DATE, 2020

**Re: Addressing Solar Permitting and Inspections During COVID-19 Health Crisis**

Dear Chief Building Official / AHJ Official Name,

I hope this letter finds you and your team healthy and safe, and thank you for your service during this global crisis. We appreciate all the work that you do for the solar and storage industry and for society as we fight through this human crisis and this difficult time in our nation’s and state’s history.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, businesses across New York are experiencing several negative short- and long-term consequences. Given the devastating health and economic impacts across the state, our industry is determined to identify opportunities to keep the maximum number of our staff - many of whom earn hourly wages - employed so they may provide a steady paycheck to their families.

The closure of public agencies has a disproportionate impact on the functions of the local solar industry. For example, without an operating permitting department many solar contractors will be forced to shut down sales and cut staff. With over 10,000 New Yorkers employed, many of which are in XXX town -- we respectfully urge you to enable us to maintain operations. To that end, we have the following specific recommendations:

1. **Continue holding any public meetings (planning board meetings, public hearings) with regard to solar project permitting remotely, either by teleconference or videoconference.** [Executive Order 202.1](https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-2021-continuing-temporary-suspension-and-modification-laws-relating-disaster-emergency), issued by Governor Cuomo on March 12, authorizes public meetings to be held remotely, provided that the public has the ability to view or listen and that such meetings are recorded and transcribed. If such technology is not available, the solar industry is willing to aid XXX town in setup of equipment or even offering conferencing programs.
2. Allow for **remote/electronic permit application processing and approval**, including inspection activity and plan reviews, either through an online system or email. The City of Chicago, IL, the City of Prescott, AZ, the City of Sacramento, CA and many, many more municipal governments have already taken similar steps to streamline permitting.
3. **Implement conditional building permits in which companies are required to submit plan sets to the permitting department and AHJ and are allowed to self-inspect.** Such conditional permits could state that construction work cannot begin until the Governor has lifted the existing restrictions on in-person work and essential construction per Empire State Development [guidance](https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/ESD_EssentialEmployerFAQ_033120.pdf). Plan checks can be conducted post-installation and following the lifting of the stay-at-home Order, city/town or third-party inspections can resume and companies will be held liable for any code violations or remediation. This approach has the same safety and design protocols followed before the system is activated, just in a different order and without emphasis on applications that are not actually installed. Installers take risk that they are out of compliance, which would be flagged by inspectors. This also enables permitting authorities to continue working by email - and may actually experience higher permitting fee volume due to faster processing and fewer cancellations.
4. As an alternative to recommendation (3) above, **allow electronic submissions of photographic evidence for work-in-progress or final inspections** related to the permitting process.

Please let us know how your town plans to address permitting and inspections this Spring and any way that we can be of assistance.

On behalf of XXX company and the more than 10,000 solar workers in New York, I sincerely appreciate your consideration to this matter. Our economy is on the brink of a prolonged recession, and any steps local authorities can take to ensure work can safely continue would go a long way to preventing further layoffs and letting our employees put food on their families’ tables. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at XXX email.

Sincerely,

XXX Name

XXX Company