



# Renewable Energy in Neighborhoods

## Department of Planning & Housing

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### REPORT TO PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

June 3, 2009

From: Sam Perry, Planner

On May 18, 2009, an “open house” was held to engage the public regarding solar and wind equipment in residential neighborhoods. The attendance was about 40 people total, which was considered very good by planning staff. There were a few middle-school aged students, who attended with their parents, for educational extra credit by a local science teacher. Even with a relatively small percentage of the community present, there was a good cross section of the community. As observed by staff, there were building trade professionals, scientists, environmentalists, property owners, investors and educators present. No sign-in was required, which allowed anonymous participation. After an initial introduction and Q&A session, the atmosphere was more casual, much like a science fair. The attendees had three different methods of providing feedback: (1) verbally to planning staff, (2) written, on the survey forms, and (3) by rating pictures with colored stickers. All of the planning staff was available for answering questions.

Before releasing the attendees to study the 3-d model and the 20 photographed scenarios, a brief summary of common concerns associated with wind and solar equipment was given. The audience was asked to imagine themselves in the position of a neighboring property owner. What concerns might they have with these scenarios? If they think they might have concerns, can those concerns be mitigated? Or, is the benefit of the equipment worth more than the “cost” of the concern? Questions were asked about the noise of wind turbines and if there was radio frequency interference caused by them. There were also questions about how net metering works, which was explained by Don Kom, Director of Electric Services. There was generally support of residentially-generated power by the attendees with an expressed desire for more information about what the real systems actually look and sound like. Since the open house, staff has located some real sites, where property owners have agreed to allow staff to direct people to drive by their properties.

Some trends observed from the open house and within the survey responses were:

- The City should be cautious about regulating placement angles and locations because conditions are very site-specific. The City should also be cautious about architectural review.
- Equipment can be obtrusive in a neighborhood. Property value effect is a concern. More subtle systems were favored by some. Additional landscaping could help.
- Even though they generate very little power, the smaller, less obtrusive wind equipment, such as vertical axis, and roof-mounted, should be allowed.
- Solar and wind access can be problematic in neighborhoods. People may not want to invest if they can not ensure many years of access. How can the City help?
- Overall, all attendees favored the concept, and a few individuals thought all forms should be allowed without must restraint, but some had concerns which reduced the acceptance because of obtrusive location, size or height. In some of the limited acceptance of responses, the location, size and height concern did not have to do with aesthetics, but did have to do with noise, safety, or reflection. Of those concerns, more information to educate was requested.

- Community/neighborhood-based power generation was supported by several attendees, as a way for neighbors to team up and pool their resources. It was unknown whether this was possible for existing developments or only for new developments.
- Neighbor input can be helpful in a public setting if negative impacts are expected by staff.
- More education or real working examples may be needed to gain community acceptance and understanding.

A verbal presentation of the survey results will be provided at the Commission meeting. The display boards shown at the open house, as well as the 3-d model will also be available at the Commission meeting.

Attached is a copy of the one page program from the open house.

Sample images used for the open house and surveys are on a special webpage:

<http://www.cityofames.org/HousingWeb/Planning/Renewable%20Energy/Renewable%20Energy.htm>

Alternatively, you can search using the term “renewable energy” on the City’s website.

During this report and discussion, staff anticipates receiving additional feedback from the Commission before bringing back recommended code language options at an upcoming meeting.

It has also been suggested that the display boards be placed in location where additional members of the public can comment on the scenarios to continue receiving feedback throughout the code writing and review process.

Example scenario photo of model:



cc: Mayor, City Council  
Steve Schainker, City Manager  
Susan Gwiasda, Public Relations Officer  
Donald Kom, Director, Electric Administration  
David Brown, Building Official  
Historic Preservation Commission  
Zoning Board of Adjustment



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Open House  
May 18, 2009  
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Dear Attendee,

Thank you for attending this open house about renewable energy in neighborhoods. As you may already know, the City's zoning ordinance was not written to accommodate solar or wind equipment in residential areas. Within the past several months, there have been a handful of inquiries from property owners and contractors about what options might be available. However, under the current regulations, there are very few proposals which could be approved. Because of the ever growing interest, the City Council has directed staff to investigate options and bring back some proposals. The goal of tonight's open house is to solicit feedback from you as a citizen / property owner. Try to put yourself in the position of the neighbor next door to the prospective owner of a new solar/wind system. What would you be concerned about if he/she wanted to install such equipment on their house or property? Could any of those concerns be mitigated or is the benefit of the equipment worth more than the cost of the concern? If the City can better understand what the concerns are before drafting code language, the code will be more effective and have better support of the community. Some common concerns (in no specific order) of neighboring property owners are:

1. Property Value
2. Aesthetics
3. Safety
4. Noise
5. Shadow Flicker
6. Location (front yard, back yard, etc)
7. Lot size
8. Height (wind turbines)
9. Insurance
10. Abandonment
11. Interference (wind turbines)
12. Density (number/acre) of turbines

Please browse the six display boards and use the Green, Yellow, and Red stickers to place on the individual pictures to indicate, Yes, Maybe or No. Please also fill out a more detailed survey form, which will allow space for specific comments. Feedback forms will also be placed on the City's website for those who were not able to attend the open house.

The next step will be to report the feedback to the Planning & Zoning Commission in the form of possible code language options. The Planning & Zoning Commission will then forward a recommendation to the City Council.

Thank you!!!!!!!!!!