AUC
Alberta Utilities Commission

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.