

To: Chairperson Kintner and Members of the Plan Commission

From: Brandon Nolin, AICP, Community Development Administrator
Anne Ryder Kirchner, Planner/Zoning Administrator

Date: March 5, 2026

Re: Plan Commission Case PC 25-13
Request for approval to amend a Special Use Permit (Ord. 04-21) to allow for the installation of roof-mounted solar energy collection systems at the property commonly known as 8625 Waukegan Road (PIN 10-19-103-002-0000) in Morton Grove, Illinois.

STAFF REPORT

Public Notice

The Village provided Public Notice for the March 12, 2026, Plan Commission public hearing for PC 25-13 in accordance with the Unified Development Code. The Morton Grove Champion published a public notice on February 19, 2026. The Village notified surrounding property owners via mail and placed a public notice sign on the subject property on February 19, 2026.

Application Summary

SLDIL Portfolio LLC (“Solar Landscape”) and Opal Energy Group, LLC (“Opal Energy”), on behalf of Public Storage, Inc. (“co-applicants”), submitted a complete Special Use Permit application to the Department of Community and Economic Development (under PC 25-13) for the installation of a roof-mounted community solar energy collection system (for the sale of energy) and a behind-the-meter solar energy collection system (to supply the Public Storage site with energy). A public storage facility was permitted via special use permit under Ordinance 95-13 with amendments under Ordinance 99-54 and Ordinance 04-21 (See “Attachment A”).

Revised Application

Case PC 25-13 was previously heard at a public hearing on January 20, 2026 wherein the Plan Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a Special Use Permit amendment approving a community solar installation by applicant Solar Landscape. Prior to any vote on the Special Use Permit ordinance, the Village was contacted by Opal Energy, and made aware of a parallel building permit application to install a solar energy collection system on portions of the same subject property that would be used to provide electricity to the subject property. The Village Administration withdrew the draft special use permit ordinance from the Village Board agenda and requested that Solar Landscape and Opal Energy submit a revised application under PC 25-13 as co-applicants.

While the solar installations will be leased by different entities, the projects occupy the same set of roofs and should be reviewed and considered together. Staff have no concerns with the revised proposal, but the Plan Commission should be made aware of all planned improvements at a given property to ensure any approval or denial of an application is based on a complete understanding of a given project.

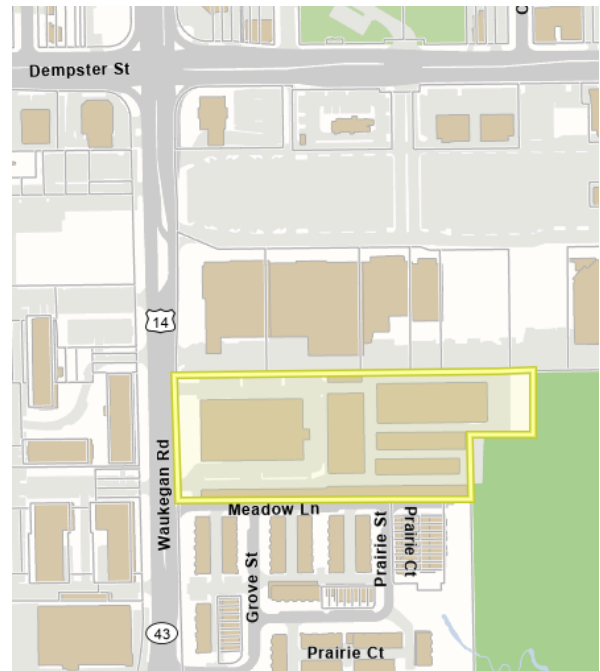
The Special Use Permit (Ord. 04-21) must be amended to accommodate both projects. If approved under a Special Use Permit amendment, both projects would need to provide decommissioning plans that would be reviewed independent of one another by the Village Administrator. Building permit applications would also be reviewed independent of one another.

Subject Property

The subject property consists of one (1) parcel occupied by the existing Public Storage facility at 8625 Waukegan Road in Morton Grove, Illinois. The parcel is approximately 285,305.21 sq. ft. and zoned C-1 General Commercial. All surrounding properties to the north, south, and west across Waukegan Road are also zoned C-1. The subject property is located to the south of the Samwill Station shopping center and north of the Trafalgar Woods townhome development. The properties to the east are located within the Forest Preserves of Cook County and zoned R-1 Single Family Residence.

Project Overview

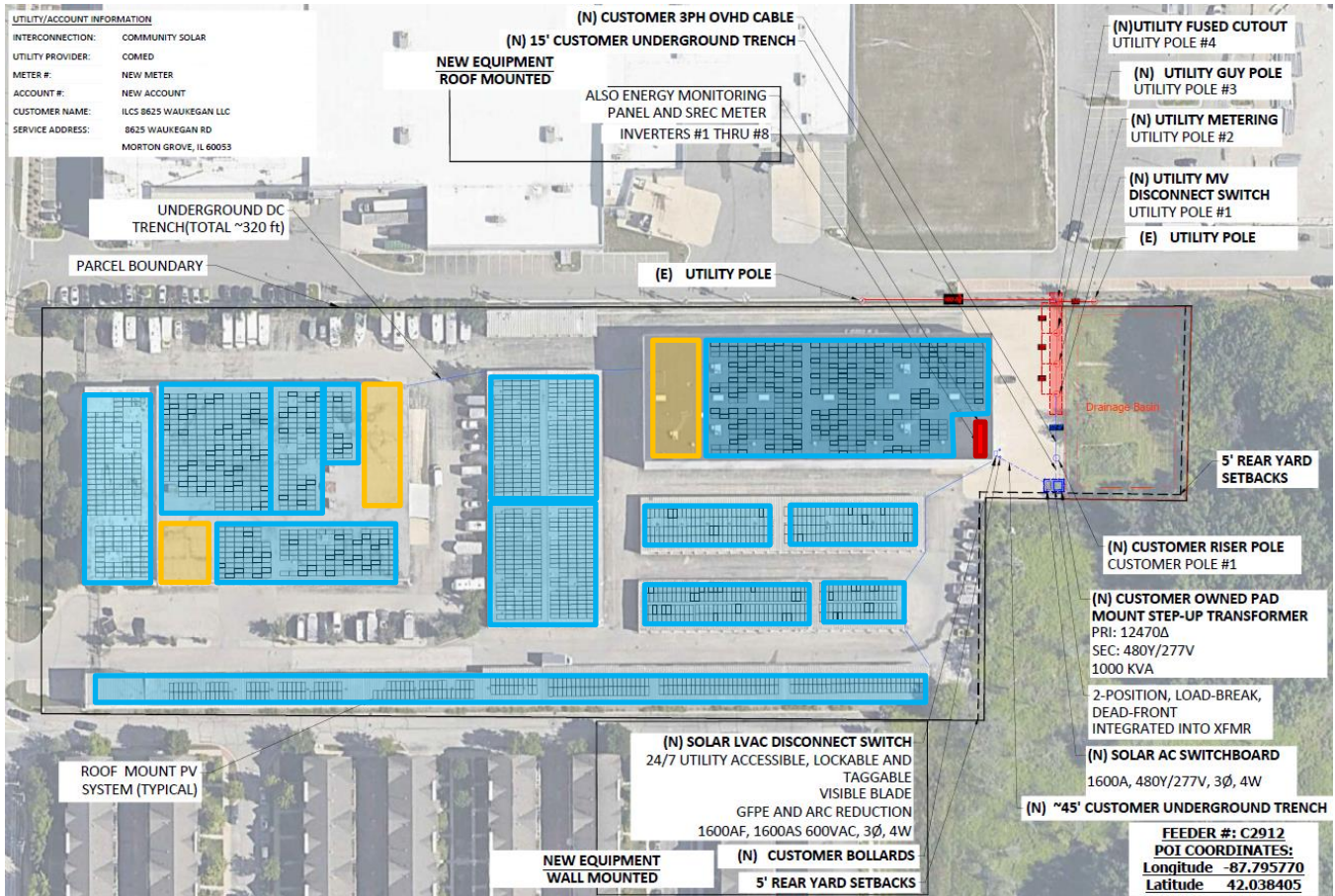
Solar Landscape, a renewable energy development company located in Asbury Park, NJ, proposes to develop a community solar project at the subject property. The project consists of roof mounted solar panels and will be installed on the existing Public Storage building located on the property. The total system size is 960kW AC and interconnection has been approved by ComEd. The project has been approved as part of the Illinois Shines Community-Driven Community Solar Program (CDCS). CDCS allows customers to subscribe to a shared solar project, offsetting their electricity costs with energy credits from the system's production.



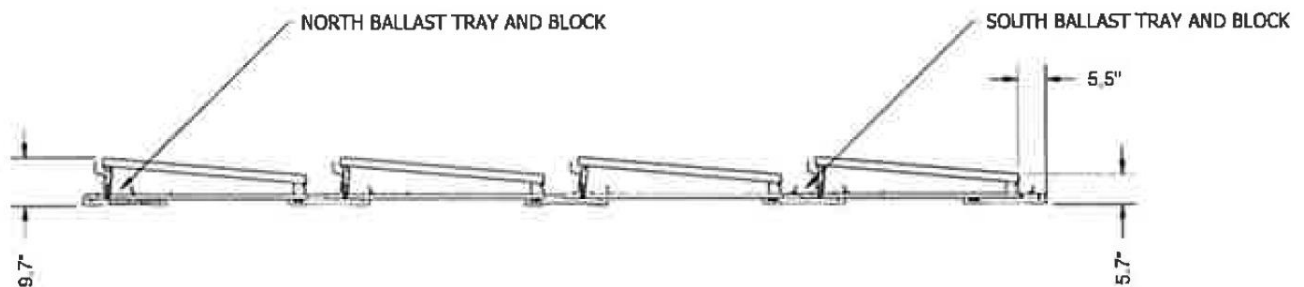
Subject Property Location Map

Opal Energy, a renewable energy company specializing in commercial and industrial energy solutions, proposes to install a behind-the-meter solar energy collection system that would supply energy to the Public Storage property. Unused energy generated by the project would be sold back to the grid via net metering and the property owner would receive bill credits from ComEd. The total size of the Opal Energy system would be 130kW AC and cover 9,174 sq. ft. across two roofs.

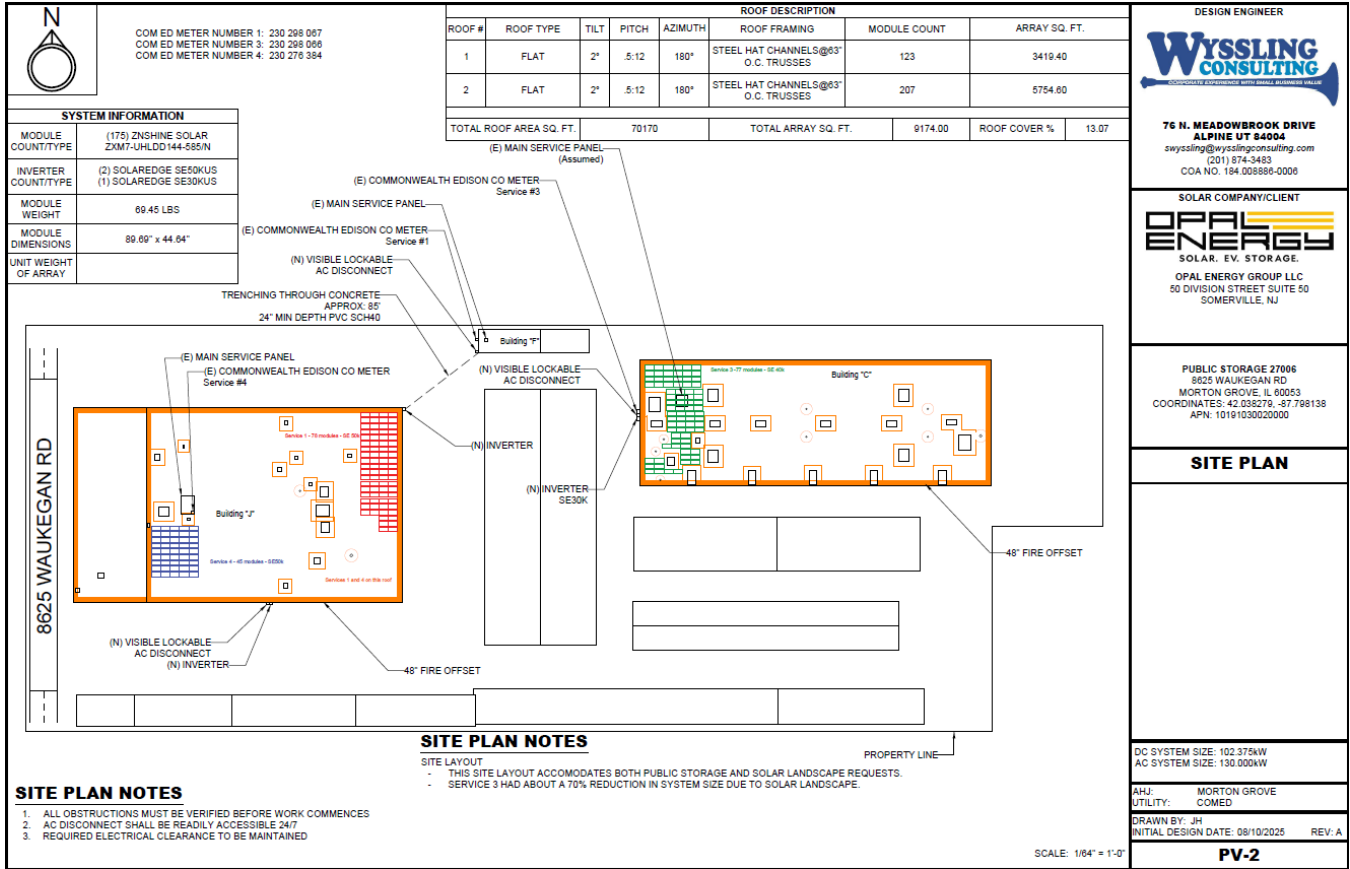
Solar Landscape is also proposing the installation of three (3) utility poles, a transformer, and a switchboard in the northeast corner of the site. That area is screened from public view by privacy fencing and the subject property buildings to the west. The utility poles would be visible from the Sawmill Station property, but would be concealed from view by a future building to be located on the undeveloped pad at the shopping center.



Proposed Site Plan: Generalized Locations of Solar Landscape Solar Arrays highlighted in BLUE; Generalized Locations of Opal Energy Solar Arrays highlighted in ORANGE; Roof-mounted Inverter Rack highlighted in RED



Proposed Solar Landscape Array Racking Details (Typical)



DESIGN ENGINEER

WYSSLING CONSULTING

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 ALPINE UT 84004
 swysling@wysslingconsulting.com
 (201) 574-3425
 COA NO. 184.008880-0006

SOLAR COMPANY/CLIENT

OPAL ENERGY

SOLAR, EV, STORAGE.
 OPAL ENERGY GROUP LLC
 50 DIVISION STREET SUITE 50
 SOMERVILLE, NJ

PUBLIC STORAGE 27006
 8625 WAUKEGAN RD
 MORTON GROVE, IL 60053
 COORDINATES: 42.036276, -87.798138
 APN: 10191030020000

SITE PLAN

DC SYSTEM SIZE: 102.375kW
 AC SYSTEM SIZE: 130.000kW

AHJ: MORTON GROVE
 UTILITY: COMED

DRAWN BY: JH
 INITIAL DESIGN DATE: 08/10/2025 REV. A

PV-2

Proposed Opal Energy Site Plan (Array locations in Blue, Red, and Green)



Proposed Opal Energy Arrays (Left typical) and Inverter (Right)

Solar Energy Collection Systems Code Update

A proposed update to the Unified Development Code that was approved by the Plan Commission (PC 25-04) and was recently approved by the Village Board, provides guidance regarding the location and installation of solar energy collection systems. Solar Landscape was provided a copy of the Plan Commission staff report including draft ordinance language approved by the Plan Commission and it is included as “**Attachment A**” in this report. The ordinance was approved on January 13, 2026.

The code requires a Special Use Permit for grid-connected solar energy systems that sell back to the energy grid. This application, which was initiated prior to the adoption of the code update, meets that requirement as an amendment to an existing special use permit. The code update also included requirements for building-mounted solar energy collection systems including standards for location, quantity, roof overhang, and height.

Roof-mounted Inverter Rack (Solar Landscape)

The proposed installations meet all proposed standards with the exception of a roof-mounted inverter rack that would exceed the maximum height established in the code. Per Section 12-3-9:A.5, systems shall not extend more than five feet (5') above the surface of a flat roof. Solar Landscape is proposing to install five (5) inverters, one inverter per rack, resulting in a collective length of 20 ft. with a height of 6 ft. Existing mechanicals on the roof at 4 ft. tall.

Solar Landscape modified the initial design to relocate the inverters from the side of the building to the roof, citing concerns with the potential for damage from vehicles accessing the westernmost. The required disconnect switch for the solar energy system would be ground-mounted near the inverter rack location and protected by a pair of bollards.

The Appearance Commission noted that screening should be required for the inverter racks, but did not indicate opposition to the roof-mounted location. In response to comments from the Appearance Commission, Solar Landscape provided three sample images of example screening systems for presentation to the Plan Commission that could be used to screen the proposed roof-mounted inverter rack. Solar Landscape has not indicated a preference or confirmed which specific screening system would be used. **As a condition of approval, Staff recommend requiring screening that is neutral in color and is similar in style to the options presented by Solar Landscape.**



**Example of an unscreened Inverter Rack
(with two inverters)**

Wall-mounted Inverters (Opal Energy)

Opal Energy is proposing a wall-mounted inverter in two locations. One inverter would be located on the south wall of the westernmost building and located behind the subject property's entrance gate/screening. The other inverter would be on the west wall of the northeast building and located on an internal accessway. In reviewing typical solar permit applications, Community and Economic Development staff permit inverters to locate in side yards with similar guidance to other mechanical equipment, such that they cannot be located in a required side yard. Staff have no concerns with the proposed locations of the wall-mounted inverters.



Images of Example Screening Systems provided by Solar Landscape

Decommissioning Plan Required

Section 12-3-9:C.6 of the Municipal Code indicates that a decommissioning plan shall be required for all installations in commercial or industrial zoning districts and such a plan shall run with the land. Decommissioning is to be required for all solar energy collection system installations in commercial and industrial zoning districts when the primary structure is vacant for a period of three hundred and sixty-five (365) days. ***Staff recommend as a condition of approval that both co-applicants be required to submit revised final plans that include decommissioning plans for their respective projects subject to review and approval by the Village Administrator.***

Glare Analysis

Solar Landscape is proposing solar arrays to be mounted to the roof of every building at the subject property. This includes locating solar arrays on the westernmost building that fronts Waukegan Road as well as on the buildings located along the south lot line immediately adjacent the Trafalgar Woods townhome complex. Staff has concerns regarding the potential for glare to impact the adjacent townhome project. There is potential for light to reflect off of the roof-mounted solar arrays visible from upper stories of adjacent townhomes. In response to Staff comments, Solar Landscape provided a glare report that summarizes the results of simulated glare from various observation points.

The analysis evaluates both “glint” which is defined as a bright, momentary flash of light; and “glare” which is defined as a more continuous and sustained presence of light that may appear to “sparkle” from viewing locations. The report also notes that the solar arrays are designed specifically not to reflect light, thus reducing the potential for glint and glare. The report found no potential for glare at any of the observation points. Latitude and longitude for each observation point were shared and Staff has requested a map to help illustrate observation point locations. Several observation points were located along the south lot line at a height of 12 ft. in an effort to simulate second-floor observation points from adjacent residences.

No glare analysis was provided by Opal Energy. Given the similar location and array design, Staff do not believe the Opal Energy installation would create additional glare. **Opal Energy should speak to the potential glare from their installation specifically.**

Property Value Impacts

When discussing the glare analysis, the Appearance Commission inquired about potential impacts to adjacent properties. In response to Appearance Commission comments, Solar Landscape provided copies of two studies addressing the impact of solar energy collection systems on property values along with a summary of the studies. A summary provided by Solar Landscape and the two studies are included as “**Attachment B**” in this report. Solar Landscape indicates that the studies have generally concluded that there is no discernable impact upon property values. Staff summary notes are below:

- **Loyola University, School of Sustainability report:** This academic paper evaluated home values surrounding 70 utility-scale solar facilities built in the Midwest from 2009 to 2022. The researchers found that utility-scale solar projects increase nearby property values by 0.5% to 2.0% and that smaller projects have more of a positive impact on nearby property values than projects that are 20 megawatts or larger.
- **Solar Energy Industry Association (SEIA) pamphlet:** This document summarizes the results of three studies from various appraisal and accounting firms. While those studies focused on more expansive solar farms in rural areas, all reach the general conclusion that there is no consistent link between proximity to a solar farm and property values.

Installation Examples

In response to Appearance Commission comments, Solar Landscape has provided imagery from other similar installations in the Chicago region. Images for roof-mounted solar arrays at Public Storage facilities in Chicago Heights, IL and Justice, IL are shown below. The solar arrays are difficult to see or not visible from the street level in both locations. The Justice, IL location includes an inverter rack that has been mounted to the perimeter fence of the facility, while the Chicago Heights, IL location includes a wall-mounted inverter rack that is located within a gap in the building façade.



Roof-mounted Solar Energy Collection System with Fence-mounted inverter racks (Solar Landscape, Public Storage, Justice, IL)



Roof-mounted Solar Energy Collection System with Façade-mounted Inverter Racks protected by a Chain Link Fence (Solar Landscape, Public Storage, Chicago Heights, IL)

Commission Review

Appearance Commission

On December 2, 2025, the Appearance Commission reviewed Case PC 25-13. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Appearance Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to recommend approval of the application including conditions regarding the need for an approved decommissioning plan prior to applying for the building permit, and final elevations and materials information to address concerns regarding the proposed roof-mounted inverter rack. The Staff Report to the Appearance Commission and related minutes have been included as “**Attachment C.**”

Traffic Safety Commission

As the requested special use permit amendment does not impact traffic or parking at the subject property, the Village Engineer waived the requirement for Traffic Safety Commission (TSC) review.

Departmental Review

The proposed project was reviewed by several department representatives and no comments were issued.

- **Building Department:** No comments at this time.
- **Fire Department:** No comments at this time.
- **Public Works Department/Engineering:** No comments at this time.

Standards for Review

The Standards for Special Uses are established in Section 12-16-4:C.5 of the Unified Development Code:

Standards For Special Uses: The following standards for evaluating special uses shall be applied in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration the restrictions and/or limitations which exist for the site being considered for development:

1. **Preservation of Health, Safety, Morals, And Welfare:** The establishment, maintenance and operation of the special use will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals or general welfare.
2. **Adjacent Properties:** The special use should not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for the uses permitted in the zoning district.
3. **Orderly Development:** The establishment of the special use will not impede normal and orderly development or impede the utilization of surrounding property for uses permitted in the zoning district.
4. **Adequate Facilities:** Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and other necessary facilities are in existence or are being provided.
5. **Traffic Control:** Adequate measures have been or will be taken to provide ingress and egress designed to minimize traffic congestion on the public streets. The proposed use of the subject site should not draw substantial amounts of traffic on local residential streets.
6. **Adequate Buffering:** Adequate fencing and/or screening shall be provided to ensure the right of enjoyment of surrounding properties to provide for the public safety or to screen parking areas and other visually incompatible uses.
7. **Conformance To Other Regulations:** The special use shall, in all other respects, conform to applicable provisions of this title or amendments thereto. Variation from provisions of this title as provided for in subsection 12-16-3A, "Variations", of this chapter, may be considered by the plan commission and the Village Board of Trustees as a part of the special use permit.

Recommendation

Should the Plan Commission recommend approval of this application, staff suggests the following motion and conditions:

Motion to recommend approval to amend a Special Use Permit (Ord. 04-21) to allow for the installation of roof-mounted solar energy collection systems, all within the C-1 General Commercial District, at the property commonly known as 8625 Waukegan Road in Morton Grove, Illinois, subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Prior to filing any Building Permit Application, each co-applicant shall submit final plans, including a decommissioning plan, that meet the requirements of draft Ordinance 25-22 subject to review and approval by the Village Administrator. Final plans, elevations and materials must be deemed consistent with the approved materials, as determined by the Community Development Administrator and Appearance Commission Chairperson. If such designs are deemed to be inconsistent with the approved plans or if materials are deemed to be of a lower quality than the approved materials, then the owner/applicant will be required to file an application for an amendment to the Appearance Certificate.*
- 2. Prior to filing any Building Permit Application, co-applicant Solar Landscape shall submit material selections for roof-mounted inverter rack screening, subject to review and approval by the Community Development Administrator. Proposed screening for roof-mounted inverter racks shall be a neutral color that matches or complements the color of surrounding roofing materials and mechanicals.*

Attachments

- **Attachment A** – Ordinances 04-21, 99-54, and 95-13 regarding the Special Use Permit to permit a self-storage facility at 8625 Waukegan Road
- **Attachment B** – Staff Report for PC 25-04 – Solar Energy Collection Systems Text Amendments, dated November 12, 2025
- **Attachment C** – Summary of Property Value Impact Studies Concerning Solar Energy Projects and Nearby Residential Property Values, Submitted by SLDIL Portfolio LLC, received December 12, 2025
- **Attachment D** – Staff Report for the Appearance Commission for PC 25-13, prepared by Brandon Nolin, AICP, Community Development Administrator, dated November 26, 2025
- **Attachment E** – Final Plans and Supporting Documents for PC 25-13