



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____



Executive Summary

Directions: Include an executive summary of the program (no more than one page double-spaced) that can be used as a quick reference guide for judges.

Louisa County proves to be a desirable location for utility-scale solar generation facilities. These solar projects may benefit Louisa County citizens through associated tax revenue, so while officials will continue to consider the projects, they are taking measures to ensure appropriate implementations for the community.

Louisa County has established additional parameters to ensure approved solar projects will align with the goal to protect and preserve the County's rural character. These additional parameters were legally adopted by ordinance amendments, [Regulations for Solar Generation Facilities](#), in August 2022. The updates furthered 30+ conditions outlined in the ordinance and included: limiting the land use for this project type to no more than 3% of the total County acreage; increasing the vegetative buffer requirement to obscure project visibility for nearby locations; and prohibiting solar panel disposal at Louisa County landfill sites.

Louisa County officials held many discussions with other localities regarding their experiences with solar projects. Those conversations helped inform the ordinance changes and now that the ordinance amendments are in effect, Louisa County continues to participate in regional meetings and other collaborative learning opportunities.

To complement the ordinance amendments and peer discussions, Louisa County offers informational material on its approach to solar. These materials include a dedicated [webpage](#) and [explainer video](#).



Program Overview

Directions: Include a brief overview of the program (2-3 paragraphs) that could be used for press releases, brochures, etc.

Louisa County's electrical infrastructure and geography make it a desirable location for utility-scale solar projects. While these solar projects represent benefits to the County including tax revenue with limited need to increase essential services, the Louisa County Board and staff have refined solar project parameters to protect alignment with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan like ensuring the County retains its rural character. The following reflect Louisa County's thoughtful approach to a solar program:

- 1.) Informational Materials – To minimize speculation and establish our position, the County developed information materials to benefit solar project applicants as well as the public. The webpage louisacounty.gov/solar offers project information in addition to an explainer video on applicant rights and why Louisa County considers solar projects.
- 2.) Information Sharing – The Louisa County Solar Committee held numerous discussions that helped shaped our current program. Plus, Louisa County planning staff presents on our experience navigating solar project implementation and participates in regional discussions to help other localities determine their best path forward. These open discussions also allow our planners to bring back learned experiences from other local communities.
- 3.) Ordinance Change – The largest and most impactful aspect of our approach to solar is the ordinance change passed in August 2022 that limits the land that may be used for utility-scale solar projects, ensures limited visibility from adjoining properties, and provides decommissioning rules. The unanimously approved amendments to the "Regulations for Solar Generation Facilities" builds upon efforts to establish over 30 conditions that Louisa will ask a solar project plan to reflect, like the incorporation of pollinators and limiting how much land may be disturbed at one time.



The Situation

Our residents frequently voice their desire for the County to retain its rural character. This desire is reflected as one of the eight goals of the Louisa County Comprehensive Plan and guides decisions of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and County staff.

As one method of controlled growth, the County looks for opportunities to increase tax revenue without increasing the need for essential services. Solar generation projects represent good candidates for this type of opportunity, and as our electrical infrastructure and geography make Louisa County a desirable location for solar generation projects, bringing solar projects to Louisa County may prove mutually beneficial to our locality and the utility providers.

Program Approach

Louisa recognizes the state and federal goals to transition to cleaner energy and aims to balance related projects with the desire of the County citizens to preserve the County's rural character. As we expect electric service providers continuing to respond to the Virginia Clean Economy Act signed into law in 2020, we've developed more program parameters through an updated ordinance, leveraged information sharing, and produced informational materials to educate applicants and citizens.

Ordinance Change

The Louisa County Board of Supervisors approved amendments to the [Regulations for Solar Generation Facilities](#) following a Public Hearing on Monday, August 1, 2022. These amendments were ultimately produced through the work of the Louisa County Solar Committee, public input, and technical data.



Louisa County's Approach to Utility-Scale Solar Projects

Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards 2023 Application

"We've gained experience through existing projects, communication with other localities, and our team's knowledge," Chairman Duane Adams remarked at the August Public Hearing. "This legislation maintains our open stance on solar generation, better protects citizen and environmental interests, and furthers our goal of maintaining the rural nature of the County."

The amended ordinance includes modest flexibility while maintaining responsible control. Highlights include:

- A Limit to the Amount of Land Use – The Board approved a provision limiting the combined total land area of utility-scale solar generation to less than 3 percent of total County acreage (9,800 acres).
- Increase in Vegetative Buffer Requirement – The vegetative buffer requirement (with a primary purpose to obscure a project's visibility from the surrounding area) was increased from 150 feet to 300 feet. However, the Board acknowledged project size, elevation and other factors could impact project-specific requirements and highlighted a waiver process that could allow requirement adjustments on a project-specific basis. For example, viewshed analysis and other considerations could enable the Board to consider buffer tweaks.
- Prevention of Solar Panel Disposal at Louisa County Landfill – The Board also sought to protect its landfill facilities from improper disposal of materials by prohibiting panels at County landfill sites.

These significant updates only further enhance previous updates to the ordinance, including but not limited to the following conditions:

- Erosion and Sediment Control – Sediment control features shall receive county approval on a phase-by-phase basis before beginning any land disturbance or construction activities. Site clearing shall not exceed 100 acres for each phase of development. This controlled process



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exceeds the Department of Environmental Quality's requirements and is intended to minimize impacts to nearby property.

- Setbacks – The project area shall be set back a distance of at least 300 feet from all abutting public rights-of-way and main buildings on adjoining parcels, and from adjacent property lines. Increased setbacks over 300 feet and additional buffering may be included in the conditions for a particular permit. Access, erosion and stormwater structures, and interconnection to the electrical grid is allowable through setback areas if such are generally perpendicular to the property line or underground.
- Opaque vegetative buffers with Pollinator Area – Vegetative buffers sufficient to mitigate the visual impact of the facility have several requirements including a pollinator-smart designated area with appropriate pollinator-friendly native plants, shrubs, trees, grasses, and wildflowers.

Information Sharing

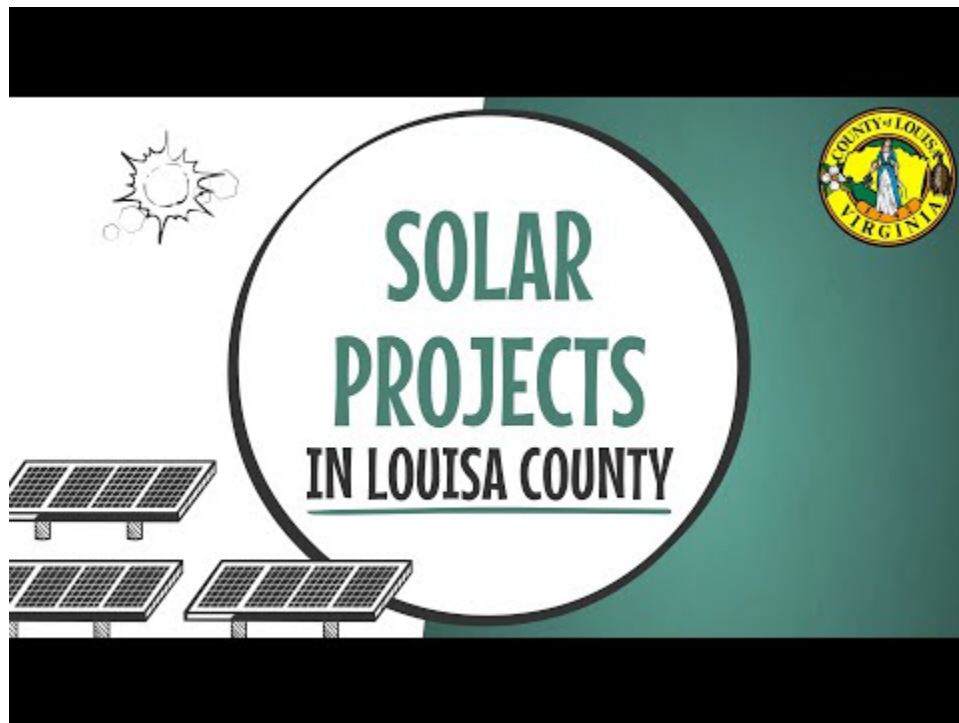
The importance of information sharing to our approach begins with the work of the Louisa County Solar Committee. The Committee held numerous conversations with County staff, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and other localities – providing ideas and learning how to further shape our requirements in the best interest of our citizens.

Though the ordinance amendment was approved this past fall, information sharing hasn't ceased. Our Community Development planners share information directly with other localities by fielding phone calls, providing media responses, and speaking at 2022 events like the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials conference and sessions hosted for regional colleagues at the Louisa County Office Building. Our presentations provide insight on how Louisa has thoughtfully worked to create parameters for projects that will be largely out-of-sight with vegetative buffers and offer additional benefits like pollinators. We also cover the County's requirements for detailed project plans and phased clearing.



Informational Materials

In 2022, Louisa County released an [explainer video](#) (below) to use in illustrating our Community Development's responsibility in shepherding solar project applications through the process. *Note, the department's assistance in the completing the condition use permit application process is neither an endorsement nor a guarantee of the project approval.*



The explainer video was the starting point for a webpage, louisacounty.gov/solar. The page intends to help applicants obtain an overview of requirements as well as educate the public on why we continue to consider solar projects. This webpage touches on:

- State carbon reduction goals including the Virginia Clean Economy Act
- Applicant rights
- Public involvement steps in the application process



- Benefits that solar projects represent
- How we are working to improve implementations
- Current projects and updates
- The amended ordinance

Finance and Staffing

The cost associated with the enhancements to our solar program is minimal as only staff time was required. The ordinance updates, working with other localities and the informational material were developed in-house by our professional staff without the use of consultants. While the video software has a yearly subscription fee, multiple videos were produced in 2022, leaving this video software production cost to be less than \$100.

Staff that contributed to the enhancement of the County's solar program included County Administration and Community Development. The Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and Solar Committee provided direction.

Current Status

Currently approved solar projects total 5,211.734 acres – a little more than half of the new 3% land use limit. We have 589.474 acres in the Conditional Use Permit process.

We continue to refine our list of applicant conditions, and recently added: "Job Fair & CTE Program. The Project Owner will attend the Louisa County High School Job Fair the year the Project will start construction. The Project Owner will attend at least one CTE class to provide information on the solar industry to students. This condition is null and void if the Louisa County School System rejects the Project Owner participating in the CTE class or the job fair. The Project Owner will ask the Louisa County Chamber of Commerce to share any job postings with local businesses."



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Louisa County has also recently been selected for a two-hour Deep Dive with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Dominion Energy, and Long Road Energy to present at the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association's 53rd Annual Conference. This selection is one of many similar efforts as staff continues to be active in communicating the recent changes. Other efforts include:

- Participating in [tv news interviews](#) and responding to [media](#) inquiries
- Issuing a [press release](#)
- Including an update in the Community Development section of the most recent [Community Report](#)
- Providing presentations and leading discussions, as shown in this [Louisa County LinkedIn post](#):

