems

Public Staff Conference

October 21, 2026

Welcome & Housekeeping

1. Welcome & Housekeeping
2. Brief presentation
3. Question & Answer
   - Please save all questions/comments until Q&A
   - Use the chat bar only for tech-related issues or questions.

Purpose of Meeting

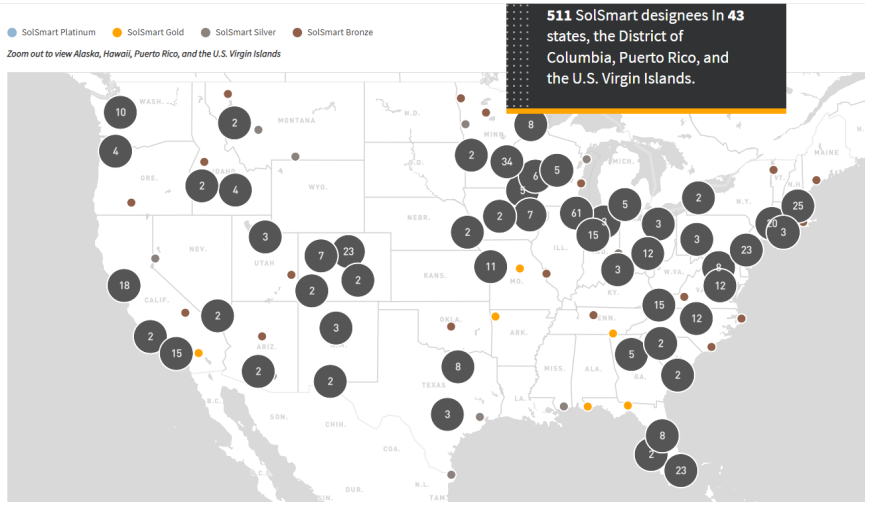
This is a public meeting to inform about the proposed text amendment policy and obtain public input.

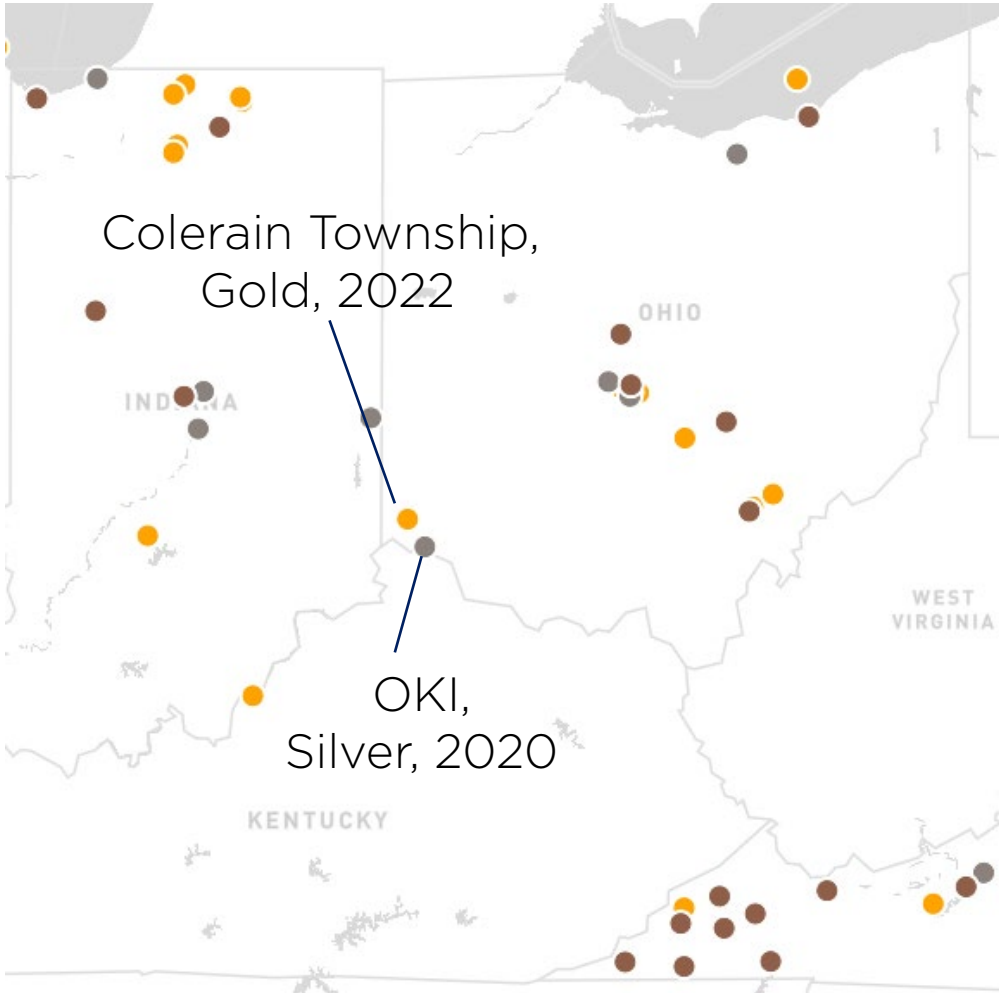
- City staff is here to facilitate the meeting and answer any process-related questions
- **No decisions are being made at this meeting**

SolSmart Certification

SOLSMART

NATIONALLY DISTINGUISHED. **LOCALLY POWERED.**





SolSmart Certification

There are four levels of designation: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Communities achieve designation by meeting prerequisites as well as meeting other elective criteria.



IREC
INTERSTATE RENEWABLE ENERGY COUNCIL
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SOLSMART
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ICMA

SolSmart Categories & Criteria

4 Designation Levels

Bronze	**60 Total Points**	**3 Prerequisite Criteria**
	☐ 20 Points in Permitting & Inspection ☐ 20 Points in Planning & Zoning ☐ 20 Points from any other category	☐ Solar Statement (PR-1) ☐ Solar permitting checklist (PI-1) ☐ Zoning review (PZ-1)
Silver	**100 Total Points**	**4 Prerequisite Criteria**
	☐ Complete bronze designation requirements	☐ Permit staff training (PI-2) ☐ Inspection staff training (PI-3) ☐ Zoning clarification (PZ-4) ☐ Solar landing page (CE-1)
Gold	**200 Total Points**	**3 Prerequisite Criteria**
	☐ Complete silver designation requirements	☐ Permit turnaround time (PI-4) ☐ Zoning accessory use (PZ-5) ☐ Zoning barrier removal (PZ-6)
Platinum	**350 Total Points**	**4 Prerequisite Criteria**
	☐ Complete gold designation requirements	☐ Instant permitting (PI-5) ☐ Post metrics (PI-6) ☐ Install solar (GO-1) ☐ Community partnerships (CE-2)

PR = Prerequisite

5 Criteria Categories

Permitting & Inspection (PI) – 28 Criteria
- Online solar permitting checklist
- Permitting & Inspection staff training
- 3-business day turnaround for residential solar PV

Planning & Zoning (PZ) – 26 Criteria
- **By-Right solar PV use in all major zones**
- **Eliminate barriers to solar PV use in zoning ordinance**

Government Operations (GO) – 14 Criteria
- Install solar PV on government facilities
- Procure solar energy for municipal operations

Community Engagement (CE) – 13 Criteria
- Post a solar landing page on City's website
- Post online resources about consumer protection

Market Development (MD) – 10 Criteria
- Provide residents with Community Choice Aggregation

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Zoning Clarification Letter

"the Zoning Administrator has determined that rooftop solar PV systems are considered part of the ***Principal Structure*** *or* ***Accessory Structure*** *(e.g. detached garage) that they are built on.* ***Ground-mounted solar PV systems installed to serve a principal structure are considered Accessory Structures.****"*

"The following determination clarifies how the accessory use of solar panels in the City of Cincinnati is permitted:

- *Both* ***rooftop and ground mount solar PV systems will be permitted by right in all zoning districts*** *and form-based code transects (relevant to the Land Development Code) within the City of Cincinnati,* ***as long as they meet the development standards*** *for their zoning district or form-based code transect, including setbacks and height, and the property is in compliance with the Zoning Code and Land Development Code."*



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CITY PLANNING & ENGAGEMENT

September 30th, 2024

City of Cincinnati
Zoning Administrator
805 Central Avenue, Suite 500
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

RE: ADVISORY DETERMINATION OF USE – Accessory solar photovoltaic systems

The City of Cincinnati has set several building and energy-related goals under the Green Cincinnati Plan, including obtaining 40% of electricity load from clean energy sources by 2030 and reducing building emissions 30% from 2021 levels by 2030. To support residents and building owners in their adoption of clean energy, the City is pursuing SolSmart designation, which involves establishing processes and guidance to simplify the pathway for solar photovoltaic (PV) system installations.

One way the city is simplifying the process of adopting solar is by providing clarification in and of the Zoning Code and Land Development Code.

The Cincinnati Zoning Code defines two types of structures: **Principal Structure** and **Accessory Structure**. These definitions help determine what development standards apply. An **Accessory Structure** is defined as, *"a structure other than a sign, exclusively associated with a specified principal structure located more than one foot from the principal structure"* (Section 1401-01-A2). A **Principal Structure** is defined as, *"a building or other facility that is designed for or occupied by a principal use"* (Section 1401-01-P16). Currently, the City's Zoning Code does not list solar PV systems as a specific type of structure. Therefore, the Zoning Administrator has determined that **rooftop** solar PV systems are considered part of the Principal Structure or Accessory Structure (e.g. detached garage) that they are built on. **Ground-mounted** solar PV systems installed to serve a principal structure are considered Accessory Structures.

The following determination clarifies how the accessory use of solar panels in the City of Cincinnati is permitted: **Both rooftop and ground mount solar PV systems will be permitted by right in all zoning districts and form-based code transects (relevant to the Land Development Code) within the City of Cincinnati, as long as they meet the development standards for their zoning district or form-based code transect, including setbacks and height, and the property is in compliance with the Zoning Code and Land Development Code.**

This advisory determination does not pertain to solar power generation as a primary use of the property (i.e. a solar farm).

This advisory determination confirms that solar PV systems are permitted as long as they follow applicable development standards, with one caveat: **some historic and urban design overlay guidelines may need additional review regarding locational approval.** The City's Urban Conservator assists with interpretation of historic conservation guidelines, and Zoning Administration staff assist with interpretation of the urban design overlay development standards. Although solar PV panels are allowed by right, on historic properties or within historic districts and urban design overlays they may be subject

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ts like other mechanical equipment (e.g. HVAC systems) and other
for the specific district or overlay.

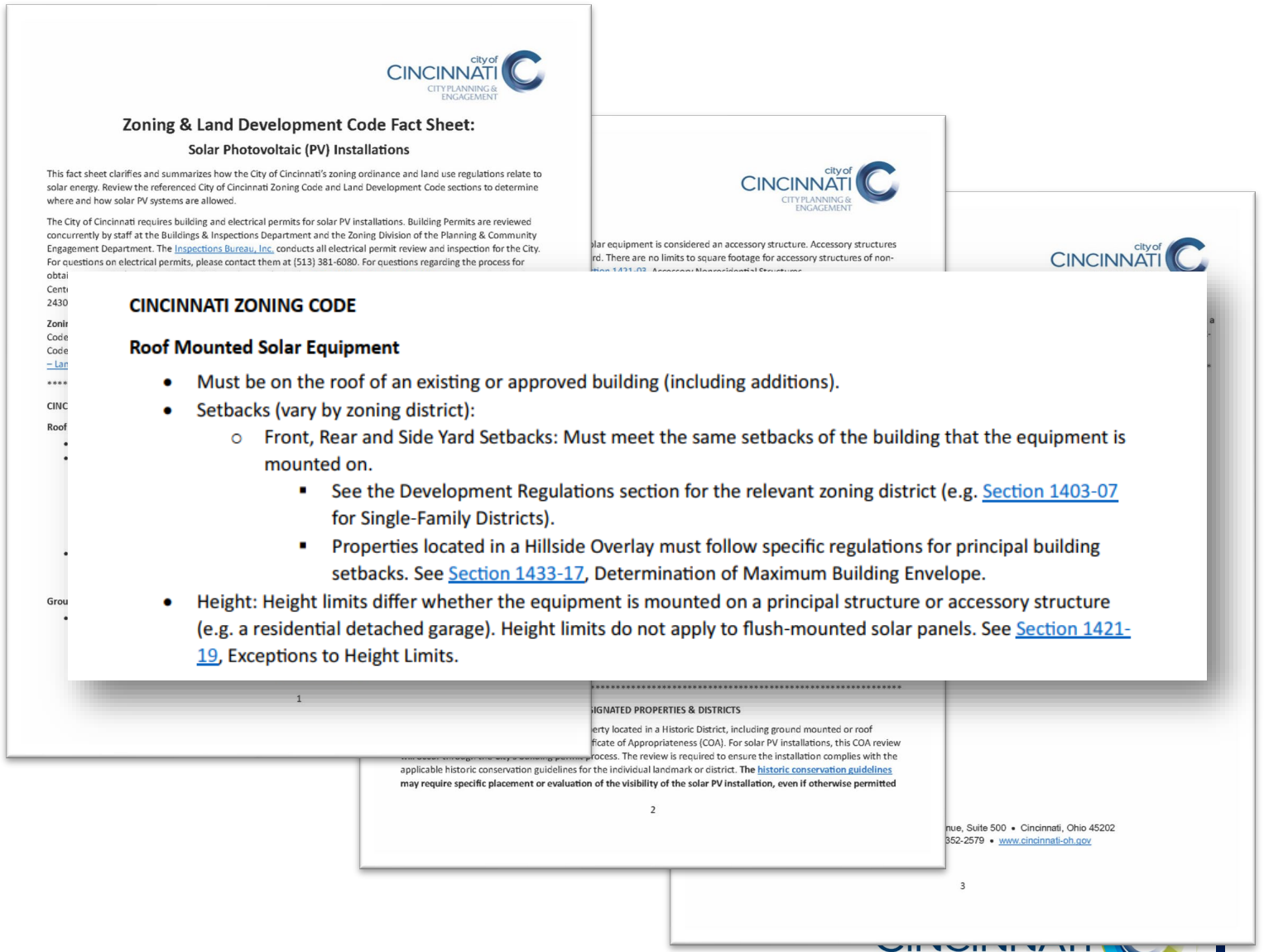
uire building and electrical permits. To find more information and
it the Applications & Forms page of the City's Buildings &
voltaic (PV) Installations"). The City's Solar + Clean Energy page,
& Sustainability's website, has additional information, including a
t Sheet for Solar PV Installations.

ctor, Department of City Planning and Engagement

Solar Zoning Fact Sheet

Clarifies and summarizes how the City of Cincinnati's **zoning ordinance and land use regulations relate to solar energy**:

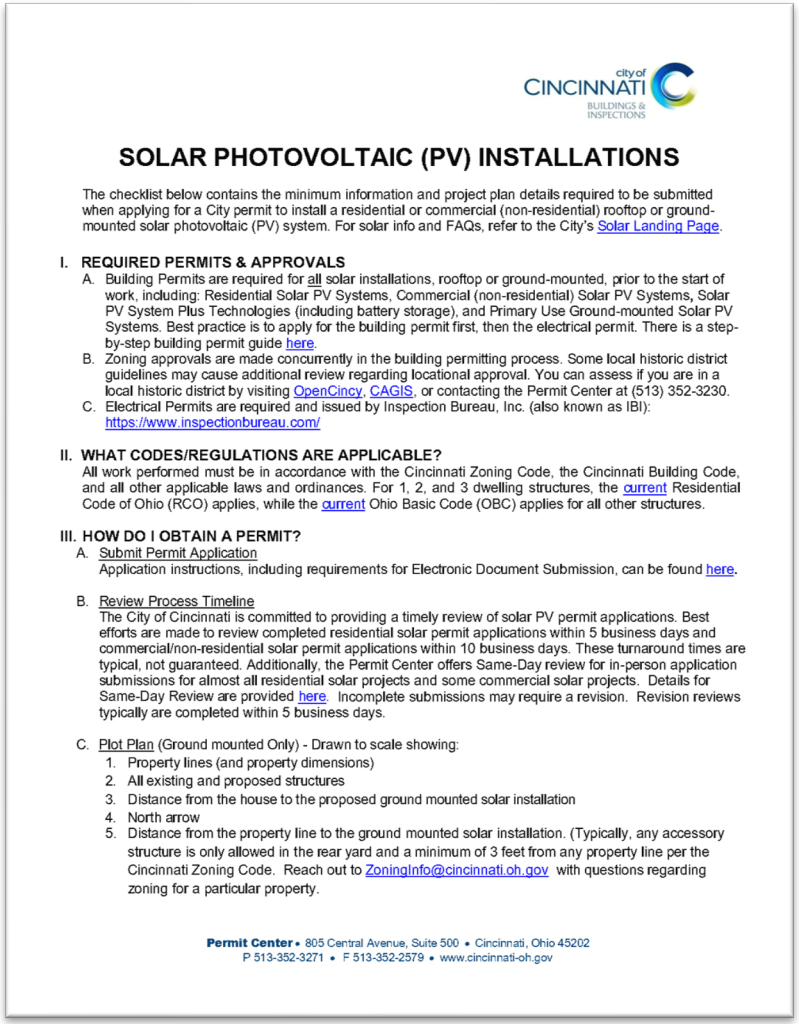
- Roof Mounted Solar Equipment
- Ground Mounted Solar Equipment
- Cincinnati Land Development Code
- Planned Development Districts
- Historically Designated Properties & Districts
- Hillside Overlay District
- Urban Design Overlay Properties



Permitting Checklist

Step-by-step Permitting Guide

- Required permits and approvals
- Applicable regulations
- Permit process
- Contractor requirements
- Permit Fees
- Permit status and tracking
- Post permitting and inspection



city of CINCINNATI BUILDINGS & INSPECTIONS

SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC (PV) INSTALLATIONS

The checklist below contains the minimum information and project plan details required to be submitted when applying for a City permit to install a residential or commercial (non-residential) rooftop or ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) system. For solar info and FAQs, refer to the City's Solar Landing Page.

I. REQUIRED PERMITS & APPROVALS

A. Building Permits are required for all solar installations, rooftop or ground-mounted, prior to the start of work, including: Residential Solar PV Systems, Commercial (non-residential) Solar PV Systems, Solar PV System Plus Technologies (including battery storage), and Primary Use Ground-mounted Solar PV Systems. Best practice is to apply for the building permit first, then the electrical permit. There is a step-by-step building permit guide here.

B. Zoning approvals are made concurrently in the building permitting process. Some local historic district guidelines may cause additional review regarding locational approval. You can assess if you are in a local historic district by visiting OpenCincy, CAGIS, or contacting the Permit Center at (513) 352-3230.

C. Electrical Permits are required and issued by Inspection Bureau, Inc. (also known as IBI): https://www.inspectionbureau.com/

II. WHAT CODES/REGULATIONS ARE APPLICABLE?

All work performed must be in accordance with the Cincinnati Zoning Code, the Cincinnati Building Code, and all other applicable laws and ordinances. For 1, 2, and 3 dwelling structures, the current Residential Code of Ohio (RCO) applies, while the current Ohio Basic Code (OBC) applies for all other structures.

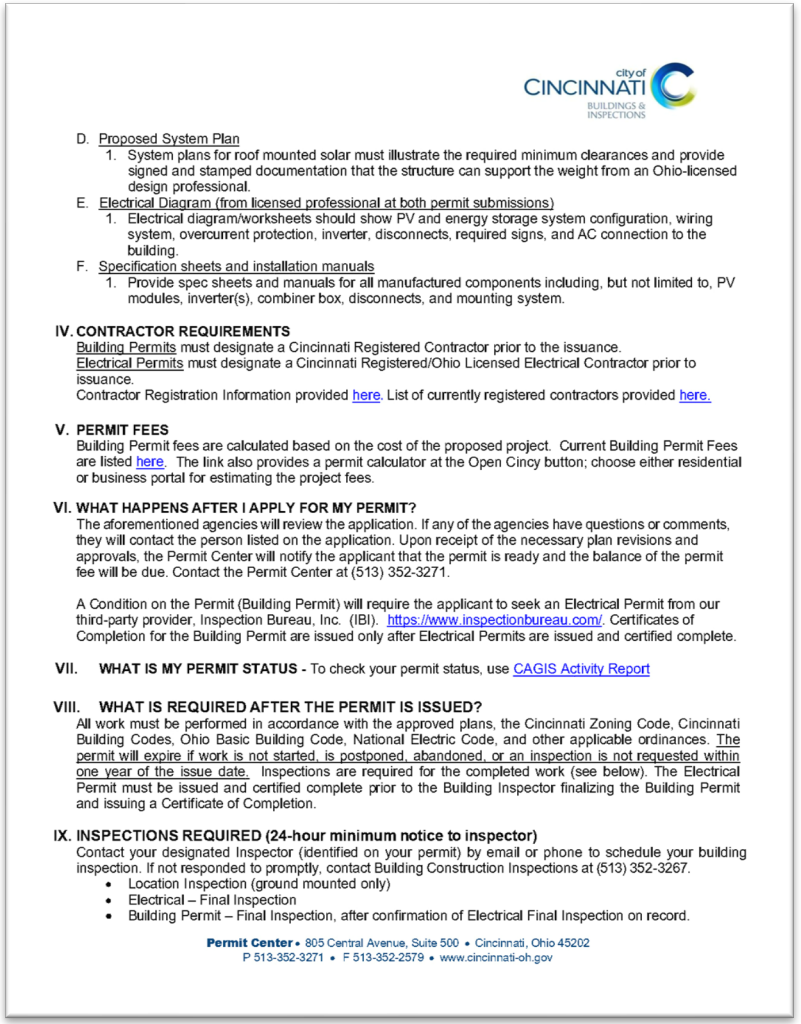
III. HOW DO I OBTAIN A PERMIT?

A. Submit Permit Application
Application instructions, including requirements for Electronic Document Submission, can be found here.

B. Review Process Timeline
The City of Cincinnati is committed to providing a timely review of solar PV permit applications. Best efforts are made to review completed residential solar permit applications within 5 business days and commercial/non-residential solar permit applications within 10 business days. These turnaround times are typical, not guaranteed. Additionally, the Permit Center offers Same-Day review for in-person application submissions for almost all residential solar projects and some commercial solar projects. Details for Same-Day Review are provided here. Incomplete submissions may require a revision. Revision reviews typically are completed within 5 business days.

C. Plot Plan (Ground mounted Only) - Drawn to scale showing:
1. Property lines (and property dimensions)
2. All existing and proposed structures
3. Distance from the house to the proposed ground mounted solar installation
4. North arrow
5. Distance from the property line to the ground mounted solar installation. (Typically, any accessory structure is only allowed in the rear yard and a minimum of 3 feet from any property line per the Cincinnati Zoning Code. Reach out to ZoningInfo@cincinnati.oh.gov with questions regarding zoning for a particular property.

Permit Center • 805 Central Avenue, Suite 500 • Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
P 513-352-3271 • F 513-352-2579 • www.cincinnati-oh.gov



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D. Proposed System Plan
1. System plans for roof mounted solar must illustrate the required minimum clearances and provide signed and stamped documentation that the structure can support the weight from an Ohio-licensed design professional.

E. Electrical Diagram (from licensed professional at both permit submissions)
1. Electrical diagram/worksheets should show PV and energy storage system configuration, wiring system, overcurrent protection, inverter, disconnects, required signs, and AC connection to the building.

F. Specification sheets and installation manuals
1. Provide spec sheets and manuals for all manufactured components including, but not limited to, PV modules, inverter(s), combiner box, disconnects, and mounting system.

IV. CONTRACTOR REQUIREMENTS

Building Permits must designate a Cincinnati Registered Contractor prior to the issuance.
Electrical Permits must designate a Cincinnati Registered/Ohio Licensed Electrical Contractor prior to issuance.
Contractor Registration Information provided here. List of currently registered contractors provided here.

V. PERMIT FEES

Building Permit fees are calculated based on the cost of the proposed project. Current Building Permit Fees are listed here. The link also provides a permit calculator at the Open Cincy button; choose either residential or business portal for estimating the project fees.

VI. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I APPLY FOR MY PERMIT?

The aforementioned agencies will review the application. If any of the agencies have questions or comments, they will contact the person listed on the application. Upon receipt of the necessary plan revisions and approvals, the Permit Center will notify the applicant that the permit is ready and the balance of the permit fee will be due. Contact the Permit Center at (513) 352-3271.

A Condition on the Permit (Building Permit) will require the applicant to seek an Electrical Permit from our third-party provider, Inspection Bureau, Inc. (IBI). https://www.inspectionbureau.com/. Certificates of Completion for the Building Permit are issued only after Electrical Permits are issued and certified complete.

VII. WHAT IS MY PERMIT STATUS - To check your permit status, use CAGIS Activity Report

VIII. WHAT IS REQUIRED AFTER THE PERMIT IS ISSUED?

All work must be performed in accordance with the approved plans, the Cincinnati Zoning Code, Cincinnati Building Codes, Ohio Basic Building Code, National Electric Code, and other applicable ordinances. The permit will expire if work is not started, is postponed, abandoned, or an inspection is not requested within one year of the issue date. Inspections are required for the completed work (see below). The Electrical Permit must be issued and certified complete prior to the Building Inspector finalizing the Building Permit and issuing a Certificate of Completion.

IX. INSPECTIONS REQUIRED (24-hour minimum notice to inspector)

Contact your designated Inspector (identified on your permit) by email or phone to schedule your building inspection. If not responded to promptly, contact Building Construction Inspections at (513) 352-3267.
- Location Inspection (ground mounted only)
- Electrical – Final Inspection
- Building Permit – Final Inspection, after confirmation of Electrical Final Inspection on record.

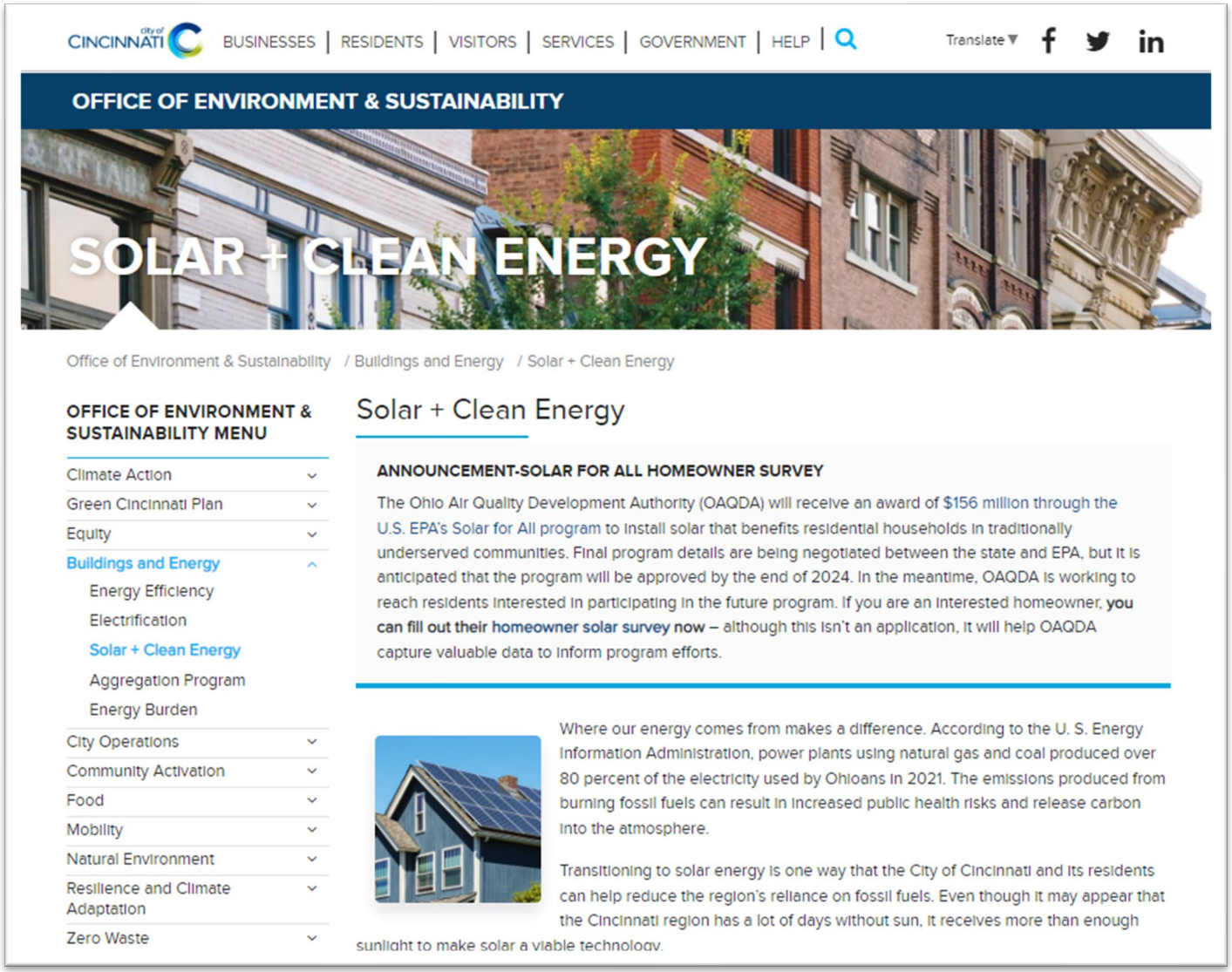
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P 513-352-3271 • F 513-352-2579 • www.cincinnati-oh.gov

Solar Resource Hub

Solar Landing Page

- Homeowner resources
  - Assessing solar potential tools
  - Financing opportunities
  - Permitting checklist
- Policies and Procedures
  - Permitting checklist
  - Zoning clarification letter
  - Zoning and Land Development Code Fact Sheet
- FAQs

https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/oes/buildings-and-energy/solar-and-clean-energy/



Solar Text Amendments Process

Solar Zoning Code Text Amendments Process:

- February 2025 - Professional Stakeholder Focus Group
- March/April 2025 – Public Survey
  - Neighborhood Summit (public survey promotion)
  - City Webpage and Social Media Promotion
- 2025 and 2026 – Research, Policy Creation, and Refinement
  - October 2025 – Cincinnati Achieves Bronze Certification
- October 2026 - Public Staff Conference (today)
- *November 2026 – City Planning Commission
- *End of 2026 – City Council

Engagement Summary

100+ public survey respondents + Professional Stakeholder Focus Group.

Topic	Public Survey	Professional Stakeholders
Top Barriers to Installing Solar	Cost	Cost, inspections, design and permitting, and other
Location of Solar	Both groups okay with locating solar in most places on a lot.	
Height Limits	Both groups okay without any height limits, or limiting to the underlying zoning regulations.	
Screening Requirements	Most liked screening (e.g. vegetation, fencing), but should not be required.	
Solar Canopy Size Limits	Majority did not want size limits or thought it should follow setbacks.	

Proposed Policy | Definitions

Zoning Code:

- Solar Energy Systems (SES)
- Ground-mounted SES
- Roof-Mounted SES
- Added SES to existing definitions:
  - *Public Utility Distribution System*
  - *Public Utility Plant*



Form-Based Code:

- Solar Energy Systems
- Added SES to existing definitions:
  - *Accessory Structure*
  - *Utility*



Proposed Policy | Permissions in Zoning Districts

Solar as an Accessory Use

- Allowed in All Zoning Districts
- Solar Canopies permitted anywhere a parking space is permitted, including over driveways.



Solar as a Primary Use

- Only where Public Utilities Plants or Public Utility Distribution Systems are permitted.
- No changes to utility permission in each district.



Proposed Policy | Development Regulations

Development Regulations:

- New dedicated Solar section:
  - Where solar is permitted on a lot
  - How regulations apply
  - Relationship with base zoning districts
- All other development regulations must follow the zoning districts they are in.
  - Each District's Development Regulations section will reference back to 1419-42.



Proposed Policy | Development Regulations

Proposed Development Regulations	
Roof Mounted Solar	
Flush mounted	Allowed, special overlays supersede
Non-residential uses	10’ height or less, or Special Exception needed
Residential uses	No additional height allowed beyond zoning district limit
All other Dev. Regs. follow base zoning limits	
Ground Mounted Solar	
Non-residential uses	Allowed in rear and side yards
Residential uses	Allowed in rear yards.
All other Dev. Regs. follow base zoning limits	
Solar Canopies	
Allowed anywhere surface parking is, including driveways	







Question & Answer

- Please **remain muted** while others are speaking.
- Everyone will get an opportunity to speak.
- Use the chat bar only for tech-related issues or questions.

Next Steps & Contact

Next Steps:

City Planning Commission

- Friday, November 20, 2026 at 9:00 AM

Housing and Growth City Council Committee

- Tuesday, December 8, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Contact:

Maria Dienger | Senior City Planner

maria.dienger@cincinnati-oh.gov

https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/planning/projects/active/zoning-study-and-text-amendments-to-reduce-barriers-for-expanding-solar-energy/