4.6 Streamline Solar Permitting for Small Solar Installations

10 Points

Objective

Encourage residential solar deployment by reducing transactional costs for small solar PV installations by making the solar permitting process transparent and simple.

Municipalities that complete this action may qualify for Bronze status in the national SolSmart community designation program. Note: if seeking dual program credit you must also complete a SolSmart Statement. Visit www.gosparc.org to learn more about how you can receive dual recognition, and even Gold status!

What to Do

All elements must be completed to receive credit.

1. Review zoning requirements and identify restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development. Compile findings in a memo. Consider the actions on this list of best practices.

   Submit: A copy of the memo. A sample of the memo is available for download.
2. Create and make available an online checklist detailing the steps of your community's solar permitting process. Consider using the CT Standardized Instruction Template for Solar PV Permitting.

   Submit: A link to your online permitting checklist (which applies to at least the permit process for solar).
3. Require no more than one application form for a rooftop PV project. Consider using the CT Standardized Solar PV Permit Application.

   Submit: A link to your residential solar PV permitting process and permit application form required by your municipality.
4. Review the permitting process for efficiency improvements. Reduce processing time to 30 days or fewer (or 10 days or fewer, if you want to receive SolSmart certification.) Consider the actions on this list of best practices.

   Submit: A document that tracks the date of permit application submissions and decision dates; or documentation from a local solar installation company indicating the average permit turnaround time; or a memo stating that the typical permitting process is 30 days or less.
5. Integrate solar PV and/or shared solar (pilot project(s) and/or virtual net metering) into your local energy, climate, and conservation plans. Include quantifiable metrics or specific actions. Consider the recommendations for Integrating Solar Energy into Local Plans.

   Submit: The link to relevant plans that incorporate solar PV goals or metrics. Please indicate relevant sections.
6. Train building inspectors and permitting staff on solar PV technologies and best practices for solar permitting. Check the Office of Education and Data Management's Continuing Education calendar for upcoming solar PV trainings, or visit www.energizect.com/sunrisene for other online resources.

   Submit: A memo from building official or staff describing training; or the link to an agenda with materials from the training; or the link to written verification from the training provider.

(Documentation should include information on date, time, location, and content covered.)

7. Train planning staff on best practices in planning and zoning for solar PV. Training must have occurred within the past five years.

   Submit: The link to a memo providing an agenda from the training, when it was held and who attended. Please list any continuing education requirements attendees received.

OR

1. Achieve at least Bronze status in the national SolSmart community designation program.

   Submit: A copy of your final prerequisite summary and credit summary.

Potential Municipal and Community Collaborators

Staff from the building, planning and zoning, and engineering departments, and a representative from the planning and zoning, or energy commission could be helpful in implementing this action.

Funding

For a complete listing of potential funding opportunities to assist with implementing Sustainable CT Actions, please visit the Sustainable CT Grants Portal, which is searchable by Action. Please also visit the Sustainable CT Resources for Certification page for opportunities for technical assistance and other supports.

Resources

Toolkits, Calculators, Guidance Documents

- CT Rooftop Solar PV Permitting Guide
- CT 2016 Municipal Solar Scorecards
- CRCOG Regional Permitting Initiative
- From Paperwork to Panels
- Acadia Center, "Community Energy Vision, Action Guide for Connecticut"
- CT Green Bank: No-cost technical assistance and SolSmart technical assistance

Organizations and Relevant Program

- CT Green Bank
- SolSmart

Why This Matters

Each of Connecticut's 169 municipalities has its own permitting processes, permit application and fee structure, which makes widespread solar deployment a challenge. By streamlining the procedures and documents required for a permit, your town or city can encourage more sustainable projects, including solar, and bring more business into your community.

We developed the recommendations and resources for improving rooftop solar PV (< 1 Megawatt) permitting in this action from research conducted by the Connecticut Rooftop Solar Challenge team. These suggestions align with the work of leading organizations throughout the nation that are working to help understand and improve solar PV permitting processes.

Benefits

You can reduce everyone's guesswork and frustration by creating open access to information, streamlining permit application submissions, implementing online permitting software and waiving or reducing permit fees.

Help contractors get it right the first time by clarifying the information they should provide when they apply for a solar PV permit.

CT Success Stories

- Coventry, CT: "Solar Panel Permitting"
- Hartford, CT: "Zone Hartford, Zoning Regulations" (Section 4.20.6)

Credit for Past Action

- **This action does not expire and can be completed at any time to receive credit.**