



CITY OF BUFFALO, MINNESOTA

# Residential & Commercial Solar



We are all starting to focus on environmental consciousness and sustainable living, and this is paramount. Our City is at the forefront of harnessing the power of the sun to transform the way we generate and consume energy. Welcome to our Solar brochure, your guide to discovering the bright future of renewable energy in our community and the process it takes to apply for proper installation and the actual building permit.

## APPLICATIONS & INTERCONNECTION

Before you begin your solar building project, any resident or commercial business must have an approved **Interconnection Application** and a **Uniform Contract** in place. Please contact Buffalo Municipal Utilities for these documents (see info bottom right). Oftentimes your solar installer will begin the application process on your behalf, but ultimately the contract is between YOU and the utility provider. The Buffalo Municipal Utilities application and initial fee of \$100\* (this fee is non-refundable) begins the entire process. The actual Interconnection Fee is \$500\*. **\*Note:** neither of these fees are included in the cost of your building permit but are required for the building permit application. Without them, you cannot submit a building permit application for Solar.

Besides the initial \$100, the application requires a Utility Contract, proof of additional liability insurance (\$300,000 minimum for residential), the site/mounting plan and electrical schematic drawings of your solar array. Your utility has 30 days to complete necessary reviews of your application and all supporting documents. After that 30 days, the Interconnection Fee and signed contract is collected.

Additionally, the City of Buffalo has an area served by Wright Hennepin Electric Cooperative Association (WHECA). If you are a resident in the territory served by WHECA, they will require similar documentation before a building permit can be submitted. Please see their website to enroll with their NOVAPower Portal, and if you have further questions, contact them at the number provided on your utility bill.

**IN REGARD TO THE ACTUAL BUILDING PERMIT**  
Residents or Contractors will need to submit the actual building permit through the City's website on the Citizen-Serve portal. You will need to register as a user and then apply for your building permit application. Through this

CitizenServe portal, you will select **Solar** as your permit type, and then select **Residential or Commercial (whichever applies)** as a sub-type. One of the very first required questions to answer is whether or not the above mentioned documents (Interconnection Application and Uniform Contract) are in place and it gives you a place to upload them.

For more detailed requirements and specifications, please refer to our City Code regarding solar on the flip-side of this brochure.

**IN CLOSING...** Before adding solar energy production, we encourage you to limit your need for additional energy by making your residence as energy efficient as possible. Get an energy assessment to find opportunities to reduce energy usage and check out Home Energy Guides for efficiency tips. If you're working on decreasing your kWh used for electricity, do a monthly review and look at your utility bill. If you need assistance with looking at the bill, one of our Utility Billing Specialists will be happy to help you get started.



We respect and value renewable energy resources. If Solar is something you're passionate about, but you're not quite ready for an array, you can support renewable resources with as little as \$3 per month with our Clean Energy Choice program. For more information on that topic, visit our Utilities page on the City's website:

[ci.buffalo.mn.us](http://ci.buffalo.mn.us)

## More Questions? Contact Us!

**Electric Utilities Admin. Assistant**, Kim Smith  
[kim.smith@ci.buffalo.mn.us](mailto:kim.smith@ci.buffalo.mn.us)

**Utilities Director**, Jason Meusburger  
[jason.meusburger@ci.buffalo.mn.us](mailto:jason.meusburger@ci.buffalo.mn.us)

**Utility Billing** 763.682.1001

**Building Permits** [permits@ci.buffalo.mn.us](mailto:permits@ci.buffalo.mn.us)

212 Central Avenue, Buffalo MN 55313  
Phone 763-682-1181

## Sec. 50-485. - Solar energy systems.

(a) *Definitions.* The following words, terms and phrases, when used in this section, shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this subsection, except where the context clearly indicates a different meaning:

- *Building-integrated solar energy system* means a solar energy system that is directly incorporated into the building by replacing typical building materials.
- *Ground-mounted solar energy system* means a solar energy system that is installed onto the ground directly or by means of brackets or poles.
- *Roof-mounted solar energy system* means a solar energy system mounted to a house or other building.
- *Solar energy system* means a set of devices whose primary purpose is to provide for the collection, storage and distribution of solar energy for space heating or cooling, electricity generation or water heating.
- *Solar thermal system* means a system that includes a solar collector and a heat exchanger that heats or preheats water for building heating systems or other hot water needs of the building.

(b) *Permitted accessory use.* Solar energy systems are allowable as an accessory use in all zoning districts, subject to the following requirements:

(1) *Standards.*

- a. *Height.* Roof-mounted solar energy systems shall not project beyond the peak of the roof and shall not be more than three feet above the roof surface to which they are attached. Ground-mounted solar energy systems shall not exceed 15 feet in height.
- b. *Location.* Ground-mounted solar energy systems must be located in the rear yard only.
- c. *Setbacks.* Ground mounted solar energy systems shall be meet minimum building setback from all property lines as defined for that property's zoning classification, a minimum of ten feet from all buildings located on adjacent lots, and a minimum of ten feet from all utility easements. Roof-mounted solar energy systems shall comply with all building setbacks in the applicable zoning district and shall not extend beyond the exterior perimeter of the building on which the system is mounted.
- d. *Coverage.* Roof-mounted solar energy systems shall not cover more than 80 percent of the total area of the roof. Solar energy systems must have three feet of clearance around all roof plane edges and 18 inches along all ridge lines, provided no less than a total of three feet of

width on both sides of the ridge is available to facilitate emergency responder access.

- e. *Feeder lines.* All power exterior electrical or other service lines must be buried below the surface of the ground.
- f. *Exemption.* Building integrated solar energy systems are exempt from the requirements of this section and shall be regulated as any other building element.
- g. *Color.* Solar thermal piping shall match roof or solar collector color.
- h. *Shoreland district.* For lots subject to the shoreland district, requirements for solar energy systems are as follows:
  1. Solar energy systems are not allowed within the required shoreland setback if not on a building;
  2. One panel on boat lifts no greater than two square feet in size shall be a permitted use.

(2) *Safety.*

- a. *Compliance with building code.* All solar energy systems shall comply with the state building code and any local building code requirements.
- b. *Compliance with electrical code.* All solar energy systems shall comply with the city's adopted electrical code.
- c. *Compliance with plumbing code.* All solar thermal systems shall comply with the state plumbing code.
- d. *Certifications.* Solar energy system components shall be certified by Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. and the Solar Rating and Certification Corporation. The city reserves the right to deny a building permit for proposed solar energy systems deemed to have inadequate certification.

(3) *Approval.*

- a. *Permits.* The erection, alteration, improvement, reconstruction, and movement of a solar energy system requires a building permit from the city.
- b. *Utility notification.* The owner of a solar energy system that will physically connect to a house or other building's electrical system or the electric utility grid must enter into a signed interconnection agreement with the utility prior to the issuance of a building permit.

(4) *Abandonment.* If the solar energy system remains nonfunctional or inoperative for more than 12 consecutive months, the system shall constitute a public nuisance. The owner shall obtain a demolition permit and remove the abandoned system at their expense. Removal includes the entire structure, including collector, mount, and transmission equipment.