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Contact: (925) 246-1880

Linda Best, [lbest@cococo.org](mailto:lbest@cococo.org)

Terry Shoaff, [tshoaff@cococo.org](mailto:tshoaff@cococo.org)

Molly Walker, [mwalkercom@yahoo.com](mailto:mwalkercom@yahoo.com)

## **New Streamlined Rooftop Solar PV Permitting Process Makes Solar a More Viable Option for Contra Costa County and Cities**

**February 6, 2013, Concord, CA** — Eight jurisdictions within Contra Costa County, including seven cities and the county itself, have agreed to move forward with a streamlined solar rooftop permitting process that will make the permitting and installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems easier, faster, and cheaper for residential and small-commercial applications. In addition to Contra Costa County, the cities signing on to the improved process are Antioch, Brentwood, Concord, Martinez, Oakley, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek.

The effort is part of the Contra Costa Economic Partnership's clean technology industry cluster initiative, the Diablo Innovation Alliance (DIA). The Economic Partnership was one of 22 teams from across the country awarded a Rooftop Solar Challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Energy in December 2011. All of the teams were challenged to develop and implement streamlined and standardized processes that will dramatically improve local market conditions for rooftop solar PV.

Participating jurisdictions in the county have been working with area solar contractors and the California Solar Energy Industries Association (CALSEIA) since February 2012 to develop a streamlined permitting process, which will enable solar contractors and installers to submit permit applications and standard solar PV plans over the counter or online beginning in early 2013. Participating solar contractor firms include Ally Electric & Solar, Automation Solar, Green Air, NextEnergy, Solar Universe Diablo Valley, SunPower, Sungevity, The Solar Company, and UMA Solar.

Solar FasTrac™, an online portal featuring a streamlined permitting process with standard plans and worksheets in an interactive PDF format, has been developed with input from local county and city building officials to improve the solar PV permit submittal, review, and approval process for both residential and small-commercial installations. In addition, a detailed set of permitting guidelines and checklists are available to solar installers to assist in the preparation of solar PV permit applications. Developed as part of the Rooftop Solar Challenge, the Solar FasTrac™ system is currently operational on Contra Costa County's web server and is available for use by other jurisdictions within the county to enable contractors and installers to submit the required plans and documents and to obtain permits online. The DIA hopes to eventually scale up adoption of the Solar FasTrac™ system to include the remaining cities in Contra Costa County and throughout the greater East Bay.

"This is a great program that we anticipate will save money and result in greenhouse gas reductions for these cities and the county," said **Linda Best**, executive director of the Contra Costa Economic Partnership. "The focus of this initiative, and related programs the Partnership and the Diablo Innovation Alliance are supporting, is to capitalize on the economic

strengths and values at play in advancing clean technology, renewable energy, and other new technologies in the greater East Bay.”

“CALSEIA applauds Contra Costa County for its work to streamline and improve the solar permitting process. This improved process will reduce the cost of solar and is another step toward making rooftop solar a mainstream technology,” said **Bryan Crabb**, CALSEIA executive director. “Solar installers will be able to pass these savings along to customers, which makes solar energy an even more viable option for homeowners and businesses to save on their electricity bills.”

**Andrew Birch**, chief executive officer of Sungevity, a leading residential solar firm based in Oakland, CA, noted, “We also applaud these cities and Contra Costa County for their leadership in implementing an innovative new program that will help standardize the solar permitting process. This standardization will lead to greater efficiency for both solar installers and local governments, which will ultimately lead to lower costs and faster processing for homeowners and businesses looking to harness the benefits of solar power.”

“Solar energy and leading solar companies have a critical role to play in addressing some of our planet’s greatest social and environmental challenges. Working with county and city officials to adopt and implement a solar PV standardized, streamlined, online permitting process is a tremendous step forward in reducing some of the barriers to solar PV market adoption,” said **Bobby Ram**, managing director of SunPower Corp., a Silicon Valley based manufacturer of high-efficiency solar cells, solar panels and solar systems. “We hope that more jurisdictions will see the value in what the Diablo Innovation Alliance, the Contra Costa Economic Partnership, and all participating municipal jurisdictions have achieved, and follow their important and commendable lead.”

“The new, standardized solar PV documents, streamlined permit process, and the Solar FasTrac™ online portal will allow our permitting staff to maximize their productivity, rather than continually reproducing plan submittal documents, being uncertain of the permit approval timeline, and logging ‘windshield time’ driving around Contra Costa County to obtain the required permits,” said **Dave Brown**, president of Solar Universe Diablo Valley, a solar PV installation company located in Martinez, CA, and a part of the Solar Universe franchise. “In addition to the obvious staff time savings, vehicle wear-and-tear and fuel expenses should be reduced dramatically.”

#### **Comments from County and City Building Departments**

“The Diablo Innovation Alliance has achieved a faster and more consistent permitting process for solar PV in Contra Costa County,” said the county’s **Jason Crapo**, deputy director, Building Division, Department of Conservation & Development. “This will help local contractors better serve their customers and help local governments achieve their climate action plan goals.”

“The streamlined permitting process developed through the Rooftop Solar Challenge program will help to expedite plan review and approval of typical residential and commercial rooftop systems from submittal to finished construction,” said **Robert Woods**, Concord’s chief building official. “Rooftop solar installations will increasingly play a significant role by helping the community meet its energy needs and assisting the city in meeting its climate action plan in the future.”

“I enjoyed working with the solar contracting industry and the other jurisdictions to develop a streamlined solar rooftop permitting process,” said **Vance Phillips**, chief building official, San Ramon. “It allowed me to understand the different internal operations of the contracting companies and it provided insight to contractors of the different processes and



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difficulties the permitting agencies work with. Given the financial difficulties most cities are facing, creating a process that will benefit the industry and property owners—without jeopardizing safety and hopefully reducing costs for everyone involved—was time well spent,” said Phillips.

“Walnut Creek is very pleased to have been a part of this public-private partnership to develop and implement a more uniform and efficient solar permitting process,” said **Sharon Goei**, Walnut Creek’s chief building official. “As a city committed to customer service and innovation, we look forward to delighted solar customers and economic growth in the area.”

**About the Diablo Innovation Alliance:** The Diablo Innovation Alliance ([www.diabloinnovationalliance.org](http://www.diabloinnovationalliance.org)) is a business-driven initiative of the Contra Costa Economic Partnership focused on emerging clean technology sectors that will drive regional economic growth and job creation in the greater East Bay. The Contra Costa Economic Partnership is an association of business, education, and public sector leaders dedicated to creating and retaining quality jobs in the greater East Bay to maintain the region’s economic vitality and quality of life.

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