



Culver City Passes Solar Energy Ordinance

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Like the rest of California, Culver City is going green. Culver City has many programs in place to make its self environmentally friendly such as holding electronic waste round-events and launching community recycling programs. Now it's focusing on making its buildings greener.

In March of 2008, Culver City passed an ordinance requiring commercial and multi-family dwelling homes to install Solar Photovoltaic panels. Photovoltaic panels convert sunlight directly into electricity.

In mandating the installation of Solar Photovoltaics on new buildings, Culver City is joining the trend of other Southern California Cities that have solar energy or green building programs such as Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Pasadena.

According to Southern California Edison, which offers rebates on the installation of Photovoltaic systems, as part of the California Solar Initiative., as of 2008 there are 2,393 solar energy installation projects that are in review, in progress, or completed.

According to newly elected Culver City Mayor D. Scott Malsin, the majority of projects submitted to the Culver City building department are green building - buildings designed, built and operated to be environmentally friendly.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed an Executive Order regarding Green Buildings on December 14, 2004. It established the State of California's priority for energy and resource-efficient high performance buildings.

The Executive Order sets a goal of reducing energy use in state-owned buildings by 20 percent by 2015 (from a 2003 baseline) and encourages the private commercial sector to set the same goal.

Prior to this ordinance, many buildings and businesses in Culver City had already begun installing Solar PVs.

Sony Pictures recently announced that, a pilot solar energy program will be launched with the installation of solar photovoltaic cells on the roof of the existing Jimmy Stewart Building.

[PermaCity](#), a solar energy company, is now installing the systems at Costco's La Habra, Westlake Village, Simi Valley and Culver City warehouses. At approximately 600 kW (DC) per location, the solar energy systems will be part of one of the largest privately owned, multi-site commercial photovoltaic systems in the U.S., according to PermaCity.

Culver City's historical West End Hotel got a solar powered upgrade. The building was upgraded by RWE Schott Solar Inc., a leading manufacturer and distributor of high-quality solar systems. The company had to overcome challenges such as meeting city regulations for buildings with an historical designation, while also meeting the fire department's strict safety code for buildings of this type. The hotel now has a flat-roof photovoltaic system producing 20kW.

The requirement doesn't apply to one and two family structures, garages or parking structures. The solar PV requirement was proposed to the City Council by Culver City Building Official, Craig Johnson. Malsin refers to this ordinance as a "discreet proposition." According to Malsin, getting the proposal passed was pretty straight forward. "There was a slight bureaucratic issue with getting an agreement with the California Energy Commission, but approval was given."

The ordinance is currently in affect.

All new construction in Culver City of 10,000 square feet, or greater, additions of 10,000 square feet or greater, and major renovations of 10,000 or greater are required to install 1 Kw of solar photovoltaic power per 10,000 square feet of applicable building area.

It is a requirement, not optional. Permit fees, up to \$5000, are waived for solar PV installations. The amount is capped being many large companies such as Sony and Costco are applying for permits. "They don't need larger rebates," says Malsin.

When asked about the financial impact of this ordinance on the city, Malsin said, "The short-term affect of the fee waivers to the city is minimal." Project developers can choose to pay an in-lieu fee in an amount equal to the installed cost of the required amount of photovoltaic power, with the approval of Culver City staff.

The method in which southern California cities are implementing their solar initiatives varies. Pasadena Water and Power, which previously capped rebates at \$8,000, now fully reimburses permit fees for development projects including solar systems installations. In Santa Monica, buildings eligible for expedited permits are also eligible for grants of \$20,000 to \$35,000, depending on the level of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. LEEDs is a green building rating system.

West Hollywood, which adopted one of the nation's first mandatory [green building ordinance](#) on October 1, 2007, has a Green Building Point System offering incentives for new construction that achieve "exemplary" status. Malsin referred to the various methods in which various cities are implementing their solar energy programs and setting requirements as something of a "patchwork approach." According to him having so many different requirements for Solar Energy installations is not beneficial to builders. He thinks it would be ideal for builders in southern California if the cities were more uniform in their Solar Energy Building programs.

When asked about plans to offer incentives for solar energy installations to owners of existing commercial or residential property in CC, Malsin said that "When the Solar PV ordinance passed, he proposed a study be made into the impact of a fee waiver program on single dwelling homes."

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