Guidance for Local Planning and Zoning to Promote Solar

Roof-mounted Solar as an Accessory Use. According to the Solar Energy Industries Association, there are over 3 million solar energy systems in the United States, the vast majority of which are on residential property. Add to this commercial roof-mounted solar energy systems, and it is clear that the roof-mounted solar industry is well developed, professional, and experienced with installing systems safely and effectively.

Despite the widespread installation of roof-mounted solar, some local government zoning codes fail to address roof-mounted solar. This can cause uncertainty, delays, and increased costs for roof-mounted solar projects. If your local government wants to take a proactive approach to permitting solar, you can adopt the simple model language below to make it clear that roof-mounted solar is allowed by right in all zoning districts. Local governments should feel free to add to, subtract from, or modify this language based on local conditions or policy preferences. As always, work with your county or city attorney to make sure all legal requirements are met.

> "*Section [X]. Roof-mounted Solar Energy Systems as Accessory Uses*.
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> a) A solar energy system is any device or structural design feature used for the collection, storage, and distribution of solar energy for space heating, space cooling, lighting, electric generation, or water heating. A roof-mounted solar energy system is a solar energy system that is structurally mounted to the roof of a building or structure.
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> b) Roof-mounted solar energy systems are allowed by right in all zoning districts as accessory uses, and they may be mounted on principal and accessory structures.
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> c) All applicable setback regulations apply to roof-mounted solar energy systems.
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> d) Roof-mounted solar energy systems may not extend more than three feet above the applicable maximum building height limit for the subject building type or more than five feet above the highest point of the roof line, whichever is less.
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> e) Notwithstanding any general limits on accessory uses to the contrary, there are no screening requirements or restrictions based on visibility for roof-mounted solar energy systems
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> f) Owners of roof-mounted solar energy systems are solely responsible for negotiating with other property owners for any desired solar easements to protect access to sunlight. Any such easements must be recorded with the county recorder of deeds.
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> g) All roof-mounted solar energy systems shall be permitted in accordance with the state minimum standard codes, including the applicable parts of the building and electrical codes. Software systems, such as SolarAPP+, may be used to expedite permitting and inspection of roof-mounted solar energy systems so long as they meet the requirements of the state minimum standard codes."

Comprehensive Planning to Promote Solar. To move beyond the easy first step of making roof-mounted solar allowed by right as an accessory use, local governments could use their comprehensive planning processing to explore more ideas for promoting solar.

1. *Set a Community Goal for Roof-Mounted Solar Energy Systems*. A local government could, using free tools like Google's Project Sunroof, identify a community goal for roof-mounted solar

energy systems based on the number, size, building age, orientation of roofs, and solar potential of roofs. By setting a goal and tracking the community's progress, this would help policy makers decide whether to create local incentives and/or reduce barriers and disincentives.

2. *Identify Roof-mounted Solar Opportunities on Local Government Buildings and Structures*. Using free tools like Google's Project Sunroof, a community could identify and plan to install roof-top solar on roofs and structures with good sun exposure. For roofs owned by other federal, state, or local governments, the local government could plan to engage these third parties and encourage them to pursue their own roof-mounted solar energy systems or otherwise partner with the local government.

3. *Consider Solar Ready Requirements for New Buildings.* Solar-ready codes for new construction (one- and two- family dwellings, multifamily, workplaces, etc.) can help make future solar installations easier and more cost effective. As defined by the National Renewable Energy Laboratories (NREL) overview of Solar Ready Implementation Practices, "solar ready buildings designed with continuous roof space uninterrupted by roof equipment, minimal roof shading throughout the year, and a roof oriented on an east-west horizontal axis can increase production and shorten simple payback periods." Solar-ready codes can be included in the residential and/or building code, the green building code, or the zoning ordinance. The 2018 International Energy Conservation Code includes appendices for solar-ready zones in both the residential and commercial code.

4. *Evaluate Opportunities for Ground-Mounted Solar*. In metropolitan Atlanta, land costs tend to be very high, which makes ground-mounted solar less economical compared to rural areas. However, some local governments may encompass land that has limited development potential that would in turn result in lower land costs and higher ground-mounted solar profitability. Through the comprehensive planning process, any such areas of land could be identified, and zoning rules could be established to allow ground-mounted solar.