

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT

Project Name	Rooftop Solar Criteria for a New Category of Countywide Certificate of Appropriateness
Review Type	Work Session
Proposal	To establish design criteria for rooftop solar installations in the Entrance Corridor Overlay District to be used by staff in the review of Countywide Certificate of Appropriateness applications.
ARB Meeting Date	April 20, 2026; Rescheduled for May 11, 2026
Staff Contact	Margaret Maliszewski

HISTORY

At the September 2, 2025, meeting, the Architectural Review Board (ARB) reviewed and approved three applications for rooftop solar installations. At the meeting, the ARB expressed interest in developing design criteria by which future applications of this type could be reviewed and approved by staff. A Resolution of Intent to amend the County Code to add a category of Countywide Certificate of Appropriateness for rooftop solar installations was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on December 10, 2025. The ARB reviewed draft criteria for the Countywide Certificate on January 20, 2026, commented on the criteria, and asked for revisions to be reviewed at an upcoming meeting. (Attachment 1 is an excerpt from the draft Action Memo/Minutes from that meeting.)

DISCUSSION

The draft criteria have been revised to incorporate ARB comments #1-3, 5-6, 8 and 12 from the January 20 meeting. See Attachments 2 and 3 for red-line and clean copy versions of the revised criteria. ARB comments #4, 7, and 9-11 are addressed below. See Attachment 4 for additional images of rooftop solar installations for reference.

4. ARB members asked if 6” clearance between panels and pitched roofs is workable with current and future technologies.

A general internet search showed that 4-6” spacing is typical. The following clearances were also found in the codes of other Virginia localities:

- Chesapeake: system must not be more than 8” from surface of roof to face of panel.
- Richmond: panels may not extend more than 6” above the roof surface.
- Smithfield: panels should be mounted less than or equal to 6” above the surface of the roof.
- Williamsburg: panels should not project greater than 12” above the roof surface.

Also, the Virginia Asphalt Services solar design approved by the ARB included panels approximately 4” above the roof surface. Based on this information, the 6” clearance was retained.

7. ARB members recommended adding “if not visible from the EC” to flat roof criterion #1.

Installations that aren’t visible from the EC don’t require ARB review/approval, so this criterion was deleted and a note was added at the end of both numbered lists to clarify when ARB review is needed and that documentation confirming lack of visibility will be required.

9. ARB members asked how panels over parking spaces fit into the criteria.

A proposal to add solar panels to an existing parking canopy could be handled the same as panels on buildings with pitched or flat roofs. For new solar parking canopies – structures specifically engineered to shelter vehicles and generate solar energy – it is anticipated that the solar panels would be fully integrated into the form and structure for the most efficient operation. Consequently, many of the criteria under consideration would not apply. However, an internet image search (see following images) suggests that some solar parking canopies are designed with dramatic profiles and integrated lighting and could be used in multiples to cover large parking areas. These factors could result in visual impacts as viewed from the Entrance Corridor street. This type of installation could be reserved for ARB review, or criteria might be established for staff level review of canopies with less visual impact; for example, single structures with a single slope roof and full cutoff lighting.



10. ARB members asked how solar shingles fit into the criteria.

If an entire roof is covered with solar shingles, criteria regarding location, orientation, and mounting would not likely be issues, though color and pattern could contribute significantly to overall appearance. If solar shingles are to be mounted to only part of a roof, design criteria could be like those for solar panels. Coordinating shingle size, color, orientation, and mounting details with the existing roof form and materials could all be relevant considerations. (See following images.)



11. In response to the first two images below, ARB members noted that arrays that are more open are more difficult to see as countywide certificates.

Arrays on flat roofs may have varying levels of visibility: 1) those that are fully screened by parapets, 2) those that are mostly screened by parapets and are oriented to the EC street in a way that significantly minimizes the visual impact of the array, and 3) those that are visible and significantly change the building's proportions, form, focus, and general character. Fully screened arrays would not require ARB review/approval. Installations that would be visible from the EC could be reserved for ARB review, and/or criteria might be established for staff level review of installations with lower levels of visibility.



QUESTIONS FOR THE WORK SESSION

1. Are the red line edits to the criteria text acceptable?
2. Should the countywide criteria apply to solar panels proposed to be added to parking canopies?
3. Should countywide criteria be drafted for solar parking canopies?
4. Should countywide criteria be drafted for roofs covered entirely in solar shingles? Should these include criteria beyond color and pattern?
5. Should countywide criteria for coordinating size, color, orientation and mounting details be drafted for solar shingles installed on parts of roofs?
6. Should arrays on flat roofs that are not fully screened by parapets require ARB review/approval? Is there some level of “not fully screened” that should be available for staff level review?

ATTACHMENTS

Attach. 1: [Rooftop Solar Criteria: Draft Action Memo / Minutes excerpt from January 20, 2026, ARB meeting](#)

Attach. 2: [Rooftop Solar Criteria: Revised draft design criteria redline](#)

Attach. 3: [Rooftop Solar Criteria: Revised draft design criteria clean](#)

Attach. 4: [Rooftop Solar Criteria: Selected images of rooftop solar installations](#)