

Understanding Commercial Solar in Our Community

Over the past several months, we have heard from members who have questions and concerns about rumors of large-scale, commercial solar projects being planned in or near our service territory. These conversations are happening in many rural communities across Indiana and the Midwest, and it's understandable that people want clear, factual information about what this could mean for their community.

The goal of this article is not to advocate for or against any particular project, but to help separate fact from speculation and to clarify the role your electric cooperative plays—or does not play—when it comes to commercial solar development.

What is meant by “commercial” or “utility-scale” solar?

When people refer to commercial or utility-scale solar, they are typically talking about large, ground-mounted solar installations that may cover hundreds or even thousands of acres. These projects are usually developed by private, third-party companies and are very different from rooftop solar systems on homes or small-scale community solar projects.

It is important to note that not all solar projects are the same. Size, ownership, and purpose all matter, and large commercial projects operate under a different set of rules and approvals than smaller, local installations.

Why are these projects being discussed more often?

Several factors have contributed to an increase in interest in large-scale solar development. Federal incentives have made these projects more attractive to developers, and rural areas with open land and access to existing electric infrastructure are often targeted. In many cases, developers approach individual landowners privately before any public discussions occur, which can make these projects feel sudden or unexpected once they become more widely known.

What role does your electric cooperative play?

This is one of the most important—and most misunderstood—parts of the conversation.

Southeastern Indiana REMC is a distribution cooperative. Our primary responsibility is to deliver safe and reliable electricity to homes, farms, and businesses throughout our service territory. We do not generate electricity, and we do not make decisions about where commercial solar farms are built.

We do not negotiate land leases, select sites, or approve

or deny commercial solar projects. Decisions related to land use, zoning, and siting are made by local county officials and, in some cases, state-level authorities.

Likewise, evaluating whether a large-scale solar project can safely and reliably connect to the broader electric grid is not the role of the local distribution cooperative. That responsibility falls to the electric power suppliers and transmission providers that own and operate the generation and high-voltage transmission system, such as Hoosier Energy or Duke Energy, depending on the location and scope of the project.

Our role remains focused on operating and maintaining the local distribution system that serves our members.

Why do opinions differ so strongly?

Members hold a wide range of perspectives on commercial solar, and those views are often shaped by deeply held values. Some see potential economic opportunities for landowners or a role for renewable energy in the future. Others have concerns about the long-term use of farmland, changes to the rural landscape, or how projects may affect neighboring properties.

As a cooperative, we serve all members—regardless of where they stand on this issue. Respectful conversation and access to accurate information are essential as communities navigate these discussions.

Where are decisions ultimately made?

Commercial solar projects typically require approvals through county planning and zoning processes and may also involve state-level review. These processes include public meetings and hearings where community members can learn more and share input. Those forums are where land-use decisions are discussed and determined.

Our commitment to you

Your cooperative remains committed to transparency, safety, and reliable electric service. When verified information is available that directly affects our members or our distribution system, we will share it. We will continue to answer questions honestly and focus on our responsibility to serve the long-term interests of the entire membership.

If you have questions or would like more information, we encourage you to contact us directly. Staying informed through reliable sources is the best way to navigate complex and emotional topics like this one—together, as a community.

Keith Mathews
CEO, Southeastern Indiana REMC