



An Extended Guide · No. 1518

# Is Your Roof a Good Candidate for Solar?

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Sun, space, shade, age, and  
structure — an honest look

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**! Read this first — this is professional, on-the-roof work**

Putting solar on a roof is expert, permitted work — not a weekend project. It means drilling into your roof and sealing every hole against water for decades, or setting heavy ballast your roof has to carry, all while working at a height where a fall can be deadly and around wiring that is live whenever the sun is up. This guide is here to help you understand and judge that work — so you can hire the right people and ask good questions — not to walk you up a ladder to do it yourself. For any roof-mounted system, use a licensed, insured, properly credentialed solar installer, make sure the required permit and inspection actually happen, and protect your roof's warranty before the first hole is drilled. And please don't climb up to inspect or adjust anything yourself — the roof is their job, not yours. This guide is about looking honestly at your own roof before you get quotes — not about climbing up to check anything yourself.

## Let's take an honest look at your roof

Before you get quotes or fall in love with a layout, it helps to step back and ask a plainer question: is your roof actually a good place for solar in the first place? This guide walks through that, honestly and without any pressure either way.

I'm Bill, and I help folks across Portage County make sense of decisions like this one before the salespeople show up. Every roof is different, and 'good candidate' doesn't mean perfect — it means understanding the handful of things that matter most, so you go into the process with your eyes open.

We'll walk through direction and sun, shade, how much usable roof you really have, your roof's type, its age, and whether the structure underneath can carry the load. Each gets its own deeper guide in this set — this one is the honest overview that ties them together.

**★ No wrong answers here**

Whatever your roof turns out to be, I can help you understand it and figure out sensible next steps. Call or text me anytime at (330) 200-8042 and we'll go at your pace.

## The whole guide, on one page

If you only read one page, read this one — the honest short version of what makes a roof a good host for solar.

- ❑ Solar likes sun — south-facing roofs generally see the most, north-facing the least.
- ❑ Shade from trees, chimneys, dormers, or a neighbor's house can rule out an otherwise great roof.
- ❑ Usable roof area is often smaller than the whole roof plane, once code pathways and setbacks are subtracted.
- ❑ Your roof's type, age, and condition all shape what's possible and when.
- ❑ The roof's structure — its rafters or trusses — has to be able to carry the added weight.
- ❑ None of this is DIY — a licensed installer confirms candidacy on site, in person.

### ✓ **There's no perfect roof**

Almost every real roof is a mix of strengths and trade-offs. The goal here is an honest picture, not a passing grade.

## The six things worth looking at

Whether a roof is a good candidate for solar comes down to a handful of honest questions — not a mysterious formula.

- **Direction and sun.** Which way your roof faces, and how much of the day it sees open sky.
- **Shade.** Trees, chimneys, dormers, and neighboring homes that block the sun.
- **Usable area.** How much roof is actually available once code pathways are set aside.
- **Roof type.** What your roof is made of, since each type mounts its own way.
- **Roof age and condition.** Whether the roof itself is ready for decades more service.
- **Structure.** Whether the framing underneath can carry the added weight.

### ★ We'll take these one at a time

Each gets its own short section here, and its own deeper guide if you want to go further. (330) 200-8042.

## Direction and sun

Which way your roof faces is one of the first things an installer will ask about — and one of the easiest for you to notice yourself.

In our hemisphere, a roof facing south generally sees the most sun over the course of a day, which usually makes it the strongest candidate. East- and west-facing roofs still work, just with some loss compared to south. North-facing roofs are the weakest position.

Most homes have more than one usable roof plane, so it's common to end up using a south-facing section, or splitting an array across a couple of directions. This is a conversation for your installer, not a measurement you need to make yourself.

### ✓ We go deeper in our own guide

Exactly how direction interacts with your roof's own slope is its own topic — see our guide on roof direction and tilt for more.

## Shade is the quiet dealbreaker

A roof can face the right direction and still be a poor candidate, if something blocks the sun for a good part of the day.

- **Trees.** Even a distant, tall tree can shade a roof for hours — and trees keep growing.
- **Chimneys and dormers.** Your own roof's shape can throw shade on itself at certain times of day.
- **Neighboring homes.** A close two-story neighbor to your south can matter more than you'd think.
- **Other tall structures.** Worth a mention if anything tall sits near your roofline.

The tricky part is that shade changes with the seasons and the time of day, so a quick glance on a sunny afternoon doesn't tell the whole story. That's exactly what a professional site evaluation is built to catch.

### **! Don't guess — have it checked**

Guessing at shade from memory is one of the most common ways homeowners misjudge a roof's potential. Let an installer assess it properly before you rule your roof in or out.

## How much usable roof you really have

The whole roof plane and the usable roof area are not the same number — and the gap between them surprises a lot of folks.

Model fire and building codes commonly require clear pathways and setbacks on a roof — for example, room near the ridge and routes so firefighters can move and ventilate safely if they ever need to. Those requirements reduce the area actually available for panels.

Vents, chimneys, skylights, and other roof features take up additional space, and they don't move for a solar array. The result is that a roof's true usable area is often meaningfully smaller than it looks from the ground.

Exactly how much space code pathways require is set by your local building department and the details of your roof, not a fixed number we can quote here. Your installer works this out with the local code in hand.

### ✓ Ask to see the layout

A good installer will show you where panels can and can't go, and why — including the space code requires them to leave clear. Our fire-code guide covers this in more depth.

## Does your roof type work

Every common roof type can host solar — but each mounts its own way, and some are simpler jobs than others.

| Roof type               | What to know as a candidate                                |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Asphalt shingle         | The most common and standardized — our most-covered case.  |
| Metal, standing seam    | Often mounts with no roof holes at all — a real advantage. |
| Metal, exposed-fastener | Common on barns; through-fastened, sealing matters.        |
| Tile                    | Workable, but more careful, specialized labor.             |
| Flat or low-slope       | Fastened or ballasted, often tilted toward the sun.        |

✓ **Start with your own type's guide**

Every roof type in this table has its own guide in this set — start with the one that matches yours for the details that matter most.

## Roof age and condition

A technically mountable roof can still be the wrong roof to mount on right now, if it's near the end of its life.

Solar panels and their mounting are built to last for decades. If your roof is getting old or showing wear, the smarter order of operations is usually to re-roof first, rather than install now and pay later to remove and reinstall the panels for a new roof.

A roof in good condition, with a reasonable amount of service life left, is simply an easier and more cost-effective candidate. This is a judgment your roofer is best positioned to make — not something to guess from the driveway.

### ★ An easy question to ask early

'How much life is left in this roof?' is a fair question for your roofer before you get serious about solar. Our roof-age guide walks through this in detail.

## Can the structure carry it

Panels and racking add lasting weight to a roof, spread across many attachment points — and whether your roof can carry that is worth confirming, not assuming.

What matters is what's underneath the surface: the rafters or trusses, their size and spacing, and the roof's overall condition. A good installer looks in the attic or has the structure reviewed as part of a proper evaluation, and the permit process often asks for that proof directly.

### **! This is not a homeowner judgment call**

Whether a roof's framing can carry added weight takes a trained eye or a structural review — never a guess from someone without the training. Our structural-load guide covers what that review involves.

## Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Being a 'good candidate' looks different depending on where you live and what roofs you have to choose from.

### If you live in town or the suburbs

In town and the suburbs, the house roof is usually your only option, and it's often smaller, more shaded, and shaped by a tighter lot.

- Shade from trees, chimneys, dormers, and neighboring homes is the factor most likely to work against a suburban roof.
- A smaller roof plane means usable area, after code setbacks, matters even more.
- An HOA or neighborhood association may have its own rules about placement or appearance — worth checking early.
- Most in-town houses are asphalt shingle, which is the most standardized case to evaluate.

### If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, you often have more roofs to weigh against each other — the house, plus a barn, pole building, or shop — and a real shot at an excellent candidate.

- A big, unshaded, south-facing barn or pole-building roof can be a genuinely better candidate than the house roof itself — often metal, which can mount very cleanly.
- Fewer nearby trees and neighbors often means less shade to fight.
- Outbuilding structure varies a lot, so it still needs its own honest look before it's trusted with panels.
- If your water comes from a well, a strong rural candidate roof is extra reason to think about keeping power on — see our whole-home-solar and battery guides.

#### ★ Not sure which of your roofs is the real candidate?

Comparing a house roof against a barn roof is one of the most common conversations I have with rural families. Tell me what you've got and we'll think it through together. Call (330) 200-8042.

## When the neighborhood has a say

For in-town and suburban homeowners, there's a factor that has nothing to do with sun or structure: the neighborhood's own rules.

Some subdivisions and homeowners' associations have covenants that touch on solar — where panels can go, or how they should look from the street. These rules vary widely and have nothing to do with whether your roof is physically a good candidate.

It's worth finding your HOA documents, or asking directly, before you get attached to a specific layout. It's a much easier conversation to have early than after a contract is signed.

### ✓ Bring it up with your installer too

An experienced local installer has likely dealt with your HOA, or one like it, before and can help you navigate what's required.

## A candidacy walk-through you can use

Here's the honest checklist version of everything in this guide — a way to organize your own thinking before you call anyone.

- ☐ Which way does most of my roof face, and how much open sky does it see?
- ☐ What shades it — trees, my own roofline, chimneys, dormers, or a neighbor's house?
- ☐ How much roof area is left once I picture code pathways and roof features taking up space?
- ☐ What is my roof made of, and does that type mount in a straightforward way?
- ☐ How old is my roof, and does it have plenty of service life left?
- ☐ Do I have any reason to think the structure underneath is anything other than sound?

### ★ Bring this list to your evaluation

Walking through this list before a site visit means you'll understand exactly what the installer is checking, and why. Happy to go through it with you first — (330) 200-8042.

## What a good site evaluation looks like

A proper candidacy check isn't a five-minute driveway glance — it's a real, on-site look by someone qualified to give one.

- **They look at the whole roof**, not just the first plane that catches their eye, including any outbuildings you mention.
- **They ask about shade through the seasons**, not just what's obvious on the day they visit.
- **They check the attic or ask about the structure** rather than assuming it's fine.
- **They talk about your roof's age and condition** honestly, even if it means recommending you wait or re-roof first.
- **They explain code pathways and usable area** in plain terms, showing where panels realistically can and cannot go.

### ✓ A rushed evaluation is a red flag

If a visit feels more like a sales pitch than an honest look at your roof, that's worth noticing. Our guide on choosing an installer has more on picking someone thorough.

## Before you get too excited

It's tempting to climb up and take a look yourself once you start wondering about your roof. Please don't.

Everything in this guide is meant to be judged from the ground, from old paperwork, and in conversation with a professional — not from up on the roof itself. Assessing shade, structure, and condition safely and accurately takes training most of us don't have, plus fall protection most of us don't own.

### **! This is a look-and-learn guide, not a go-and-check one**

Please don't get on a ladder or the roof to judge any of this yourself. A licensed, insured installer can assess everything here safely, on your behalf, as part of a normal site evaluation.

## Signs a roof may need some work first

None of these are automatic disqualifiers — but they're honest reasons to pause and talk to a roofer before you go further.

- Visible wear or missing pieces on the roofing material itself.
- A roof that's getting up there in age, with an unknown amount of service life left.
- Known leaks, stains, or soft spots noticed from inside the attic or on ceilings.
- Uncertainty about the structure — for example, an older outbuilding whose framing has never been reviewed.
- Heavy, unmanaged shade from trees that could be trimmed or, in some cases, removed.

### ✓ A pause is not a no

Most of these just mean 'handle this first,' not 'solar won't work here.' Our roof-age guide and our structural-load guide both walk through what 'handling it first' can look like.

## Signs of a strong candidate

On the flip side, here's what tends to add up to an easy, encouraging conversation with an installer.

- A large, mostly unshaded roof plane facing south, or close to it.
- A roof that's asphalt shingle, standing-seam metal, or another well-understood type in good condition.
- A roof with plenty of service life left, or one that was recently replaced.
- A structure with no known issues, ideally confirmed by a look in the attic.
- Enough usable area, once you picture code pathways, to fit a meaningful array.

### ★ Plenty of ordinary roofs qualify

You don't need a picture-perfect roof — most solar installs happen on perfectly ordinary homes. This list is just what makes the conversation easiest.

## When the house roof isn't the answer

Sometimes the most honest answer is that the house roof isn't the best candidate — and that's not the end of the story.

If your house roof is small, heavily shaded, or aging, it's worth asking whether another roof on your property might be the better host. This comes up often for rural households with a barn, pole building, shop, or garage in the mix.

A big, unshaded metal outbuilding roof can be an excellent candidate even when the house roof is a tough one — though its own structure still needs an honest look, since outbuilding framing varies a lot. Our guide on barns and outbuildings goes into this specifically.

### ✓ It doesn't have to be the house

Ask your installer to walk every roof on your property, not just the obvious one. The best candidate isn't always where you'd first guess.

## From candidate to confident next steps

Once you have an honest sense of your roof, here's generally how the process moves forward.

- **Get a real site evaluation.** A licensed installer confirms direction, shade, area, type, age, and structure in person.
- **Get more than one opinion.** Multiple quotes and evaluations help you see where installers agree — and where they don't.
- **Handle any roof work first.** If a re-roof or structural fix is needed, sort that out before panels go up.
- **Ask about the paperwork.** Permits, inspections, and your roof warranty all matter regardless of how good a candidate your roof is.

### ★ This is where I come in

Once you've got quotes or evaluations in hand, I'm glad to help you make sense of them, with no stake in the outcome. (330) 200-8042.

## Questions worth asking early

A short list to bring to your very first conversation with an installer.

### **Q: Which parts of my roof did you consider, and why?**

A thorough installer looks at every viable roof plane, including outbuildings, not just the first one they notice.

### **Q: What shade did you account for, and at what times of year?**

You want to hear that they considered the changing angle of the sun, not just what's obvious on a single visit.

### **Q: How much usable area is actually available, once pathways are set aside?**

A good answer shows you an honest layout, not just the roof's full outline.

### **Q: Did you check the structure, or are you assuming it's fine?**

The answer should involve an actual look, in the attic or through a structural review — not an assumption.

#### **★ Bring me the answers**

If anything an installer tells you is unclear, I'm glad to help you make sense of it — no obligation, no pressure. (330) 200-8042.

## Common Questions

The questions I hear most often about whether a roof is a good candidate, answered honestly.

### **Q: Is there a minimum roof size for solar?**

There's no fixed number to quote here — it depends on your usable area and what you're hoping to power. An installer can tell you what's realistic for your specific roof.

### **Q: Does a little shade rule out solar completely?**

Not necessarily. Some shade is common and can often be worked around with the right equipment and layout. Heavy, all-day shade is the bigger concern.

### **Q: My roof isn't old, but I'm not sure about the structure. What now?**

That's exactly what a structural review or an attic look is for. It's a normal part of a proper evaluation, not a special request.

### **Q: Is my roof automatically a bad candidate if it's not south-facing?**

No. East- and west-facing roofs are workable, just with some trade-off compared to south. North-facing is the toughest case, not an automatic no.

### **Q: Should I ask more than one installer to evaluate my roof?**

Yes. Getting more than one honest look, and more than one quote, is one of the best ways to feel confident in the answer you land on.

#### **★ Still wondering about your own roof?**

That's exactly the kind of question I like best. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and let's talk through what you've got.

## Bringing it all together

Being a good candidate for solar isn't about a perfect roof — it's about an honest, informed look at the roof you actually have.

Direction and sun, shade, usable area, roof type, age, and structure — those six things, looked at honestly, tell you almost everything you need to know before quotes start arriving. None of them require you to climb anything or become an expert.

Whatever your roof turns out to be, the next right step is the same: a real, professional, on-site evaluation, done by someone licensed and insured, followed by the permits and paperwork that protect you and your roof.

### ★ Let's look at your roof together

Whether you're just curious or ready for quotes, I'm glad to be your patient, plain-spoken second opinion — no sales pressure, ever. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

## You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made figuring out whether your roof is a good candidate for solar feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

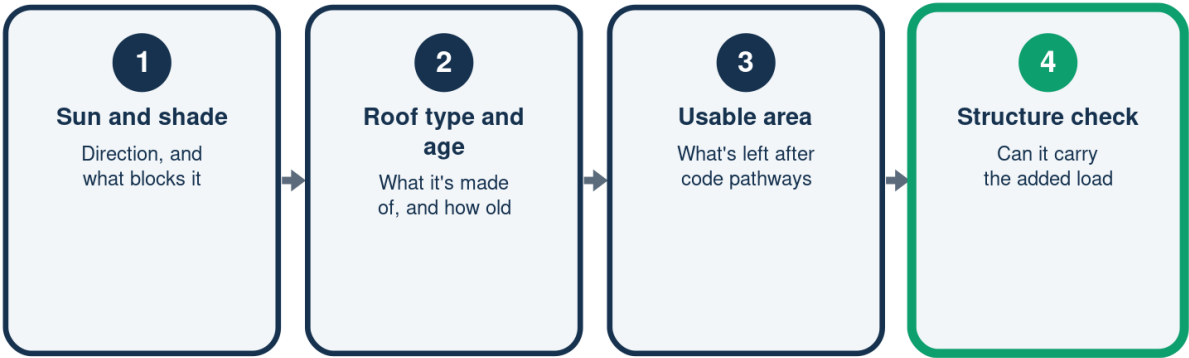
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### ★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

## The Candidacy Walk-Through

Four things worth checking before you get quotes



A good installer walks through all four with you, on site.

## Which Way Does Your Roof Face

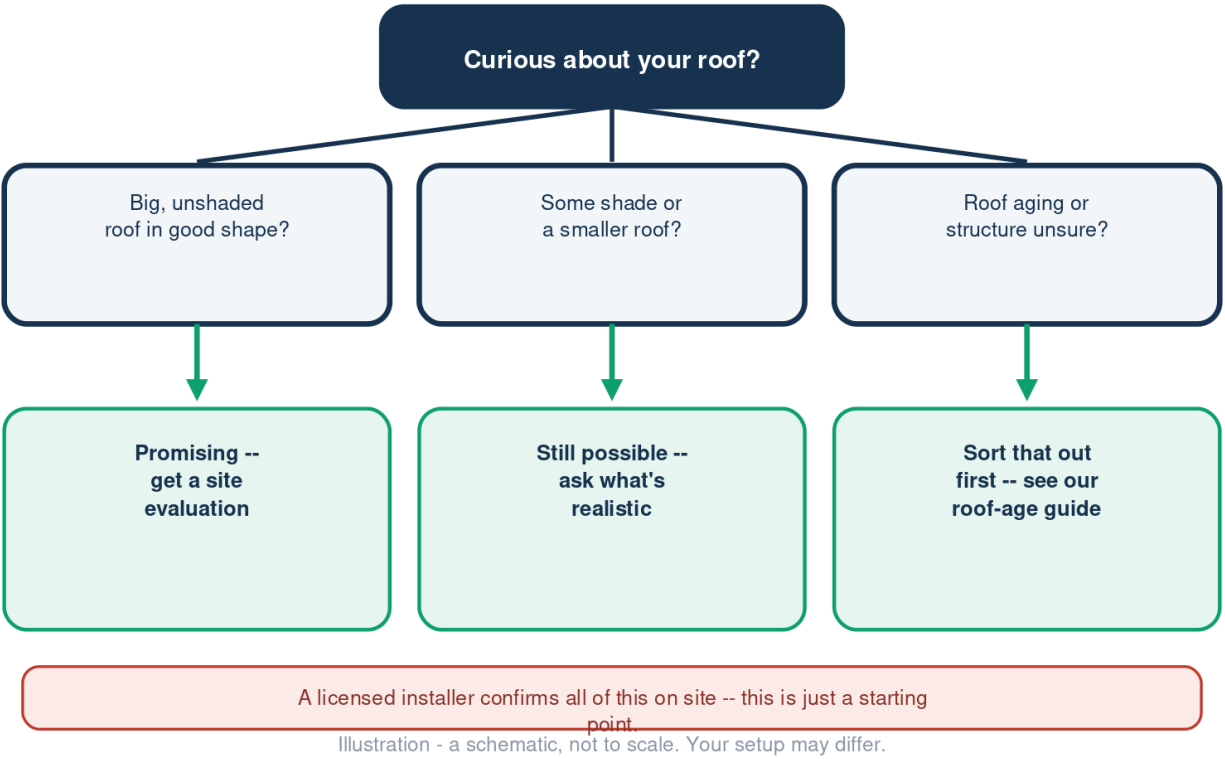
Direction shapes how much sun an array will see

| Sun exposure     |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| South-facing     | Most sun, best fit  |
| East/west-facing | Workable, some loss |
| North-facing     | Usually the weakest |

Our roof-direction-and-tilt guide goes deeper on this.

# Is This Roof Worth a Closer Look

Three honest starting points, before you get quotes



## What Shrinks Usable Roof Area

Real space is often less than the whole roof plane

| Effect on space    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Fire code pathways | Reserves clear space |
| Shade sources      | Rules out some area  |
| Vents and chimneys | Break up clean space |

Your installer and local code set the exact layout -- this is just the idea.



## Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.  
You just have to remember you can call.  
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

### BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness, no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

**(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com**

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

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### Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



## A Note From Bill

### A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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