



# AGENDA REPORT

**TO:** Steven Falk  
Interim City Administrator

**FROM:** William Gilchrist  
Director, Planning and  
Building Department

**SUBJECT:** California Automated Permit  
Processing (CalAPP) Program Grant

**DATE:** March 20, 2023

City Administrator Approval 

Date: Mar 28, 2023

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt The Following Resolution:  
A Resolution Authorizing The City Administrator To Apply For, Accept, And Appropriate  
Up To A Total Of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) In California Automated  
Permit Processing Permit Program (CalAPP) Grant Funds From The State Of California  
Energy Commission And Adopting Appropriate California Environmental Quality Act  
Findings.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Approval of the proposed resolution will authorize the City Administrator to accept, and appropriate up to One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) in California Automated Permit Processing Permit Program (CalAPP) grant funds from the State of California Energy Commission (CEC). Grant funds would be used to implement, pilot and adopt SolarAPP+ for solar and energy storage eligible projects allowing for same day permit issuance.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

On September 22, 2015, the state legislature passed Senate Bill (SB 129), which provided \$20 million to the CEC to establish a grant program for cities and counties to utilize online solar permitting through the adoption of an automated permitting software, such as SolarAPP+.

The SolarAPP+ initiative grew out of an industry stakeholder meeting co-organized by The Solar Foundation and The Solar Energy Industries Association in the summer of 2018, with the Rocky Mountain Institute as the facilitator. Based on international and domestic examples of automatic permitting processes for solar energy system installations, a group of researchers, non-profits, industry trade groups, installers, and other stakeholders met regularly since the Senate Bill adoption to advance the idea of a national automated permitting process from concept to reality. Ultimately, SolarAPP+ was developed by the United States Department of Energy and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

SolarAPP+ permitting specifications are based on model building, electrical and fire codes and are cross-referenced to the leading permitting guidebooks from California, New York and the SolSmart National Simplified Permit Guidelines for Residential Photovoltaic Arrays. SolarAPP+ is fully adopted in communities in California and Arizona and is working to expand across communities in the United States.

On September 16, 2022, the state legislature passed SB 379, which requires every city and county in California to implement an online, automated permitting platform that verifies code compliance and issues permits in real time for certain residential solar energy and storage systems.

On August 29, 2022 the City applied to the CEC for a \$100,000 dollar CalAPP grant, prior to the state legislature and Governor passing SB379. The City is proposing to utilize these funds for the implementation and pilot of the SolarApp+ permitting software with full deployment to the public expected by August 2023. On August 30, 2022, the CEC notified the City of their recommendation to approve the grant application, subject to entering into a formal grant agreement.

## **ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

The proposed resolution would authorize the City Administrator to accept, and appropriate up to One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) in CalAPP grant funds to implement, pilot and adopt SolarApp+ for solar and energy storage eligible projects allowing for same day permit issuance. This action would meet the City-wide priorities of vibrant , sustainable infrastructure by facilitating the adoption and increase in renewable energy for residential properties by facilitating same day permit issuance for solar and energy storage system permits, thereby improving the responsiveness of the City of Oakland to property owners.

### **Solar Permits**

The City has seen an increase in the application and inspection for solar installations consistent with the State and City's goal for adoption and increase in renewable energy. However, the process to apply for solar installation takes at minimum five (5) days from submittal. Adoption of SolarApp+ by the City will improve the City's turnaround time to same day automated permit issuance for new residential solar and energy storage system installations that meet the SolarApp+ eligibility criteria. These criteria include conformance with applicable California and Oakland building codes and among other items, requirements that the systems do not exceed 600V per DC system size and that the systems be installed by a licensed contractor."

SolarApp+ will also allow the City to improve and create efficiencies in regard to required inspections, as it provides a standard inspection process thereby reducing the number of inspections necessary for a solar installation.

### **Energy Storage**

The City has seen an increase in the application and inspection for energy storage systems consistent with the State and City's goal for adoption and increase in renewable energy, as a response by homeowners to PG&E power outages and for disaster preparedness. However, the

process to apply for energy storage systems currently takes at minimum five (5) days from submittal. Adoption of SolarApp+ by the City will improve our turnaround time to same day automated permit issuance for most eligible Residential energy storage system installations.

SolarApp+ will also allow the City both to improve and create efficiencies regarding inspections, as it will provide a standard inspection process, thereby reducing the number of inspections necessary for energy storage systems.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There are no Fiscal Impacts as a result of accepting, appropriating and spending the CalAPP grant funds.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST**

Upon adoption of this resolution, the Planning and Building Department shall post its adoption to the department website as well as notify professional associations and property owners through their organizations.

### **COORDINATION**

The Planning and Building Department has coordinated with the City Administrator's Office - Sustainability Program Division and the Department of Finance to bring this item forward and prepare for its implementation if adopted.

### **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

**Economic:** The use of CalAPP grant funds to implement and roll-out SolarApp+ will save time and resources, freeing up permitting staff time to assist other customers with permitting needs.

**Environmental:** SolarApp+ will allow the City of Oakland to meet its goal of adoption of renewable sources of energy. Equitable Climate Action Plan (ECAP) Action TLU-2 directs staff to align permit and project approvals with ECAP priorities, including reducing the cost and administrative burden on residents seeking to install solar photovoltaic systems on their homes. Use of the SolarApp+ system will fulfill a portion of ECAP Action TLU-2. Adoption of the SolarApp+ system will also result in a lower cost and faster permit approval process for solar systems. The installation of these systems has broad environmental benefit for Oakland, including a reduction in the need for fossil-fuel based electricity generation, reduced demand during peak periods for the electrical grid, and more capacity for individual buildings to replace natural gas systems with electrical alternatives without requiring improvements or upgrades to electrical services or panels.

**Race & Equity:** SolarApp+ will allow all residential property owners city wide to obtain Residential solar and energy storage permits in an efficient and equitable manner.

**CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)**

In accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15738(b)(4)-(5) this action is not a project under CEQA because it involves and constitutes an organizational, administrative, or government fiscal activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment, and Section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed action could have a significant impact on the environment.

**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Staff Recommends That the City Council adopt the following resolution:

A Resolution Authorizing the City Administrator to apply for, accept, and appropriate up to a total of One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) in California Automated Permit Processing Permit Program (CalAPP) grant funds from the California Energy Commission and adopting appropriate California Environmental Quality Act findings.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Chris Ragland, Building Official/Deputy Director, at 510-238-6435.

Respectfully submitted,



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