



Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: *Commercial Solar Facilities – Processing Timelines and Road Frontage*

To: DPZ-DLD, DPZ-DED, OCS, OOT, DPW-Traffic, DILP

From: Amy Gowan, Director 
Department of Planning and Zoning

Date: July 5, 2022

This policy memorandum serves to memorialize Howard County's revised Site Development Plan processing timelines and revised road frontage requirements for Commercial Solar Facilities (CSFs).

This revision is based on County policy to encourage and facilitate the construction of solar power sources inside the county as they are critical in meeting the County's goal of zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and the aggressive renewable energy goals to be set in the forthcoming Climate Action Plan. These revisions will support the Office of Community Sustainability's County-wide solar initiative by establishing clear expectations from the start of the project, and provide fiscal predictability to Commercial Solar Facilities developers and partners.

1) Expedited Processing

The following review and approval timelines have been established for commercial solar facilities:

- Environmental Concept Plan (ECP) review by County – 3 weeks
- Site Development Plan (SDP) review by County – 3 weeks

The SDP can be submitted upon approval of the ECP and can begin processing according to the 3-week timeline while the ECP mylars are being routed and signed.

- Building Permits- Department of Inspections, Licensing, and Permits (DILP) will accept Building Permits once the SDP is Technically Complete, as long as no SDP

modifications would require additional DILP review. DILP will not approve the permits until the SDP and mylars are signed.

To note: The review timelines are for county review. If the county requests a revised SDP, a new three-week timeframe would begin once the revised plans are submitted.

2) Road Frontage Improvements

- CSFs are generally sited on parcel(s) that have varying degrees of public road frontage or are internal to the parcel and do not impact the public road right of way.
- CSF's vehicle trip generation rates are comparable to utility plants or cell phone towers and therefore do not generate sufficient vehicle trips to trigger the Adequate Public Facilities road studies requirement and frontage improvements.
- While some projects are located in the "eastern" portion of the county, defined here as inside the priority funding area many are located outside this area on large, unimproved farm parcels.
- The road improvements required for CSFs are typically 8' shoulders. The length of frontage for some of these parcels can be quite extensive and can require thousands of feet of shoulder improvements that can trigger associated actions to relocate or expand bridges and culverts, add stormwater management and disturb environmental areas. These associated actions have made it difficult to design and implement road improvements; this has resulted in the county taking a fee-in-lieu in most cases.

Therefore, the County will allow a fee in lieu, or limited road improvements, when the solar panels (Impact Area) in a CSF are located adjacent to the frontage of a public road. These improvements or fee in lieu will be for the length of the public road adjacent to the Impact Area and the fee shall be based on county-approved unit costs. If a fee is taken instead of road improvements, the developer shall also place a right of way reservation equal in width to the current road functional classification criteria on the SDP for the length of the parcel's frontage. This land can then be dedicated to the County with any future capital improvement project.