Article for Solar Energy Systems

*Approval of this article will regulates the siting and installation of residential and commercial solar energy systems in the Town. 2/3 majority to pass.*

ARTICLE \_\_\_\_. To see if the Town will vote to amend the Zoning By-Laws by adding a new Section XXIII, or take any other action relative thereto:

Section XXIII. Solar Energy Systems

Purpose. The purposes of this by-law are to facilitate and encourage the use of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels; to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases; and to address climate change. The location and construction of solar energy systems are subject to the regulations in these zoning by-laws. The regulations are intended to preserve forested watershed lands that are instrumental in improving and protecting the water quality of the public and private drinking water reservoirs within and surrounding the Town; to preserve forests to promote carbon sequestration; to contribute to the protection of healthy ecosystems; to prevent loss of wildlife habitat; to minimize any negative impact on neighboring properties; and to preserve the dominant rural, residential, and agricultural character and uses of the Town.

1. Definitions.
2. A large scale solar energy system is (i) a solar photovoltaic installation primarily intended to generate electricity to be used off of the site on which the system is located, or (ii) a solar photovoltaic installation that occupies more than 1,750 square feet of panel surface area.
3. A small scale solar energy system is a solar photovoltaic installation that occupies no more than 1,750 square feet of panel surface area and is primarily intended to generate electricity to be used on the site on which the system is located although incidental electricity may be transmitted off site.
4. This by-law is not intended to regulate individual solar-powered outdoor light fixtures and similar applications with small dedicated solar panels.

1. General Requirements.

A All solar energy systems and their accessory structures shall comply with all applicable town, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations.

B The connection of a solar energy system to the electric grid in Princeton requires approval by the Princeton Municipal Light Department.

1. No building permit shall be issued and no construction or site preparation shall be started for any large scale solar energy system, or for any small scale solar energy system subject to paragraph 4.A.(ii) or paragraph 4.B, unless a site plan has been reviewed and approved by the planning board after notice to abutting landowners.
2. Except as may be specifically provided in this Section XXIII, a solar energy system and any accessory structures shall comply with all requirements of these zoning by-laws

1. Large Scale Solar Energy Systems

Notwithstanding any other provisions in these zoning by-laws, a large scale solar energy system may be constructed in any zoning district subject to the following conditions:

A. The site shall have a minimum area of five (5) acres. No more than twenty-five (25) acres on any one site, or on contiguous sites owned or operated by the same entity, shall be occupied by solar energy systems and their accessory structures (excluding transmission lines).

B. The site need not have frontage on a public way provided that access to the site is over a deeded and recorded easement to a public way, and the access road is sufficient to allow the passage of Town fire trucks and other service vehicles. Any such easement must specifically allow use of the easement by the Town when the Town requires access to the site.

C. All large scale solar energy systems (and all accessory structures including but not limited to inverters, transformers, and battery storage systems but excluding transmission lines and fences) shall be set back not less than one hundred (100) feet from public ways, and not less than fifty (50) feet from the property line on the side and rear lot lines.

D. All large scale solar energy systems (and all accessory structures including but not limited to inverters, transformers, battery storage systems and fences (but excluding transmission lines) shall be screened by native vegetation on all sides not less than twenty (20) feet high and not less than thirty (30) feet in depth.

1. At least seventy (70) percent of the surface of the site shall be permeable to allow natural water infiltration.
2. A large scale solar energy system constructed in a Residential-Agricultural District or in a Business District requires a special permit from the planning board pursuant to Section VIII of these zoning by-laws. In addition to the criteria set forth in Section VIII, the planning board shall specifically consider the purposes of this Section XXIII and may impose, as a condition of its decision, such restrictions not otherwise prohibited by statute as will effectuate the purposes of this Section XXIII.

G. The Town shall be given a non-cancellable bond reasonably acceptable to the Town, or a cash deposit to be held in escrow by the Town, sufficient to cover the cost of removal of the large scale solar system (and all accessory structures including but not limited to inverters, transformers, battery storage systems, transmission lines and fences) upon decommissioning or abandonment. If the owner/operator of the large scale solar energy system has not completed removal within one year of decommissioning or abandonment, the Town may remove or complete the removal of the large scale solar energy system and apply the bond or deposit against the resulting costs incurred by the Town.

1. Small Scale Solar Energy Systems.

Notwithstanding any other provisions in these zoning by-laws, a small scale solar energy system may be constructed in any zoning district subject to the following conditions.

1. Small Scale Solar Energy Systems on Buildings.
2. A small scale solar energy system that is placed on a building and that is parallel to the plane of an existing roof surface requires only a building permit. If a legally existing roof surface exceeds the height permitted by Section VI.2 of these zoning by-laws, a small scale solar generation system parallel to the plane of an existing roof surface may also exceed the height permitted by Section VI.2, but must be a minimum of three feet below the existing ridge line.
3. A small scale solar energy system that is placed on a building but that is not parallel to the plane of an existing roof surface is subject to the height regulations in Section VI.2 of these zoning by-laws.
4. Other Small Scale Solar Energy Systems.

A small scale solar energy system that is not placed on a building shall be subject to the following conditions:

1. Any such small scale solar energy system shall be set back at least fifty (50) feet from the property line where the property borders a public way, and at least thirty (30) feet from the property line on the side and rear lot lines.
2. The site plan review for any such small scale solar energy system shall include appropriate screening with native vegetation.