



# BUILDINGS 2025-013 BULLETIN ZONING

ISSUANCE DATE  
November 20, 2025



**ISSUER:** Keith L. Wen, R.A.   
Assistant Commissioner  
Code & Zoning Interpretation

**PURPOSE:** To clarify screening and enclosure provisions in zoning, as applied to outdoor energy infrastructure equipment and accessory mechanical equipment.

**SUBJECT(S):** Equipment screening requirement per zoning

## RELATED CODE/ZONING SECTIONS & RESOURCES

**Zoning Resolution (ZR):** §12-10, §23-312 (g) (2), §23-372, §26-50, §26-51, §26-52, §23-62 (g) (2), §37-20, §37-21, §37-22, § 54-11, §54-51(c), Mechanical Code §915

### I. OVERVIEW

Zoning for Carbon Neutrality (ZCN) was adopted on 12/6/2023, which increased bulk allowances of certain outdoor equipment as a part of the NYC *City of Yes* efforts to facilitate the installation of renewable energy and battery storage equipment.

Except for solar and wind energy systems, views of equipment in open spaces or on rooftops must be mitigated by screening per requirements in Zoning Resolution (ZR) §26-50 and §37-20. Since equipment layouts and site design may vary, this bulletin provides guidance for all required screening for the purposes of complying with the ZR.

### II. DEFINED TERMS

**Equipment:** As used in this Bulletin, the term *equipment* refers to all outdoor building equipment<sup>1</sup> that meets either the accessory mechanical equipment description in ZR §12-10 ‘accessory use, or accessory’ definition, or the ZR §12-10 ‘energy infrastructure equipment’ definition.

Accessory mechanical equipment, including equipment serving the following building systems:

- (i) mechanical, electrical, or plumbing systems
- (ii) fire protection systems
- (iii) power systems, including, energy generation systems such as solar or wind energy systems and generators; and
- (iv) energy storage systems, where the amount of energy being stored shall not exceed 24 hours of the electrical load generated at peak demand by the principal use on the *zoning lot*. Where a *zoning lot* contains multiple *uses*, such calculation may be applied to the total demand of all the uses such power system is accessory to.

<sup>1</sup> Although the description of accessory mechanical equipment includes solar and wind energy systems, they are exempt from screening requirements per ZR 26-51(f), ZR 26-52, ZR 37-21(d) and 37-22.

#### Energy infrastructure equipment (EIE)

Includes renewable energy generation systems ... and energy storage systems, such as fuel cells and batteries, which are essential throughout all districts in order to support the acceleration towards a distributed energy grid with electricity from fully renewable sources.

Energy infrastructure equipment shall refer to equipment that is a principal use on a zoning lot. Where such equipment is accessory to another use, it shall be considered accessory mechanical equipment.

Provisions pertaining to energy infrastructure equipment shall apply to all types of renewable energy generation systems, as well as to all types of energy storage systems, unless specific rules are otherwise specified, such as for solar and wind energy systems

### III. SCREENING REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL EQUIPMENT

ZR §26-50 and §37-20 specify screening requirements, which include locational requirements, for accessory mechanical equipment and EIE. These zoning sections exempt wind and solar generation equipment, and equipment located entirely within 18" of an exterior building wall:

- The intent of special screening provisions in zoning is to limit the visual effect of equipment<sup>2</sup> as viewed from the street and buildings around the equipment. Sides of equipment must be entirely screened when screening is required by ZR §26-51 and §37-21, while not inhibiting necessary maintenance.
- Screening may be opaque or perforated; when perforated, cannot have more than 50% of the face open per ZR 26-51(c) or §37-21(c). Solid building walls may serve as screening where they comply with sections IV(1), V(1), and VI below. Since transparent materials and chain link fencing are considered to be more than 50 percent open, they do not meet screening requirements.
- Fencing required by NYC Construction Codes, as well as the NYC Electrical Code, may satisfy screening requirements for applicable zoning per ZR §26-51 (c), §26-52, §37-21 (c), and §37-22 if they are at least 50% opaque.
- Casings are often engineered around equipment for protection and safety, which are inherently integral with equipment for engineering function. As such, for the purposes of zoning requirements, casings do not meet screening requirements for equipment and additional screening is still needed to comply with applicable provisions in ZR §26-50 and §37-20.

### IV. AT-GRADE SCREENING & ENCLOSURE REGULATION

1. Screening may have up to 5 feet of clearance around individual equipment or clusters of equipment, or a specific dimension as required to provide for the necessary maintenance and access by the manufacturer's instructions, minimum clearance as required by the NYC Electrical Code, or as otherwise required by the DOB Office of Technical Certification and Research. Building walls with such maximum clearance around equipment are also permitted to serve as screening unless there is a legally required window located at the same story as the equipment, per section VI below.
2. Screening for equipment is not subject to maximum heights of walls or fences in zoning or the Building Code. The maximum height of screening is regulated by the maximum heights of permitted obstructions for EIE and mechanical equipment in zoning, as well as ZR §26-51 (e) (1).
3. Generators and cogeneration equipment utilizing fossil fuels which are accessory to buildings other than single- or two-family residences shall be completely enclosed within a building or other structure, per ZR §26-51 (a) and § 37-21 (a), and attenuate noise as regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection. If not within a building, such other structure must either:

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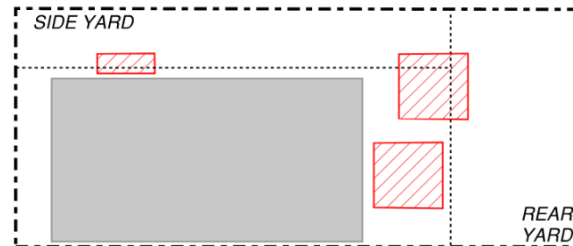
<sup>2</sup> City Planning Commission (CPC) report ULURP# N230113ZRY , pages 9 and 10.

- a. have DOB permit approval pursuant to Mechanical Code § 915, or
    - b. be a UL2200 casing provided by the manufacturer of the generator and also screened as described in section III above. Although casings provided by the manufacturer meet the enclosure requirement, they do not meet the screening requirement.
  4. Screening is required around all equipment if a rectangle drawn around their outermost perimeters in plan view exceeds 25 square feet per ZR § 26-51 (c) and § 37-21 (c). To determine which equipment requires screening, use the following steps as illustrated by these diagrams of a sample site:
    - a. Draw an analytical rectangle around outdoor equipment in or near each required yard. All equipment must be in one rectangle. Equipment outside required yards must be looped into a rectangle associated with a nearby required yard.

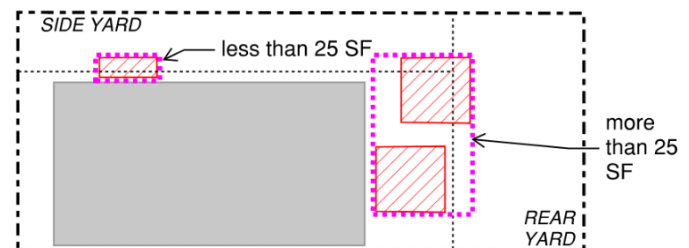
- - - - - Zoning lot  
 [Red hatched] Equipment  
 [Grey] Building  
 [Dashed pink] Analytical rectangle  
 [Orange line with circles] Screening  
 ..... Yard line

  - b. Design screening around all equipment in any analytical rectangle(s) on the site that exceeds 25 sq. ft., such as the rectangle in and near the rear yard in this illustrated example.
5. Verification of maximum permitted obstructions: The total areas of equipment footprints and screened areas in required yards must not exceed 25% of each required side or rear yard area, with each side, rear, or front yard having separate calculations. Similarly, equipment and its screening must not exceed 25 SF in a front yard per ZR § 23-312 (g) (2) (i). Using the prior example in item 4 above, the equipment and screening area meets the limitation of ZR § 23-312 (g) (2)

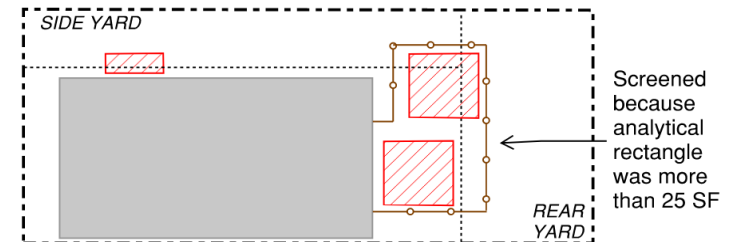
#### SAMPLE SITE



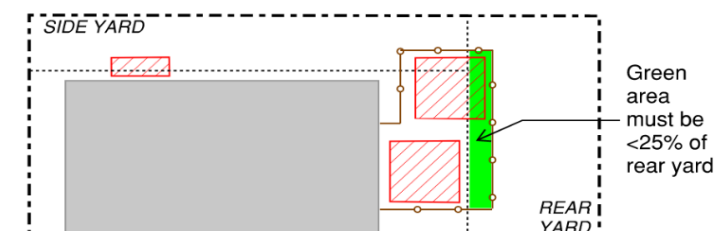
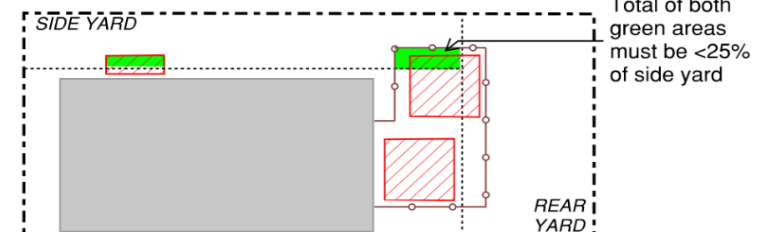
#### Step A



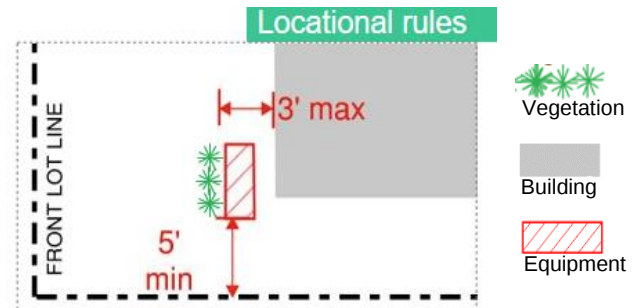
#### Step B



#### Verification of Maximum Permitted Obstructions



6. Equipment location requirements near lot lines or in front of buildings are measured to the outer surface of equipment per ZR §26-51 (b) and §37-21 (b). The specific 3-foot maximum from a front building wall, and 5-foot minimum from a lot line, are illustrated. The 3-foot maximum is measured to the furthest surface of the equipment, while the 5-foot minimum is measured to the nearest surface.

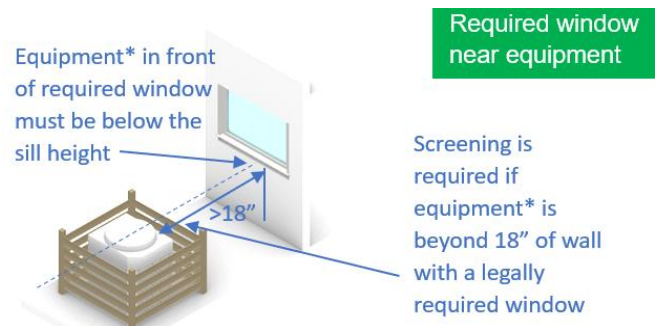


## V. ROOFTOP SCREENING & ENCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

1. A building wall without a legally required window, or parapet<sup>3</sup> may serve as screening if it is equal in height or taller than the equipment. Refer to section VI below if a legally required window is within such a wall.
2. Rooftop water tanks require screening because they are part of plumbing or fire protection systems which are listed as accessory mechanical equipment in the ZR §12-10 “accessory use, or accessory” definition. For existing water tanks, see section VII below.
3. The following rooftop items do not need to be screened in order to comply with zoning: dunnage for EIE or mechanical equipment, chimneys, air vents, ductwork, plumbing vents, piping, and window washing equipment.

## VI. SCREENING NEAR LEGALLY REQUIRED WINDOWS

1. Equipment and its screening must be clear of the perpendicular projection of legally required windows per ZR §23-372 (Distance between legally required windows and lot lines). Equipment or screening taller than the windowsill of a legally required window must be located next to such window and not in front of it.
2. Screening must be provided to equipment located beyond 18 inches from a building wall with a legally required window at the same story. See the illustration.



## VII. EXISTING EQUIPMENT & BUILDINGS

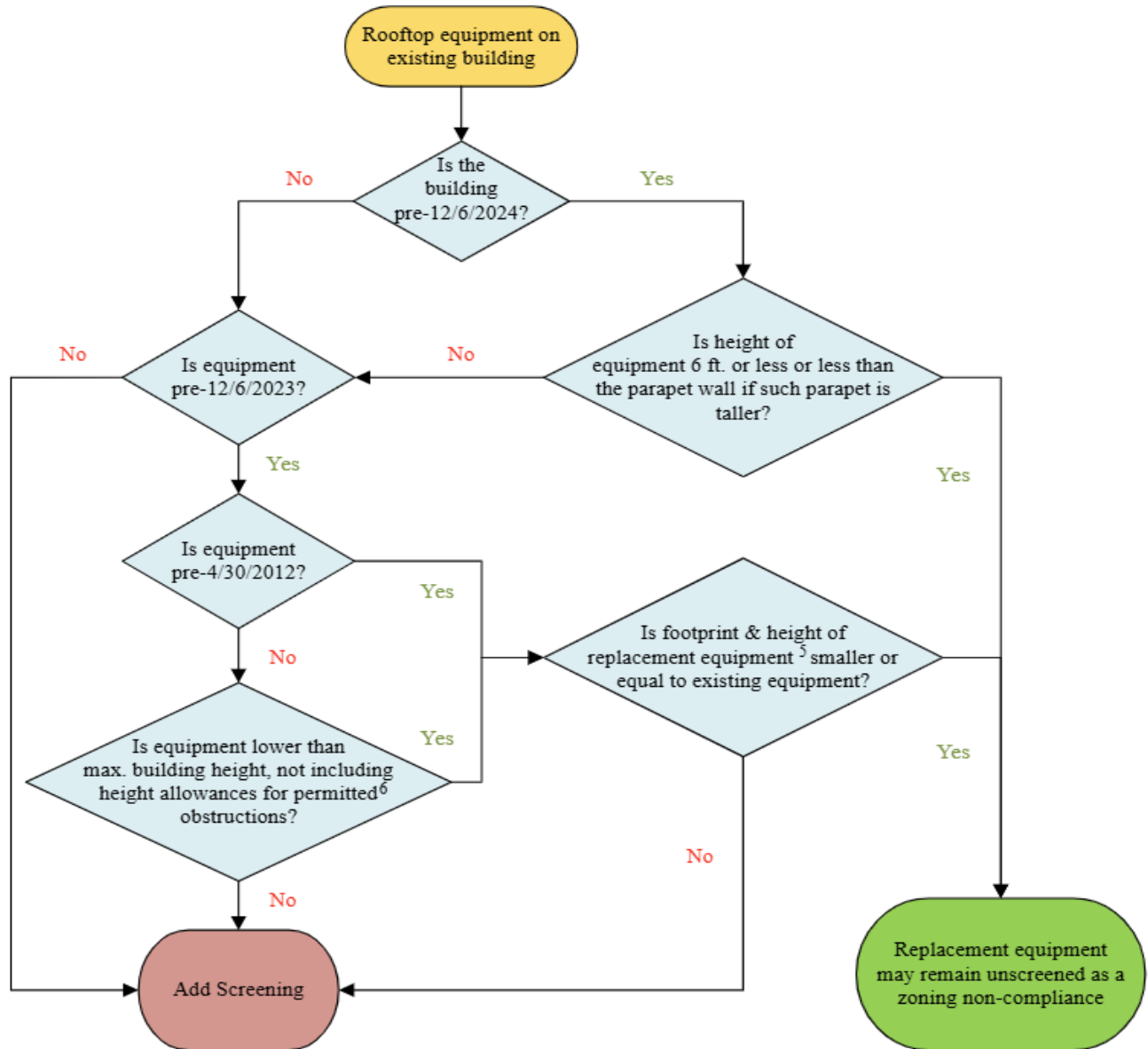
Replacement of existing equipment must meet zoning screening requirements, including retrofits that are otherwise non-complying per ZR §54-51(c), unless specified otherwise below:

1. *At Grade Equipment*
  - a. If equipment at grade was installed prior to December 6, 2023, beyond the yards and open space required by zoning, and beyond the courts, and there is no increase in equipment footprint and height as compared with the current equipment,<sup>4</sup> in-kind replacements may remain unscreened as a zoning non-compliance per ZR § 54-11.

<sup>3</sup> Note that zoning floor area may be incurred when the parapets exceed the limitations described in the definition of ‘floor area’ in ZR § 12-10 (f) or (k)

<sup>4</sup> Applicants proposing upgraded equipment must indicate, on submitted drawings, plan and elevation details that propose equipment with no increase in existing footprint and height as compared with the current equipment, in order to omit screening as a permitted zoning noncompliance.

- b. Equipment within yards or open space required by zoning, and within courts need to be screened, unless documentation from a registered design professional specifically demonstrates that the ZR at the time of installation allowed such outdoor equipment in a required yard and open space without screening.
2. *Rooftop Equipment:* See the flowchart below to determine whether replacement equipment may remain unscreened:



<sup>5</sup> Applicants proposing upgraded equipment must indicate, on submitted drawings, plan and elevation details that propose equipment with no increase in existing footprint and height as compared with the current equipment, in order to omit screening as a permitted zoning noncompliance.

<sup>6</sup> Prior zoning after 4/30/2012 and before 12/6/2023 required screening for any mechanical equipment that was located above the maximum building height as a permitted obstruction per prior ZR revision §23-62 (g) (2), §24-51 (f) (2), §33-42 (f) (2), and §43-42 (e)(2).