AUC
Alberta Utilities Commission

Bulletin 2026-14

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Standardized setback guidelines for wind and solar power plants

The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) is introducing new standardized setback guidelines for wind and solar power plants (and associated energy storage facilities where applicable). While the Commission retains its discretion to consider each application before it on a case-by-case basis, standardized distances provide guidance for applicants and stakeholders on the Commission's expectations for project siting.

In February 2024, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities requested that the AUC pursue standardized setbacks for renewable infrastructure in the province. In response, the AUC consulted on appropriate setbacks from residences and other important infrastructure as part of the Rule 007: *Facility Applications* review in 2025. In 2026, the AUC conducted a further targeted consultation with municipalities specifically on setbacks with a goal to collaboratively consider default setback standards for renewable projects.

After consideration of the feedback received, the AUC is issuing guidelines for all new wind and solar power plants that file an application to the AUC for approval on or after January 1, 2027.

Applicants for all new solar and wind power plant applications (new projects or major amendments[1] filed on or after January 1, 2027) must:

- continue to satisfy all applicable information requirements in Rule 007; and
- discuss how the power plant adheres to the *Standardized setback guidelines for wind and solar power plants*.

The Commission will continue to review all new wind and solar power plant applications on a case-by-case basis, and will take an applicant's proposed setbacks into consideration when making its public interest determination. Applicants for wind and solar power plants whose proposed setbacks do not align with the Commission's guidelines must provide reasons for the deviation and explain why the proposed location is nonetheless in the public interest.

[1] Where an amendment substantially changes the nature or layout of a project, it will likely be considered a major amendment.

These guidelines do not apply to thermal or other types of power plants, standalone energy storage facilities, or hydro developments – they are specifically intended to address the request from the Minister of Affordability and Utilities that the AUC pursue standardized setbacks for renewable infrastructure in the province.

For energy storage facilities:

- If a new energy storage facility is proposed as a standalone facility, the setback guidelines do not apply.

- If a new energy storage facility is attached to, or applied for in conjunction with, a new wind or solar power plant, the Commission considers that the setback guidelines apply to that facility. The Commission will consider the facility's attributes in assessing whether it must comply with these guidelines, not merely whether the energy storage facility forms part of the same eFiling System proceeding.

- If a new energy storage facility is proposed to be added within the project boundary of an existing wind and solar power plant (existing means it was approved and/or constructed before January 1, 2027), the Commission will treat that facility as a standalone project and the setback guidelines will not apply. The Commission will consider any potential impacts from that facility on a case-by-case basis through its usual process.

The standardized setbacks are not designed for the unique context of First Nations reserves or other federal lands. Projects that are proposed on or within the Rule 007 notification radii of First Nations reserves or other federal lands will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

The guideline will be included within Rule 007 as an appendix to the information requirements contained in the rule once the guideline is effective on January 1, 2027.

Specific inquiries related to this bulletin can be directed to Kim Macnab, Executive Director – Facilities at kim.macnab@auc.ab.ca. General stakeholder questions can be directed to info@auc.ab.ca or 310-4AUC (310-4282).

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Appendix A

Standardized setback guidelines for wind and solar power plants

These setback guidelines apply to any utility-scale renewable energy infrastructure project that requires an approval from the AUC (e.g., it does not include microgeneration such as rooftop solar).

Clear setback ranges help landowners, municipalities, local authorities, industry, developers and others better understand what can reasonably be expected in the AUC's review process.

While the Commission considers each application on a case-by-case basis and retains discretion to depart from these guidelines, an applicant whose wind or solar power plant does not align with these guidelines must explain how the siting of its project is sufficiently protective of the public interest. The setback distances are not meant to displace project-specific evidence, replace the Commission's broader public interest assessment, or operate as mandatory thresholds for the purposes of the Commission's standing determinations.

The minimum setback distances should be applied as baseline planning thresholds to identify suitable locations for the siting of a wind or solar power plant. These distances are in part based on typical distances associated with achieving noise compliance at dwellings, but should not be treated as substitutes for project-specific technical review. Projects must always comply with Rule 012: *Noise Control*, without exception or relaxation, regardless of any standard setback distances between infrastructure and residences.

The maximum setback distances should be applied as planning boundaries compared to the applicable municipal planning documents including municipal development plans, intermunicipal development plans, area structure plans, land use bylaws (including applicable setbacks) and other municipal bylaws. The Commission will place significant weight on municipal planning choices that fall within the ranges below. Municipal setbacks exceeding the maximum setback distances will have less weight but will be considered as part of the application process on a case-by-case basis.

Solar project setback ranges

Setback from	Minimum	Maximum *	Measured from
Dwellings as defined in Rule 012	**100 metres**	**800 metres**	**Fenced project boundary**
Aerodromes as defined in Rule 007 (measured to a clearly defined reference point)	**1,000 metres**	**1,500 metres**	**Fenced project boundary**

* Maximums are in relation to municipal planning documents. Municipal setbacks exceeding the maximum setback distances will have less weight but will be considered as part of the application process.

Wind project setback ranges			
Setback from	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Measured from**
Dwellings as defined in Rule 012	**800 metres**	**1,500 metres**	**Nearest turbine**
Aerodromes as defined in Rule 007 (measured to a clearly defined reference point)	**2,000 metres**	**4,000 metres**	**Nearest turbine**

The standardized setbacks apply to dwellings as defined in Rule 012: *Noise Control* and aerodromes as defined in Rule 007: *Facility Applications*.

An applicant should apply the setback guidelines to any dwellings and aerodromes that exist as of the start of its participant involvement program to determine whether the proposed wind or solar power plant complies with the setback guidelines. A dwelling or aerodrome is considered as existing if construction of that dwelling or aerodrome has started or a development permit authorizing the dwelling or aerodrome has been obtained. An applicant should provide documentation as part of its application that shows how it applied the setbacks to the identified dwellings and aerodromes on the start date of its participant involvement program. Any subsequent proposed dwellings or aerodromes may be considered by the Commission as part of the application process. This approach is consistent with the objectives of Rule 007 and Rule 012, which assess project effects based on identified receptors, while considering the timing of a dwelling's construction on a case-by-case basis.

For aerodromes, the setback distance should be measured to a clearly defined reference point, such as the end of a runway, the centre of a helipad, an air traffic control tower, or another clearly defined point consistent with applicable Transport Canada guidance.

The Commission may consider an exception to the minimum setback distances from a dwelling if an applicant provides a signed waiver from a participating or hosting landowner and the site-specific circumstances warrant an exception. The Commission considers that landowners may choose to accept certain project-related impacts on their property. Regardless of any waiver, applicants will need to demonstrate compliance with applicable regulatory requirements, including Rule 012, and address relevant considerations such as municipal development plans and bylaws and the cumulative effects of the power plant.