

Hillsborough Historic District Commission Eases Solar Panel Installation Process

1/27/2015



The Hillsborough Historic District Commission has simplified the process for installing solar panels within the historic district.

Installing solar panels in the Hillsborough Historic District just got easier.

The Hillsborough Historic District Commission has simplified the process for installing photovoltaic solar collecting panels by classifying such installations as a “minor work” when they cannot be seen from the street.

Hillsborough Commissioner Jenn Weaver is pleased with the commission’s decision. “It is perfectly in keeping with the need to preserve the character of the Historic District while promoting alternative energy in the age of climate change,” she said. “Streamlining the solar panel approval process is a way the town can support alternative energy, and I’m so grateful to our staff and HDC volunteers for having the wisdom to come up with this solution.”

Classifying solar panel installations as a less substantial exterior work expedites the review process by eliminating the need for review by the Historic District Commission. The commission approved the following addition to the Minor Works list in the Hillsborough Historic District Design Guidelines:

37. Installation/alteration/removal of low profile, photovoltaic, solar panels, skylights, ventilators, and mechanical equipment or communications equipment when placed on roof slopes that are not visible from the public right-of-way and in locations that do not compromise the architectural integrity of a building.

The change allows town staff now to review solar panel applications, which formerly were processed as Certificate of Appropriateness applications requiring full review by the commission. Commission reviews often can take one to two months.

About 25 individuals from within the Historic District already have contacted the town about an interest in installing solar panels following initiation last fall of the Solarize Hillsborough program — a grassroots initiative that organized Hillsborough and Orange County neighborhoods together for group discounts on solar panel installations.

Town staff generally can review and approve minor work permits within three business days. A \$10 fee is required for staff review of minor work.