

Summary of Proposed Solar Energy Conversion Systems Ordinance March, 2024

Purpose of Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the construction of large solar energy projects and protect Alna’s natural, scenic and agricultural resources and the public health, safety and welfare of Alna citizens.

Exemptions: The regulations do not apply to personal roof-mounted systems and ground-mounted systems small than 4,356 sq. ft. (1/10 of an acre) as long as they are safely installed.

Standards: The ordinance establishes regulations to protect the public interest. The regulations address a number of issues including protection of wildlife habitat, surface waters and groundwater, exterior lighting, visual impacts, protection of high quality agricultural land, vegetation management around the solar panels, erosion, safety, performance guarantees, decommissioning, and reclamation.

Nonconforming Uses: A legally existing, nonconforming solar energy project may continue to operate if it meets specific requirements. Expansions of nonconforming uses must comply with the standards of this ordinance.

Examples of Standards include:

- Setbacks: A setback of at least 100 feet from property lines (or more depending on size of project) is required.
- Visual buffer: If project is along a public road or residential dwelling lot, it must maintain a 30 ft vegetated buffer (using existing vegetation if it exists – otherwise, plant shrubs or have a berm.)
- Significant farmland: A solar project can only be built on farmland that has been determined by the state to be of statewide significance if it is a “dual use project” (a dual use project is one that can continue to be used for agricultural purposes as well as solar energy.)
- Decommissioning and reclamation: The solar panels and other equipment must be removed and the site reclaimed within one year after the project ceases operating.

Examples of Procedural Requirements include:

- Notice: Landowners within 2000 feet of the property and the public must be notified.
- Expert Consultants: Applicants may be required to provide funds to enable the town to hire experts to help review an application.