

UNIFIED SOLAR PERMIT CASE STUDY: TOWN OF HIGHLAND

Questions answered by Code Enforcement Officer Jim Hanson and Building Clerk Michelle Reed

Community Snapshot



2,530 people



51.7 square miles

Favorite clean energy project: Conversion of Street Lights & Indoor Lights to LEDs

Sustainability Website: townofhighlandny.com/departments/climate-smart-community

Solar Permitting Snapshot

Solar Permits Issued Annually (since 2020): 4

Year of Adoption of the Unified Solar Permit: 2016

Building Department Size: Part-time CEO and two part-time clerks

Clean Energy Communities High-Impact Actions Completed



Benchmarking – Municipal Buildings



Clean Energy Upgrades



Energy Code Enforcement Training



Unified Solar Permit



Is your community considering the Unified Solar Permit? Here's why the Town of Highland thinks you should adopt.

1) Why did your community choose to adopt the Unified Solar Permit application?

The Town is known for and values its natural beauty, and is officially a part of the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway. The Town was also seeing a growing public interest in solar. The Town decided that adoption of the USP application was a good interim step to safeguarding the Town's natural beauty until the Town could update its zoning.

2) Did your community have a solar energy law in place prior to adoption of the USP?

When the Town adopted the USP, it did not have a solar energy law in place and its zoning had not been updated in quite some time. After observing how other communities had fared after passage of a solar energy law, and finding that other local governments did not experience any major issue, the Town hired an engineering firm to develop its law. The solar energy law was adopted by the Town in April of 2021.

3) How have residents or solar installers reacted to the USP application?

Applicants have been able to easily complete the USP application and generally there are no significant questions and no glaring issues. People are used to roof-mounted solar and appreciate the value that it adds to their homes.

4) What was the Permit application's impact on your building department's workload?

The Permit has improved the building department's workflow. The USP application provides clear direction on what can and cannot be done, which is helpful.

5) What advice would you give communities considering passing the Unified Solar Permit today?

Even with the USP in place, it has been important to the Town to complete a thorough review of the property where the solar installation is being proposed. Thorough reviews have allowed the Town to reduce issues that may arise between neighbors. Everyone puts their life savings into their homes and it is important to protect that. In areas with high scenic value, such as the portion of the Town along the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, a thorough review is especially important to reduce the visual impact for homeowners who live along the Delaware River. This level of due diligence ensures that solar continues to be a good fit for the community.