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County Executive

FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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HB 1104 –Residential Solar Energy Systems - Local Inspections and Permitting

DATE:	March 3, 2026
COMMITTEE:	House Environment and Transportation Committee
POSITION:	Opposed
FROM:	Frederick County Division of Planning and Permitting

As the Department Head of the Frederick County Department of Development Review and Planning, and on behalf of the Division of Planning and Permitting, I urge the committee to oppose **HB 1104 –Residential Solar Energy Systems - Local Inspections and Permitting**.

Frederick County shares the State's commitment to expanding solar energy access and streamlining the permitting process. However, we respectfully offer the following concerns regarding the bill's operational, safety, and legal impacts on local jurisdictions and customers.

Overview of Frederick County's Current Permitting Process and Turnaround Times
Frederick County currently utilizes a fully electronic permitting and plan review system through Infor Public Sector (IPS), seamlessly integrated with ProjectDox for digital plan review and Infor Mobile for field inspections. Solar applications—both rooftop and ground-mounted—are submitted electronically, reviewed within a unified workflow that includes zoning, structural, electrical, and environmental analysis, and tracked across the entire approval process.

All of Frederick County's rooftop solar permits are expediated. Our staff performs same-day intake review, and most residential rooftop solar permits are approved within 3–5 business days. Straightforward rooftop installations are often approved even faster. Between 2023 and 2025, 46% of rooftop solar permit applications were approved within 2 days. The other 54% of applications were issued within 1-2 weeks depending on a variety of factors that local jurisdictions have no control over, i.e., incomplete applications or plan submissions, delayed resubmissions from contractors and property owners, or delayed fee payments. Inspections are completed within 24–48 hours of receipt of the request. Frederick County provides next-day inspections for any request submitted prior to 2pm on the preceding business day. This system already provides efficiency, transparency, and full compliance with local and state requirements, without the need for an additional external automated permitting software product.

Clarification Needed on Automation Requirements
HB 1104 requires jurisdictions to implement software for tracking and approving residential solar energy systems, residential storage systems, electrical panel upgrades, and panel derates. However, only residential solar PV appears intended for automated plan review and immediate permit issuance. We request clear confirmation that automation applies exclusively to rooftop solar PV.

Electrical panel upgrades and energy storage systems carry significantly higher electrical and fire-safety risks and must remain subject to human review and qualified inspection to ensure public safety.

Concerns Regarding Remote Inspection Requirements
The bill mandates that remote inspections—using recorded video or photographs—must be allowed for projects approved through automated software, with capped fees and limited authority for repeat inspections. While remote inspections may be appropriate for certain limited elements of rooftop installations, they are not safe or adequate for verifying electrical panel upgrades, energy storage systems, or structural conditions. These installations require physical inspection to ensure the protection of life and property, and remote formats cannot reliably confirm code compliance.

Plan review and onsite inspections ensure solar installations meet building and electrical codes, maintaining clearances, access pathways, ventilation, and proper structural mounting to protect first responders and property owners. Inspectors also verify safe electrical connections, grounding, and breaker configurations to prevent shock, arc-flash hazards, and electrical fires. These safety checks require in-person verification and limiting inspections to remote-only reviews would undermine inspection ethics and compromise public safety.

Prohibition on Manual Review Reduces Local Oversight
HB 1104 prohibits counties from conducting any manual review of permits or inspections approved through the software. This restriction removes essential oversight tools. Automated systems cannot always detect nuanced safety, structural, electrical, or code-compliance issues. Local governments maintain legal responsibility for public safety, and prohibiting manual review removes a critical layer of quality control that protects both residents and inspectors. These potential safety issues pose a threat not just to those using rooftop solar systems, but our first responders that are responsible for responding to solar system malfunctions. If installed improperly, the risk of injury increases as our first responders do not have the relevant information needed to deal with system malfunctions in the most safe and efficient manner.

Concerns Regarding SolarAPP+ Functionality
Although HB 1104 does not specifically name SolarAPP+, its detailed requirements closely mirror the capabilities of that platform. SolarAPP+ only supports rooftop solar and does not evaluate historic preservation easement requirements or some structural conditions. It also relies heavily on contractor self-certification, and errors discovered at inspection can create financial hardship for homeowners who believed they had received a fully approved permit. Additionally, documents generated through the system reside outside County databases, complicating compliance with State record retention and public information requirements. By requiring counties to use SolarAPP+ or similar software, the bill forces jurisdictions into a one-size-fits-all system, preventing them from relying on local processes and tools that best serve their communities.

Conflict With Frederick County's Integrated Permitting System
Frederick County already operates a fully integrated electronic permitting ecosystem through IPS, ProjectDox, and Infor Mobile—covering rooftop solar, ground-mounted solar, storage systems, and electrical upgrades within a single, efficient workflow. Requiring an additional, duplicative platform solely for rooftop solar would disrupt County operations, degrade customer service, and require staff to manage parallel processes with inconsistent data retention and review capabilities.

Fee Cap Creates an Unfunded Mandate
The bill imposes a fee cap that does not align with actual local costs associated with permit review, inspection, software integration, and administrative support. This creates a structural funding gap that must be absorbed by local government or shifted onto county taxpayers.

In summary, HB1104 imposes requirements that undermine local expertise, limit the ability of counties to maintain safe and effective procedures, and force jurisdictions into systems that may cause applicants more confusion, delay, and expense. Frederick County's established processes already ensure efficiency, safety, and accountability, and any new mandate should enhance—not compromise—these standards. We remain committed to supporting solar deployment, but it must be done in a way that protects residents, first responders, and the integrity of local oversight.

Thank you for considering these concerns.