

Executive Summary of Commercial & Residential PV Permit Fee Report, Placer County

by Sierra Club, Placer Group, 11/8/2011

A fall 2011 survey by the Sierra Club revealed wide variations in permit fees charged for commercial and residential rooftop photovoltaic (PV) energy systems by municipalities in Placer County. The survey found that fees for commercial PV projects of 131 kW in size varied from under \$1,400 to over \$9,000 (survey responses are based on a current market valuation of \$700,000, prior recent Sierra Club surveys used a higher valuation: \$1,200,000, see appendix A in the full report for survey details). High fees can discourage businesses and residences from making good, long-term, high-yield investments in solar power. Six of the seven Placer County jurisdictions are charging fees that exceed the maximum cost-recovery levels identified in this report for commercial PV projects. For 3 kW residential PV permits one municipality is charging a fee that is slightly higher than necessary.

The time needed for city staff to review and inspect a commercial PV project does not vary linearly by system size. For instance, interviews conducted in the preparation of this report revealed that the difference in time needed to process a 100 kW PV project is about two to three times longer than a 10 kW project (not ten times longer). Some efficient jurisdictions can do plan reviews and inspections for large commercial PV projects that take only slightly longer than a medium sized commercial PV project.

Basing fees on the value of the solar equipment inflates permit costs to unreasonably high levels, especially for larger, more expensive solar power projects. To recover costs, therefore, permit fees should be based on specific review times and billable hourly rates and not on PV project valuations.

The authors of this study have developed a free, public fee calculator spreadsheet for PV systems mounted on commercial rooftops to help municipalities determine cost recovery: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeeCalcCommercial.xls.

This report recommends best practices that municipalities can adopt to assure greater consistency, and help our society develop an energy source that leads to a healthier, safer, and more stable community. These include setting permit fees at cost-recovery levels, and instituting streamlined permit processing procedures.

PV permitting recommendations: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVPermitFeeRecommend2010.pdf

Solar Electric Permit Fees for Commercial and Residential Installations in Placer County Report: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeeStudyPlacer.pdf

Web site for the Placer County report on commercial and residential PV permit fees: www.SolarPermitFees.org/placer.html

View survey responses at: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeesPlacerCounty.html.

This executive summary: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeePlacerExecSum.pdf

Summary of California Laws Governing PV Solar Permits and Fees: www.SolarPermitFees.org/SolarPermitLawsSumCA.pdf

Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter Solar PV Permit Fee Campaign: www.SolarPermitFees.org

PV Permit Fees 131 kW Commercial Systems
Placer County as of 11/8/2011

Municipality Rank by Fee	131 kW Fee	Notes
Auburn	\$9,268	
Roseville	\$7,527	Add \$1,932 for Utility meter fee
Placer County	\$7,194	Revised from \$4,569
Colfax *	\$7,181	
Loomis *	\$7,000	
Lincoln	\$4,114	
Rocklin	\$1,398	
Average	\$6,240	

* Fees under review
Fees reduced

PV Permit Fees, 3 kW Residential Systems
Placer County as of 11/8/2011

Municipality Rank by Fee	3 kW Fee	Notes
Colfax *	\$515	
Loomis	\$200	
Placer County	\$163	
Roseville	\$155	Add \$252 for Utility meter fee
Auburn	\$141	
Lincoln	\$126	
Rocklin	\$125	
Average	\$203	

* Fees under review
Fees reduced
^ Fees increased