



DATE: August 7, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

FROM: Brian Oh, Director of Community Development
Jerome Hoberg, Chief Building Official
Charles Lucas, Deputy Chief Building Official

SUBJECT: Resolution Authorizing the City of Petaluma to Accept a Grant Award from the California Energy Commission to Automate Small Residential Solar Permits

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council accept a \$60,000 grant from the California Energy Commission to support Petaluma's efforts to streamline processing of eligible residential solar permits and be in compliance with state law.

BACKGROUND

Last year, California lawmakers passed the Solar Access Act (SB 379, Wiener), which requires most cities and counties to adopt SolarAPP+, an automated online permitting platform for standard residential solar and storage systems. Compliance deadlines depend on the size of the community, and some are exempt entirely. Cities and counties with more than 50,000 residents must adopt SolarAPP+ by Sept. 30, 2023. Cities and counties with 50,000 residents or fewer must adopt SolarAPP+ by Sept. 30, 2024.

In an effort to support local jurisdictions with this transition, the California Energy Commission provides non-competitive funding for interested jurisdictions who submit an application to its California Automated Permit Processing (CalAPP) Program. Grant funds can be used for, but not limited to, reimbursement of staff or consultant time associated with implementing the software as well as other secondary permitted uses, such as hardware, installation, and maintenance costs. The program was funded with \$20 million from the California Budget Act of 2021 to support a grant program for California cities and counties to establish online solar permitting.

DISCUSSION

The California Energy Commission is granting up to \$60,000 to the City of Petaluma to reimburse eligible costs associated with implementing SolarApp+, which is a permitting software

developed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) for expediting solar permit review and issuance.

The Grant Agreement (Attachment 2) outlines the scope of the grant and stipulations the project must follow. Staff recommends that City Council accept this grant as a way to reimburse expenses for the implementation of this software program.

Petaluma is required adopt SolarAPP+ by Sept. 30, 2023, and is currently in compliance with SB 379. The City Council action on the grant application will not affect our compliance under state law.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This agenda item appeared on the City's tentative agenda document on July 17, 2023, which was a publicly noticed meeting.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

An economy that prospers. Encourage a thriving business environment that results in a strong, diverse, resilient economy and supports community prosperity. An environmental legacy we can be proud of. Preserve and protect Petaluma's environment for future generations and become a municipal leader in sustainability by reducing and drawing down greenhouse gas emissions; and encouraging sustainable development.

CLIMATE ACTION/SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

This grant will encourage and simplify obtaining solar permits. Solar permits are aligned with City goals for clean and carbon free energy.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as accepting a grant to install an online permitting program is not a project under CEQA as this action does not have any direct or indirect effects on the environment and it is needed to comply with state law.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

The Grant is awarding the City of Petaluma up to \$60,000 for this project, therefore there are no additional financial impacts to the City's general fund.

ALTERNATIVES

City Council may choose not to accept the grant award and staff will continue to process building permit applications for new residential solar permits.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
2. Grant Agreement Packet