

Chapter 22.91

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM REVIEW PROCESS

Sections:

- 22.91.010 Definitions.**
- 22.91.020 Administrative Approval Process.**
- 22.91.030 Expedited, Streamlined Permitting Process for Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems.**

22.91.010 Definitions.

The following words and phrases as used in this Chapter 22.91 are defined as follows:

A. “Electronic submittal” means the utilization of one or more of the following:

1. e-mail, or
2. the internet, or
3. facsimile.

B. “Feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the specific, adverse impact” includes, but is not limited to, any cost-effective method, condition, or mitigation imposed by the City on another similarly situated application in a prior successful application for a permit. The City shall use its best efforts to ensure that the selected method, condition, or mitigation meets the conditions of subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) of Section 714 of the Civil Code, as such section or subdivision may be amended, renumbered, or redesignated from time to time.

C. “Small residential rooftop solar energy system” is a solar energy system that satisfies all of the following elements:

1. A solar energy system that is no larger than 10 kilowatts alternating current nameplate rating or 30 kilowatts thermal;
2. A solar energy system that conforms to all applicable state fire, structural, electrical, and other building codes as adopted or amended by the City and paragraph (iii) of subdivision (c) of Section 714 of the Civil Code, as such section or subdivision may be amended, renumbered, or redesignated from time to time;
3. A solar energy system that is installed on a single residential unit or two-residential unit (as defined in Chapter 28.04 of this Code); and
4. A solar panel or module array that does not exceed the maximum legal building height as defined by the authority having jurisdiction.

D. “Solar energy system” has the same meaning set forth in paragraphs (1) and (2) of subdivision (a) of Section 801.5 of the Civil Code, as such section or subdivision may be amended, renumbered, or redesignated from time to time.

E. “Specific, adverse impact” means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified, and written public health and safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete. (Ord. 5713, 2015.)

22.91.020 Administrative Approval Process.

The City shall administratively approve applications to install solar energy systems pursuant to the provisions of this Chapter 22.91. If an application for a solar energy system satisfies all of the requirements of the Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System checklist, the application shall receive expedited review pursuant to Section 22.91.030. Otherwise, all applications to install solar energy systems shall be processed pursuant to this Section 22.91.020.

A. Application. Prior to submitting a solar energy system permit application and checklist to the City, the applicant shall:

1. Verify to the applicant’s reasonable satisfaction through the use of standard engineering evaluation techniques that the support structure for the solar energy system is stable and adequate to transfer all wind, seismic, and dead and live loads associated with the system to the building foundation; and
2. Verify that the existing electrical system’s current or proposed configuration will accommodate all new photovoltaic electrical loads in accordance with the edition of the California Electrical Code in effect at the time the solar energy system permit application is submitted; and
3. Verify that the proposal is exempt from, or otherwise complies with, the coastal development permit requirements pursuant to Public Resources Code 30610, Sections 13250 to 13253 of Title 14 of the California Administrative Code, and Chapter 28.44 of the Santa Barbara Municipal Code.

B. **Extent of Review.** The review of all applications to install a solar energy system shall be limited to the Building Official's review of whether the proposed solar energy system meets all health and safety requirements of local, state, and federal law, and the City Planner's review of applicable building height, open yard requirements, and zoning setbacks pursuant to Title 28 of the Santa Barbara Municipal Code. If the Building Official makes a finding, based on substantial evidence, that the solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety, the City shall require the applicant to obtain a Performance Standard Permit.

C. **Standards for Solar Energy Systems.** All solar energy systems proposed for installation within the City of Santa Barbara shall meet the following standards, as applicable:

1. All solar energy systems shall meet applicable health and safety standards and requirements imposed by state and local permitting authorities, including building height, zoning setback, minimum open yard, and permitted construction standards.

2. Solar energy systems for heating water in single-family residences and solar collectors used for heating water in commercial or swimming pool applications shall be certified by an accredited listing agency as defined in the California Plumbing and Mechanical Codes.

3. A solar energy system for producing electricity shall meet all applicable safety and performance standards established by the California Electrical Code, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and accredited testing laboratories such as Underwriters Laboratories and, where applicable, rules of the Public Utilities Commission regarding safety and reliability.

4. Solar energy systems may be installed on a property with outstanding violations of the City's Municipal Code so long as both of the following requirements are satisfied:

a. The proposed solar energy system installation will not rely upon prior construction that was identified as a violation in an unresolved City notice or document; and

b. In the course of conducting the building inspection for a solar energy system, a health or life-safety hazard is not observed. Examples of such hazards include, but are not limited to, conditions that could lead to structural failure, electrical shock, and sanitary sewer failures.

D. **Performance Standard Permit.** In the case where the Building Official makes a finding, based on substantial evidence, that the solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety, the solar energy system shall not be installed until a Performance Standard Permit has been issued for the solar energy system pursuant to Chapter 28.93 of this Code. The Performance Standard Permit shall require the installation or incorporation of methods or conditions necessary to minimize or avoid the specific, adverse impact.

E. **Appeal.** The Building Official's decision that a proposed solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety is appealable in accordance with the following procedures:

1. **Who May Appeal.** The decision of the Building Official may be appealed to the Planning Commission by the applicant. No other persons can appeal.

2. **Timing for Appeal.** The applicant must file a written appeal with the Community Development Director no more than 10 calendar days following the Building Official's decision. The appeal shall include the grounds for appeal.

3. **Grounds for Appeal.** The decision of the Building Official may be appealed on the grounds that the Building Official's decision that a proposed solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety is not supported by substantial evidence.

4. **Scheduling an Appeal Hearing.** The Community Development Department shall assign a date for an appeal hearing before the Planning Commission no earlier than 10 calendar days after the date on which the appeal is filed with the Community Development Director. The appeal hearing shall generally be held within 60 calendar days following the filing of the application for the hearing.

5. **Power to Act on the Decision at Appeal Hearing.** The Planning Commission may affirm, reverse, or modify the Building Official's decision that a proposed solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety in accordance with the following:

a. A decision to affirm the decision of the Building Official shall require a finding based on substantial evidence in the record that the proposed solar energy system could have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety.

b. If the Planning Commission determines that there is not substantial evidence that the solar energy system could have a specific adverse impact upon the public health and safety, then the decision of the Building Official shall be reversed and the project shall be approved.

c. If the Planning Commission determines that conditions of approval would mitigate the specific adverse impact upon the public health and safety, then the decision of the Building Official shall be reversed and the project shall be conditionally approved. Any conditions imposed shall mitigate at the lowest cost possible, which generally means the permit condition shall not cause the project to exceed 10 percent of the cost of the small rooftop solar energy system or decrease the efficiency of the small rooftop solar energy system by an amount exceeding 10 percent.

6. The decision of the City Planning Commission is final. (Ord. 5713, 2015.)

22.91.030 Expedited, Streamlined Permitting Process for Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems.

In compliance with Government Code Section 65850.5, the City has developed an expedited and streamlined permitting process for qualifying Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems. The submittal requirements and review procedures for applications of Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems are as follows:

A. **Application Checklist.** In order to be eligible for expedited review, prior to submitting a solar energy system permit application and checklist to the City, the applicant shall:

1. Verify to the applicant's reasonable satisfaction through the use of standard engineering evaluation techniques that the support structure for the solar energy system is stable and adequate to transfer all wind, seismic, and dead and live loads associated with the system to the building foundation; and

2. Verify that the existing electrical system's current or proposed configuration will accommodate all new photovoltaic electrical loads in accordance with the edition of the California Electrical Code in effect at the time the solar energy system permit application is submitted; and

3. Verify that the proposal is exempt from, or otherwise complies with, the coastal development permit requirements pursuant to Public Resources Code 30610, Sections 13250 to 13253 of Title 14 of the California Administrative Code, and Chapter 28.44 of the Santa Barbara Municipal Code.

B. **Application Submission.** The City accepts the submission of applications for Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems and the associated checklist and documentation in person at the Building Permit counter or by electronic submittal. The City shall accept signatures electronically for electronic submittals.

C. **Standards for Solar Energy Systems.** All solar energy systems proposed for installation within the City of Santa Barbara shall meet the following standards, as applicable:

1. All solar energy systems shall meet applicable health and safety standards and requirements imposed by state and local permitting authorities, including building height, zoning setback, minimum open yard, and permitted construction standards.

2. Solar energy systems for heating water in single-family residences and solar collectors used for heating water in commercial or swimming pool applications shall be certified by an accredited listing agency as defined in the California Plumbing and Mechanical Codes.

3. A solar energy system for producing electricity shall meet all applicable safety and performance standards established by the California Electrical Code, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and accredited testing laboratories such as Underwriters Laboratories and, where applicable, rules of the Public Utilities Commission regarding safety and reliability.

4. Solar energy systems may be installed on a property with outstanding violations of the City's Municipal Code so long as both of the following requirements are satisfied:

a. The proposed solar energy system installation will not rely upon prior construction that was identified as a violation in an unresolved City notice or document; and

b. In the course of conducting the building inspection for a solar energy system, a health or life-safety hazard is not observed. Examples of such hazards include, but are not limited to, conditions that could lead to structural failure, electrical shock, and sanitary sewer failures.

D. **Application Review.** The Building and Safety Division shall confirm whether the application and supporting documents are complete and meet the requirements of the City's Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System checklist. The Building and Safety Division shall review applications for Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Systems within 24 working hours (3 working days) of submission. Mounting the solar panels on the plane of the roof with the California Solar Permitting Guide "Flush Mount" standards, will eliminate the need for confirmation of maximum building height.

E. **Complete Application.** An application that satisfies the information requirements specified in the City's Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System checklist shall be deemed complete.

F. **Incomplete Application.** If the Building and Safety Division determines that an application for a Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System is incomplete, the Building and Safety Division shall issue a written correction notice detailing all deficiencies in the application and any additional information required to be eligible for expedited permit issuance. Alternatively, if the Building and Safety Division determines that the proposed solar energy system, as proposed, will not qualify as a Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System, the Building and Safety Division may recommend that the applicant resubmit his or her application pursuant to Section 22.91.020.

G. **Permit Approval.** Upon confirmation by the Building and Safety Division that the application and supporting documents are complete and meet the requirements of the Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System checklist, the Building Official shall approve the application and issue all required permits or authorizations electronically.

H. **Inspections.** The installation of a Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System shall only require one building inspection which, if a fire inspection is required, shall be consolidated with the fire inspection. If the installation of the Small Residential Rooftop Solar Energy System fails the inspection, a subsequent inspection or inspections shall be required, at the applicant's expense, until the installation passes inspection or is cancelled and the solar energy system is removed to the satisfaction of the Building Official. (Ord. 5713, 2015.)