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In an effort to increase solar use in homes, Philly cuts red-tape and cost for installers

by Frank Kummer, Posted: October 14, 2020- 1:36 PM



SOLAR STATES



Micah Gold-Markel, owner of Solar States, a solar installation company, had grown frustrated with the permitting process in Philadelphia.


“People love solar. It’s a great product. It works,” Gold-Markel said of the growing demand. “It’s just all the regulation. And I’m a pro-regulation guy, but with this there are just so many layers.”

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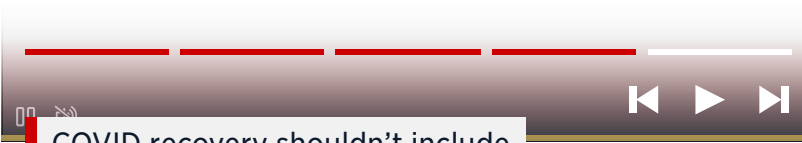
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On one job, he said, it took three months for the city to open a PDF file containing building plans because of a technology issue.

Now, Philadelphia officials say they have made the process easier on home solar installers like Gold-Markel, hoping to prompt more installations throughout the city as part of its [Solarize Philly](#) program. The new permitting process is both quicker and cheaper.

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Installers can apply for an [EZ Permit for Solar](#) online through the Department of Licenses and Inspections for systems with 10 kilowatts of capacity or less, which should fit most home installations. The process no longer requires installers to submit detailed electrical plans, which used to add considerable time and cost.

In addition, solar permit applications made online will be reviewed within three business days, saving weeks, if not months, in the process. Those submitted in person will be reviewed the same day.

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Last year, the city capped building permits for solar, which are required for commercial systems over 10 kw, at \$200. Before that, the fee could run in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Gold-Markel welcomed the changes and said it makes sense that detailed plans are no longer required because solar installations are equivalent to small electrical jobs. The new permit only requires installers to say they will adhere to all codes.

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“Solar companies, we heard your call for a streamlined permitting process and responded,” Mayor Jim Kenney said in a news release Tuesday. “Philadelphia wants you to do business here in our city. We need to substantially grow the use of solar in Philadelphia as part of our strategy to combat climate change, and we need your help to get us there.”

Ron Celentano, president of the Pennsylvania Solar & Storage Industries Association, welcomed the new process. He said in the release that solar permitting “has remained a challenge over recent years, which has deterred some companies from operating inside the city limits.”

Laura Rigell, with the Philadelphia Energy Authority, which manages the Solarize Philly program, called the new process “a big step in streamlining for solar.”

Since the city launched the Solarize Philly program four years ago, 700 contracts have been signed for home and small commercial operations, Rigell said.

Previously, the city offered a rebate that amounted to about \$1,000 on an average home installation. That has not been renewed for the current fiscal year because of the impact COVID-19 has had on the city budget.

“We’re hoping funding is renewed for the program,” Rigell said. “We know we need a lot more solar installed to get on track to meet the city’s climate goals.”

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But she said homeowners and small businesses can still qualify for a separate \$250 discount on a system through Nov. 30.

And she said a federal tax credit of 26% of the total cost of a system is available, though that will decrease to 22% in 2021, and zero the year after that on home systems.



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