

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Energy and Environment

Community Solar Zoning Text Amendment Hearing (April 1, 2019)

Director Wells Talking Points

A fundamental goal of the Sustainable DC Plan is to increase the use of renewable energy to make up 50% of the District's energy use. This goal is an essential piece of Mayor Bowser's commitment to achieve a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Pursuant to these goals, on Friday, January 18th, Mayor Bowser signed into law the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2018. The Act increased the Renewable Portfolio Standard to 100% by 2032, and increased the amount of the District's energy supply required to come from solar installed within the District to 10% by 2041.

DOEE seeks to clarify and streamline the permitting process in anticipation of the increased installation of solar throughout the city. We anticipate 50-70 community solar projects, supported by \$10-23 million in public funding, to be permitted and built this year. This significant funding comes with a requirement that the projects be completed by the close of this fiscal year. Many projects also include private investment, which may be put at risk by the added uncertainty and extended timeframe imposed by a special exception. This year's projects are part of an even larger pipeline of 22 megawatts (MW) of planned community solar projects. They are funded by the Solar for All (SfA) program, an initiative mandated by District law, through 2021.

Community Solar is an arrangement by which solar panels are installed on one site, and the monetary value of the energy benefits is attributed to off-site residents (subscribers). This was the Council's intent in enacting the Community Renewable Energy Amendment Act of 2013. DOEE's Solar for All grant-funded projects are required to provide 100% of the value of the solar installation's electricity to low-income households, at no cost. This requirement can often be realized more efficiently through a community solar model.

- The urgent need for this text amendment is a result of the millions of dollars in investments the District has made pursuant to the Solar for All Program.
- Under SfA, the District is required to provide access to and benefits of solar to at least 100,000 low-income households, and cut their bills by 50% by 2032. Community solar is the only way the program's goals will be accomplished for renters and households living in multifamily buildings.
- If these community solar systems are not built as planned in fiscal year 2019:
 - The funds will be at risk of being transferred to the General Fund and repurposed
 - At least 2,000 households will not be served in fiscal year 2019, and more than 6,000 households by 2021.
- Community solar developers often must secure financing within a short timeframe to move forward with their projects. Requiring developers to obtain a BZA variance would result in applications for variances for the 50 – 70 Community Solar Facilities. Without

this text amendment, completion of these projects would be in jeopardy.

The proposed text amendment would define Community Solar Facilities and would permit them as a matter-of-right, subject to the height and yard requirements of the zone. This critical change will clarify and streamline the solar energy permitting process in anticipation of the District's increasing solar deployment.