CITY OF LONG PRAIRIE
TODD COUNTY, MINNESOTA

ORDINANCE NO. 26-06-10-03
AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 16 OF THE LONG PRAIRIE CITY CODE BY ADDING SECTION 16.990 REGULATING SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS

THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LONG PRAIRIE, MINNESOTA, ORDAINS:

SECTION 1. AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 16.

Chapter 16 of the Long Prairie City Code is hereby amended by adding Section 16.990, Solar Energy Systems, as follows:

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS

16.990. Solar Energy Systems.

16.9901. Purpose and Intent.

The purpose of this section is to:

(1) Encourage the safe, effective, and orderly use of solar energy systems.

(2) Promote renewable energy development while protecting the public health, safety, welfare, and neighborhood character.

(3) Provide clear and consistent standards for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and utility-scale solar energy systems within the City of Long Prairie.

(4) Establish standards for the location, design, installation, maintenance, screening, operation, and decommissioning of solar energy systems.

16.9902. Definitions.

For purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the meanings given them:

(1) Solar Energy System. A device, array, panel, equipment, structure, or structural design feature used to collect solar energy and convert it to electricity, heat, or another usable form of energy.

(2) Roof-Mounted Solar Energy System. A solar energy system mounted on, attached to, or integrated into the roof of a principal or accessory building.

(3) Ground-Mounted Solar Energy System. A solar energy system mounted on the ground using a rack, pole, foundation, ballast, or similar mounting system.

(4) Solar Parking Canopy. A solar energy system mounted above a parking area, driveway, or similar improved area and designed to provide both solar energy collection and vehicle coverage.

(5) Residential Solar Energy System. A solar energy system accessory to a permitted or lawful residential use and designed primarily to serve the energy needs of the property on which it is located.

(6) Commercial, Industrial, Institutional, or Agricultural Accessory Solar Energy System. A solar energy system accessory to a permitted or lawful commercial, industrial, institutional, or agricultural use and designed primarily to serve the energy needs of the property on which it is located.

(7) Utility-Scale Solar Energy System. A solar energy system designed primarily to generate electricity for off-site use, sale, distribution, or delivery to a utility, transmission system, or other off-site energy user.

(8) Project Area. The area within the boundaries of a utility-scale solar energy system, including solar arrays, access drives, equipment, fencing, stormwater facilities, and related improvements.

(9) Decommissioning. The removal of a solar energy system, including panels, supports, foundations, electrical equipment, fencing, and related improvements, and restoration of the site as required by this section.

16.9903. General Standards Applicable to All Solar Energy Systems.

(1) Compliance with Applicable Codes. All solar energy systems shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations, and codes, including but not limited to:

a. The Minnesota State Building Code;

b. The National Electrical Code;

c. Applicable fire safety requirements;

d. Applicable zoning district standards; and

e. Other applicable provisions of the Long Prairie City Code.

(2) Permits Required. No solar energy system shall be installed, constructed, expanded, or materially altered until all required permits and approvals have been obtained. Required permits may include, but are not limited to:

a. Zoning permit or administrative zoning approval;

b. Building permit;

c. Electrical permit;

d. Conditional use permit, when required by this section;

e. Site plan review, when required by this section or other provisions of the City Code; and

f. Airport-related, FAA, MnDOT Aeronautics, or Airport Layout Plan review, when applicable.

(3) Manufacturer Specifications. Solar energy systems shall be installed and maintained in accordance with manufacturer specifications and applicable industry standards.

(4) Glare. Solar panels shall be designed, located, and installed to minimize glare toward adjacent properties, public rights-of-way, and aviation facilities. The City may require a glare analysis when necessary to determine potential impacts.

(5) Maintenance. Solar energy systems shall be maintained in good repair and safe operating condition. Damaged, defective, or unsafe components shall be repaired or removed within a reasonable time as determined by the Zoning Administrator.

(6) Electrical Equipment. Inverters, transformers, batteries, and other electrical equipment shall be installed in accordance with applicable codes and shall be located or screened to minimize visual impacts when reasonably practicable.

(7) Lighting. Lighting associated with solar energy systems shall be limited to that necessary for safety and security. Lighting shall be shielded and directed downward to avoid glare onto adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. Motion-activated lighting shall be used where feasible.

(8) Noise. Solar energy system equipment, including inverters and transformers, shall comply with applicable Minnesota Pollution Control Agency noise standards.

(9) Impervious Surface. Solar panels and mounting systems shall not be considered impervious surface, provided that stormwater infiltration beneath and around the panels is maintained. Foundations, equipment pads, access drives, and other constructed surfaces may be counted as impervious surface as determined by the City.

(10) Drainage and Stormwater. Solar energy systems shall be designed and maintained so as not to cause erosion, flooding, concentrated runoff, or drainage impacts on adjacent properties or public rights-of-way.

(11) Abandoned Systems. A solar energy system shall be considered abandoned if it has not produced energy for a continuous period of twelve (12) months, unless the property owner

demonstrates to the Zoning Administrator that the system is under repair or is otherwise intended to be returned to service. An abandoned solar energy system shall be removed by the property owner within one hundred eighty (180) days after notice from the City.

16.9904. Residential Solar Energy Systems.

(1) Applicability. Residential solar energy systems shall be permitted as an accessory use in all zoning districts where residential uses are permitted or lawfully exist, subject to the standards of this section.

(2) Types Allowed. The following residential solar energy systems may be allowed:

a. Roof-mounted solar energy systems; and

b. Ground-mounted solar energy systems.

(3) Roof-Mounted Systems. Roof-mounted residential solar energy systems shall comply with the following standards:

a. Panels shall not extend more than three (3) feet above the roof surface or roofline to which they are attached.

b. Panels shall not project beyond the edge of the roof.

c. Systems shall be mounted in a manner that does not interfere with required fire access, roof drainage, or building safety requirements.

(4) Ground-Mounted Systems. Ground-mounted residential solar energy systems shall comply with the following standards:

a. Maximum height shall be fifteen (15) feet.

b. Systems shall be located in the side or rear yard unless otherwise approved by the Zoning Administrator due to site conditions, solar access, or practical difficulty.

c. Systems shall meet the principal structure setback requirements of the applicable zoning district.

d. In no case shall a ground-mounted solar energy system be located closer than thirty (30) feet from an existing residential structure on an adjacent property.

(5) Lot Coverage. Ground-mounted residential solar energy systems shall not exceed ten percent (10%) of the total lot area.

(6) Screening. The Zoning Administrator may require landscaping, fencing, or other screening measures when necessary to reduce visual impacts on adjacent residential properties or public rights-of-way.

(7) Permits. Residential solar energy systems shall require all applicable zoning, building, electrical, and other permits prior to installation.

16.9905. Commercial, Industrial, Institutional, and Agricultural Accessory Solar Energy Systems.

(1) Applicability. Commercial, industrial, institutional, and agricultural solar energy systems that are accessory to a principal use shall be allowed in zoning districts where the principal use is permitted or lawfully exists, subject to the standards of this section.

(2) Types Allowed. The following accessory solar energy systems may be allowed:

a. Roof-mounted solar energy systems;

b. Ground-mounted solar energy systems; and

c. Solar parking canopies.

(3) Roof-Mounted Systems. Roof-mounted systems shall comply with applicable building, fire, and electrical code requirements.

(4) Ground-Mounted Systems. Ground-mounted systems shall comply with the following standards:

a. Maximum height shall be twenty (20) feet.

b. Systems shall meet the principal structure setback requirements of the applicable zoning district.

c. Systems shall be located at least fifty (50) feet from an existing residential structure on an adjacent property.

(5) Solar Parking Canopies. Solar parking canopies shall comply with applicable building, fire, electrical, parking, circulation, and site design requirements.

(6) Lot Coverage. Ground-mounted solar energy systems shall not exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the total lot area and shall count toward the total lot coverage allowed within the zoning district.

(7) Screening. Ground-mounted systems visible from residential districts or residential uses may require landscaping, fencing, berming, or other screening measures as determined by the Zoning Administrator.

(8) Permits. Commercial, industrial, institutional, and agricultural accessory solar energy systems shall require all applicable zoning, building, electrical, and other permits prior to installation.

16.9906. Utility-Scale Solar Energy Systems.

(1) Applicability. Utility-scale solar energy systems are solar energy systems designed primarily to generate electricity for off-site use, sale, distribution, or delivery to a utility, transmission system, or other off-site energy user.

(2) Allowed Districts. Utility-scale solar energy systems may be allowed only in the following zoning districts, subject to conditional use permit approval:

a. Agricultural districts; and

b. Industrial districts.

(3) Conditional Use Permit Required. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall require approval of a conditional use permit in accordance with Section 16.630 of the Long Prairie City Code and all other applicable provisions of Chapter 16.

(4) Site Plan Review. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall require site plan review. The applicant shall submit all information reasonably required by the City to evaluate the proposed use, including but not limited to:

a. Existing and proposed property lines;

b. Existing and proposed structures;

c. Solar array locations;

d. Equipment locations;

e. Access drives;

f. Fencing;

g. Landscaping and screening;

h. Stormwater and drainage facilities;

i. Utility connections;

j. Topography and grading;

k. Wetlands, shoreland, floodplain, or other regulated natural features;

l. Adjacent land uses;

m. Proposed construction phasing; and

n. Any additional information required by the Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, City Engineer, or City Council.

(5) Types Allowed. Utility-scale solar energy systems may include:

a. Ground-mounted solar arrays;

b. Inverters, transformers, substations, and utility equipment;

c. Battery storage systems when approved as part of the conditional use permit;

d. Access drives and internal service roads;

e. Fencing and security improvements; and

f. Other accessory equipment or facilities customarily incidental to the solar energy system.

(6) Maximum Height. Solar panels and mounting systems shall not exceed twenty (20) feet in height.

(7) Minimum Project Area. The minimum project area shall be five (5) acres.

(8) Lot Coverage. Solar panel coverage shall not exceed seventy percent (70%) of the total project area.

(9) Setbacks. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall meet all applicable zoning district setback requirements and the following minimum setbacks:

a. Property lines: fifty (50) feet;

b. Public road rights-of-way: seventy-five (75) feet;

c. Residential zoning districts: one hundred (100) feet; and

d. Existing residential structures on adjacent properties: one hundred fifty (150) feet.

When more than one setback applies, the most restrictive setback shall govern.

(10) Fencing. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall include perimeter fencing of at least six (6) feet in height unless a different height or design is approved by the City Council as part of the conditional use permit.

(11) Screening. Vegetative screening, berming, fencing, or other screening shall be required when the facility is adjacent to or visible from residential districts, residential uses, public roadways, parks, trails, or other sensitive areas, as determined by the City Council.

(12) Glare Analysis. The City may require a glare analysis prepared by a qualified professional when the facility may affect adjacent properties, public rights-of-way, airports, aviation facilities, or other sensitive receptors.

(13) Airport and Aviation Review. When applicable, the applicant shall coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration, MnDOT Aeronautics, the City, and any affected airport authority regarding potential airport, airspace, or Airport Layout Plan impacts.

(14) Emergency Access. The applicant shall provide emergency access information and site plans to the City and emergency service providers. Access drives and gates shall be designed to accommodate emergency access as approved by the City.

(15) Conditions of Approval. The City Council may impose conditions necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare; ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses; mitigate impacts; ensure compliance with this section; and provide for site restoration and decommissioning.

16.9907. Agricultural Land Protection.

(1) Prime Agricultural Soils. Utility-scale solar energy systems should avoid placement on prime farmland soils where feasible, as defined or mapped by the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.

(2) Soil Information. The City may require submission of a soil classification map or other soil information for the project site.

(3) Agricultural Compatibility. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall be designed and constructed to allow future restoration of the site to agricultural use where practicable.

(4) Construction Practices. Construction practices shall:

a. Minimize soil compaction;

b. Preserve topsoil during installation;

c. Minimize grading and disturbance where feasible;

d. Protect drainage patterns and drainage systems; and

e. Stabilize disturbed areas to prevent erosion.

16.9908. Vegetation and Ground Cover Management.

(1) Ground Cover Required. Ground-mounted solar energy systems and utility-scale solar energy systems shall maintain permanent vegetative cover beneath and around solar panels, except for access drives, equipment pads, foundations, and other approved improvements.

(2) Approved Ground Cover. Ground cover may include:

a. Native grasses;

b. Pollinator-friendly vegetation;

c. Low-growing vegetation suitable for stormwater infiltration;

d. Turf grass where appropriate; or

e. Other ground cover approved by the City.

(3) Vegetation Management Plan. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall submit a vegetation management plan describing:

a. Proposed seed mixtures;

b. Pollinator habitat, if proposed;

c. Weed control measures;

d. Erosion control measures;

e. Establishment period maintenance;

f. Long-term maintenance practices; and

g. Replacement or reseeding procedures.

(4) Maintenance. Vegetation shall be maintained to prevent:

a. Soil erosion;

b. Noxious weeds;

c. Excessive vegetation growth;

d. Drainage problems; and

e. Unsafe or nuisance conditions.

16.9909. Decommissioning Plan for Utility-Scale Solar Energy Systems.

(1) Plan Required. A decommissioning plan shall be required for all utility-scale solar energy systems prior to issuance of a building permit or commencement of construction.

(2) Contents. The decommissioning plan shall include, at a minimum:

a. The anticipated useful life of the facility;

b. The conditions under which the facility will be considered abandoned;

c. Procedures for removal of solar panels, mounting systems, foundations, fencing, access drives not needed for continued use of the property, electrical equipment, and other improvements;

d. Procedures for recycling, disposal, or reuse of materials;

e. Procedures for site restoration;

f. A schedule for decommissioning and site restoration;

g. A decommissioning cost estimate prepared by a qualified professional; and

h. Any other information required by the City.

(3) Removal and Restoration. Decommissioning shall include:

a. Removal of solar panels and related equipment;

b. Removal of mounting systems and foundations to a depth approved by the City;

c. Removal of electrical equipment;

d. Removal of fencing unless otherwise approved by the City;

e. Removal of access drives unless needed for continued use of the property and approved by the City;

f. Stabilization of disturbed areas; and

g. Restoration of the site to a condition reasonably suitable for agricultural or other lawful use.

(4) Time for Completion. Decommissioning shall be completed within one hundred eighty (180) days after abandonment or termination of the use, unless the City Council approves a longer period for good cause.

16.9910. Decommissioning Financial Assurance.

(1) Financial Assurance Required. Utility-scale solar energy systems shall provide financial assurance to ensure removal of the facility and restoration of the site.

(2) Beneficiary. Financial assurance shall be payable to or held for the benefit of the City of Long Prairie.

(3) Cost Estimate. The applicant shall submit a decommissioning cost estimate prepared by a qualified professional. The estimate shall include, at a minimum:

a. Removal of solar panels;

b. Removal of mounting systems and foundations;

c. Removal of electrical equipment;

d. Removal of fencing and access improvements;

e. Site restoration;

f. Disposal, recycling, or transportation costs; and

g. Administrative, inspection, and contingency costs.

(4) Salvage Value. The decommissioning cost estimate shall assume no salvage value for materials unless otherwise approved by the City Council.

(5) Form of Financial Assurance. Prior to construction, the applicant shall provide financial assurance in a form acceptable to the City, which may include:

a. Surety bond;

b. Letter of credit;

c. Escrow account; or

d. Other financial guarantee acceptable to the City.

(6) Review and Adjustment. The amount of financial assurance shall be reviewed at least once every five (5) years and may be adjusted by the City based on updated decommissioning cost estimates, inflation, site conditions, or other relevant factors.

(7) Release. Financial assurance shall not be released until the City has verified that decommissioning and site restoration have been completed in accordance with the approved decommissioning plan and all applicable City requirements.

16.9911. Administration and Enforcement.

(1) Zoning Administrator. The Zoning Administrator shall administer this section and may require information necessary to determine compliance with this section.

(2) Planning Commission Review. When a conditional use permit is required, the Planning Commission shall review the application and make a recommendation to the City Council in accordance with Section 16.630 and other applicable provisions of Chapter 16.

(3) City Council Approval. The City Council shall make the final decision on conditional use permit applications for utility-scale solar energy systems and may impose conditions as authorized by the Long Prairie City Code and Minnesota law.

(4) Conflicts. If a provision of this section conflicts with another provision of the Long Prairie City Code, the more restrictive provision shall apply unless otherwise required by law.

(5) Violations. Any violation of this section shall be subject to the enforcement provisions and penalties applicable to violations of Chapter 16 of the Long Prairie City Code.

SECTION 2. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This ordinance shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and publication according to law.

Passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of Long Prairie, Minnesota, this 10th day of June, 2026.

APPROVED:

James Kreemer, Mayor

ATTEST:

Candace Bruder, City Administrator