



HOW SOLAR-FRIENDLY ARE LONG ISLAND MUNICIPALITIES?

An in-depth evaluation of 19 municipalities and solar policies on Long Island

Some municipalities require fees for additional permits. Garden City requires permit fees for the Architectural Review Board, which are \$450 for a project less \$20,000 or \$725 for projects above \$20,000 and an electrical permit at a cost of \$200. The Village also requires the homeowner to leave a substantial deposit with the Village that is returned after the permitting process is completed. The Village of Floral Park requires fees for the Architectural Review Board permit, application permit, building permit and an electrical permit. These fees add to the cost of the solar installation for the homeowner and act as a deterrent to solar instead of encouraging homeowners to go solar.

4. Municipalities should lead by example and install solar for municipal projects: Municipalities should lead by example and install solar on municipal buildings. Long Beach, Glen Cove, Oyster Bay, Smithtown, Brookhaven, Huntington, Southampton, East Hampton, Southold, and the Village of Southampton all installed solar on their own municipal buildings.

5. All new construction should be required to be built solar-ready: The 2015 International Residential Code, adopted by New York State building code includes "Appendix U". This appendix is an optional part of the building code and allows individual municipalities to adopt it. It details how newly constructed homes should be "solar ready" and leave an open, contiguous area available to site solar panels. This means that if a homeowner moves in and wants to install solar, the roof will not have a chimney in the middle or multiple "peaks", making solar installation limited. Many of the municipalities claimed, "If it's in the code we follow it." Yet no Long Island municipalities have adopted this as part of their own codes or practices yet. One town, Brookhaven passed their own "solar ready" building code but rescinded the legislation less than a year later. They are not enforcing the NYS Appendix U.

In other states and even in neighboring NYC, new construction is not only required to be "solar ready" but must include solar in the new building.

We would like to thank the solar companies on Long Island for providing the necessary data for our report.



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All photos provided by EmPower Solar

MUNICIPALITIES LONGEST TURNAROUND TIMES

1. Village of Floral Park (avg. 136 days)
2. Town of Brookhaven (avg. 75.2 days)
3. Village of Garden City (avg. 54.3 days)

MUNICIPALITIES SHORTEST TURNAROUND TIMES

1. City of Long Beach (avg. 6.3 days)
2. Town of Oyster Bay (avg. 7.8 days)
3. Town of Riverhead (avg. 8.8 days)

MUNICIPALITIES OFFERING FREE SOLAR PERMITS

1. City of Long Beach
2. Town of North Hempstead
3. Town of Southampton
4. Town of East Hampton

CCE collected data from the 5 largest solar companies on Long Island detailing the length of time needed to issue a solar permit for residential roof top installation. These companies include Empower Solar, Green Logic LLC, Sunrun, Sun Nation Solar Systems Inc, and Long Island Power Solutions. CCE developed a grading system for solar permitting including the length of time to process the permit, incentives for solar on new construction, adoption of a uniform permit application, costs of solar permits, solar installations on municipal buildings, and any additional obstacles for the homeowner. CCE conducted phone interviews with all of the municipalities and evaluated codes and permit applications regarding solar. All of the data was compiled and municipalities were ranked into 3 categories: Sunny Skies, Partly Cloudy, and Dense Fog.

New York is a national leader on climate change. In 2019, Governor Cuomo signed into law, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. This landmark bill establishes an ambitious goal of achieving 70% renewable energy by 2030 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions 85% by 2050. Long Island is on the front lines for many adverse impacts caused by climate change. This includes warming and acidification of our estuaries, rising sea levels, and an increase in powerful storm events,

such as Superstorm Sandy. Long Island must lead the way in advancing renewable energies, including solar and wind power to replace fossil fuels.

Is solar power progressing? According to NYSERDA, Long Island has installed 563.3 mw of solar power, 394.6 mw in Suffolk and 168.7 mw in Nassau. This is a total 49,875 projects, with 30,108 projects in Suffolk and 19,767 projects in Nassau. Although we have made

significant progress, we have much more to do.

This Long Island Solar Report analyzes 19 Long Island municipalities to evaluate if their permit policies are “solar-friendly”. CCE evaluated 12 towns, 2 cities, and 5 villages. We identified a wide range of policies that make it easy for homeowners to go solar and many policies that are hindering homeowners from switching to solar due to excessive barriers and long permit turn-around times.

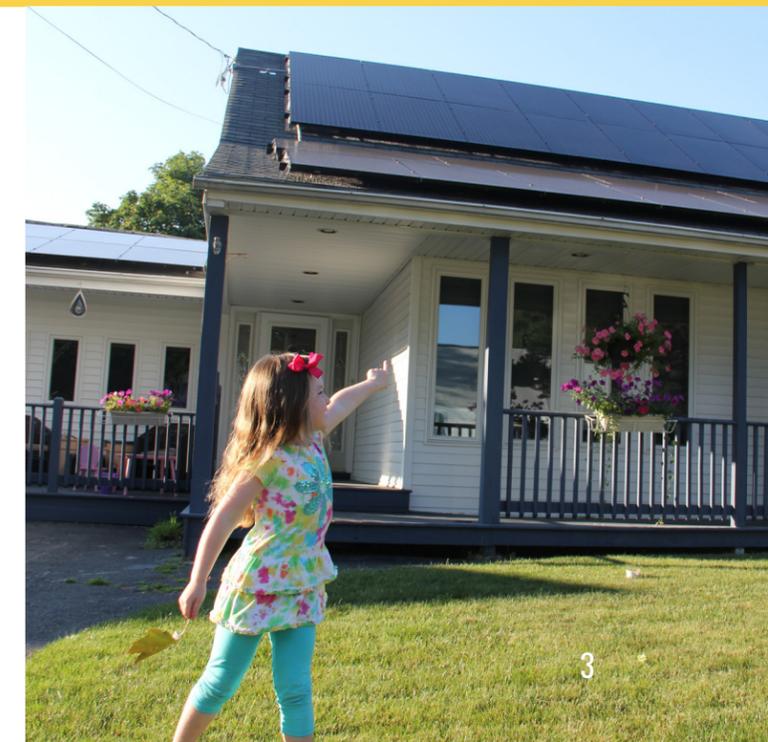




CHART KEY

 - Yes/ Positive

 - No/Negative

	Municipality	Incentivizes Solar Ready Buildings	Adopted a Unified Solar Permit (USP) Initiative	Turn-around time	No Additional Steps beyond USP Requirements	No Property Survey Required	No Architectural Review Board	Accepts Online Applications	Price of Solar Permit	Installed Solar on Municipal Buildings
Sunny Skies	City of Long Beach	☁	☁	6.3 days	☀	☀	☀	☁	No Cost	☀
	Town of East Hampton	☁	☀	12 days	☀	☀	☀	☁	No Cost	☀
	Town of Southampton	☁	☀	17 days	☁	☀	☀	☁	No Cost	☀
	Town of Smithtown	☁	☀	15.5 days	☁	☀	☀	☁	\$100	☀
	Town of Huntington	☁	☀	19.9 days	☁	☀	☀	☁	\$110 (\$150 for Non-Standard)	☀
Partly Cloudy	Town of Southold	☁	☀	10.8 days	☀	☀	☀	☁	\$200	☀
	Village of Southampton	☁	☁	17.8 days	☀	☀	Historic District Only	☁	\$250	☀
	Town of Hempstead	☁	☀	25.8 days	☁	☁	☀	☁	\$100 (\$200 for fast track)	☀
	Town of Oyster Bay	☁	☁	7.8 days	☁	☁	☀	☁	\$175-\$1,000 depending on how many solar panels	☀
	Town of Riverhead	☁	☀	8.8 days	☁	☁	☀	☁	\$150 (\$50 for fast track)	☁
	City of Glen Cove	☁	☀	18.3 days	☀	☀	☀	☁	\$100 for project's first \$1,000, \$15 per \$1,000 after	☀
	Town of Islip	☁	☀	14.8 days	☀	☀	Historic District Only	☁	\$200	☁
	Village of Babylon	☁	☀	10.3 days	☀	☀	☀	☁	\$300	☁
Dense Fog	Town of North Hempstead	☁	☁	39.8 days	☁	☀	Historic District Only	☁	No Charge	☁
	Town of Babylon	☁	☀	25 days	☁	☁	☀	☁	\$200	☁
	Town of Brookhaven	☁	☀	75.2 days	☁	☁	Historic District Only	☀	Approximately \$100	☀
	Village of Valley Stream	☁	☁	28 days	☁	☁	☀	☁	\$50 for project's first \$1,000, \$6 per \$1,000 after	☁
	Village of Garden City	☁	☁	54.3 days	☁	☁	☁	☁	\$400 for the project's first \$1,000 and \$20 per \$1,000 after	☁
	Village of Floral Park	☁	☁	136 days	☁	☁	☁	☁	\$150 for project's first \$1,000, \$10 per \$1,000 after	☁

Recommendations

1. Municipalities need to fast track solar permit applications: The City of Long Beach is a leader. They process solar permits in 6.3 days. Oyster Bay is right behind with an average of a 7.8 day review. However, other municipalities are not as diligent in their review processes. The Village of Floral Park has the longest processing time with an average of 136 days. Floral Park requires solar companies to attend multiple meetings with the Fire Department, Safety Department, and Building Department. Each meeting can result in multiple changes to the design of the project and even then it is not guaranteed that the permit will be given to the homeowner. The Town of Brookhaven averages 75 days to process permits, but on the plus side, they are the only town to accept permits electronically to make it more convenient for solar companies.

2. Municipalities need to keep the permit process simple: The Long Island Unified Solar permit and the New York State Unified Solar Permit were developed to simplify the process for installers and homeowners. The more complicated the process, the more time and resources installers and homeowners need to invest, leading to higher costs. The good news is that many municipalities adopted these permits. However, several municipalities are requiring additional documents from homeowners. The objective of the unified permit is for the process to be streamlined and efficient – adding on additional requirements defeats the purpose and adds burdens to the consumer.

In the most egregious example, the Village of Floral Park (which has not adopted the uniformed permit) requires multiple additional documents causing the process to be overly burdensome. They require: a glare analysis, sun and shadow diagram, elevation diagram, plan depicting all homeowner's trees, and a load itemization chart. Floral Park places obtrusive restrictions on solar, including requirements that panels are only allowed on the back slope of homes, equipment and wires must be painted to match the roof and siding, and plans must be independently reviewed by the fire, safety, and building departments.

3. Municipalities need to keep the application at a reasonable cost to homeowners: Long Beach, North Hempstead, Town of Southampton, and Town of East Hampton lead the way with a FREE application. Other towns base permit fees on the total cost of the solar installation or number of panels installed. These models are not solar friendly. It does not require more work for the municipality whether the homeowner is installing a \$20,000 project or a \$30,000 project. For instance, Garden City charges \$400 for the first \$1,000 and \$20 for every \$1,000 afterwards. Floral Park, the costs are \$150 for the first \$1,000 and then \$10 for every \$1,000 after. The Village of Valley Stream also has a fee based on the cost of construction, \$50 for the first \$1,000 of construction and then \$6 for every \$1,000 in construction costs after.

“Solar technology has advanced over the last decade, and the cost of modules has substantially decreased. However, the total installation cost has only incrementally been reduced. The reason for this remains mostly in the “soft costs” of solar. Materials and equipment are more efficient and less expensive than ever, however the costs of marketing, permitting, interconnection, and labor remain high, especially in our region.

Making processes and the administrative burden easier and more streamlined for both solar companies and solar customers would expedite the process of going solar and would, therefore, reduce costs of labor, financing, and overhead. A typical solar company on Long Island can spend ten staff-hours or more on permitting a single solar project, and weeks of waiting for an approval from some municipalities. Solar companies typically hire one permitting employee for every 100-200 projects per year. Their jobs require completing paperwork, ensuring each design matches each municipality's building code requirements, driving to each town in person to file permits – a process that can sometimes take hours, disputing objections from building departments, resubmitting, picking up approved plans, and ultimately, closing out a client's building permit. Closing out a building permit often requires a few more hours of work per solar project, as it requires coordinating inspections between homeowners and building inspectors, revisiting the installation to complete inspector's requests, going back and forth about code interpretation, and following up with the AHJ for the Certificate of Completion.”

- Tara McDermott, LISEIA

