



Canadian Solar Industries Association  
*L'Association des Industries Solaires du Canada*  
150 Isabella St., Suite 605  
Ottawa, Ontario  
CANADA K1S 1V7

T • 1 (613) 736-9077  
1 (866) 522-6742  
F • 1 (613) 736-8938  
E • [info@cansia.ca](mailto:info@cansia.ca)

CanSIA

[www.cansia.ca](http://www.cansia.ca)

## LRP I Backgrounder: Solar and Property Values

*Do large-scale, ground-mounted solar projects impact the property value of nearby neighbours?*

It is natural to be concerned about any newly proposed development. However, there is no evidence to suggest that large-scale ground mounted solar projects will impact the value of neighbouring properties.

The concern about property values typically stems from concerns about how the project may look or impact the feel of a community. With reasonable setbacks and visual buffering using existing or newly planted vegetation or berms, a solar project is not expected to have any long-term impacts on neighbouring properties.

In fact, a well-designed solar project is often considered to be a very good neighbour since it will be quiet and will not be visually intrusive over the landscape. Solar projects contribute to local economic development and provide greater ongoing tax revenue to the local municipality compared to other rural lands uses. In addition, solar projects are constructed following rigorous environmental assessments to ensure safety for the environment, human health, local wildlife and natural heritage<sup>1</sup>.

*What does a visual buffer typically consist of?*

Solar project developers are encouraged to make use of existing natural site features which may provide visual screening of the projects; otherwise the developer may, but is not necessarily required to, install new screenings based on consultation with local residents.

Although site plans may vary, visual buffers may be comprised of a continuous row of live indigenous vegetation which at the time of planting is typically an average height of at least 1.3 metres and spaced at a distance of approximately of 0.8-1.0 metres. Once matured, the hedges are typically least 3.0 metres on average<sup>2</sup>. These measurements are established as a part of the FIT Program but are not necessarily required for non-FIT Projects. Vegetation is selected to provide year-round screening and is developed upon the recommendation of an arborist, landscaping architect or other qualified professional.

*What set-backs are typically considered?*

All large ground-mounted solar projects must abide by the requirements of approvals issued by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Renewable Energy Approval.** (<http://www.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/renewable-energy-approvals>)

<sup>2</sup> **CanSIA Update: FIT 2.0 Land Use Working Group Submission.** (<http://www.cansia.ca/news-media-archive/update-fit-20-land-use-working-group-submission>)

<sup>3</sup> See Footnote 1



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The requirements ensure that any noise emitting equipment, such as the inverter, is set back reasonably from any dwelling. Set-backs are such that any dwelling in proximity to the solar project would not be subject to noise any louder than 40 dB - this is equivalent noise level of a library<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, some solar project developers include additional set-backs from neighbouring property. Depending on the specific site characteristics, solar projects are typically set-back from residential property lines and any open-road allowance<sup>5</sup>. The extent of any additional set-backs are generally determined via consultation with neighbouring property owners.

### *How can I get involved in site design considerations?*

As good business practice solar project developers will strive to ensure that all concerns from the community are considered. Feedback from neighbours is especially important to this process. As part of the Large Renewable Procurement administered by the Independent Electricity System Operator, all neighbours are notified about proposed projects at very early stages of development<sup>6</sup>. Neighbours are encouraged to submit questions to project developers directly, ask for site layout drawings, request one-on-one meetings, and attend community public meetings on the project. If the project is awarded a contract and moves forward with permitting and approvals, the project developers would be required to conduct additional detailed public consultation and consider specific requirements to mitigate any impacts of the project<sup>7</sup>.

### *How will a solar project affect the tax classification of a property?*

For rooftop solar, the assessment and tax classification of a property will not change due to the addition of a rooftop solar project. For groundmount solar, the change in the assessment and tax classification will depend on the size of the project and what type of entity is generating the electricity.<sup>8</sup> For groundmount solar where the entity is a corporate power producer, the property will continue to be taxed at the industrial rate. For entities that are not corporate power producers, the following guidelines apply.

- **Medium-size** ground installations with a generation capacity **over 10 kW and up to 500 kW** will be taxed based on the surrounding land use (e.g. residential, farm, multi-residential, commercial).
- **Large-size** ground installations with a generation capacity **over 500 kW** will be taxed based on the surrounding land use for the proportion of assessment up to 500 kW, and at the industrial rate for the proportion over 500 kW.

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<sup>4</sup> **Comparative Examples of Noise Levels: Comparative Examples of Noise Sources, Decibels & Their Effects.** (<http://www.industrialnoisecontrol.com/comparative-noise-examples.htm>)

<sup>5</sup> See Footnote 2

<sup>6</sup> **Large Renewable Procurement.** (<http://www.ieso.ca/Pages/Participate/Generation-Procurement/Large-Renewable-Procurement/default.aspx>)

<sup>7</sup> See Footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup> **Government of Ontario Fact Sheet.** (<http://news.ontario.ca/mof/en/2012/01/fact-sheet.html>)