



**COLUMBIA CITY/WHITLEY COUNTY
JOINT PLANNING & BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

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RE: Solar fields and solar arrays

Inquiries for solar power installations are becoming more common in Whitley County. For the record, the following interpretations of the zoning and building codes have been made regarding these uses. Note that some covenants and restrictions may have further regulations regarding solar installations.

Roof-mounted arrays

Solar photovoltaic modules mounted to the roof of compliant structures and uses are permitted in all zoning districts. They are subject to the same development standards (e.g. height, setbacks) as the structure to which they are attached. A building permit is required.

Ground-mounted arrays, accessory use

Solar photovoltaic arrays that are ground-mounted, installed on a property with a zoning-compliant primary use (e.g. a residence, business, etc.), and used mostly to power that primary use are considered accessory uses. This applies even if the installation also has the ability to backfeed energy to the power grid. Development standards for accessory uses apply, including lot coverage, and a building permit is required.

Ground-mounted arrays, primary use

Solar photovoltaic arrays that are ground-mounted and designed to supply electricity to the power grid are defined as power generators/power plants and are considered primary uses. Such uses are currently only permissible in certain zoning districts. This includes IN and IPM (by special exception) in the County and, in some circumstances, I-1 and I-2 in Columbia City. Development standards for primary uses apply, including lot coverage. A review of each individual proposal is needed to fully determine applicable code regulations, but a minimum of a Development Plan and building permit are required.

Other solar systems

Concentrated solar power systems used for power generation as a primary use are significantly different than photovoltaic systems due to inherent differences in their performance effects, and this interpretation does not apply to them.

Solar thermal collectors used for heating and generally of a similar scale and design as photovoltaic installations may be treated in a similar manner as outlined above, depending on the specifics of the proposal. A building permit could be required.

Nathan Bilger, AICP
Executive Director

Note that this is an administrative determination that may be subject to appeal to the Board of Zoning Appeals under I.C. 36-7-4-919.