



SunShot Initiative Rooftop Solar Challenge Permitting Recommendations for CT Jurisdictions

The following list of ideas for improving rooftop solar PV permitting results from research conducted by the Connecticut Rooftop Solar Challenge team. Though our team arrived at these suggestions independently from other teams across the country, these themes are consistent with the work of other teams throughout the nation that are working to help understand and improve permitting processes.

Jurisdictions are encouraged to consider these suggestions to support efficient and safe rooftop solar PV installations in their communities. Other resources on the Sun Rise New England site provide more details as well as specific examples and templates you might use to implement recommendations that could be feasible and beneficial for your community.

Make information available

Post permitting information online

Consider making information and resources pertaining to your solar PV permitting process and fee available and easily accessible on your jurisdiction website.

- Compile the steps for obtaining a solar permit into the [CT Standardized Instructions Template for Solar PV Permitting](#)¹
- Post your permit application(s) online
- If not using the CT Standardized Instructions

template, make sure the following information is available online:

- Contact information for relevant departments
- Permitting office hours
- List of required documentation to be included with application
- Methods of submission
- Permit fees
- Required department reviews and signoffs
- Information on how to schedule an inspection

Create a clean energy webpage

Constituents want to know about local clean energy projects and activities, policies and incentives, your clean energy task force (if applicable), and successes and participation in programs such as the Rooftop Solar Challenge, Solarize, the Clean Energy Communities Program, the CT Solar Challenge, and C-PACE.² You could consider:

- Including links to resources such as the Sun Rise New England, GoSolarCT and EnergizeCT websites. [EnergizeCT](#)³ is a state initiative to provide energy-related information and resources. The [Sun Rise New England](#)⁴ website contains resources and tools for reducing solar soft costs and streamlining solar permitting. [GoSolarCT](#)⁵ is dedicated to providing Connecticut residents with the information they need to make informed decisions about solar energy for

¹ Available at www.energizect.com/sunrisene

² Rooftop Solar Challenge, eere.energy.gov/solarchallenge; SunShot Initiative, eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot; Solarize, solarizect.com; Clean Energy Communities Program, energizect.com/communities/programs/clean-energy-communities; CT Solar Challenge, ctsolarchallenge.com; C-PACE, c-pace.com.

³ www.energizect.com

⁴ www.energizect.com/sunrisene

⁵ www.gosolarct.com

their home. This website offers consumers information and resources that help them become savvy solar shoppers.

- If your municipality has a Clean Energy Taskforce, post a link to their webpage. Check out [West Hartford](#), [North Haven](#), [Fairfield](#), and [Westport's](#) clean energy websites as examples.

Provide a clean energy property tax exemption form

In Connecticut, property owners can exclude the added value of a solar PV system from the valuation of their property for tax purposes. However, they must file a form with their municipal tax collector to claim the exemption. Make it easy for them by posting the form on your website. A sample form is available at www.energizect.com/sunrisene.

Shorten Permit Approval Times

Adopt best practices for short permit turnaround

By Connecticut law, a permitting decision must be made within 30 days. However, a shorter timeframe encourages installers to do business in your jurisdiction and speeds up the time between a customer's intent to generate clean energy and their ability to do so.

- Consider the best practice of issuing same day or "over-the-counter" permits for standard small-scale rooftop solar PV systems that clearly meet your jurisdiction's permit approval criteria.
- If same-day permits are not available, consider implementing a standard timeframe for processing solar pv permits or provide a typical processing time for standard systems
- Allow for all required signoffs, document submission and payment to be completed in a single visit.
- Improve communication with applicants.
 - Provide updates to contractors when applications are missing information
 - Email approved permits or if permits are sent by mail, call or email the applicant to notify them that the permit has been approved and is on its way.

Streamline Permit Application Submission

Simplify the Application Process

Consider making one department responsible for the rooftop solar PV permitting process and reduce the number of steps and extra requirements asked of installers.

- Only require Building Department approval for roof-mounted solar PV
- If multiple department signoffs are required, circulate the application internally rather than requiring the applicant to visit each department

Create a solar PV-specific application form

The [CT Standardized Solar PV Permit Application](#) can be used in its entirety or components of the package can supplement resources you create.

- Clarify requirements and increase consistency across jurisdictions by adopting our Standardized Rooftop Solar PV Permit Application Package.
- If not using the [CT Standardized Solar PV Permit Application](#), consider requiring applicants to submit an Electrical Permit Application only, unless structural upgrades are necessary. This saves applicants time and redundant paperwork in the Building Department.

Adopt online permitting or other methods for simpler submission

Online permitting enables applicants to obtain and submit solar PV permit application materials online and can make it easier for your municipality to process and keep track of permits.

Check out "Online Permitting for CT Jurisdictions"

- Consider trying out an online permitting system, a great way to make permitting easier for your municipality and for applicants. (See "[Online Permitting](#)" for more information and potential vendors)

- If online permitting isn't an option, consider allowing installers to obtain and submit permit application materials by email or by regular mail. Offering these options for application submission will save applicants time and money, encouraging them to do more business with your community.

Set a fair permit fee for solar

Consider whether your permit fee structure accurately reflects the time and cost for your Building Department to permit solar PV projects. (See "[Determining a Fair Permit Fee](#)" for more information)

Streamline Review and Inspection Requirements

Train municipal staff

Take advantage of training resources offered for jurisdiction staff who would benefit from learning more about solar PV. (See "[Training Resources](#)" for more information)

- Your staff can participate in free trainings offered through this project (announcements will be provided on our website, www.energizect.com/sunrisene), state sponsored trainings, and also access free online training courses and resources.

Streamline Reviews

Consider re-evaluating your solar PV permitting requirements to identify and remove reviews that are not critical to safe and efficient operation of a proposed rooftop solar PV system. In particular, engineering reviews could potentially be streamlined or eliminated by considering criteria and a methodology for determining when these reviews are needed.

- Consider developing criteria and a methodology such as using the [CT Structural Review Worksheet](#) for determining when professional engineering reviews are not necessary, without compromising safety.
- Consider removing the requirement for approval from the Tax Department for permit issuance. Municipalities

may have an ordinance that requires Building Permits to be withheld if the property owner has delinquent municipal taxes. Since many solar PV systems are owned by a third party and require no down payment from the customer, consider exempting permits for solar PV from this requirement. This type of regulation can pose major barriers to low income homeowners interested in going solar. (See the "[Solar PV Model Permitting Ordinance](#)" for example exemption language)

Simplify the Inspection Process

Consolidate inspections:

Coordinating multiple inspections can be time consuming for contractors and inspectors, consider consolidating inspections to save everyone time.

- Offer a single, comprehensive inspection for roof-mounted systems instead of requiring multiple appointments.
- Consider scheduling specific appointment times for inspections or providing an inspection window of 1 hour or less.
- If issuing a Certificate of Occupancy (C.O.) or a Certificate of Approval (C.A.), allow contractors to obtain at the inspection appointment or electronically.
- Consider removing fees associated with a Certificate of Occupancy (C.O.) or Certificate of Approval (C.A.)
- Be flexible with who you require to attend the inspection. Solar contractors often have multiple crews and electricians, and it can be difficult to assign specific employees to a given project. As long as the contractor is qualified, be flexible with who you require at the inspection.

For assistance contact:
CGBSunShot@ctgreenbank.com
Or visit: EnergizeCT.com/sunrisene

¹http://publicecodes.cyberregs.com/icod/irc/2012/icod_irc_2012_1_sec012.htm