

# Regional Recommendations for Solar Permitting & Inspections

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*Encouraging regional consistency in permitting and inspections for residential solar PV*

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON

**Council of Governments**



# Regional Solar Permitting Recommendations

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- **Objectives:**

- Within the framework of existing government programs, move toward national best practices for residential solar PV
- Encourage simpler and more consistent permitting and inspections processes across the region

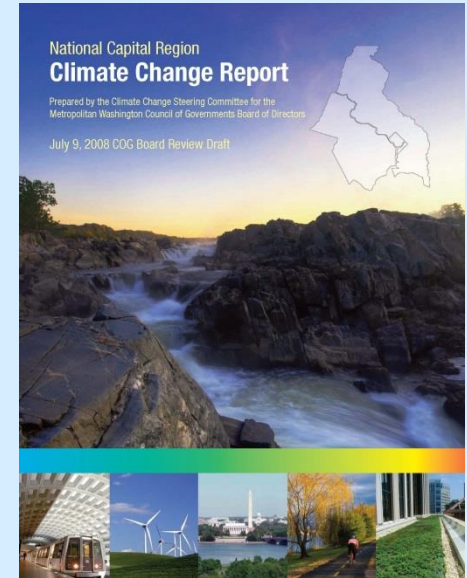
- **Motivations:**

- Economic Development: Make the National Capital Region a more attractive solar market
- Help Residents Save Money: Reduce the cost and paperwork burden of installing solar

# Background

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- 2008 NCR Climate Change Report
- GHG Reduction Goals
  - 20% by 2020 and 80% by 2050
- Recommendations:
  - “Examine options for removing barriers to implementing renewable energy (e.g. solar panels)”



# Permitting Adds Costs to Solar

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Comprehensive study in 2011 estimated that permitting adds (national avg):

- **\$2,516 for each residential installation (\$0.50/watt)**
  - \$505 = Customizing each permit application
  - \$726 = Variation in building code requirements for solar
- **DOE SunShot Goal:**
  - Solar is cost-competitive (**\$1/watt**) with fossil-fuels by 2020
- **Solutions:**
  - Transparent process and clear requirements
  - Adopt a standard solar permit application and process
  - Increase consistency across jurisdictions

# Rooftop Solar Challenge

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***Objective: reduce soft costs for solar PV at the local level***

- **Complete a Solar Market Baseline Assessment**
  - Identify current practices and areas for improvement
  - Track progress on the Solar Roadmap
  - **Significant variation in practices across the region**
- **Work toward National Best Practices**
  - Identified by: U.S. DOE, National Renewable Energy Lab, Solar America Board for Codes & Standards
  - Technical assistance from Rooftop Solar Challenge teams

# Solar Permitting in the NCR

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Recommendation	Washington DC	Montgomery	Prince George's	Fairfax	Arlington
Base residential permit fee on actual cost to administer					
Require only one permit application submittal					
Use a standard solar PV-specific permit application form					
Adopt a permit submittal checklist					
Allow electronic permit application submittal					
Enable online approval of application form					
One-day walkthrough for permit review and approval					
Streamline and expedite process for qualifying projects					
Adopt a Solar PV Inspection Checklist					
Offer a specific inspection appointment or small window					
Require only one inspection visit					

Based on most recent SM3 surveys, SolarRoadmap.com and jurisdiction progress updates

# Regional Recommendations for Solar PV Permitting & Inspections

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## Packet Includes:

- **Recommendations**
  - Permitting, Inspections and Website Improvements
- **Model checklists and expedited process**
  - Template Permit Checklist
  - Template Inspection Checklist
  - Example Simplified Permit Review for Qualified Systems





# Recommendations for Permitting Residential Solar PV

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## **Fees:**

- Create a flat permit fee based on the actual cost to administer

## **Permitting**

- Require only one permit application submittal
- Use a standard permit application form specific to solar PV systems
- Adopt a permit submittal checklist
- Allow electronic permit application submittal
- Enable online approval of application form
- One-day walkthrough for permit review and approval
- Streamline and expedite process for qualifying projects

# Recommendations for Inspections and Website Enhancements

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## **Inspections**

- Offer a specific inspection appointment time or small window
- Require only one inspection visit
- Adopt an inspection checklist
- Master electrician is not required to be on site for inspection but on call by phone to answer inspector questions

## **Website Enhancements**

- Post permit and inspection process information online, including applicable fee schedules
- Make permit application form available online
- If online processing is not available, offer a one-day walkthrough permit review and approval process for residential solar PV systems

# Template Checklists

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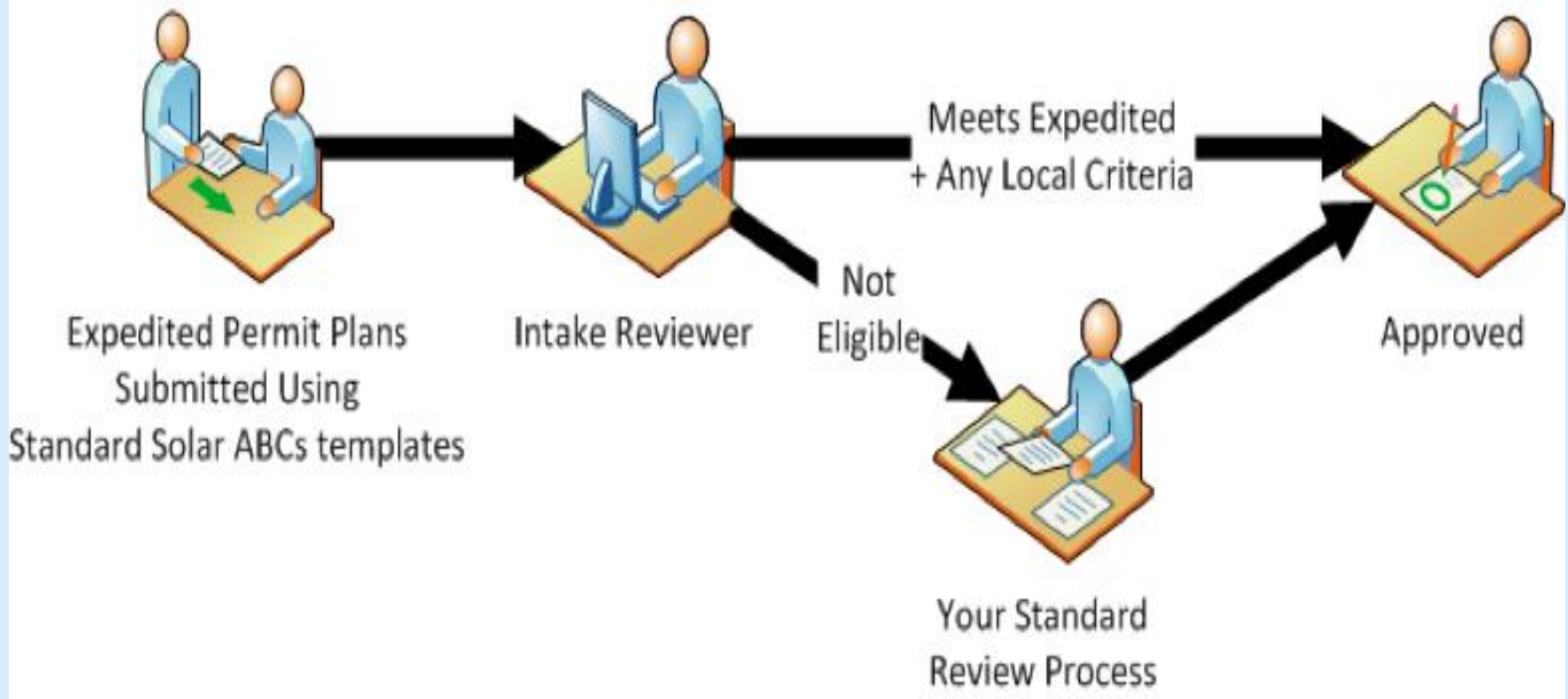
- Checklists let residents and installers know what they need to do
  - Reduce information barriers and confusion
  - Improve efficiency of permit application processing
  - Make sure systems are properly installed
  - Easily modifiable for local needs



# “Fast Track” Qualified Systems

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Simplified permit review if system meets certain criteria



# Permit Streamlining Efforts Across the Region

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- **Washington, DC**
  - Revised permit process for solar PV and solar thermal
  - Reduced fees ~50%
  - Went into effect October 1, 2014
- **Montgomery County**
  - Bill 10-14 passed in April 2014 to:
    - Establish expedited process for qualified systems on single family detached homes
    - Reduce fees ~50%
- **Maryland Energy Administration**
  - Comprehensive Online Application Portal
  - Pilot phase to begin in 2015



# Next Steps

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- **Goal: Achieve greater consistency across the region**
  - Within the framework of existing programs, examine opportunities to adjust or clarify permitting and inspection process for residential solar PV
- **Communication**
  - Letters of support from NVRC, MEA
  - Feedback solicited from RSCII participants and jurisdiction representatives
  - CEEPC motion to support on November 19, 2014
- **Implementation**
  - Share with COG member jurisdictions & permitting offices
  - COG and MDV-SEIA available to provide technical assistance, model language and other resources

# Feedback / Questions?

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