Planning Commission
App. No. 037-2024 TA

Zoning Text Amendment

Lafayette Township

Meeting: July 3, 2024
Applicant: Lafayette Township Zoning Commission (ZC)
Hearing: May 14, 2024
Amendments: Section 223 Alternative Energy Sources-Solar Collection System Panel
Reviewer: Denise Testa
Recommendation: **APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS**

Proposal: In a letter dated May 17, 2024, Karen Schoonover, Lafayette Township Zoning Commission Secretary, requested a review of changes to the Lafayette Township Zoning Resolution.

New text is underlined, and deleted text is shown as a ~~strikethrough~~. Staff comments are ***bold and italicized***.

SECTION 223 ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES – SOLAR COLLECTION SYSTEM/PANELS (Effective 7/17/13)

~~Solar Panels, for on-site energy use only, shall be allowed in all zoning districts either attached to permitted principal or accessory buildings or as accessory structures subject to the following regulations.~~ All solar panels/systems require a permit. Solar Collection System/ Panels are considered an accessory system and shall be allowed in all zoning districts, either attached to permitted principal or accessory buildings or as accessory structures subject to the following regulations. A system is considered an accessory solar energy system only if it supplies electrical or thermal power solely for on-site use, except that when a property upon which the system is installed also receives electrical power supplied by a utility company, excess electrical power generated and not presently needed for on-site use may be used by the utility company.

Staff support this portion of the text amendment. According to the American Planning Association, zoning resolutions that allow for minor, ground-mounted installations as accessory systems establish clear regulatory pathways for said systems and assists with the expansion of local solar installations.

Does the Zoning Resolution include alternative energy sources – solar collection system/panels in the definition section?

Attached to Building – Where attached to a building the solar panels shall be subject to the same regulations as the building in terms of height and setbacks. Solar panels may be attached to the roof or the building wall, but not to both.

A. Roof mounted panels shall include solar panels integrated as the surface layer of the roof structure with no additional apparent change in relief or projection (the preferred installation), or separate flush-mounted solar panels attached to the roof surface.

1. Solar panels integrated, as the surface layer of the roof structure may be located on any part of the roof.
2. Separate flush-mounted solar panels installed on a building or structure with a sloped roof surface shall not project vertically above the peak of the roof to which it is attached.
3. Solar panels mounted on a flat roof shall not project vertically higher than the height of the parapet wall surrounding the roof or shall be screened by architectural features.

B. Flush-mounted solar panels on the building wall shall not face a street. ~~may only be attached to one (1) side or rear building façade and shall not face a street.~~

C. Free-Standing – Solar panels that are not attached to a building shall be permitted as accessory structures subject to the following regulations:

1. Free-standing solar panels shall be permitted in the rear and side yard only.
2. Free-standing solar panels shall be a minimum setback of ten (10) feet from the furthest panel to the ~~set back six (6) feet from the~~ side and rear lot lines.
3. Free-standing solar panels shall not exceed a height of ~~four (4) feet~~ ten (10) feet at their highest level.
4. The surface area covered by a free-standing system shall not exceed one thousand square feet. ~~two percent (2%) of the lot or three hundred sixty (360) square feet, whichever is less. Area covered shall be included in the lot coverage calculations for the lot.~~
5. All power lines shall be underground.

D. Glare-Solar panels shall be placed and arranged such that reflected ~~solar radiation or~~ glare shall not be directed onto adjacent buildings, properties, or roadways.

According to Forge Solar, "glare is defined as a continuous source of bright light associated with stationary objects…" Determining the existence of glare impacting a nearby or adjacent property is a challenging task and may be problematic and expensive to confirm with small scale solar panels/systems. Ohio communities such as Highland and Knox Counties have considered glint and glare studies for large-scale solar projects. Staff did not find a strategy to address glare generated by small-scale solar projects.

E. ~~Permits are required.~~ (Note from Township: This is addressed in opening statement.)

F. Building/Zoning Permit – Solar energy systems shall conform to applicable industry standards, including all applicable local building, plumbing and electrical codes. A zoning permit shall be required for all solar system/ panel installations, except a solar energy system with a generation output of five hundred (500) watts or less, or a combination of accessory solar energy systems with an aggregate generation output of five hundred (500) watts or less, shall not require a permit and shall be exempt from the requirements of this section, provided that the system is independent and disconnected from the electrical service supplied to the lot on which the solar energy system is located. All applicants for solar panels shall submit a site drawing showing the location of the units in relation to existing structures on the property along with adjacent property sites and structures, ~~which are within three hundred feet (300') of the applicant's site~~.

Staff recommend sending the text amendment for review by the Medina County Prosecutor's Office.

Recommendation: Planning Services staff recommend the Planning Commission **APPROVE WITH MODIFICIATIONS** the proposed amendments to the Lafayette Township Zoning Resolution.