



Process Improvements

Step 3, PR 3-B

Pre-qualify Electrical Plans

Develop a process for pre-qualification of standard plans

Pre-qualification of plans typically works as follows:

- An installer has a typical template approach or “plan” for installing a solar panel system.
- The installer meets with local permitting staff to review this plan in terms of system design and components.
- If the permitting staff finds that the plan is compliant with all relevant codes, they approve it.
- If the installer intends to install a system conforming to the approved plan, therefore incorporating the approved system design and using the approved components, they inform the permitting department.
- The permitting department then immediately issues an electrical permit.
- During project inspection, the inspector confirms that the system design and components are the same as originally approved.

It is important to note that the steps outlined above typically apply only to an electrical permit process, not to the building permit process. The building permit process would still be required, since the pre-qualification of the standard plan does not address the specific site or structure the system is located on. The Solar American Board of Standards (see Solar ABCs) has developed a series of checklists, and sample forms and plans for expediting permitting processes that are widely recognized around the country.

Examples

City of Honolulu, Hawaii

The Honolulu permitting department allows installers to submit a template of a typical system design and, depending on the installer, a limited number of pre-approved variations. If approved, an installer can skip the electrical plan check process and proceed directly to the inspection process.

www.irecusa.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-Sharing-Success-w-cover-revised-final052012.pdf (p. 27).

State of Florida

The Florida Solar Energy Center approves photovoltaic (PV) systems and components. Criteria for approvals are based on applicable codes and standards, and consistency with industry-accepted design practices. This approval does not replace or exempt utility or local jurisdiction requirements, but it is a resource for expert oversight that local jurisdictions may be unlikely to have on-staff.

<http://bit.ly/NycUkB>

Solar ABCs Expedited Permitting Guide

The guide presents a detailed checklist of electrical requirements, and a simple questionnaire for municipalities receiving electrical and building permit requests for small-scale solar systems.

www.solarabc.org/about/publications/reports/expedited-permit/pdfs/Expermitprocess.pdf

City of Portland, Oregon

Portland has developed an expedited permitting process for installations which meet a number of set criteria. These “prescriptive installations” can be processed more quickly than custom-designed systems when submitted by a trained

installer. Installers also must complete the city’s standardized checklist and forms. Portland has made the guidance and process for residential systems available for the public.

www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/article/195360

Related Resources:

See the “Develop permit criteria outlining thresholds for “standard” installations and streamline permitting processes accordingly,” a resource that Solar Ready KC developed, as an additional reference:

<http://marc.org/Environment/Energy/pdf/BMP-Process-Step-1-1-C-Streamline-Permitting.aspx>.