Model Solar Permitting Practices

Where are we today?
After a decade of widespread growth, the solar industry has gained the experience and knowledge to consistently install safe, simple, and standardized solar systems backed by strong insurance policies. However, complex permitting and interconnection requirements can delay installations and increase costs to solar consumers, while also leading to cancellations. Altogether, these soft costs add approximately $1 per watt per project. Fortunately, solutions are available through a collaboration between the industry and AHJs. We provide examples below that reduce costs and resource needs for everyone involved. Every week shaved off external processes can increase local installations by up to 5-10%. More installations lead to lower costs and open access to more people, bringing in more permitting fees and making our communities more resilient!

What is the solar industry doing to improve the situation?
● Working with municipal leaders and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) to develop an open-source online permitting application portal that can produce instant permits upon fee payment
● Improving a national certified equipment list with system design standards, spec sheets, and certification explanations
● Asking you to join our campaign and provide input on these topics at thesolarfoundation.org/solarapp

What AHJs policies improve the situation?
● Instantaneous permitting for solar and storage
● Online application portals that include live inspection scheduling and tracking
● Flat or algorithm-based fees under $500 for solar with or without storage
● No requirement to meet onsite for inspection
● For high performers; video inspections, audits instead of inspections, and/or full inspections reduced to 10%

What do AHJs gain from improved processes?
● Firmly places liability on the installer
● More installs with less work and the same fees per project
● Greater community resilience, especially as storage proliferates
● Fewer full inspections for high performing installers provides a carrot for new and struggling installers
● Fewer full inspections mean fewer on-the-job injuries

What AHJs provide permitting and inspection models?
● City of Las Vegas, Nevada provides an online portal that asks for the system size and homeowner customer address. A fee based on system size is calculated and paid, then the contractor is immediately allowed to build. They are working on adopting the Tucson model for inspections as well!
● Clark County, Nevada provides online applications, instant permits, and reduced inspections. Full inspections are performed on 10% of projects, while the remaining 90% are performed from the ground by photo.
● City of Los Angeles, California provides an online portal that asks for system components, calculates those input values using a computer program, and after this instantaneous compliance check, it outputs an instant permit online.
● Pasco County, Florida allows solar inspections by video. Contractors schedule an appointment with the inspector to meet them via VuSpex: Virtual Inspections. The appointment window is no longer than 30 minutes. The AHJ doesn’t need to send the inspector on site, saving time and money on truck rolls.

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