



## Legislation Text

**File #:** 23-1022, **Version:** 1

Planning and Building Department, Building Services Division, recommending the Board:

1) Accept a grant award from the California Energy Commission for the California Automated Permit Processing Program in the amount of \$80,000 for a term upon execution through May 31, 2027; and  
2) Delegate authority to the Planning and Building Department Director to execute the Grant Agreement and all grant-related documents including, but not limited to, amendments that do not require a County match, contingent upon approval by County Counsel and Risk Management, requests for payment, reports, and all associated documents necessary to secure grant funds and implement the approved grant program.

**FUNDING:** California Automated Permit Processing Program Grant Funds.

### **DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND**

Senate Bill 129 (Skinner, Budget Act of 2021) appropriated \$20 million in funding to the California Energy Commission (CEC) and established the CalAPP program to establish a non-competitive funding program. This program assists local governments in California with establishing and implementing an online, automated permitting platform that verifies code compliance and issues permits in real time for a solar energy permit.

In 2022, Senate Bill 379 passed requiring most cities and counties to adopt an automated online permitting platform for standard residential solar and storage systems. Cities and Counties with more than 50,000 residents must adopt an online permitting platform by September 30, 2023.

The CalAPP Program grant funding is intended to encourage cities and counties to further enhance permitting processes and accelerate processing and turnaround times, particularly regarding plan review. Overall, funding is intended to promote the development of residential solar and solar-plus-storage systems, greatly decreasing approval times, cutting permitting costs for local governments and homeowners, and helping California meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals through an easier installation process.

In December 2022, the County was notified of a non-competitive grant funding opportunity under the CEC's CalAPP Program grant, which provides funding to assist local governments in California with establishing online, automated solar permitting. Under this grant program, the Planning and Building Department (Department) would receive grant funds on a reimbursement basis for eligible program costs. Grant funding payments will be issued as reimbursement to the Planning and Building Department (Department) of eligible costs. Grant activities can be reimbursed until May 1, 2027.

Tasks eligible for reimbursement under the CalAPP Program grant include:

- Ongoing staff labor costs associated directly with the adoption, and maintenance of a qualifying online, automated permitting platform, including:
  - In-house staff time, including IT resources

- Third-party consultation services
- Ongoing, in-house staff time spent on staff training specific to the platform.
- Ongoing costs associated with training installers, developers, and other external parties in the use of the system, including but not limited to:
  - Facility rental
  - Training printouts and materials
- Essential hardware or equipment necessary to support the adoption of a qualifying platform, which could not otherwise be completed without such hardware or equipment.
- Following the adoption of an online, automated permitting platform, a maximum of three years of maintenance and subscription costs for permit tracking software in support of the adopted permitting platform.
  - Maintenance may include adding support for energy storage paired with solar energy system permitting to an existing platform such as SolarAPP+.

On April 3, 2023, the Department applied for the CalAPP Program grant and on April 17, 2023, received notification from the CEC that the Department was approved for up to \$80,000 of CalAPP funding to implement an online, automated solar permitting platform and associated implementation costs as indicated in the attached Grant Agreement (Attachment B). The Department is currently evaluating two permitting platforms including the CEC sponsored permitting platform, SolarAPP+. SolarAPP+ is a free, web-based portal developed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory that automates project plan review and produces code-compliant approvals to support building departments in quickly issuing permits for residential solar energy system installations. Although this program provides applicants with a quick turnaround, some short-comings have been identified. It is a "stand-alone" program and cannot be integrated with other land use management and permitting software systems such as Trakit. Staff is also evaluating another program that has more integration abilities and is also offered at no cost. Staff will work with IT to evaluate the options, ensure security, and select a program within the next month. The program will be installed, staff will receive training and information will be shared with solar contractors and the public prior to the September 30 deadline.

Because the programs are no-cost, most expenses will be for staff time related to implementation, staff training and ongoing maintenance. These costs are not expected to exceed \$80,000 within the three-year period of this grant.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The Board may choose to deny the acceptance of these grant funds. This would result in the forfeiture of the available grant funds awarded to the County under this grant program. State law requires that the County adopt an automated online permitting platform for standard residential solar. Without grant funds, another funding source will need to be identified for the costs associated with implementation of such a program.

## **PRIOR BOARD ACTION**

N/A

## **OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

Information Technologies and County Counsel.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION / COMMENTS**

Approve as recommended.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There is no change to Net County Cost associated with this item and there are no local match funds required. Grant Revenue has been included in the Fiscal Year 2023-24 Recommended Budget and any unspent grant funds will be included in future years' budget(s) accordingly.

**CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS**

N/A

**STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT**

Good Governance: Implement systems that improve system-wide process, data sharing and departmental collaboration.

**CONTACT**

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