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City Reports 54 Percent Increase in Number of Solar Permits

RECORD 2,235 SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC PERMITS ISSUED IN 2016

SAN DIEGO – As part of its ongoing sustainability efforts, the City of San Diego is turning up the heat on solar photovoltaic installations. The City’s Development Services Department (DSD) reported a 54 percent increase in solar photovoltaic (PV) permits issued in 2016 (2,235 permits) compared to 2015 numbers (1,207 permits).

Since 2014, San Diego has ranked second in the nation for the number of solar panels installed, according to a [2016 report](#) published by the Environment California Research & Policy Center. The same report ranks San Diego as fourth among U.S. cities for installed solar PV capacity per person.

As part of the City’s [Climate Action Plan](#) to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half, one of the City’s goals is for all electricity used in the City to come from renewable sources by 2035.

"Creating more solar opportunities is key to reaching our sustainability goals," said Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer. "By streamlining the permitting process, we’re allowing more residents and businesses to do their part to protect the environment for future generations of San Diegans."

Plummeting costs, technological innovation and the City’s strong, pro-solar policies and efforts to streamline its solar PV permit processing services contributed to the increase in the number of solar PV permits issued in 2016.

The City’s permitting process was streamlined by:

- Relocating solar PV plan reviews to the downtown offices so that more complex PV projects are getting a quicker review;

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- Increasing the number of training classes for customers to receive professional certification to allow them to submit plans without a plan review;
- Collaboration between DSD and San Diego Fire-Rescue Department staff to develop a template for fire access, thus eliminating the need for some plan reviews;
- Giving authority to DSD staff to allow their inspectors to approve simple construction changes in the field without requiring a plan review, preventing delays with the installation while plans are being reviewed.

As a result of these improvements, installation costs for solar PV panels for contractors have been reduced. The savings are passed along to the homeowners, which in turn has resulted in the installation of more solar panels in San Diego.

“San Diego was recognized in April of last year by National Basketball Association legend and solar enthusiast, Bill Walton, along with local renewable energy advocates and industry leaders for its solar power achievements,” said Michelle Kinman, clean energy advocate with Environment California Research & Policy Center. “We are expecting San Diego to be ranked near the top again in our list of U.S. solar ‘Shining Cities’ when our next report is published in April 2017.”

According to the Center’s researchers examining solar power installations in 64 cities nationwide, San Diego has enough installed solar capacity to power nearly 50,000 homes. The report also noted that San Diego’s installed solar capacity grew 26 percent in 2015.

Area businesses have also been joining in the effort to go solar. For example, the San Diego International Airport is expected to save an estimated \$8 million in energy costs over the course of a 20-year power purchase agreement with the owner of the solar system installed at the airport, NRG. The 3.3 megawatt system installed last year will avert more than 3,700 metric tons of carbon pollution annually. DSD reviewed, issued permits and inspected both the ground mounted solar panels and the roof-mounted panels at the airport in February 2016.

“Much of the credit for the large increase in solar PV permits issued and as a result, solar panels getting installed, goes to my staff,” said Development Services Director, Robert Vacchi. “They recognize the importance of being efficient in processing the permits and then inspecting the work. We spent a lot of time creating and then implementing new procedures to make the process easier for customers who wish to install PV systems.”

To view data on 2016 solar permits issued online, please visit <http://data.sandiego.gov/story/see-solar-permits-issued-2016>. Additional information about the City of San Diego’s residential solar PV resources can be found online:

<https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/homeowner/residential-solar>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/environmental-services/san-diego-solar-map>

<https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/industry/incentive/sustainable>

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