

# City of Lowell Solar Permitting Checklist

The City of Lowell encourages the safe and efficient installation of solar energy systems through its permitting and inspection process. All residential solar projects and all roof-mounted commercial systems are handled as expedited projects and will receive a decision or a request for additional information within three business days of the City's receipt of the application. Commercial ground-mounted projects will receive a decision or request for additional information within 10 business days in most cases.

This checklist, intended for solar installers, walks you through the steps.

1. Contract
  - a. Have a signed contract in hand before starting the permit process.
2. Apply for an Electrical Permit
  - a. The City of Lowell requires a single permit for solar installations. Go online to <http://www.lowellma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1034> to download the **electrical permit application** form or pick up a copy at City Hall, Office of Development Services, Room 55. The form is online but the installer will have to fill it out and either mail in the paper form or deliver it in person. Installers do NOT need a separate building permit.
  - b. The Permit Application requires:
    - The jobsite address and owner information
    - Applicant (installer) contact information
    - The Home Improvement Contractor's contact information and a copy of the Construction Supervisor License
    - Contractor Master Electrician license information (with copy of license)
    - Workers Compensation Insurance Certificate
    - Liability Insurance Certificate or waiver signed by property owner
    - A copy of the contract to perform the work, signed by installer and building owner
    - 2 copies of the plan set
    - A signed engineer's affidavit that the building's roof can support the load.  
Note: The Ninth Edition of the State Building Code, as proposed, will require new homes to be built "solar ready." If Massachusetts adopts this provision, homes built to the new code will no longer need this structural review certification for solar installations.
    - Estimate of the project's cost
    - Permit fee, which is based on the cost
    - The blank on the permit application calling for a utility authorization number does NOT pertain to solar projects.

c. Internal Staff Review

- Once the completed application is received at City Hall, it circulates among staff who check for compliance with zoning requirements, building codes, and electrical codes. Staff will also determine that the building's taxes are paid. The City will not issue a permit if the building is in arrears.
- Staff will email the applicant when its work is complete. The City will mail out a permit card to the applicant, or the applicant can pick it up at City Hall. This needs to be posted at the job site.
- Lowell puts all of its solar permits on its "fast track" for expedited permitting and commits to turn around applications for residential systems and roof-mounted commercial systems within three days and ground-mounted commercial systems within 10 days. By law, the City must respond to all applications within 30 days.

3. Installation and Inspection

- With the building permit in hand, the installer completes the job, then calls the inspector whose name is on the permit to schedule a final inspection.
- The City will establish a firm appointment time for a building inspector and an electrical inspector to review the installation. Whenever possible, the inspectors go to the site together, though separate inspections may be required.
- The installer should present to the inspectors a signed engineer's construction control letter certifying that the plans are adequate and the project was installed to specs.
- If the project passes, the inspector will take the permit card and construction control letter back to City Hall for filing in the Property Folder for future reference.

4. Grid Interconnection

- The installer will manage the interconnection process directly with National Grid. The city is not involved in this crucial step in the process.

5. Permit Fee

- The fee for an electrical permit for solar panels is based on the total cost of the installation job (panels plus related charges). Lowell charges \$50 for the first \$1,000 and \$10 for each \$1,000 or fraction over \$1,000. In addition, Lowell requires a \$75 fee for either a "Certificate of Completion" or an occupancy permit.
- For an average residential installation, the fee is around \$285. The average value of 132 residential solar systems installed between January 1 2016 and February 14, 2017, was \$16,389. The fee for that "average" system would be  $\$50 + (16 \times \$10) + \$75 = \$285$ . See The Lowell Department of Planning and Development, Schedule of Fees, February 2017: <http://www.lowellma.gov/1082/Electrical-Permit-Fees>