

APPROVED:
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Town of Cheshire Guidelines for Solar on Historic Properties

Sections

1. OVERVIEW
2. TYPES OF SOLAR
3. PROCEDURE
4. GENERAL GUIDANCE
5. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: BUILDING-MOUNTED SOLAR
6. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: FREESTANDING SOLAR
7. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: SOLAR PARKING LOT CANOPIES
8. HDC REGULATION RE: SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS & OTHER RENEWABLE RESOURCES

TOWN OF CHESHIRE - HDC GUIDELINES FOR SOLAR

1. OVERVIEW

A. Intent

These guidelines aim to assist property owners submitting applications to the Town of Cheshire for the installation of solar energy systems within historic districts. The town's overall objective is to preserve character-defining features and the historic fabric in its historic districts, while accommodating the need for solar access. The Historic District Commission reviews all applications on a case-by-case basis and makes decisions based on applicable statutes, regulations and ordinances. Therefore, following these guidelines may not automatically assure approval.

B. Applicability

These guidelines apply to properties in the Cornwall Avenue – Town Center and South Brooksvale Road Historic Districts.

C. Regulations and Requirements

Proposed solar projects must meet the zoning regulations and requirements of the building code.

2. TYPES OF SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS

The Town of Cheshire recognizes that there are three types of solar energy system installations.

A. Solar – Building-Mounted

A solar energy system that is affixed to or an integral part of a principal or accessory building, including but not limited to photovoltaic or hot water solar energy systems which are contained within roofing materials, windows, skylights, and awnings.

B. Solar – Freestanding

A solar energy system with a supporting framework that is placed on, or anchored in, the ground and that is independent of any building or other structure other than parking lot canopy solar energy systems.

C. Solar – Parking Lot Canopy

A solar energy system with a supporting framework that is placed on, or anchored in, the ground and that is independent of any building or other structure, which is used in a parking lot or the top story of a parking structure to shade vehicles parked in such lot or structure.

3. PROCEDURE

Historic Commission Review and Approval

All applications will be reviewed by the Historic District Commission which will determine whether a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) and requisite public hearing is required.

4. GENERAL GUIDANCE

A. Overall Goal

When planning the installation of solar panels on historic properties, the overall goal is to reduce the visual impacts of solar panels as seen from the public right-of-way (usually the street) and to preserve character-defining features and the historic fabric of the property and district.

B. Case-By-Case Basis

All solar panel installations must be considered on a case-by-case basis, recognizing that the best option will depend on the characteristics of the property under consideration.

C. Recommended: the Secretary of the Interior Standards

All solar panel installations should conform to the applicable U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which can be found at Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 76 (36 CFR 76). In particular, the following standards apply:

- (1) "The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided." (Standard Two)
- (2) "New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic material that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment." (Standard Nine)

D. Not Recommended

Property owners should not submit applications that propose any of the following things:

- (1) Remove historic roofing materials in order to install, or during the installation of, solar systems.
- (2) Remove or otherwise alter the historic roof configuration – dormers, chimneys, or other features – to add solar systems.

TOWN OF CHESHIRE - HDC GUIDELINES FOR SOLAR

- (3) Use an installation procedure that will cause irreversible changes to historic features or materials.
- (4) Locate a solar panel on a primary or street-facing roof plane.
- (5) Use solar systems in historic windows or on wall, siding, and shutters, unless consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.
- (6) Place or design solar panels that detract from the historic character of the site or destroy historic landscape materials.
- (7) System that covers the entire roof with solar panels.

5. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: BUILDING MOUNTED SOLAR

Part A provides guidance on building-mounted solar in historic districts. Cheshire's zoning rules allow building mounted solar in every zoning district.

A. Historic Preservation Guidance

(1) On the Roof – Photovoltaic Systems or Solar Shingles on Flat Roofs.

- (a) Position the system or shingles behind existing architectural features – such as parapet, dormers, or chimneys – and set them back from the roof edge to limit visibility from the public right-of-way.
- (b) Adjust pitch and elevation to reduce visibility from the public right-of-way.
- (c) Refer to Section 5.2.5 of the HDC Regulations (which is attached) for possible design modifications and limitations.

(2) On the Roof – Photovoltaic Systems on Pitched Roofs

- (a) Place the system on a roof face, such as the rear roof, which cannot be seen from the public right of way, as long as doing so does not materially impair the performance of the solar system.
- (b) Position the system behind existing architectural features – such as parapets, dormers, or chimneys – to limit its visibility from the street. See Figure D.
- (c) Use equipment that is compatible in color to established roof materials so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.

TOWN OF CHESHIRE - HDC GUIDELINES FOR SOLAR

- (d) Mount panels flush to the roof face as much as possible.
- (e) Refer to Section 5.2.5 of the HDC Regulations (which is attached) for possible design modifications and limitations.

(3) On the Roof – Solar Shingles on Pitched Roofs

- (a) Place the shingles on a roof face, such as the rear roof, which cannot be seen from the public right-of-way, as long as doing so does not materially impair the performance of the solar system.
- (b) Position the solar shingles behind existing architectural features – such as parapets, dormers, or chimneys – to limit their visibility from the street.
- (c) Use solar shingles that are compatible in material and color to established roof material so as to be as unobtrusive as possible.
- (d) Choose solar shingles that are specifically designed for historic properties, including solar shingles that mimic slate or terra cotta tiles, where appropriate.
- (e) Refer to Section 5.2.5 of the HDC Regulations (which is attached) for possible design modifications and limitations.

(4) On Walls – Solar Windows

- (a) Use transparent solar window, rather than tinted or patterned solar windows, wherever possible.
- (b) Place solar windows which would affect the profiles of historic window frames or which are not transparent on building facades not visible from the public right-of-way.

(5) On Walls – Solar Awnings

- (a) Place solar awnings on building facades not visible from the public right-of-way.
- (b) Adjust pitch to conform to and complement historic rooflines.

6. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: FREESTANDING SOLAR

A. Historic Preservation Guidance

- (1) Install a freestanding solar system in locations that minimize visibility from the public right-of-way, such as the side or rear yards.
- (2) Use a matte finish and a color scheme consistent with the primary structure for exposed hardware, frames, and piping.
- (3) Screen a freestanding solar system from the public right-of-way with fencing, landscaping, or vegetation.
- (4) Consider the visibility of a freestanding solar system from neighboring properties.

7. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE: SOLAR PARKING LOT CANOPIES

A. Historic Preservation Guidance

Recognize that solar parking lot canopies have the potential to be a highly impactful installation when located within a historic district; follow to the extent applicable the guidance set forth in Part 6.A. for freestanding solar structures.

B. Solar – Parking Lot Canopy

A solar energy system with a supporting framework that is placed on, or anchored in, the ground and that is independent of any building or other structure, which is used in a parking lot or the top story of a parking structure to shade vehicles parked in such lot or structure. A proposed system should be compatible with the existing historic structure on the property.

(1) Size

A system in any residential district shall not exceed either the area of 50 percent of the principal building footprint or 600 square feet, whichever is greater.

(2) Maximum Height

The system shall be between 8 and 15 feet in height, so as to provide for parking underneath the system.

(3) Clearance

Minimum clearance between the lowest point of the system and the surface on which the system is mounted is 7.5 feet.

TOWN OF CHESHIRE - HDC GUIDELINES FOR SOLAR

(4) Location

- (a) For any property located within a historic district, such system shall be located in the rear yard or interior side yard.
- (b) Shall not cover more than 50 percent of the parking lot or story of the parking structure in which it is located.

(5) Setbacks

All parts of the freestanding system shall be set back to meet the standards set by the regulations of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

(6) Appearance

Such system must be gray, natural green, or beige in color, with the exception of the solar photovoltaic panels which are usually black, or system must be screened from view from surrounding residential properties. Signage or writing of any kind is not permitted on any portion of any parking canopy solar energy system, other than required manufacturer plates or safety labeling.

(7) Materials

Such system shall not include any unfinished lumber.

8. HDC REGULATION RE: SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS & OTHER RENEWABLE RESOURCES

5.2.5¹ Solar energy systems and other renewable resources: No application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for an exterior architectural feature, such as a solar energy system, designed for the utilization of renewable resources, shall be denied unless the Commission finds that the feature cannot be installed without substantially impairing the historic character and appearance of the District. A Certificate of Appropriateness for such a feature may include stipulations requiring design modifications and limitations on the location of the feature that do not significantly impair its effectiveness. Such stipulations may include, but are not limited to:

1. Alternatives to the primary elevation;
2. Panels placed at parallel plane with roof structure; and
3. Panels at maximum height of 4" when mounted.

¹ Amended 6/05/17; Effective 6/29/17