



New Jersey Pinelands Commission PRESS RELEASE

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Pinelands Commission adopts rules to encourage the environmentally-appropriate siting of solar energy facilities in the Pinelands

NEW LISBON, N.J. – The New Jersey Pinelands Commission has approved several rule changes that encourage the development of solar energy facilities in the Pinelands, while safeguarding the region's environment.

Solar energy facilities are universally-permitted as an accessory use throughout the million-acre Pinelands Area of southern New Jersey. During its meeting today, the Commission adopted a series of rule changes that expand opportunities to develop solar energy facilities as a principal use.

"These changes encourage efforts to harness the power of the sun to produce clean energy -- and do so in a manner that protects the Pinelands' special environment," said Nancy Wittenberg, the Commission's Executive Director.

Solar energy systems that are accessory uses supply electricity to the principal use on the property, such as a home or a business, and these types of facilities are already permitted throughout the Pinelands. Solar energy facilities that are the principal use on a property are generally larger in scale and supply electricity for regional use. These types of facilities have been permitted in Pinelands Regional Growth Areas, Pinelands Towns and, under certain circumstance, Pinelands Villages and Rural Development Areas.

The revisions provide a mechanism to speed the development of accessory solar energy facilities where they would be located on existing structures or installed over existing impervious surfaces. Specifically, the installation of accessory solar energy facilities on existing structures will not constitute development, and therefore will be exempt from the need to file a development application with the Pinelands Commission. Exempting such installations will hasten the local approval process and would eliminate the cost of applying to the Commission for approval.

The rule changes also:

- Authorize Pinelands municipalities to permit solar energy facilities as a principal use in all management areas, provided that all Pinelands environmental standards are met.
- Stipulate special limitations that apply to solar energy facilities installed as a principal use in the Preservation Area District, Special Agricultural Production Area and the Forest Area. The provisions set forth that such installations in those areas will be limited to three circumstances.

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First, installation could be authorized on the parcel of an existing landfill which has been, or will be, closed in accordance with the Commission's landfill closure standards. Second, installation could be authorized on a parcel that has been, or will be, environmentally-remediated of toxic or hazardous wastes or similar substances, provided the remediation has been, or will be, approved by the Commission. The third circumstance applies to the previously disturbed portions of a parcel upon which resource extraction (e.g., sand and gravel mining) has occurred, and for which there is no obligation for site restoration;

- Require that solar energy facilities and associated off-site infrastructure be located and screened to minimize the visual impacts as viewed from wild and scenic rivers and special corridors;
- Limit clearing for the development of new, or the expansion of, existing on-site or off-site infrastructure to that which is necessary to accommodate the solar energy facility in accordance with the Commission's existing clearing and disturbance standards;
- Stipulate special limitations that apply to solar energy facilities installed as a principal use in the Agricultural Production Area. Based on these limitations, up to 10 acres of any parcel could be used for such installations. Prime agricultural soils and areas of high ecological integrity must be avoided to the maximum extent feasible; and
- Require that solar energy facilities be decommissioned within 12 months of the cessation of their use. This includes removing all energy facilities, structures and equipment from the parcel.

The development of solar facilities will yield significant benefits to the Pinelands' environment because they will offset the need for new fossil-fuel dependent power plants, thereby reducing atmospheric emissions such as carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury and particulates. Removing these emissions will have a positive impact on public health, crop production, forest health, fish populations and water quality.

Today's action by the Pinelands Commission does not take effect until 30 business days after a copy of the meeting minutes have been delivered to the Governor to allow time for his review and consideration.

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