



An Extended Guide · No. 1500

The Solar Install & Permit Process

From site visit to
switched-on, step by step

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! Read this first — two honest truths about home solar

Two honest truths before we start, because they surprise a lot of good folks. First, home solar is a professional job — it takes a licensed installer, building permits, and your utility's approval to connect (called interconnection). This guide is here to help you understand, plan for, and live with solar; it is not a do-it-yourself project, and I never want you climbing on a roof or opening an electrical panel. Second, a plain grid-tied solar system — one without a battery — shuts itself off during a power outage, even in bright sunshine. That is a required safety feature, so the system cannot put electricity onto the lines while the crews are repairing them. If keeping the lights on during an outage matters to you, you will need a battery, and we will talk about that plainly. This guide walks through that professional process step by step, so the permits and paperwork feel like reassurance rather than red tape.

What actually happens, from handshake to switched-on

Going solar isn't a weekend project — it's a guided process with real steps: a site visit, a design, permits, a utility hookup, the install itself, inspections, and finally the green light to switch on. Knowing the steps takes the mystery out of it.

I'm Bill, of Bill's Home Tech in Portage County. My goal here is to show you the whole journey ahead of time, so nothing feels like a surprise or a stall. A good installer runs most of this for you; you mostly need to understand it and be patient.

One theme runs through it all: permits, inspections, and utility approval aren't hoops for their own sake. They're the safeguards that make sure your system is safe, legal, and built right. That's a good thing.

★ I'll help you follow along

If the process ever feels confusing or slow, that's a fine time to call me. I can explain where things stand and what's next, in plain English, so you never feel left in the dark. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The whole process, on one page

Every solar install follows roughly these steps, in order.

- ❑ A site assessment — an installer studies your roof, shade, and panel.
- ❑ A design and written proposal sized to your home and goals.
- ❑ A contract you review carefully before signing.
- ❑ Permits filed with your local building department (the AHJ).
- ❑ An interconnection application to your utility to connect safely.
- ❑ The install itself, then inspections, then the utility's OK to turn on.

✓ Most of it is waiting, not working

The hands-on install is often quick — it's the permits, the utility approval, and the inspections that take the calendar time. That's normal. Patience here is a sign the job is being done properly.

Step one: the site assessment

Everything starts with a real look at your home. This is where an honest installer earns your trust.

An installer comes out (or uses detailed imagery) to measure your roof's size, direction, and pitch, study the shade across the day and year, look at your electrical panel, and review a year of your electric bills. From all that, they can size a system honestly and spot any problems early.

This is why a trustworthy estimate takes a proper look, not a phone quote. If someone offers you a firm price and production promise without studying your specific home, be skeptical — there's no shortcut to a good design.

✓ Have your bills and goals ready

Gather a year of electric bills and jot down your goals — lower bills, backup power, or both — before the visit. It helps the installer size things right, and it shows them you're an informed homeowner.

Step two: the design and proposal

With the assessment done, the installer draws up a design and puts it in a written proposal for you to consider.

The proposal lays out where the panels would go, how big the system is, what equipment it uses, an honest estimate of how much it should produce, and the price and payment options. This is the document you'll compare against other installers' proposals.

Take your time with it, and don't be shy about questions. A good proposal is clear and specific; a vague one, or one that leans on too-good-to-be-true savings, deserves a hard second look. Our reading-a-quote guide helps you make sense of every line.

✓ Get more than one

Always gather two or three proposals before deciding. Comparing them side by side is the single best way to land on a fair price and a good installer — and it keeps anyone from rushing you.

Step three: the contract

When you've chosen an installer, you'll sign a contract. This is the moment to slow down and read, not to rush.

The contract should spell out the system, the price and payment terms, the warranties, who handles permits and the utility, the rough timeline, and what happens if something changes. Everything you were promised verbally should appear here in writing.

Never feel pressured to sign on the spot. A fair deal is still fair after you've read it carefully or had someone you trust look it over. If a salesperson pushes a 'today only' signature, that's a reason to pause.

! If it's not in writing, it's not promised

Verbal assurances about savings, warranties, or timelines mean little unless they're in the contract. Before you sign, make sure every promise that matters to you is written down.

Step four: permits and the building department

Before any panels go up, your project needs permission from the local authorities. Your installer handles this, but here's what's happening.

Your installer files for building and electrical permits with your local building department — often called the authority having jurisdiction, or AHJ. They review the design to confirm it meets code and is safe. In some areas an HOA or historic board may weigh in too.

This step protects you: it means a knowledgeable authority has checked that the plan is sound before anyone builds it. It can take a while depending on how busy the office is, which is a normal part of the wait.

✓ Permitting pace varies by town

Some building departments turn permits around quickly; others take longer. It's rarely something your installer can rush — it's simply the local office's pace. A local installer will know roughly what to expect.

Step five: the utility interconnection

Because your system will connect to the grid, your utility has to approve it. This runs alongside the permitting.

Your installer files an interconnection application with your utility — essentially, permission to safely tie your system into the grid. The utility reviews it to make sure everything is safe and up to their standards, and it's also where net metering gets set up where it's offered.

This is a required, sensible step — it's part of why grid-tied solar is so safe. It can add time, especially if the utility is working through a backlog of applications, but it's not optional and it's worth doing right.

✓ Interconnection and net metering go together

For most homes, the interconnection approval is also when you're enrolled in net metering. Keep the paperwork — it's handy for billing questions and when you eventually sell the home.

Step six: the install itself

Here's the part folks picture — the crew on-site putting the system in. It's often the quickest step of all.

Once permits and utility approval are in hand, the crew mounts the racking, sets the panels, installs the inverter (and battery, if you're adding one), and wires it all to your electrical panel. For many homes this takes only a day or a few, depending on size and complexity.

You don't need to do anything but give them access and stay out of the way. It's active, professional work involving rooftop labor and electrical connections — exactly the sort of thing that must be left to trained, insured installers.

! This is skilled, hazardous work — leave it to pros

Rooftop work and electrical wiring are dangerous for the untrained. Please never try to help beyond keeping pets and clutter clear. The crew has the gear and training to do it safely; your job is simply to let them.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The steps are the same everywhere, but the pace and the players can differ between a town home and a country property.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, you're usually dealing with a city or county building department and a large utility with an established interconnection process. There may also be an HOA to satisfy.

- Permitting goes through the local city or county building department.
- The big utilities have well-worn interconnection and net-metering steps.
- Factor in any HOA or historic-district review up front.
- Crews and inspectors are usually close by, which can speed things.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, permitting may run through the township or county, and your electric provider might be a rural co-op with its own process. Distances and a ground mount can add steps.

- Township or county rules and setbacks may apply, especially for ground mounts.
- A rural co-op's interconnection and net-metering process may differ from a big utility's.
- A ground mount adds trenching and possibly extra inspections.
- Travel time for crews and inspectors can stretch the schedule a bit.

★ Wondering how it works in your township?

Local processes vary, and I know our area. Tell me where you are and I'll help you understand what your permitting and utility steps will likely look like. Call (330) 200-8042.

Step seven: inspections

After the install, officials come to verify the work. This is a safeguard for you, not a hurdle.

A local building or electrical inspector checks that the system was installed to code and safely. Depending on your area, the utility may also inspect before allowing the connection. If anything needs adjusting, the installer fixes it and the inspector returns.

Passing inspection is real peace of mind: an independent, qualified person has confirmed your system is safe and correct. It's one of the best reasons to be glad solar is a permitted, professional job rather than a DIY one.

✓ You may need to be home

Inspections sometimes require someone to let the inspector in or provide access to the panel. Your installer will coordinate timing — just be ready for a scheduled visit.

Step eight: permission to operate, and switch-on

The final step is the one you've been waiting for: the utility's official OK to turn the system on.

Once inspections pass, the utility grants what's often called permission to operate. Frequently they also swap your meter for one that measures power flowing both ways. With that in hand, your installer commissions the system and switches it on.

From that moment, your panels are making power, your monitoring is live, and any net-metering credits begin. After the wait, it happens quietly — often with no fanfare beyond a friendlier next electric bill.

✓ Don't flip it on before you're cleared

It's important not to run the system before the utility gives the go-ahead. Your installer manages this; just know the switch-on comes after permission to operate, not before.

Why the whole thing takes as long as it does

Folks are often surprised that going solar takes weeks or months, not days. Here's the honest why, so the wait doesn't worry you.

The install itself is fast. It's the surrounding steps — permits from a busy building department, review and approval from the utility, scheduling inspections — that set the calendar. Each involves other offices working at their own pace, which no installer fully controls.

I won't quote you a number of weeks, because it truly varies by town, utility, and season. What I'll say is that a steady, patient process is a sign things are being done properly. Rushing these safeguards would be the worrying thing, not the wait.

! Beware promises of a suspiciously fast turn-on

If an installer promises to have you switched on remarkably fast, ask how they'll get permits and utility approval that quickly. Those steps have their own timelines. Honest installers set realistic expectations.

What's expected of you

Happily, your role in all this is small. Mostly it's a few decisions and a bit of patience.

- Share your electric bills and your goals honestly up front.
- Read the proposal and contract carefully before signing.
- Make a few choices — battery or not, panel placement, and so on.
- Give the crew and inspectors access when scheduled.
- Be patient through the permit and utility steps.
- Keep every document you're given in one safe folder.

✓ Keep a project folder

Start a folder — paper or digital — for your proposal, contract, permits, interconnection approval, and warranties. You'll be glad to have it all in one place for future questions and when you sell the home.

What can slow things down

A few common things stretch the timeline. None are cause for alarm, but it helps to know them.

- **Permit backlogs:** a busy building department simply takes longer to review.
- **Utility queues:** interconnection approval can wait behind other applications.
- **Roof surprises:** if the roof needs repair or reinforcement, that comes first.
- **Design changes:** switching equipment or layout mid-stream resets some steps.
- **Weather:** Ohio storms and snow can delay rooftop work.

✓ Delays usually mean care, not trouble

Most hold-ups are other offices doing their due diligence, or your installer handling a surprise properly. Ask for updates if you're unsure, but a measured pace is generally a good sign.

Why the permits and inspections are on your side

It's easy to see red tape as a nuisance. With solar, these steps are genuinely protecting you and your home.

A permit means the design was reviewed by someone qualified before it was built. An inspection means the finished work was checked by an independent expert. Utility approval means your system connects safely and won't endanger anyone. Together, they're your assurance that the job was done right.

They also matter later. A properly permitted, inspected system is far easier to insure and to explain to a future buyer. An unpermitted install, by contrast, can cause real headaches down the road.

! Never accept an unpermitted install

If an installer suggests skipping permits to save time or money, walk away. An unpermitted system can be unsafe, uninsurable, and a serious problem when you sell. The permits are not optional — they're protection.

Where a battery fits in the process

If you're adding a battery, it folds into the same steps — with a little extra design and inspection.

A battery is designed in from the start (or planned for later), permitted along with the rest, and installed by the same crew. Because it stores energy, there may be extra attention to where it's placed and how it's wired, and possibly an added inspection point — all normal.

If you think you might add a battery down the road rather than now, say so during design. Setting the system up battery-ready can make that future step much simpler. Our adding-batteries guide covers the details.

✓ **Decide on the battery early**

It's cleaner to plan for a battery during the initial design than to bolt one on later. Even if you wait to buy it, ask your installer to make the system ready for one.

The steps and who handles them

A quick map of the journey and who's responsible for each part.

Step	Who handles it	Your part
Design	Installer	Share goals, bills
Permits	Installer	Sign, then wait
Interconnection	Installer & utility	Approve, wait
Install	Installer's crew	Give access
Inspection	Inspector, utility	Be available
Turn-on	Installer & utility	Enjoy it

As you can see, the heavy lifting is the installer's. Your job is mostly to choose well up front, stay patient, and keep the paperwork — which is exactly what these guides prepare you to do.

After the system is switched on

Once you're up and running, there are just a few loose ends to tie off and then you can largely forget about it.

Make sure your monitoring app or website is set up and you know how to glance at it. File away all your paperwork — contract, permits, interconnection approval, warranties, and the monitoring login. And note how to reach your installer if you ever have a question.

After that, a solar system asks very little of you. Our guides on monitoring, maintenance, and warranties cover the gentle, occasional attention it needs from here on.

★ I'll help you get set up to enjoy it

Once your system's on, I'm glad to help you set up the monitoring app, organize your paperwork, and understand your new bill — the little things that make it all click. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask about the process

Put these to any installer so you know what the journey will look like before you commit.

Q: Do you handle all the permits and the utility interconnection?

A full-service installer files everything for you. You want a clear yes, with an explanation of what they'll manage and what, if anything, needs you.

Q: Roughly how long will the whole process take for my area?

You want an honest range, not a suspiciously fast promise. A good installer explains that permits, utility approval, and inspections set the timeline, and gives a realistic feel for your locale.

Q: Will everything be permitted and inspected?

The only acceptable answer is yes. Permits and inspections protect your safety, your insurance, and your future home sale. Anyone suggesting otherwise should be shown the door.

✓ Their timeline honesty is telling

How an installer talks about the timeline reveals a lot. Realistic ranges and clear steps mean they know the process; breezy 'we'll have you on in no time' promises deserve a follow-up question.

Red flags in the process

A few warning signs that a solar project isn't being handled the way it should be.

- **Skipping permits** to save time or money — never acceptable.
- **No mention of utility interconnection** — a required step they should own.
- **Pressure to sign immediately**, before you've read or compared.
- **Promises to turn on remarkably fast**, glossing over approvals.
- **Vague answers** about who handles permits, inspections, and warranties.

! When in doubt, slow down and ask

Any of these is a reason to pause. A trustworthy installer welcomes your questions about the process. If you feel rushed or brushed off, that's your cue to get another opinion — mine's a phone call away.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about the install and approval process.

Q: How long does going solar take, start to finish?

It varies widely by town, utility, and season — often weeks to a few months. The install is quick; permits, utility approval, and inspections set the pace. A steady process is a sign of care, not trouble.

Q: Do I really need permits and inspections?

Yes. They confirm your system is safe, code-compliant, and properly connected — protecting you, your insurance, and your future home sale. Never accept an installer who wants to skip them.

Q: What's 'interconnection' and 'permission to operate'?

Interconnection is your utility's approval to tie your system into the grid safely; permission to operate is their final green light to turn it on. Both are normal, required steps your installer handles.

Q: What do I actually have to do?

Not much: share your bills and goals, read and sign the contract, make a few choices, give access for the install and inspections, be patient, and keep the paperwork. The installer does the heavy lifting.

★ Feeling lost in the process?

If the steps or the waiting ever leave you confused, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'll explain where things stand and what's next, in plain English, with nothing to sell you.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made the solar install and permit process feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

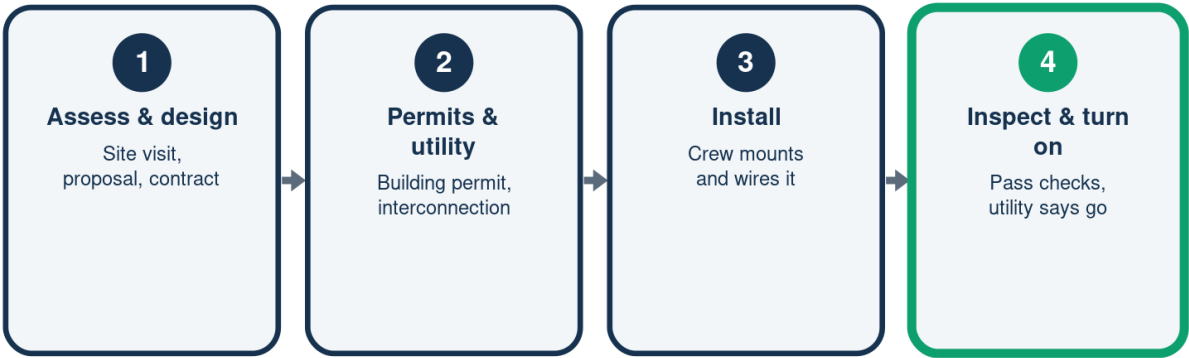
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★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

From Handshake to Switched On

The whole journey, in four broad stages



The install is quick; permits and approvals set the calendar.

Who Handles What

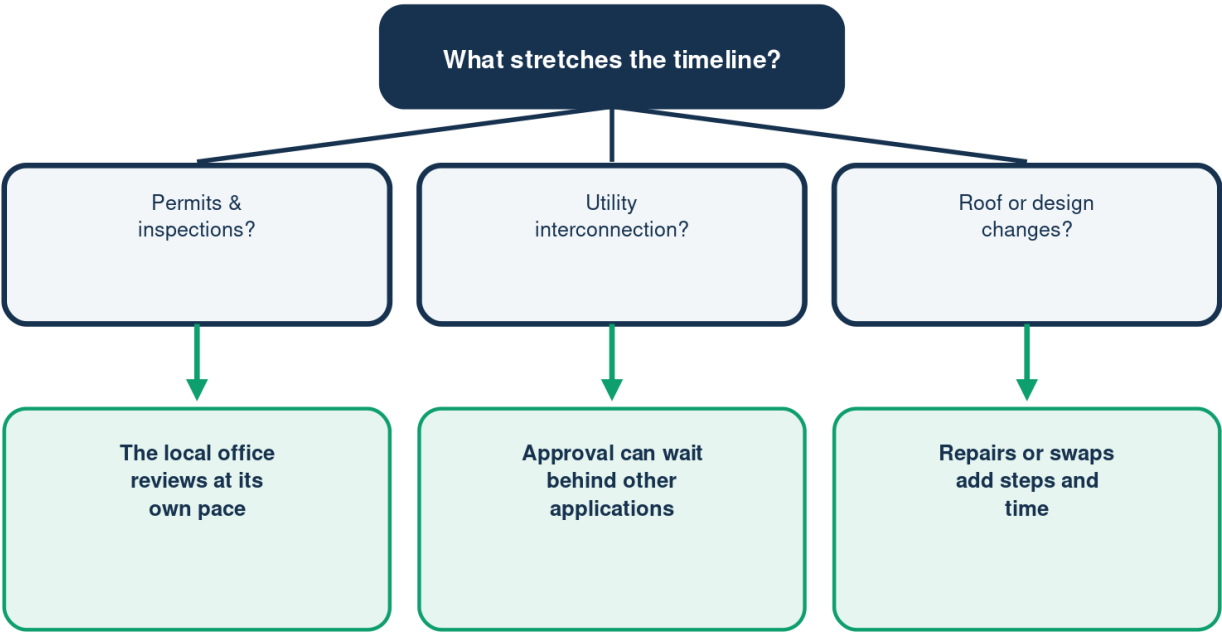
The heavy lifting is the installer's

	Who handles it	Your part
Design	Installer	Share goals/bills
Permits	Installer	Sign, then wait
Interconnection	Installer/utility	Approve
Install	Installer crew	Give access
Inspection	Inspector/utility	Be available

Your job: choose well, stay patient, and keep the paperwork.

Why Does It Take Weeks or Months?

The install is fast -- the approvals set the pace



A steady, patient process is a sign the job is being done properly.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

What Protects You in the Process

Red tape that's genuinely on your side

	Safeguard	Why it matters
Permit	Design reviewed	Before it's built
Inspection	Work checked	By an expert
Interconnection	Safe grid tie	Utility approved
Written contract	Promises kept	In black & white

Never accept an unpermitted install -- the safeguards protect you.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness, no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

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— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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