

SB1054: Local Government – Building Permits for Residential Solar Energy and Residential Energy Storage Systems – Required Platform and Inspection
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 7th, 2024
FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future

Environment Maryland is a citizen-based statewide environmental advocacy organization. We work to protect clean air, clean water, and open space.

Our groups urge support for SB1054 to codify a recommendation of the [Maryland Task Force to Study Solar Incentives](#) to streamline and speed up solar permitting in Maryland to help us deploy more rooftop solar faster through the adoption of Solar APP+.

As this committee is well aware, only 5.3% of Maryland homes have rooftop solar, a figure that needs to grow rapidly for the state to meet its clean energy goals. Installing a rooftop solar system should be as fast and easy as possible, without compromising health and safety. Unfortunately, obtaining a permit from the local building department for rooftop solar and battery storage can take days, weeks, or months. The permit process can be complex, cumbersome, and costly. Maryland can't afford that kind of inefficiency for something as common-sense as rooftop solar.

What is Solar App+ ?

The Department of Energy created SolarAPP+, a free tool for localities that can cut permit processing time to less than one hour, slashing wait times, and lowering costs.

- The Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) has received \$4.48 million from DOE to support adoption of SolarAPP+ by Maryland jurisdictions.
- Solar projects submitted through SolarAPP+ are installed and inspected on average 12 business days faster than projects using the conventional process. These time savings, coupled with a uniform interface across jurisdictions promises to make it easier and faster to install more rooftop solar more affordably.
- SolarAPP+ also accommodates permitting for other clean energy technologies, such as in-home battery storage, making a comprehensive shift to being able to power our lives with renewable energy easier.
- Montgomery County has piloted SolarAPP+, and 240 communities across the country have signed up, including: Phoenix and Tucson, AZ; San Francisco, CA; Denver, CO; Oklahoma City, OK; and, Houston, TX.

Last year California became the first state to mandate that cities and counties adopt SolarAPP+ to make residential solar and energy storage installations fast, streamlined and hassle-free. It's time for Maryland to do the same.

Potential Amendments

We have been working with stakeholders from local and county governments on several amendments. The primary amendment would ensure the law is technology neutral and not mandating the use of a single software so as not to set a precedent and to enable counties and municipalities to develop their own or contract with a private company to provide automated permitting. We are comfortable with this amendment as long as it does not open the door for software that doesn't have the same functionality as Solar APP+. Requiring online permitting is not good enough. And to be clear, we do think Solar APP+ is and will remain the best option for local permitting because it is the gold standard. It is also provided to them free, has financial support from the federal government for adoption, and is backed by the federal government. Alternatives are available, but have the potential to drive up costs, or lose functionality over time if private companies go under.

We are happy to answer any questions about this or other amendments.

What's at stake?

Rooftop solar is one of the best energy sources for Maryland. Because it generates clean energy that can be used on-site, rooftop solar can help to decrease dependence on fossil fuels, reduce strain on the grid, and increase the grid's resilience to threats like extreme weather and spikes in demand.

According to a [recent report from Environment Maryland Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group](#), small-scale solar energy – of which rooftop is the largest contributor – has grown rapidly in Maryland over the past ten years, producing enough electricity to power 119,694 households in 2022. While our rooftop solar progress is encouraging, we're just scratching the surface of our rooftop solar potential. The sooner we tap that potential the sooner we'll have cleaner air and a more stable climate.

We respectfully recommend a favorable report.