



Renewable Communities

Massachusetts cities and towns
leading the way to 100% renewable energy

Watertown: Rooftop solar policy

Since its designation as a Green Community in 2010, Watertown has reduced energy consumption for municipal facilities by 14% through energy efficiency measures. The town has converted all streetlights to efficient LED fixtures, saving more than \$105,000 per year. Local officials have installed solar panels on the roofs of the public works building, police station, and high school, reducing energy costs by \$30,000 per year.¹

Watertown is home to 231 solar installations, mostly on residential buildings.² Town officials recognized an opportunity to tap into more of Watertown's solar energy potential by installing solar panels on the roofs of commercial buildings.

In 2018, the town council unanimously passed an ordinance requiring all new commercial buildings greater than 10,000 square feet or residential buildings with more than 10 units to be built with solar panels on at least 50 percent of the roof area. Additionally, parking structures must have solar panels covering 90 percent of their top surface.³ The ordinance also requires existing buildings that are undergoing renovation to install solar panels.⁴ It allows for exemptions for buildings that do not have sufficient solar exposure on their roofs.⁵

Town officials expect that the rooftop solar requirement will not be an impediment to new development. Local leaders hope that the ordinance will help reduce pollution and support local solar energy businesses.⁶

A report by the Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group found that requiring rooftop

solar panels on new homes built in Massachusetts between 2020 and 2045 would add more than 2,300 megawatts of solar capacity, equivalent to all of the solar that has been installed in the state so far. The electricity generated by these solar panels would reduce Massachusetts' global warming emissions by 1.9% from 2015 levels.⁷ Extending this requirement to commercial buildings, similar to Watertown's ordinance, could lead to even greater benefits.

1. "Energy and Sustainability Office," Town of Watertown, <<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/777/Energy-and-Sustainability>>.

2. "Watertown ordinance requires solar panels on commercial buildings," Meredith Gabriliska, Massachusetts Municipal Association, March 2019, <<https://www.mma.org/watertown-ordinance-requires-solar-panels-on-commercial-buildings/>>.

3. "Planning Board Report," Planning Board, Town of Watertown Department of Community Development and Planning, 10 October 2018, <<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/26235/2018-11-27-Zoning--Solar-Assessments>>.

4. "Watertown Becomes 1st Town In New England To Require Solar Panels On New Commercial Constructions," WBUR, 9 December 2018, <<https://www.wbur.org/news/2018/12/09/watertown-commercial-buildings-solar-panels>>.

5. "Planning Board Report," Planning Board, Town of Watertown Department of Community Development and Planning, 10 October 2018, <<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/26235/2018-11-27-Zoning--Solar-Assessments>>.

6. "Watertown Requires Solar Panels On New Buildings, And Massachusetts Considers Following Suit Statewide," Craig LeMoult, WGBH, 1 February 2019, <<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2019/02/01/watertown-requires-solar-panels-on-new-buildings-and-massachusetts-considers-following-suit-statewide>>. "Watertown passes new solar requirement," Angela Thoma, Wicked Local Watertown, 5 December 2018, <<https://watertown.wickedlocal.com/news/20181205/watertown-passes-new-solar-requirement>>.

7. *Solar Homes: The Next Step for Clean Energy*, Rob Sargent, Bret Fanshaw, Abi Bradford, and Jonathan Sundby, Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group, December 2018, <<https://environmentmassachusetts.org/feature/ame/solar-homes>>.