

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Howard Tipton, Town Manager

**FROM:** Allen Parsons, AICP  
Director of Planning, Zoning, and Building Department

**REPORT DATE:** February 10, 2026

**MEETING DATE:** March 2, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Ordinance 2026-02, Solar Energy Systems

### **Background**

As part of the Comprehensive Plan Update, both the Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Board and the Town Commission have underscored the importance of promoting sustainable and renewable energy practices (via the adoption of Future Land Use Policy 1.1.4<sup>1</sup>, which encourages minimizing energy commitments and emphasizing renewable energy use). This shared priority reflects a broader community commitment to enhancing post-hurricane resilience through the development of reliable and sustainable energy sources capable of supporting critical needs during and after emergencies.

As one of the first Comprehensive Plan implementation items, the P&Z Board, beginning June 17, 2025, reaffirmed its interest in advancing this goal by evaluating and proposing updates to the Town's zoning code. Specifically, the Board expressed support for incorporating use-specific standards for various types of solar energy installations, along with complementary regulatory provisions that facilitate responsible solar development within the Town. Currently, the Land Development Code (LDC) does not include specific regulations for solar energy systems. Solar energy systems are typically regulated via mechanical equipment standards.

### **SolSmart: Technical Assistance**

A review of the current Zoning Code standards was assisted by a program funded by the United States Department of Energy called "SolSmart."

This program encouraged local governments to facilitate solar infrastructure and eliminate red tape. The program included a set of designation criteria, based on established best practices, which encourage the growth of solar energy at the local level and can earn communities' designations (such as Bronze, Silver, Platinum) that can be shared publicly. The Town took advantage of this Technical Assistance (at no cost) and did not pursue the designation.

The SolSmart Technical Assistance Team completed a review of the Town's zoning and land use regulations, evaluating the incorporation of best practices and identifying potential barriers such as height restrictions, setback requirements, and other limitations that may impact solar photovoltaic (PV)

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<sup>1</sup> Future Land Use Policy 1.1.4: The Town will encourage energy efficient land development and redevelopment that, through location, scale, and design, minimize long-term energy commitments, emphasizing renewable energy use.

development. As part of its review, the SolSmart Technical Assistance Team assessed the Town of Longboat Key's existing regulatory framework and provided targeted recommendations for improvements. These suggestions included updates and additional language aimed at reducing obstacles and supporting the continued growth of solar energy within the Town.

In October 2025, the P&Z Board reviewed three options for integrating solar energy-related requirements into the Town Code:

- **Option 1: Solar PV treated as Mechanical Equipment**, where solar photovoltaic (PV) systems are classified and regulated as *mechanical equipment* within the Code.
- **Option 2: Solar PV treated as an Accessory Use**, which would have regulated solar PV systems as an accessory use, which is related to a property's principal use. This approach would have allowed solar PV systems, by right, provided they meet general accessory use criteria; and,
- **Option 3: Solar PV treated as a standalone section**, which would consolidate all relevant solar regulations in one section, making it easier for a user seeking to install a solar PV system to navigate.

The P&Z Board voted to proceed with Option 3; solar PV treated as a standalone section. Ordinance 2026-02, Solar Energy Systems, encompasses the P&Z Board's recommendations, which include a purpose statement, definitions, general requirements, and height restrictions.

On January 27, 2026, the P&Z Board held a public hearing on Ordinance 2026-02, Solar Energy Systems, and recommended approval for Town Commission consideration.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Following the first reading public hearing, forward Ordinance 2026-02 to the April 6, 2026, Regular Meeting for second reading and public hearing.

### **Attachment(s)**

- A. Ordinance 2026-02, Solar Energy Systems (Available in Town Clerk's Office)
- B. PowerPoint Presentation (Available in Town Clerk's Office)
- C. Business Impact Estimate (Available in Town Clerk's Office)

**End of Agenda Item**