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THE TOWN OF COVENTRY

ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

IN AMENDMENT OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY CODE OF ORDINANCES,
2008 PART II – GENERAL LEGISLATION,
CHAPTER 255, ARTICLE XXI – Special Regulations – Solar Power Generators

Ordinance No. 2026-16

The Town Council of the Town of Coventry hereby ordains as follows:

Section 1. The Town of Coventry Code of Ordinance, Part II General Legislation is hereby amended by amending the following Chapter and Sections of Article XXI:

Article XXI, Chapter 255 — Zoning (Special Regulations – Solar Power Generators)

§ 255-2140 Ground-mounted solar installations.

A. Minor solar installations. Minor solar installations are permitted in all zones as an accessory use. Minor solar installations shall comply with all dimensional requirements for accessory structures as required by Article IX of this chapter.

B. Medium and major solar installations.

(1) All medium and major solar installation require the issuance of a use variance pursuant to Article IV of this chapter.

(2) Medium solar installations covering more than 20,000 square feet of area shall require minor land development approval from the Planning Commission pursuant to Coventry's Subdivision and Land Development Regulations.

(3) Unless otherwise specified by this article, medium solar installations shall meet all applicable zone requirements for accessory structures, including but not limited to lighting, and signage.

C. Major solar installations.

(1) All major solar installations require the issuance of a use variance pursuant to Article IV of this chapter and major land development approval from the Planning Commission pursuant to Article V of the Coventry Subdivision and Land Development Regulations.

D. General design standards for all ground-mounted solar installations.

45 (1) Ground-mounted solar installations shall not exceed 12 feet in height as measured from the
46 original grade of the ground surface to the highest point of the solar installation, including the top
47 of any support structure or panel. The Planning Commission may allow heights exceeding 12 feet
48 in nonresidential zones for solar parking lot canopies.

49
50 (2) No removal of topsoil or unnecessary grading/disturbance of the ground is permitted as part of
51 the installation or maintenance of a ground-mounted solar installation. Any topsoil that must be
52 moved shall be stored and stabilized on-site for future use.

53
54 (3) To the maximum extent practicable, all ground-mounted solar installations shall be located so
55 as to take advantage of existing cleared land. Clearing of forest or woodland shall be avoided to
56 the greatest extent practicable.

57
58 (4) To the maximum extent practicable, all cleared areas below and surrounding a ground-mounted
59 solar installation shall be maintained in a vegetated state to stabilize soils and prevent erosion.

60
61 (5) To the maximum extent practicable, all electrical connection and distribution lines shall be
62 located entirely within the structure of the solar installation, underground, or within the structure
63 to which the installation is supplying energy. Electrical equipment between the installation and the
64 utility connection may be above-ground if required by the utility.

65
66 E. Supplemental design standards and requirements for major and medium solar installations.

67
68 (1) Whenever development plan review is required for a major or medium solar installation, the
69 application shall include:

70
71 (a) The proposed site layout detailing any landscape changes, including but not limited to any
72 clearing of trees or forest that has occurred during the 24 months prior to application;

73
74 (b) A diagram of all electrical components;

75
76 (c) A description of the major system components to be used;

77
78 (d) An operation and maintenance plan including measures for maintaining safe access to the
79 installation, stormwater controls, as well as general procedures for operational maintenance of the
80 installation;

81
82 (e) A decommissioning plan in conformance with this chapter, including an acceptable form of
83 “Financial Security” as authorized and defined in the Town of Coventry Code of Ordinances, Part
84 II General Legislation, Chapter 123 as proof of financial surety for the removal of the solar
85 installation;

86
87 (f) Proof that the appropriate utility company authority has been notified of the applicant's intent
88 to construct a solar distributed generation facility and to submit an interconnection application
89 (required with initial submission at pre-application or master plan phase);

90

- 91 (g) Proof of utility interconnection approval (required not later than preliminary plan phase);
92
93 (h) Any memorandum of lease, easement, or utility/distribution agreements;
94
95 (i) Proof of liability insurance;
96
97 (j) The contact information for the project contractors;
98
99 (k) A shading analysis;
100
101 (l) A viewscape analysis demonstrating that the reasonable steps have been taken in the siting of
102 the proposed solar installation to reduce negative impacts on rural and forested viewscales;
103
104 (m) A landscape plan (where required); and,
105
106 (n) Additional documents may be required by the Planning Commission. The Planning
107 Commission may waive requirements of the land development review process upon written
108 request of the applicant at pre-application.
109
110 (2) Setbacks and coverage. All medium and major solar installations shall maintain the property
111 line setbacks for nurseries or greenhouses as set forth in dimensional regulations (Code § 255-610
112 of this chapter). Maximum lot coverage shall be 15%.
113
114 (3) Buffers. All medium and major solar installations shall maintain a vegetated buffer between
115 the installation and all property boundaries to screen the solar installation from view from abutting
116 properties and roads. Buffers may be incorporated into the required setback area.
117
118 (a) Medium solar installations in residential zones shall maintain a vegetated buffer of not less than
119 20 feet.
120
121 (b) Major solar installations in residential zones shall maintain a vegetated buffer of not less than
122 40 feet. A buffer plan prepared by a registered landscape architect and incorporating native species
123 from the Rhode Island Native Plant Database shall be submitted as part of the project's application
124 for major land development.
125
126 (c) All access roads through the buffer shall be angled or curved to obstruct views of the solar
127 installation.
128
129 (d) Existing vegetation shall be supplemented with additional native species where necessary to
130 ensure that the buffer adequately screens the solar installation from view beyond the property
131 boundaries on a year-round basis.
132
133 (e) Medium and major solar installations in industrial, commercial and business zones may request
134 permission from the Zoning Board of Review or, in the case of a Unified Development Review,
135 the Planning Commission to use a reduced ten-foot hybrid buffer that combines a vegetated buffer

136 with solid or slatted security fencing to both secure and obscure view of the panels. The ten-foot
137 hybrid buffer shall be extended to 20 feet where the solar installation abuts a residential zone.

138
139 (4) Security. A fence shall surround the perimeter of a major or medium ground-mounted solar
140 installation of no less than seven and no more than 10 feet in height.

141
142 (5) Emergency services. The owner or operator shall provide a copy of the project summary,
143 electrical schematic and site plan to the local fire chief. Upon request, the owner or operator shall
144 cooperate with the local emergency services in developing an emergency response plan. Upon
145 request, the owner or operator shall cooperate with the local emergency services to conduct basic
146 on-site safety and operational training. The owner or operator shall identify a responsible person
147 for public inquiries throughout the life of the solar installation.

148
149 (6) Signage. No signs are allowed on the security perimeter fencing except for a sign displaying
150 the installation name, address and emergency contact information, and trespassing/warning/danger
151 signs to ensure the safety of individuals who may come in contact with the installation. No sign
152 shall exceed four square feet in area. Externally lit signs must be orientated such that the light is
153 directed away from any adjacent properties and traffic arteries.

154
155 (7) Lighting. Lighting of solar installations shall be consistent with local, state and federal law and
156 shall be limited to that required for safety and operational purposes. Light fixtures shall either be
157 approved by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) or meet the criteria for such approval
158 and shall be both fully shielded and full cut-off. All lighting fixtures shall be shielded so as to
159 prevent light from being directed onto neighboring properties.

160
161 (8) Removal of solar installations. The property owner and the owner/operators of the solar
162 installation shall be jointly and severally responsible for removing all obsolete, abandoned or
163 unused equipment within 12 months after a solar installation has ceased operations. Removal shall
164 include:

165
166 (a) Physical removal of all systems, structures, equipment, wiring and security from the site both
167 above and below ground.

168
169 (b) All removed components shall be recycled whenever feasible.

170
171 (c) Disposal of all solid and hazardous waste in accordance with local, state and federal waste
172 disposal regulations; and

173
174 (d) Stabilization or revegetation of the site as necessary to minimize erosion. The Town may allow
175 the owner or operator to leave landscaping or designated below grade foundations in order to
176 minimize erosion and disruption to vegetation.

177
178 (9) Decommissioning. Unless otherwise approved in writing by the Planning Commission, all
179 major and medium solar installations shall be removed in accordance with their approved
180 decommissioning plan. Prior to beginning decommissioning operations, the owner or operator
181 shall notify the Building Official by USPS certified mail of the proposed dates for discontinuing

182 operation of the installation and commencing removal activities, and the anticipated date for
183 completing the decommissioning.

184
185 (10) Abandonment. Absent prior written approval from the Planning Commission extending the
186 time for removal of a solar installation for extenuating circumstances, a solar installation shall be
187 considered abandoned when it has been nonoperational for more than one year. If an owner or
188 operator fails to remove a solar installation within 150 days of abandonment, the Town may take
189 unilateral action to remove the solar installation without further notice at the owner's or operator's
190 expense.

191
192 (11) Financial security. Applicants shall provide an acceptable form of "Financial Security" as
193 authorized and defined in the Town of Coventry Code of Ordinances, Part II General Legislation,
194 Chapter 123 ~~a form of surety, either through escrow account, bond or otherwise,~~ to cover the cost
195 of removal in the event the Town must remove the installation and restore the landscape. The
196 amount and form of said Financial Security ~~surety~~ shall be determined by the Planning
197 Commission with review and input by the Town Engineer, Town Finance Director and Town
198 Solicitor and such other Town officials as deemed necessary. As part of any lease agreements, the
199 applicant shall submit a fully inclusive estimate of the costs associated with removal. The Financial
200 Security ~~surety~~ amount established by the Planning Commission shall include a mechanism for
201 calculating increased removal costs due to inflation and any expected salvage or resale value. Such
202 surety will not be required for municipally or state-owned installations.

203
204 (12) Modifications. All material modifications to a solar installation made after issuance of the
205 required building permit shall require approval by the Planning Department. Any addition to the
206 size of the area will require a new application.

207
208 **Section 2.** This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and final adoption.

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228 Approved as to Form:

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231 _____
Town Solicitor

Date

232

233

234

235 Introduced by/Pursuant to:

Council

236

237 Referred to/for: First Reading of the Ordinance on _____, 2026

238

239 Planning Commission for recommendation on _____, 2026

240

241 Public Hearing before the Town Council on _____, 2026

242

243

244 Passed or Denied on a vote of _____

245

246

247 _____
John-Paul A. Verducci – Town Council President

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250 Approved:

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253 _____
Daniel O. Parrillo – Town Manager

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256 Certification Actions by Town Clerk:

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258 _____