



## **Recommendations for Solar Electric Permit Fees and Procedures**

1. Make solar power permit fees a fixed \$324 or less for standard residential photovoltaic (PV) installations (i.e., do not base permit fee computation on PV system valuation).
  - A fixed total fee of \$324 or less is appropriate based upon extensive review of solar permitting costs in many jurisdictions with solar PV installation experience. Permitting and inspection of a typical residential PV system normally takes between 2 to 4 hours regardless of size, since the amount of work is essentially the same.
  - A fixed fee of \$324 or less brings your City into compliance with California's policy of encouraging solar as set forth in Government Code Section 65850.5 by minimizing all solar plan check and permit fees.
2. Consider fast-tracking applications for solar contractors who have reliable track records.
3. Standardize and streamline permit requirements to reduce time spent on the permit process by solar installers and City staff. For instance building department staff can be trained to do PV permit reviews and approval via cross training with planning department, public works and fire departments. A process that is quicker for solar installers is also cheaper for your city.
4. For rooftop residential PV systems of 15 kW or less, we recommend a permit issuance process that is over-the-counter (by appointment is OK if this works best for the permitting authority), particularly for PV systems that meet the following criteria:
  - Solar panel weight is under five pounds per square foot.
  - Weight of the solar array at each attachment point is less than 45 pounds.
  - The solar panels are no more than 18 inches off the surface of the roof.
  - The residence was built after 1950 with adequate rafters or trusses.
5. Consider posting solar permit guidelines, permit fees and the application on your City website.
6. Reduce the window for inspection appointments to no more than two hours. When feasible, cities should offer specific appointment times. This recommendation eliminates half-day inspection windows where expensive man hours are racked up waiting for inspectors.
7. Municipalities should not require Professional Engineering stamps for structural issues for flush-mounted rooftop PV systems, unless there are unique structural issues that need to be addressed (such as roof rafters being over spanned).
8. Do not tie permit issuance to utility approval. Some municipalities with their own electric utility require that the utility process and approve all paperwork relating to the PV system (e.g. net metering agreements, time-of-use metering agreements, solar rebate/incentive forms) before the building department will issue the permit. This needlessly adds time to the permitting process. We recommend that, before issuing a permit, such municipalities require only that the PV installer notify the utility of the pending project and submit an interconnection agreement and net metering application. The utility can then conduct its review and approval process concurrently with the PV contractor's installation process and the building department's subsequent inspection.

### Laws Governing PV Permits and Fees:

California Government Code Section 66014 provides that fees associated with building inspections and building permits "**shall not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged.**" (Emphasis added).

The California Solar Rights Act **limits the review of solar energy systems by city building officials to whether they meet applicable health and safety requirements.** (See California Government Code Section 65850.5 (b) and California Health and Safety Code Section 17959.1.) Discretionary reviews, including a design review for aesthetics, are prohibited. Section 65850.5(a) states: "It is the intent of the Legislature that local agencies not adopt ordinances that create unreasonable barriers to the installation of solar energy systems, including, but not limited to, design review for aesthetic purposes...." For details on this issue, see the letter of intent about solar permit fees and design reviews that State Senator Lois Wolk authored that was sent to all California cities on June 7, 2006. This letter can be downloaded at:

[http://www.noricalsolar.org/downloads/city\\_resources/WolkPVFeeLetter.pdf](http://www.noricalsolar.org/downloads/city_resources/WolkPVFeeLetter.pdf)

For more information on streamlining permit requirements:

1. Local chapters of the International Code Council in Northern California have approved some PV permit guidelines: <http://www.gosolarnow.com/PermitStandards.pdf>
2. The American Board of Codes and Standards is working on a technical wiring diagram that may become a national standard for PV solar permits, once approved. It is similar to: [http://www.brooksolar.com/files/Code\\_Organizer-Expedited-blank\\_INPUTS.pdf](http://www.brooksolar.com/files/Code_Organizer-Expedited-blank_INPUTS.pdf)
3. View a Sierra Club report entitled Solar Electric Permit Fees in Southern California (a comparative report). This report includes permit fee and processing time information for Southern California Cities and it has additional recommendations on PV permitting best practices. It can be downloaded at: <http://angeles.sierraclub.org/energy/pvfeereport.asp>

For more information on related solar PV permit issues, you may contact Kurt Newick via email at [SolarPermitFees@gmail.com](mailto:SolarPermitFees@gmail.com) or by phone at 408-370-9636.