



Senator Scott Wiener, 11th Senate District

Senate Bill 379 – Solar Access Act

SUMMARY

To increase the number of homes installing safe solar energy systems, Senate Bill 379, the Solar Access Act, would require certain sized jurisdictions to provide an online instant solar permitting process, like SolarAPP+, for residential solar and solar-plus-storage systems.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), a division of the U.S. Department of Energy released free software called SolarAPP+ that cities and counties can adopt to process permits for solar and solar-plus-storage systems for residential single-family homes and duplexes, and integrates with most existing permit management software. SolarAPP+ asks the contractor a series of questions to verify the solar system's design is safe, and then issues a permit automatically. SolarAPP+, developed in partnership with building safety experts and the solar industry, helps local governments and installers operate more efficiently without compromising the safety or quality of solar systems. SolarAPP+ is free for cities and counties, integrates with their existing software systems, and can be adjusted to the characteristics of the area (e.g., snowfall).

The California Energy Commission (CEC) is operating a program to deploy \$20 million in grants to help cities and counties adopt online automated permitting systems such as SolarAPP+. Jurisdictions, such as Pleasant

Hill, Sonoma County, Menifee, Stockton, Simi Valley, San Jose and Los Angeles have deployed SolarAPP+ or similar automated permitting software with great success. Pleasant Hill, for instance, was able to reduce their average permit review time to zero days (same-day approval), after they adopted SolarAPP+ for instantaneous automated permitting.

PROBLEM

California needs to accelerate its transition to clean energy in order to increase local resilience and meet its climate emissions targets by 2045. While rooftop solar systems have been a major driving force behind California's ongoing transition, the potential growth of these systems has been diminished by administrative burdens. Red tape and the 'soft costs' of permitting and installing often prevents homeowners from putting solar on their roofs. Before a contractor can install a solar system, they need to apply for a permit from the local building department. These permitting processes are often inefficient and time-consuming, and can add thousands of dollars to the cost of installing solar. As a result, fewer Californians add solar to their roofs who otherwise would. Meanwhile, the workload for building department officials continues to increase, exacerbated by pandemic-related disruptions, and government staff are increasingly unable to manage the permitting application process in a timely fashion. Relief is needed across the board, and the technology to accomplish that

is now widely available, and should be implemented as quickly as possible.

SOLUTION

SB 379 will allow more homeowners to install solar by streamlining the permitting process. The bill will require counties with populations over 150,000, and all cities within those counties to allow homeowners' contractors to receive an instant online permit for standard solar and solar-plus-storage systems, via software such as the SolarAPP+. For cities under 50,000 residents, this requirement is in place starting Sept. 30, 2024, and for those cities over 50,000 residents, the requirement is in place starting Sept. 30, 2023. Local governments can apply to the CEC to cover the costs of implementing SolarAPP+.

Overall, the bill would increase the number of households installing solar and storage systems, help California meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, increase the resiliency of homes (especially during public safety power shutoffs), reduce electricity costs to homeowners, reduce administrative costs for local governments, and create solar installation jobs.

SUPPORT

- Environment California, Co-Sponsor
- SPUR, Co-Sponsor
- 350 Humboldt
- ACR Solar
- Advanced Energy Economy
- All Valley Solar, Inc.
- Alternative Energy Systems Inc.
- Aurora
- Aztec Solar
- Bay Area Council
- California Democratic Party
- California Solar & Storage Association
- Center for Sustainable Energy
- City of Palm Springs
- Elders Climate Action, NorCal Chapter
- Elders Climate Action, SoCal Chapter
- Elizares Solar Consulting
- Energy Toolbase
- Environmental Defense Fund
- First Response Solar
- GRID Alternatives
- Habitat for Humanity Greater San Francisco
- Housing Action Coalition
- Local Government Commission
- Local Solar for All
- McCalmont Engineering
- Mosaic
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Natural Resources Defense Council Action Fund
- Omnidian, Inc.
- Planet Plan Sets
- Pure Power Solutions
- Sierra Club California
- Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action
- Solar and Fire Education
- Solar Energy Industries Association
- Solar Rights Alliance
- Solar Sense PV, Inc.
- Solar United Neighbors
- Solar Works
- SolarCraft
- Spectrum Energy Development Inc.
- Summit Technology Group
- SunEarth
- Sunrun
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- Symmetric Energy
- Taylor Energy
- TerraVerde Energy
- Tesla
- The Climate Center

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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