

Executive Summary of Commercial & Residential PV Permit Fee Report, Solano County

by Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter, 11/9/2011

A summer 2011 survey by the Sierra Club revealed wide variations in permit fees charged for commercial and residential rooftop photovoltaic (PV) energy systems by municipalities in Solano County. The survey found that fees for commercial PV projects of 131 kW in size varied from \$400 to over \$20,000 (survey responses are based on a \$1,200,000 project valuation, current market valuations are closer to \$700,000, see appendix A for survey details). High fees can discourage businesses and residences from making good, long-term, high-yield investments in solar power. Most municipalities are charging fees that exceed the maximum cost-recovery levels identified in this report for commercial PV projects. Three cities are charging more than \$10,000 for a commercial PV permit (about 4 times higher than an estimated maximum fee that enables full cost recovery). For 3 kW residential PV permits, one city in Solano County is charging excessive fees.

The time needed for city staff to review and inspect a commercial PV project does not vary linearly by system size. For instance, interviews conducted in the preparation of this report revealed that the difference in time needed to process a 100 kW PV project is about two to three times longer than a 10 kW project (not ten times longer). Basing fees on the value of the solar equipment inflates permit costs to unreasonably high levels, especially for larger, more expensive solar power projects. To recover costs, therefore, permit fees should be based on specific review times and billable hourly rates and not on PV project valuations.

The authors of this study have developed a free, fee calculator spreadsheet for PV systems mounted on commercial rooftops to help municipalities determine cost recovery:

www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeeCalcCommercial.xls.

The report recommends best practices that municipalities can adopt to assure greater consistency, and help our society develop an energy source that leads to a healthier, safer, and more stable community. These include setting permit fees at cost-recovery levels, and instituting streamlined permit processing procedures. You can see detailed survey responses for each jurisdiction at: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeesSolanoCounty.html.

PV permitting recommendations: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVPermitFeeRecommend2010.pdf

Solar Electric Permit Fees for Commercial and Residential Installations in Solano County Report: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeeStudySolano.pdf

Web site for the Solano County report on commercial and residential PV permit fees:

www.SolarPermitFees.org/solano.html

View survey responses at : www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeesSolanoCounty.html.

This executive summary: www.SolarPermitFees.org/PVFeeSolanoExecSum.pdf

Summary of California Laws Governing PV Solar Permits and Fees:

www.SolarPermitFees.org/SolarPermitLawsSumCA.pdf

Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter Solar PV Permit Fee Campaign: www.SolarPermitFees.org

PV Permit Fees, 3 kW Residential Systems
Solano County as of 11/9/2011

Municipality Rank by Fee	3 kW Fee	Changes from 2006
Dixon ^ *	\$500	Increased from \$149
Vallejo #	\$394	Reduced from \$671
Solano County #	\$352	Reduced from \$1,113
Rio Vista #	\$250	Reduced from \$783
Fairfield ^	\$221	Increased from \$203
Vacaville #	\$185	Reduced from \$404
Benicia ^	\$150	Increased from \$125
Suisun City #	\$118	Reduced from \$282
Average	\$271	Reduced from \$466

PV Permit Fees 131 kW Commercial Systems
Solano County as of 11/9/2011

Municipality Rank by Fee	131 kW Fee	Notes
Vallejo *	\$20,696	
Dixon *	\$14,531	
Rio Vista	\$11,311	
Fairfield #	\$3,519	Reduced from \$7,300
Benicia	\$1,538	
Solano County #	\$1,188	Reduced from \$22,477 in year 2010
Suisun City	\$463	
Vacaville	\$400	
Average	\$6,706	Reduced from \$9,840

* Fee under review

Fee reduced

^ Fee increased