

Stockbridge Township Solar Ordinance

Replacement of Section 7.03.05 of the Zoning Ordinance

RECOMMENDED BY PLANNING COMMISSION: January 4, 2023

ADOPTED BY TOWNSHIP BOARD: January 16, 2023

EFFECTIVE:

Section 7.03.05 Solar Energy Systems

A solar energy system as defined by this Ordinance is allowed as a Special Use when approved by the Planning Commission in accordance with the process defined herein. Large scale solar energy systems (Solar Farms) are permitted as a special use only on agricultural or industrially zoned property. Small scale (on-site) solar energy systems are permitted as a Special Use on agricultural, industrial, and residentially zoned property. In addition to the standards and requirements specified in this Ordinance, the Planning Commission shall not approve the issuance of a Special Use Permit unless the requirements in this section are met:

(A) Intent and Purpose.

- (1) **Purpose.** The most common and prevalent land uses in Stockbridge Township are agricultural and residential, and their preservation has been an ongoing goal within the community for many years. This Ordinance is intended to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the township and to encourage the safe, effective, efficient, and orderly development and operation of solar energy resources in the township while preserving and protecting the character and the stability of residential, agricultural, recreational, commercial, industrial and other areas within the township.
- (2) With advances in technology of “solar energy development” in general, specific locations within the township may support the implementation of Solar Farms. To prepare for potential solar development projects within the township, this Ordinance will require such developments to obtain a Special Use Permit to ensure Solar Farm development sites are appropriately located so as to protect the character and stability of the township’s residential, agricultural, recreational, commercial and/or industrial areas while simultaneously preserving and protecting the township’s important and sensitive environmental and ecological assets, open space, wetlands, and other ecological and environmentally sensitive areas, viewscales and aesthetics. Accordingly, regulations are necessary to further the above goals and, equally important, to minimize the potential adverse effects of this emerging land use on neighboring properties.

(B) Definitions. The following definitions shall apply in this section:

- (1) **Agrivoltaics (APV).** The simultaneous and synergistic use of a parcel of land for both agriculture and solar photovoltaic energy generation.
- (2) **Electric Linear Actuator.** The device on a solar tracker that allows a motorized solar panel to move so as to maximize exposure to the sun.
- (3) **GIS.** Geographic Information System. A computer-based system that maps, analyzes, and presents geographically-referenced data.
- (4) **GPS.** Global Positioning System. A satellite-based navigation system used to determine the ground position of an object.
- (5) **Lease Unit Boundary.** The boundary around a property or properties leased or purchased for the purpose of operating a solar energy facility, including leased or purchased adjacent parcels to the parcel on which the solar energy facility or equipment is located. For purposes of setback, the Lease Unit Boundary shall not cross road rights-of-way.
- (6) **NEC.** National Electrical Code.

- (7) **Participating Landowner.** A landowner who has leased land to the solar energy systems Applicant, recorded the notice of lease agreement with the Ingham County Register of Deeds, and has an active contract with the solar energy systems Applicant. A Participating Landowner may also be called a solar energy systems contract leaseholder. A Participating Landowner may or may not have solar panels or infrastructure located on their property.
- (8) **Participating Landowner, Non-.** A landowner who has not signed a contract or any legal document with the solar energy systems Applicant and has not given up rights to their owned land to the solar energy systems Applicant.
- (9) **Solar Battery.** A device that stores energy generated using a solar photovoltaic system for later use.
- (10) **Solar Grazing.** A variation of agrivoltaics where livestock graze beneath and around solar panels.
- (11) **Solar Inverter.** A device which converts the direct current (DC) power generated by a solar energy system into alternating current (AC) power which can then be fed into an electrical grid or network.
- (12) **Solar Panel.** A photovoltaic panel designed to absorb the sun's rays as a source of energy for generating electricity or heating
- (13) **Solar Panel, Bifacial.** A solar panel which can absorb light on both planes of the panel, often installed at a 90-degree angle to the ground.
- (14) **Solar Panel, Fixed.** A solar panel which is installed at a set angle in a permanent, fixed position.
- (15) **Solar Panel, Motorized.** A solar panel that changes angles throughout a 24-hour period by means of an actuator so as to maximize exposure to the sun during daylight hours.
- (16) **Solar Panel, Stilt-mounted.** A solar panel, usually fixed-angle, installed on stilts at a height greater than six (6) feet. Such panels are typically associated with agrivoltaics (APV).
- (17) **Solar Panel Height.** The height of a solar panel structure with a panel at the highest vertical point.
- (18) **Solar Tracker.** A motorized mount for solar panels that tilts the panels in order to maximize exposure to the sun during daylight hours.
- (19) **Utility Grid, Electric.** The electrical power system network comprised of the generating plant, transmission lines, substation, transformers, distribution lines, and consumers.
- (20) **Wetland.** As pertains to this Ordinance, wetland shall mean the areas defined as such by Michigan law (see Part 301 Inland Lakes and Rivers and Part 303 Wetlands Protections of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, last revised effective 3-29-19), and regulated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.
- (21) **Solar Energy Systems Applicant.** The person, firm, corporation, company, limited liability corporation or other entity, as well as the Applicant's successors, assignees and/or transferees, who applies for Township approval (permit) to construct a solar energy system and/or solar energy system Testing Facility.

- (22) **Solar Energy System.** A solar photovoltaic cell, panel, or array, or series of cells, panels, or arrays, that converts solar energy to usable thermal, mechanical, chemical, or electrical energy.
- (a) **Solar Farm.** A utility-scale commercial facility that converts sunlight into electricity, whether by photovoltaics, concentrating solar thermal devices or any other various experimental or new solar technologies for the primary purpose of wholesale or retail sales of generated electric power off-site.
 - (b) **Small-Scale Solar Energy System.** A single residential or small business-scale solar energy conversion system consisting of building-mounted panels, ground-mounted solar arrays, or other solar energy fixtures, and associated control or conversion electronics that will be used exclusively for private, on-site purposes and not used for any commercial resale of any energy generated, except for the sale of surplus electrical energy back to the electrical grid.
- (23) **Solar Energy System Testing Facility.** A structure and equipment such as a meteorological tower for the collection of solar data and other meteorological data and transmission to a collection source, shall not be deemed to be a communication tower.
- (C) **Small Scale Solar Energy System.** The following standards shall apply to Small Scale Solar Energy Systems in addition to the general Special Use Approval Requirements of this Ordinance:
- (1) **Zoning.** Small scale solar energy systems are permitted in all zoning districts, including on land enrolled in the Michigan Farmland Preservation Program (PA 116 of 1974). Special Use Approval shall not be required prior to the installation of a small scale solar energy system. The Zoning Administrator shall approve the small scale solar energy system and issue a zoning permit if all provisions of this section are met.
 - (2) **Height.** Structures associated with a solar energy system shall have a total height of 15 feet or less. Solar panels attached to an existing structure (including those placed on rooftops) may exceed this height, but shall not cause the structure they are attached to to exceed the maximum permitted height in the Zoning District in question.
 - (3) **Edge of Rooftop.** Solar panels attached to a rooftop shall not extend beyond the edges of the roof.
 - (4) **Setbacks.** Small scale solar energy systems shall not be located in the front yard, and shall be set back at least 15 feet from all side lot lines and 25 feet from the rear lot line. These setback requirements shall supersede all other setback requirements in this Zoning Ordinance.
 - (5) **Lot Coverage.** No more than 20% of the lot area, or 20 acres, whichever is less, on any lot shall be covered by a small scale solar energy system.
 - (6) **Glare.** Solar energy systems shall be designed and located to avoid glare or reflection onto adjacent lots and adjacent roadways, and shall not interfere with traffic or create a safety hazard off-site.
- (D) **Solar Farms.** Solar Energy Conversion Systems and Testing Facilities shall meet the following standards. An application for a Special Use permit shall be filed with the Township pursuant to Section 3.23 as to Special Use approvals. Supporting data and documentation must be submitted in their entirety at the time of application. Applicant shall provide to the Township updated documents throughout the duration of the Solar Farm application process upon request by the Township Board or Planning Commission.

- (1) **Zoning District.** Solar Farms are allowed only in the AG (Agricultural) zoning district and require a special land use permit and site plan review. In addition to all requirements for a special use permit under Section 3.23 of the Zoning Ordinance and site plan review and approval under Article 12 of the Zoning Ordinance, Solar Farms are also subject to the requirements of this Section.
- (2) **Glare.** Solar energy systems shall be designed and located to avoid glare or reflection onto adjacent lots and adjacent roadways, and shall not interfere with traffic or create a safety hazard off-site.
- (3) **PA 116 Exclusion.** No Solar Farm shall be allowed on any portion of a lot enrolled in the Michigan Farmland Preservation Program (PA 116 of 1974).
- (4) **Application Requirements.** The Applicant for a Solar Farm must provide the Township with all of the following:
 - (a) Application fee in an amount set by resolution of the Township Board.
 - (b) The name, address, and phone number of the Applicant, any authorized representatives of the Applicant, the proposed operator, and the owners of the property on which the Solar Farm is to be located.
 - (c) A site plan that includes all proposed structures and the location of all equipment, transformers, and substations, as well as all setbacks, panel sizes and locations, and the location of property lines, signage, fences, greenbelts and screening, drain tiles, easements, floodplains, bodies of water, lighting, proposed access routes, land elevations, structures on adjacent parcels, and road rights-of-way. The site plan must be drawn to scale and must indicate how the Solar Farm will be connected to the power grid.
 - (d) Scaled drawings depicting the location, height, elevation, and size of all components of the Solar Farm.
 - (e) A map and narrative description of the land uses of all non-participating parcels adjacent to the Solar Farm.
 - (f) A list of all parcel numbers that will be used by the Solar Farm; documentation establishing ownership of each parcel; legal descriptions for each parcel; and any lease agreements, easements, letters of intent, or purchase agreements for the subject parcels demonstrating the property owners' consent to include the parcels in the Solar Farm.
 - (g) A plan for managing erosion and sediment control.
 - (h) An operations agreement setting forth the operations parameters, the Applicant's inspection protocol, security and emergency procedures, and general safety documentation. The security and emergency procedures must describe how the Applicant or operator will prevent unauthorized access to the Solar Farm and warn and protect the public about potential dangers during the construction, operation, maintenance, repair or removal of the Solar Farm.
 - (i) Current photographs of the subject property.

- (j) A graphical demonstration (preferably computer-generated) of the Solar Farm as completed. The graphical demonstration must include, at minimum, the following:
 - (i) A depiction of the completed Solar Farm on the proposed site as seen from four (4) separate angles.
 - (ii) A real-time, visual model of the Solar Farm showing the direction and intensity of glare during daylight hours over the course of a 24-hour period. The visual model shall be repeated for each of the four seasons.
- (k) A copy of the Applicant's power purchase agreement or other written agreement with an electric utility showing approval of an interconnection with the proposed Solar Farm.
- (l) A written plan and schedule for maintaining the subject property, including a plan for maintaining and inspecting drain tiles and addressing stormwater management.
- (m) A decommissioning and land reclamation plan describing the actions to be taken following the abandonment or discontinuation of the Solar Farm, including evidence of proposed commitments with property owners to ensure proper final reclamation, repairs to roads, and other steps necessary to fully remove the Solar Farm and restore the subject parcels.
- (n) An escrow payment that meets the requirements of this Section.
- (o) Financial security that meets the requirements of this Section.
- (p) A plan for resolving complaints from the public or other property owners concerning the construction and operation of the Solar Farm.
- (q) A plan for managing any hazardous waste.
- (r) A description of any electromagnetic interference that may be generated by the Solar Farm.
- (s) A transportation plan for construction and operation phases, including any applicable agreements with the County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation.
- (t) An attestation that the Applicant will indemnify and hold the Township harmless from any costs or liability arising from the approval, installation, construction, use, maintenance, repair, or removal of the Solar Farm.
- (u) A copy of the manufacturer's installation instructions.
- (v) An unredacted copy of the manufacturer's safety manual for each component of the Solar Farm without distribution restraints to be kept at the Township Hall and other locations deemed necessary by the Planning Commission or local first responders. The Manual should include standard details for an industrial site such as materials, chemicals, fire, access, safe distances during Solar Farm failure, processes in emergencies, and other relevant information.
- (w) Proof of environmental compliance, including compliance with Part 31, Water Resources Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act; (MCL 324.3101 et. seq.; Part 91, Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control (MCL 324.9101 et. seq.) and any corresponding County ordinances; Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams, (MCL 324.30101 et. seq.); Part 303, Wetlands (MCL 324.30301 et. seq.); Part 365, Endangered Species Protection (MCL 324.36501 et. seq.); and any other applicable laws and rules in force at the time the application is considered by the Township.

- (x) An environmental impact study that evaluates the environmental impact of the Solar Farm, including its impact on water resources, air quality, wildlife, floodplains, wetlands, unique farmlands or soils, areas of aesthetic or historic importance, archeological or cultural resources, neighboring properties, utilities and infrastructure, noise, and any other relevant factors.
 - (y) An estimated construction timeline.
 - (z) Any additional information or documentation requested by the Planning Commission, Township Board, or other Township representative.
- (5) **Permission of Property Owner.** An Applicant must have the legal authority to represent and bind the Participating Landowner, or lessee, who will construct, own, and operate the solar energy system or Testing Facility. The duties and obligations regarding a zoning approval for any approved solar energy system or Testing Facility shall be with the solar energy system or Testing Facility owner, and jointly and severally with the owner, operator, and lessee of the solar energy system or Testing Facility if different than the solar energy system owner.
- (6) **Permitting Costs.** An escrow account shall be set up when the Applicant applies for a Special Use Permit for a Solar Farm and/or Testing Facility. The monetary amount filed by the Applicant with the Township shall be in an amount estimated by the Township Board to cover all reasonable costs and expenses associated with the special use zoning review and approval process. Such costs can include, but are not limited to, fees of officials appointed or contracted with the Township, including the Township Attorney, Township Planner, and Township Engineer, as well as any reports or studies which the Township anticipates it may require related to the zoning review process for the particular application. The escrow amount shall include regularly established fees. The Township may require the Applicant to replenish the escrow account at any time to ensure a sufficient balance. If the escrow account needs replenishing and the Applicant refuses to do so within fourteen (14) days after receiving notice, the zoning review and approval process shall cease until and unless the Applicant makes the required escrow deposit. Any escrow amounts which are in excess of actual costs shall be returned to the Applicant within ninety (90) days of completion of the permitting process. An itemized billing of all expenses shall be provided to the Applicant. The Township shall hire qualified professionals for each and any of the technical fields associated with the Special Use Permit, such as, but not limited to, electrical, acoustics, environment, economics, wildlife, health, and land-use.
- (7) **Height.** Structures associated with a Solar Farm shall have a total height of 15 feet or less when oriented at maximum tilt. Height is measured from the natural grade at the base of the component being measured. Lightning rods may exceed 15 feet in height, but they must be limited to the height necessary to protect the Solar Farm from lightning. This height standard shall apply regardless of zoning district, and shall supersede any other height maximum in this Zoning Ordinance.
- (8) **Setback.** The following minimum setbacks, measured from the outside edge of the solar panel, or other structure accessory to a Solar Farm, shall be required. The setbacks listed below shall apply to all structures accessory to a Solar Farm. The setbacks in this section shall supersede all other setback requirements in this Zoning Ordinance.
- (a) From a lot line abutting a lot that is not participating in the solar project: 300 feet.
 - (b) From a public or private road right-of-way line: 200 feet.
 - (c) From wetland delineated by the State of Michigan, regardless of whether the wetland is regulated by the State of Michigan: 50 feet.

(d) There shall be a 50 ft. setback requirement from the lot line of a participating parcel.

(9) Accessory Buildings, including Battery Storage and Inverters.

(a) Inverters and battery storage buildings must be set back at least 1,000 feet from the lot line of a non-participating lot and at least 200 feet from the lot line of a participating lot.

(b) Battery storage buildings must include secondary containment around all batteries.

(c) Applicant must provide a safety plan for all accessory buildings and devices including, but not limited to, Solar Farm batteries, battery storage buildings, inverters, and primary and secondary containment devices.

(d) Structures other than inverters, battery storage, and solar panels that are related to a Solar Farm shall be subject to the dimensional and locational standards of the zoning district in which they are located.

(e) Landscaping or other screening, in addition to what is required in Section .D.10, may be required to minimize off-site visual impacts.

(10) Landscaping and Buffering. The following landscaping requirements shall apply to the site, and shall supersede the regulations of Section, and any other landscaping provisions in the Ordinance on sites containing Solar Farms.

(a) Buffering/Screening.

(i) Along the property line adjacent to a non-participating lot containing one or more residential dwelling units, within the required setback area, the following plantings are required:

1) **Evergreen trees**, at least 8 feet high at the time of planting, planted in a staggered double row no more than 10 feet on center.

2) The Planning Commission shall determine at the time of approval whether the proposed plantings constitute a “dense visual screen” and may require additional plantings, or other design changes to the landscape plan, as a condition of Special Land Use Approval.

(ii) **Existing Trees and Woodlands.** Existing trees within the required setback area shall be preserved to the greatest extent possible. The Planning Commission may waive Subsection 1.a above upon determining that existing foliage provides a sufficient screen from neighboring residential uses.

(b) Ground Cover. Between the solar panels, the ground must be covered by natural vegetation which may include, but is not limited to:

(i) **Native Grasses**, including, but not limited to bluestem, sedge, and bottlebrush.

(ii) **Grazing Grasses**, including, but not limited, to switchgrass, gamma, and Indiangrass.

(iii) **Pollinator Habitat**, including, but not limited to, sunflower, milkweed, and black-eyed susan.

- (c) **Fence.** The Solar Farm and all accessory mechanical equipment including any structure for batteries or storage cells shall be completely enclosed by a six foot high fence with a self-locking gate, and provided with evergreen landscaping that is sufficient to buffer the equipment from view of adjacent streets and lots.
- (d) **Maintenance.** All plantings shall be installed in a manner that supports their long-term health and vitality. All plantings shall be maintained in sound health and a vigorous growing condition. The Township may require dead, diseased, damaged, or destroyed species within the required setback area to be replaced with new plantings.
- (11) **Noise.** The noise generated by a Solar Farm must not exceed the following limits. In the event of a conflict between this section and Section (or any other section of this Zoning Ordinance), the more stringent regulation shall apply.

 - (a) 40 dB(A) Leq 1 second or 50 dB(C) Leq 1 second, as measured at the property line of any adjacent non-participating parcel.
 - (b) In addition to the above limitations, a double row of evergreen trees, at least 8 feet tall at planting and spaced not less than 10 feet apart on center, must be constructed to reduce noise levels surrounding all inverters. The trees must be within 20 feet of the inverters. This requirement is in addition to the requirements of Section D.10.
- (12) **Signage.** Each Solar Farm shall have one sign per lot, located at the roadside and easily visible throughout all four seasons. Signs shall be at least two to six square feet in area. Additional signage on and around the solar panels is recommended. All signage shall meet the requirements of Section. The sign shall contain at minimum the following:

 - (a) Warning High Voltage.
 - (b) Participating Landowner's name, Solar Farm owner's name, and Operator's name.
 - (c) Emergency telephone numbers and web address (list more than one number if needed).
 - (d) Signs shall be placed on the perimeter fence at the fence entrance gate.
 - (e) Unique identification such as address of the Solar Farm.
- (13) **Safety.** The Solar Farm shall meet the following safety requirements:

 - (a) The Solar Farm shall be designed to prevent unauthorized access to electrical and mechanical components and shall have access doors that are kept securely locked at all times when service personnel are not present.
 - (b) All hazardous materials shall be properly and safely removed in a timely manner from the site of the Solar Farm.
 - (c) All collection system wiring shall comply with all applicable safety and stray voltage standards.
 - (d) An automatic fire suppression system shall be installed at each Solar Farm.

- (14) Applicant Compliance.** The Solar Farm and related equipment shall comply with any and all Federal, State, County and Township requirements, and obtain all necessary permits from all Federal, State, County, Township, or other government authority prior to the commencement of construction of the Solar Farm.
- (15) Infrastructure Wiring.** All electrical connection systems and lines from the Solar Farm to the electrical grid connection shall be located and maintained underground. Burial depth shall be at a depth that causes no known environmental, land use, or safety issues. Depth shall be a minimum of 6 feet below grade, be deeper than any existing drain tile and be in compliance with NEC 2014 or newer Code standards, whichever depth is greater. The Planning Commission may waive the burial requirement and allow above-ground structures in limited circumstances, such as when geography precludes, or where there is a demonstrated benefit to the Township. The waiver shall not be granted solely on cost savings to the Applicant. In deciding whether to waive the requirements of this section, the Planning Commission will consider aesthetics, future use of land, and the effect on nearby landowners.
- (16) Road Damage.** The Applicant and/or its contractor shall inform the Ingham County Road Commission (ICRC) and the Township of all the roads they propose to use as haul routes to each construction (including repair and decommissioning) site. This shall be done prior to beginning any construction (or decommissioning) at any site. A third-party road inspector will be retained, with mutual approval of the Township, the Applicant, and the ICRC or the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) if a state highway is involved. The road inspector will determine any precautions to be taken (including video taping and physical inspections) during the process to determine any damage that may be caused by Applicant's contractor(s), and then determine the appropriate road standards and measures to be taken to repair the damage. The cost of the third party road inspector and/or any other required third party assistance, and of all repairs necessitated to restore the roads [and related property which may be damaged by the contractor(s)], shall be the responsibility of the Applicant and/or their contractor, and shall in no case be the responsibility of the Township.

In order to assure the funds will be available to perform the work described above, the Applicant will be required to post financial security acceptable to the Township in the form of: a) a surety bond from a surety listed as acceptable on the Federal Surety Bond circular 570 of the U.S. Department of Treasury; or b) an acceptable letter of credit; or c) an escrow account established in a financial institution licensed in the State of Michigan. The amount of the security shall be a minimum of one million two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$1,250,000), but this amount may be increased if the third-party consultant determines the amount needed for road repairs is greater than this amount. The bond (or other security) shall only be released (in whole or part) when the Township Board, in consultation with ICRC and/or MDOT and the third party inspector, determines that all required road work has been completed and approved by ICRC and/or MDOT.

- (17) Construction Codes, Towers, & Interconnection Standards.** Solar farms shall comply with all applicable state construction and electrical codes and local building permit requirements. An interconnected Solar Farm shall comply with Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) standards if applicable.
- (18) Liability Insurance.** The current Solar Farm owner and operator shall insure for liability for the Solar Farm in an amount of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) per occurrence, per participating lot, without interruption until removed and comply with section "Site Insurance" (See F.5) to ensure that funds are available to resolve damage/injury claims.

- (19) Protection of Adjoining Property.** In addition to the other requirements and standards contained in this section, the Planning Commission shall not approve any Solar Farm unless it finds that the Solar Farm will not pose a safety hazard or unreasonable risk of harm to the occupants of any adjoining properties or area wildlife.
- (20) Operational, Maintenance, and Issue Resolution.** Each Solar Farm and Testing Facility must be kept and maintained in good repair and condition at all times. If a Solar Farm is not maintained in operational and reasonable condition or poses a potential safety hazard, the Applicant shall take expeditious action to correct the situation, including Solar Farm removal if needed. The Applicant shall keep a maintenance log on each Solar Farm and must provide the complete log to the Township within thirty (30) days of request. To assure compliance with this requirement, an annual audit of maintenance records, conducted by a qualified third-party maintenance expert acceptable to the Township, shall be completed at the expense of the owner/operator of the Solar Farm, and a copy of this report provided as specified by the Township.
- (21) Inspection.** The Township shall have the right, upon issuing any Solar Farm special use permit, to inspect the premises on which each Solar Farm is located at any reasonable time. The Township may hire a consultant to assist with any such inspections at a reasonable cost to be charged to the operator of the Solar Farm.
- (22) Repair Documentation.** The Applicant must provide a detailed policy and process book for the repair, replacement, and removal of malfunctioning, defective, worn, or noncompliant Solar Farm equipment. Sections of the process book should consider any ordinance requirement or Solar Farm performance deficiency. The process book shall also include a detailed maintenance schedule.
- (23) General Maintenance Bond.** The Township shall require a General Maintenance Bond to guarantee that all aspects of this Ordinance are met at all times during the construction and operation of the Solar Farm. At the time of the Special Use application, the Applicant shall submit two third-party contractor bids for construction of all fencing, landscaping, and drainage improvements associated with the Solar Farm, and the bond shall be the higher of the two bids. The Township may use the bond to repair any landscaping, fencing, drainage infrastructure (including drainage tiles), and/or to correct any ongoing violation of this Ordinance in the event that the Solar Farm owner fails to adequately maintain the required site improvements or fails to make operational changes to correct an operational violation. The Township Board shall not utilize the General Maintenance Bond unless the Complaint Resolution process described in Section.D.22 has been completed and the Township Board determines that the Solar Farm owner is unlikely to make required repairs, upgrades, or operational changes.
- (24) Complaint Resolution.** It is the intent of this Ordinance to provide a mechanism to address and resolve complaints prior to the expenditure of significant funds by the Township and/or operator for investigation and resolution. Therefore, the Township shall perform an initial vetting of complaints prior to requesting funds from the operator for complaint resolution efforts. If the Township determines that the complaint has merit, the complaint shall be resolved in the following manner:

- (a)** Complaints shall be submitted to the Township in writing from the affected property owner, or written designee, including name, address, contact information, and specific complaint. The complaint shall be added to the agenda of the next Township Board meeting in accordance with the procedure for setting the agenda.
- (b)** The Township shall submit to the operator of record notice of all written complaints to the Township within thirty (30) days of receipt of any complaint. Complaints received by the Township and the date of any Township Board meeting where complaints may be considered shall be communicated to the owner-operator at least 10 days prior to the meeting. The notice shall state that the Township Board may determine that the Solar Farm, as well as the owner-operator, is in violation of its permit.
- (c)** Upon review, if the Township Board, by an affirmative vote of the majority of the members present, deems a complaint sufficient to warrant an investigation, the Township Board shall notify the owner(s) and/or operator of the Solar Farm that an investigation has been requested by the Board.
- (d)** The owner(s) and/or operator shall be required, as a condition of the operation, to fund an escrow account for investigation of complaints for, but not limited to glare, stray voltage, noise, and signal interference in the amount of \$15,000.00 to be used at the discretion of the Township Board to pay for third party investigative services, the provider of which shall be chosen by the Township. Such funds shall be deposited with the Township Treasurer, or with a third-party fiduciary, at the discretion of the Township. When the escrow account balance is below \$5,000.00, the Township shall notify the Applicant and the Applicant shall replenish the account to the amount of \$15,000.00 within 45 days.
- (e)** If the Solar Farm is found to be in violation of this Ordinance, the owner(s) and/or operator shall take immediate action to bring the Solar Farm into compliance. If the owner(s) and/or operator fails to bring the operation into compliance within thirty (30) days, the Township may seek any relief at law or equity to abate the nuisance and may also issue a municipal civil infraction citation. Each violation for which the owner(s) and/or operators are deemed responsible shall result in a \$500.00 fine. Each day of non-compliance shall be deemed a separate offense.
- (f)** Any Solar Farm found by the Township Board to be in violation of this Ordinance set forth herein shall be considered a nuisance and the Township Board may, following notice and a public hearing, order that the Solar Farm operations cease until such time as the Solar Farm owner/operator can demonstrate compliance with the requirements of this Ordinance.
- (g)** Following the closure of the Solar Farm, the Township may opt to utilize the General Maintenance Bond (see Section D.21) to make repairs or operational improvements, in order to mitigate the violation. However, the Township shall be under no obligation to utilize the General Obligation Bond to bring the Solar Farm into compliance, and may instead notify the Solar Farm owner/operator that the Solar Farm has been determined to be irreparably out of compliance with this Ordinance, and, following notice and a public hearing, by majority vote of the Township Board, void the Special Use Permit. In the event that the Special Use permit is voided, the process for abandonment, decommissioning, removal, and site renovation shall occur as described in Sections D.23-25.

- (25) Abandonment.** Any Solar Farm, or individual solar panel that is a component of a Solar Farm, that is not used to produce energy for a period of six (6) successive months or longer shall be deemed to be abandoned and shall be promptly dismantled and removed from the property in accordance with the decommissioning regulations of this Ordinance, unless the Applicant receives a written extension of that period from the Township Board in a case involving an extended repair schedule for good cause.
- (26) Removal and Site Renovation.** A condition of every approval shall be adequate provision for the removal of the structure whenever it ceases to actively produce power for one hundred eighty (180) days or more. The Planning Commission may grant an extension of an additional one hundred eighty (180) days upon the Solar Farm owner demonstrating that the structure will be put back into use. Removal shall include the proper receipt of a demolition permit from the Building Official and proper restoration of the site, including but not limited to all participating parcels, to original condition. Removal of the structure, wiring, and its accessory use facilities shall include removing the caisson (foundation) and all other components in their entirety, to a depth of at least six (6) feet below grade. Restoration must be completed within 365 days of non-operation. If repair is allowed, the Solar Farm owner must provide data and documentation demonstrating that the repaired Solar Farm is in good operational condition and functioning at an efficiency similar to surrounding Solar Farms.
- (27) Decommissioning.** To ensure proper removal of each Solar Farm structure when it is abandoned or non-operational, application for a Special Use permit shall include a proof of the financial security in effect before permit is approved. The security shall be in a form acceptable to the Township. These should be reviewed by the Township Attorney and approved by the Planning Commission.
- (a)** The amount of each Solar Farm security guarantee shall be 125% of the average of at least two independent demolition (removal) quotes obtained by the Township. If the quantity of quotes obtained is two (2), the formula shall be (quote 1 + quote 2) divided by two (2). Quotes shall be ordered and obtained by the Township from established demolition companies. Quotes shall not include salvage values. The security guarantee shall be updated every two (2) years at the rate of 1.5 times CPI (consumer price index) for each year.
- (b)** Such financial guarantee shall be deposited with the Township Treasurer, or with a third-party fiduciary, at the discretion of the Township, after a Special Use has been approved but before construction operations begin on the Solar Farm project. Failure to keep such financial security in full force and effect at all times while the structure exists shall constitute a material and significant violation of any Special Use approval and this Ordinance, and shall be subject to any and all remedies available to the Township, including, but not limited to, enforcement actions, fines, revocation of the Special Use approval and Solar Farm removal.
- (c)** If the Applicant or operator fails to decommission the Solar Farm in a timely manner as required under this Ordinance, then the Township may draw from the financial security to decommission the Solar Farm and to pay any costs associated with decommissioning, including legal fees and expenses.
- (d)** The Applicant shall be responsible for the payment of all attorney fees and other costs incurred by the Township in the event that the structure is not voluntarily removed and the Township has to enforce removal.

(28) Transfer or Sale. In the event of a transfer or sale of the Solar Farm, the Township shall be notified and the Special Use permit may be amended by the Township Board, subject to the following conditions:

- (a)** Change in ownership alone shall be considered a minor amendment to the Special Use approval and may be approved administratively without a public hearing.
- (b)** Any proposed changes to the operating procedure or approved site plan shall be amended and resubmitted for Township review according to the procedures for all Solar Farms as outlined herein, including a public hearing.
- (c)** Upon transfer or sale, the cash bond (or form of security acceptable to the Township) shall be maintained at all times, the estimated costs of decommissioning shall be resubmitted, and the security bond adjusted to account for the new estimate.

(E) Conflicting Regulations. In the event of any conflict between this Section and any other provision of the Zoning Ordinance, this Section shall govern, unless specifically stated otherwise within this Section.