

# Suffolk County and Nassau County Planning Commissions: Long Island Unified Solar Permitting Initiative

Greater Long Island, NY region  
Population: 2.8 million  
Size: 2826 square miles  
[www.suffolkcountyny.gov](http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov)  
[www.nassaucountyny.gov](http://www.nassaucountyny.gov)

The *Long Island Unified Solar Permitting Initiative* (LIUSPI) was launched in 2009 by the Suffolk County Planning Commission and the Nassau County Planning Commission. Prior to this effort, Long Island's solar installation permitting process had a different set of regulations for each town and village, creating confusion, delays and extra costs. For example, some communities treated solar installations as a structure, as an add-on, or as related to plumbing or electrical installations.

As solar installations became more prevalent in the region, it became evident that a standardized and more efficient approach was needed. The Clean Energy Leadership Task Force run by the Sustainability Institute at Molloy College began asking local governments to identify the best set of rules that could be adopted region-wide to help facilitate solar installations. Under the direction of the Suffolk County Planning Commission Chair David Calone, a committee was formed, including representatives from the Suffolk County Planning Commission, the Nassau County Planning Commission, the Long Island Power Authority, industry experts and various municipalities. The Committee sought to create a permitting process that could be executed quickly, but retained safety and quality control. It was important that the application was not so easy that any solar installation could pass without the proper safety measures.

In October 2011, the committee proposed an expedited and standardized process for residential solar electric systems. The new Solar Energy System Fast Track Permit Application process allows municipalities to meet the regulatory requirements, while reducing the time and money associated with approving solar installation permits.

*The Long Island solar photovoltaic permitting situation was described as costly and inefficient, specifically, "inconsistent local permit requirements can add hundreds of dollars to the cost of installing a solar electric system."*

– Gordian Raache, Executive Director,  
Renewable Energy Long Island

Key components of the new standardized permitting process include:

- waived or minimal application fees;
- permit decisions provided within 14 days of completed application submissions;
- the creation of a central registry of solar installations;
- warning label requirement on the utility meter and any AC disconnect switch; and
- that the Solar Energy System Fast Track Permit Application be utilized as an alternative to existing building permits forms.

Another important aspect of the application includes waiving the need for a survey of the entire property or other information that is not relevant to the solar installation.

## Lessons Learned

To encourage municipalities to adopt LIUSPI, the Long Island Power Authority provided incentives of \$15,000 to each township and \$5,000 to each of the first ten villages in Nassau and Suffolk that adopted LIUSPI by December 2011. Currently all ten towns in Suffolk have adopted LIUSPI and the committee is continuing to reach out to the remaining municipalities.

- Research the details of the permitting process thoroughly prior to introducing an initiative. This information will help mitigate the amount of questions and uncertainty municipalities might have in regards to initiative adoption.
- Recognize the importance of standardizing solar installations to expedite the process and reduce costs, while maintaining safety and quality control.

