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Gigantic New PermaCity Solar Project Targets Low Income Area

May 3rd, 2016 by [Tina Casey](#)

Low income solar is suddenly hot, and for good reason. Some of the nation's prime spots for utility-scale rooftop solar arrays are located in and around ports and other industrial areas where low income neighborhoods cluster. Large projects like these can bring hundreds of jobs into economically depressed areas, and savvy companies are snapping up opportunities to train underemployed residents in the skills required by the solar industry.

One newly announced example that brings everything together is a 16.4 megawatt rooftop installation in Los Angeles, which will be the largest ever solar array in the US constructed under a feed-in tariff arrangement. The project, under the umbrella of [solar developer](#) PermaCity, is also noteworthy because it features a rooftop mounting system that was deemed one of the top solar products for 2015.



Yoooooge Solar Feed-in Project for Los Angeles

To be clear, competition for the "largest ever" feed-in tariff project isn't as stiff as it could be. Currently, [only California and five other states](#) have mandatory FIT regulations. A few others have established a voluntary platform for FITs. The FIT arrangement is similar to net metering, except that incoming and outgoing electricity are monitored and priced separately.

Despite the sluggish activity by state legislators, the FIT market is heating up. Besides, 16.4 megawatts is nothing to sneeze at. It's three times bigger than the nation's next-largest FIT rooftop project, with is also located in Los Angeles.

PermaCity will [install the new array](#) under a lease arrangement. It will go on the roofs of several privately owned warehouses on Westmont Drive at the Port of Los Angeles, and the electricity it generates will go to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

All together, the project will add up to two million square feet of solar panels for the Los Angeles urban energy landscape, and it will create approximately 500 construction jobs.

The project will also provide a sustainability twofer by shading the large roofs, thereby helping to cool the neighborhood microclimate.

The last big news from PermaCity was a partnership with the [ill-fated solar company](#) SunEdison, and it looks like the latter's financial woes have not slowed the former down.

Planners estimate that revenue generated by the new installation will total \$76 million over the 20-year lease. The building owner anticipates getting 85 to 90 percent of that revenue.

That's just the tip of the iceberg. Los Angeles's sustainability plan calls for bringing 1500 megawatts of solar into the city by 2025, and it looks like the FIT is playing a big role in achieving that goal. Here's a snippet from the press materials:

Since the launch of the FIT program in 2013, 23 projects have been completed, generating a total of 14 megawatts of renewable energy. As many as 88 additional megawatts are expected to come online within the next year..

Low Income Solar Meets FIT

As with power purchase agreements, the big advantage of the FIT arrangement is that it provides a huge incentive for private clean power dollars to flow into low income areas. Even if taxpayer funded assistance is unavailable, solar energy — and solar jobs — can still gain a foothold in neighborhoods that are in economic distress (for some other innovative approaches that break down financial barriers to solar, check out the [new seed fund](#) for non-profits and California's [SASH and MASH](#) programs).

According to Dr. Manuel Pastor, director of the University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, more than 40 percent of the FIT projects installed in Los Angeles so far are located in "solar equity hotspots," defined as "areas with abundant rooftops and large low-income populations in need of jobs and new economic opportunities."

In terms of new job opportunities, the new PermaCity project is led by a military veteran and it will focus on hiring veterans as well as local residents.

That brings up the issue of training. The electrical work will be conducted by current members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 11, but PermaCity also intends to train underemployed local residents for the new project. The company, which is based in Los Angeles, lists this among its efforts:

...A state-of-the-art SolarStrap™ roof and training facility for the Local 300 Laborers Union in downtown Los Angeles to train its members to become best-in-class solar installers. PermaCity's new SolarStrap™ panels to be installed on Westmont generate up to 45 percent more power than standard solar panels.

In related news, last week the [National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators](#) held a two-day ["Energy & Environment" summit](#) under the theme Energy Is A Latino Issue.

Among the emerging trends underscored at the summit, former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar noted that within the next decade, more than half of all electricity workers are expected to retire. The solar industry has a clear incentive to invest in advanced worker training if it expects to keep growing at a rapid clip.

Ángel Cruz, who is President of the Hispanic Caucus, recapped the summit with this observation:

...it is simply unacceptable that there are 27 million eligible Latino voters but only 13 million

are expected to turnout in November. In order to change this, we need to engage our community on issues that have a tremendous impact on the quality of life of their families.

Cruz represents the 180th legislative district of Pennsylvania, which includes [Philadelphia](#). Coincidentally, the City of Brotherly Love will be the site of the 2016 Democratic National Convention, so it's worth noting that the [front runner](#) for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, has made a point of connecting the growth of the clean tech sector to new employment opportunities and [environmental justice](#).

What's All This About SolarStrap?

We did mention that [another interesting point](#) about the new project is this thing called SolarStrap, which is PermaCity's proprietary mounting system:

The SolarStrap™ is a result of 13 years designing solar on roofs...The SolarStrap™ uses no ballast or penetrations that prevent owners from going solar. It is ten times stronger than ballast and comes with a 20 or more year roof manufacture warranty on TPO roofs. The SolarStrap™ is being used on many roofs, including the largest roof in the history of Los Angeles, 5.1 MWs.

That track record earned PermaCity a slot in the [top solar products](#) of 2015, as catalogued by our friends over at *Solar Power World*:

Installation simplicity is still the name of the game for racking and mounting systems...The SolarStrap requires neither penetrations nor ballasts, while being both easy to install and a low cost system. A proprietary design employs heat sealing technology to secure the framework to the roof and allows for rapid installation with minimal tools.

Innovations like SolarStrap are one reason why the installed cost of solar energy is continuing to fall. Improvements in [solar cell efficiency](#) are important, but next-generation mounting systems and other "[soft costs](#)" offer fertile ground for reducing the overall price of solar energy.

<http://cleantechnica.com/2016/05/03/gigantic-new-permacity-solar-project-targets-low-income-area/>