5.6 Streamline Solar Permitting for Small Solar Installations

20 Points

Action Updates

This action was last updated in 2024. A version of this action from the prior program year is available for comparison. Edits are highlighted in yellow.

Objective

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

What to Do

Municipalities that complete all sub-actions listed under Sustainable CT Action 5.6.1 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 https://solsmart.org to learn more about how you can receive dual recognition, and even Gold SolSmart status!

1. Streamline solar permitting for small solar installations. **(20 Points)**

   Sub-actions 5.6.1a - 5.6.1f must be completed to receive credit. Please include in your documentation a statement of how each of these sub-actions are relevant and used by your municipality.

   a. Review zoning requirements and identify restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development. Compile findings in a memo. Examples include: height restrictions, set-back requirements, screening requirements, visibility restrictions, etc. Consider the actions on this list of best practices. Present the memo of findings to your Planning and Zoning Commission.

   Submit: A copy of the memo. A sample of the memo is available for download. The agenda of the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting where the memo findings were discussed. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

   b. Draft proposed language for changes to zoning code based on the memo of findings created and discussed during the Planning and Zoning meeting in 5.6.1a. Involve planner and/or local zoning experts in the creation of the draft language.

   Submit: The proposed language for changes to zoning code. Include a list of those involved in the drafting of the proposed language (name and title). This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

   c. Create and make available an online checklist detailing the required permit(s), submittals, and steps of your community's small rooftop solar PV permitting process. Consider using the CT Standardized Instruction Template for Solar PV Permitting.

   Submit: A hyperlink and a screenshot of your online permitting checklist (which applies to at least the permit process for solar). This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

   d. Train building inspectors, permitting, and inspection staff on solar PV and/or solar and storage systems technologies and best practices for permitting/inspecting. Check the resources listed under the Resources

section below, or visit https://energizect.com/resources-for/local-government for training opportunities. Training must have occurred in the past five years. (Acceptable training enables staff to review all components of the PV system at once and covers both permitting and inspection).

Submit: The names and titles of the individuals who attended the training, date of attendance, the organization that provided the training, and an agenda or brief description of the content covered. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

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

Submit: The names and titles of the individuals who attended the training, date of attendance, the organization that provided the training, and an agenda or brief description of the content covered. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

f. Post a solar landing page on your municipal website with information that may include the community's solar goals, educational materials and tools that promote solar, and resources for solar development (e.g. permitting checklist, application forms, zoning regulations, etc.). The solar landing page ***must*** include metrics related to:

- The number of municipal solar PV or solar PV plus storage/EV installations and installed capacity;
- Municipal solar PV energy procured (ownership, PPAs, community solar offtake); and
- Percent (%) of municipal energy usage offset by renewable energy.

Submit: Both a hyperlink and a screenshot of the solar landing webpage. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

OR

2. Achieve at least Bronze status in the national SolSmart community designation program. **(20 Points)**

   Submit: A copy of your final prerequisite summary and credit summary or proof of SolSmart designation from the SolSmart program. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

Engaging Partners

Sustainable CT encourages regional collaboration and other forms of partnership. For every action, please complete the "Partners" box in your submission, indicating the name(s) of any municipalities and/or organizations you partnered with (if any) and a brief description of your municipality's role. If you collaborate with other municipalities, each community will receive points. For additional information, please see the "Partners Guidance Document".

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

If available, below are potential funding sources specific to this Action. 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 Support for Your Town page for opportunities for technical assistance and other supports.

- Urban Act Grant Program
- Sustainable CT Community Match Fund
- State Funding Readiness Project

Resources

Toolkits, Calculators, Guidance Documents

- CT Green Bank: No-cost technical assistance, email Emily Basham at Emily.Basham@CTGreenBank.com.
- Connecticut Green Bank, Solar MAP for Towns and Cities
- SolSmart Resources page includes resources for all 7 actions
- CT Rooftop Solar PV Permitting Guide
- CT 2016 Municipal Solar Scorecards
- CRCOG Regional Permitting Initiative
- From Paperwork to Panels: Video overview of home solar installation process.
- Acadia Center, "Community Energy Vision, Action Guide for Connecticut"
- Training Resources:
  - 5.6.1d
    - Interstate Renewable Energy Council training portal
    - U.S Department of Energy Sunshot webinars:
      - Efficient Solar Permitting for Your Jurisdiction: Pre-Application Materials and Application Submittal and Review
      - Efficient Solar Permitting for Your Jurisdiction: Inspections
      - SolSmart Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting: Season 1 and Season 2
    - P-8 and I-1 training
      - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 1, permitting I) (P-8 when taken with session 2, below; I-1 when taken with sessions 2 and 3 below)
      - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 2, permitting II) (P-8 when taken with session 1, above; I-1 when taken with sessions 1 above and 3 below)
      - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 3, inspection I) (I-1 when taken with sessions 1 and 2 above)
  - 5.6.1e
    - PZD-9 training
      - SolSmart Webinar: Planning & Zoning Best Practices for Large-Scale Solar
      - SolSmart Webinar: Best Practices in Solar Planning and Zoning
    - U.S. Department of Energy SunShot webinar: Promoting Solar Energy Use Through Local Development Regulations
    - U.S. Department of Energy SunShot webinar: Promoting Solar Energy Use Through Local Plans

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

- Guilford - Oct 2022 Certification
- Branford - Sep 2023 Certification
- Ellington - May 2024 Certification
- Fairfield - Oct 2024 Certification