

Historic Preservation Commission

Policy No. 20-01

ADDRESSING EMERGENCY CLIMATE MOBILIZATION THROUGH THE  
INSTALLATION OF ROOF-MOUNTED SOLAR PANELS

On December 5, 2017, the Montgomery County Council adopted an Emergency Climate Mobilization resolution (Resolution No.: 18-974)<sup>1</sup> which declared a climate emergency and charged the County Executive, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to advise the Council on methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As a body established by the County Executive, it is incumbent on the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to undertake steps to achieve the goals of the Emergency Climate Mobilization resolution.

One method for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is to replace carbon-heavy methods of energy production, like coal and natural gas power plants, with renewable sources like wind and solar power. Current historic preservation best practice is to limit the locations solar panels may be installed to preserve the character of the building above all other considerations.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 24A-8(b)(6) of County Code<sup>3</sup> establishes a balancing test for approval of a HAWP where there is an apparent conflict between the desired impact on the historic resource compared to the public benefit of the proposal. Because the widespread use of solar panels, both for hot water and for electricity production, will reduce greenhouse gases in the county, it is the position of the HPC that solar panels may be installed on all roof elevations of historic sites or historic resources located within a historic district provided:

1. The identified preferred location (on the rear of the property, building additions, accessory structures, or ground-mounted arrays) is not feasible due to resource orientation or other site limitations and;
2. The roof is not either architecturally significant or a slate or tile roof unless it can be demonstrated that the solar array will be installed without damaging the historic character of the resource or historic fabric; and
3. A Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP) is required for all work referenced in this policy.

Now, THEREFORE:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/res/2017/20171205\\_18-974.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/res/2017/20171205_18-974.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/guidelines/solar-technology.htm> and <https://www.nps.gov/tps/sustainability/new-technology/solar-on-historic.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> §24A-8(b)(6) In balancing the interest of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interest of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general welfare is better served by granting the permit.

WHEREAS, Historic Area Work Permit decisions are guided by the criteria in Section 24A, The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, and pertinent guidance from applicable master plan amendments and/or site or district-specific studies;

WHEREAS, The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation as interpreted by the National Park Service limit the placement of rooftop solar panels under Standards 2, 9, and 10 to less conspicuous locations;

WHEREAS, the County Council has established a Climate Emergency;

WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation is a body established by the County Executive and County Council;

WHEREAS, Section 24-8(b)(6) states, “In balancing the interest of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interests of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general public welfare is better served by granting the permit;”

WHEREAS, the widespread use of solar panels, both for hot water and for electricity production, will reduce greenhouse gases in the county, in accordance with the aims of the Emergency Climate Mobilization resolution (Resolution No.: 18-974), it shall be the policy of the Historic Preservation Commission that:

1. The preferred locations for solar panel installation(s) on a designated historic site or an historic resource located within an historic district is a) on the rear of the property, b) on non-historic building additions, c) on accessory structures, or d) in ground-mounted arrays;
2. If it is not feasible to install solar panels in one of the identified preferred locations due to resource orientation or other site limitations; and,
3. The roof is determined to be neither architecturally significant, nor a character-defining feature of the resource, nor is it a slate or tile roof, that unless it can be demonstrated that the solar array will be installed without damaging the historic character of the resource or historic fabric; then
4. The public welfare is better served by approving a Historic Area Work Permit for solar panels on all visible side or front roof slopes under Section 24A-8(b)(6).
5. A Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP) is required for all work referenced in this policy.