Notes from Eileen Horn, Sustainability Coordinator, City of Lawrence & Douglas County

Re: solar PV fee consideration

Cities across the country have facilitated installations of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems by offering educational materials, offering expedited permitting, providing rebates on the permit fees, and instituting a flat fee for permits.

Costs for solar PV permits are currently based on the overall project valuation. This works well for many conventional projects because this accurately represents the scale of the project. However, with a PV installation, the equipment costs are much higher than with other projects of similar scope. Therefore, this can result in high permit fees that do not reflect the complexity and scale of the PV project.

To address the concerns raised by Cromwell Solar regarding the cost of permitting fees for solar PV systems on residential and small commercial installations, the City could consider two options:

1. Changing our practice in the method of calculating the project valuation to exclude the equipment which will (perhaps greatly) reduce the fees; or,
2. Creating a revised fee schedule for CC approval that would include a standard fee for solar power installations.

Option #2, would provide a simple, flat-fee that reflects that actual costs of issuing the permit (staff time to review and inspect the system). Multiple calculators for this fee exist, including one developed by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) with Kansas City, MO, Johnson County, Olathe, Lee's Summit, and Clay County. The MARC Solar Ready program recommends a flat-fee as a best practice for cities and counties.
http://www.marc.org/environment/energy/solar_ready_kc.html

The Department of Energy also cites one possible structure, to vary based upon the size of the system:

- Small (mostly residential) PV system (up to 4 kW): $75 - $200
- Large PV system (small commercial) (up to 10 kW): $150 - $400
- For systems over 10 kW, consider a permit cost of $15 - $40 per kW.

(from the Department of Energy: http://www.dsireusa.org/solar/solarpolicyguide/?id=16)