



Renewable Energy Systems (Solar and Wind)

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Skagit County encourages renewable energy systems such as solar panels or wind turbines, subject to certain constraints.

Solar Photovoltaics

Skagit County allows photovoltaic solar systems (solar panels that generate electricity) that are not attached to the regional electrical grid as accessory to a residential uses in all zones.

Skagit County allows “net metering” photovoltaic solar systems that are attached to the grid without special land use approval in all zones when the system:

- (1) has an electrical generating capacity of not more than 100 kilowatts;
- (2) is located on the customer-generator’s premises;
- (3) operates in parallel with the electric utility’s transmission and distribution facilities; and
- (4) is intended primarily to offset part or all of the customer-generator’s requirements for electricity.¹

Standalone installations (e.g., solar farms) may require special use permits.

When is a building permit required?

A building permit **is required** for solar energy systems (except those that qualify for the residential rooftop solar exemption described below). For example, all of the following require a building permit:

- Solar system is for a commercial or industrial application.
- The solar system is not on a rooftop and requires standalone support structures.
- The solar system is part of building alterations or additions, valued over \$2,500 (not including the value of the solar equipment).
- A residential rooftop photovoltaic system does not meet all of the conditions below

Residential Rooftop Solar Building Permit Exemption

A building permit **is not required** when all the following conditions are true:²

- The system is designed and proposed for the rooftop of a single-family residence.
- The system is designed for the wind speed of the local area, and installed per the manufacturer’s specifications.
- The system does not serve as the roof covering.
- The panels are mounted no higher than 18" above the surface of the roofing to which they will be attached.

Except for flat roofs, no portion of the system may exceed the highest point of the roof.

- The total dead load of modules, supports, mountings, raceways, and all other appurtenances weighs no more than 4 pounds per square foot.
- Supports are installed to spread the dead load across as many roof-framing members as needed to ensure that at no point are loads in excess of 50 pounds exerted on a single member.
- The method and type of attachment to the roof and weatherproofing for roof penetrations is completed to manufacturer recommendations.

Even when a building permit is not required, the work must be completed consistent with the building codes. The system must comply with land use regulations, including permitted uses, setbacks, and height.

Solar Hot Water

A plumbing permit is required to install a solar hot water system.

Wind Turbine Power Generation Systems

Skagit County considers wind turbine energy systems that qualify as “net metering systems” (see definition under Solar Photovoltaics) to be accessories to residential uses.³ Those that don’t qualify as a “net metering system” may qualify as a major or minor “utility development” that is allowed via special use permit in most zones. A building permit and SEPA review is required for all wind turbine installations.

Meteorological Towers

Skagit County allows “meteorological towers” in all zones, and exempts them from the height limit. These towers are defined as “temporary towers which are primarily designed to measure wind speed and directions plus other data relevant to siting wind energy systems and which are erected for a period of 24 months or less. Meteorological towers do not include towers and equipment used by airports, the Washington Department of Transportation, or other similar entities to monitor weather conditions.”⁴

Don’t forget an electrical permit!

An electrical permit is required for any renewable energy electrical generation system. Electrical permits are issued by Washington State Labor and Industries. Contact the Mount Vernon office at 360-416-3000 or www.lni.wa.gov.

¹ SCC 14.04.020, definition of “Net metering system, solar.”

² Department policy based on IRC R324.4 and M2303.2.

³ Administrative Official Interpretation Regarding Renewable Energy Systems and Major Utility Developments (July 1, 2008).

⁴ SCC 14.04.020, definition of “meteorological tower.”