Solar Permitting in PWC

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SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS

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Solar United Neighbors

Represent Solar Consumer

- 12,000+ families helped
- 100+ MW of rooftop solar
- 50 states + DC/ Puerto Rico
- 1,400 solar installations in VA

Deployment

- Switch Together bulk purchase
- Help Desk/ Technical Support

Why Permitting Matters

Non-component "soft cost" more than 50% of rooftop solar cost

- Permitting avg. 14% cost Recent report
- Major cost driver of installations $$

Slow Permitting in PWC

- **Costs residents money**
  - Installers add 'surcharge' for PWC systems
  - Longer wait times to start saving/ missed tax credit deadlines
- **Less choice in contractors/components**
  - Contractors still won't work in PWC "I've given up on PWC"
  - Equipment manufacturers will not work in PWC (Solar Foundations)

"I want higher costs, bureaucratic red tape and longer wait times when I invest in solar for my home " (Nobody Ever)

“I have had many positive experiences this year with PWC”

- solar installer who had complained about many past problems with PWC permitting

Background on Permitting Challenges

My Experience Since 2015

"What's wrong with my installer?"

"Aaron, I don't know what to do..."

<u>Slow:</u> Wait times from signed contract to permit approval

<u>Expensive</u>- PWC residents pay 5-10% more than neighboring counties

Contractor: " I've had to tack on an extra $2,000 for jobs in PWC"

<u>Bureaucratic</u>: Multiple re-submissions, failed inspections, permits kicked back

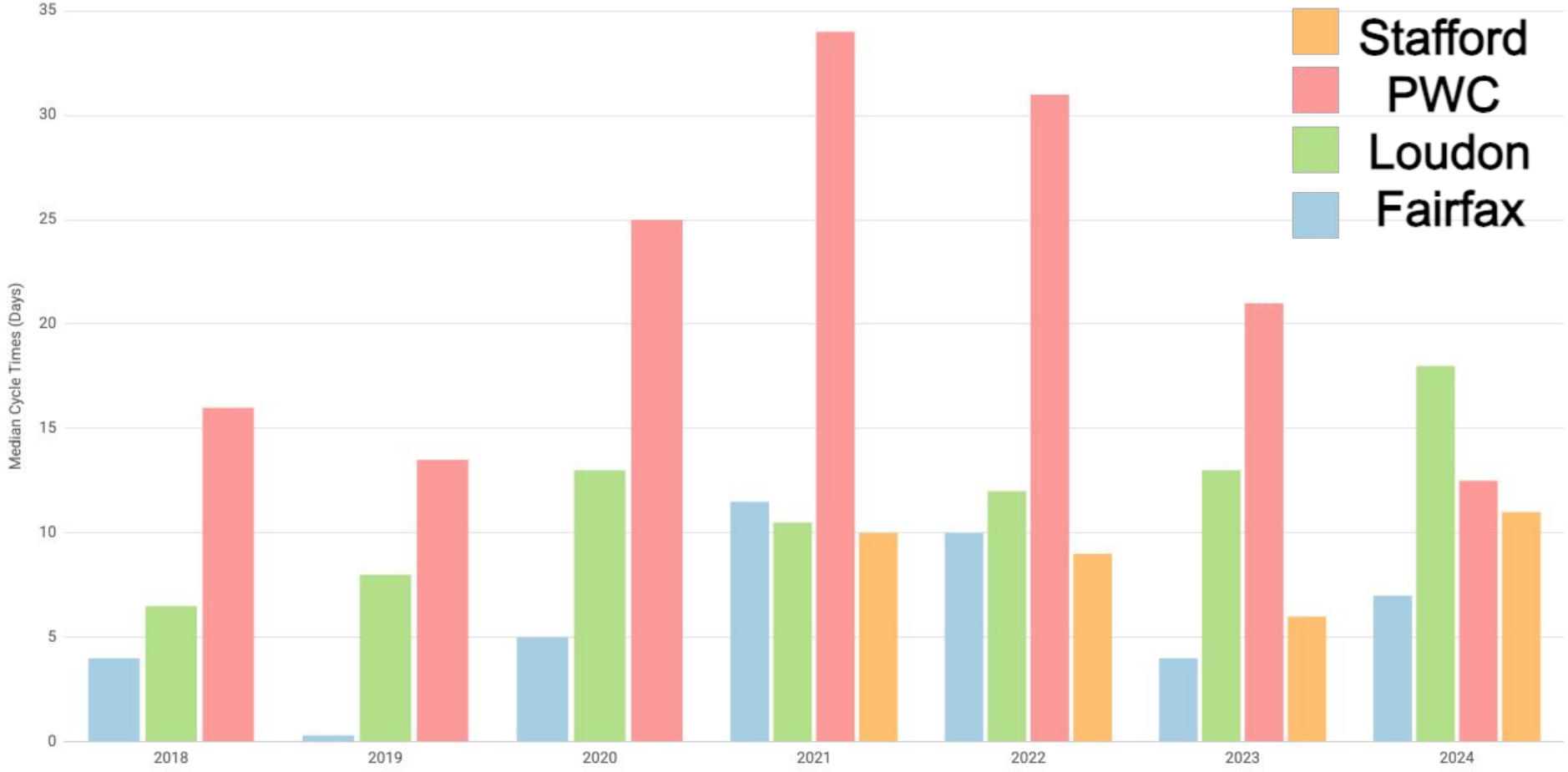
Incorrect fonts, page breaks, need pictures on every page...

"Requirements don't have much to do with safety..." installer

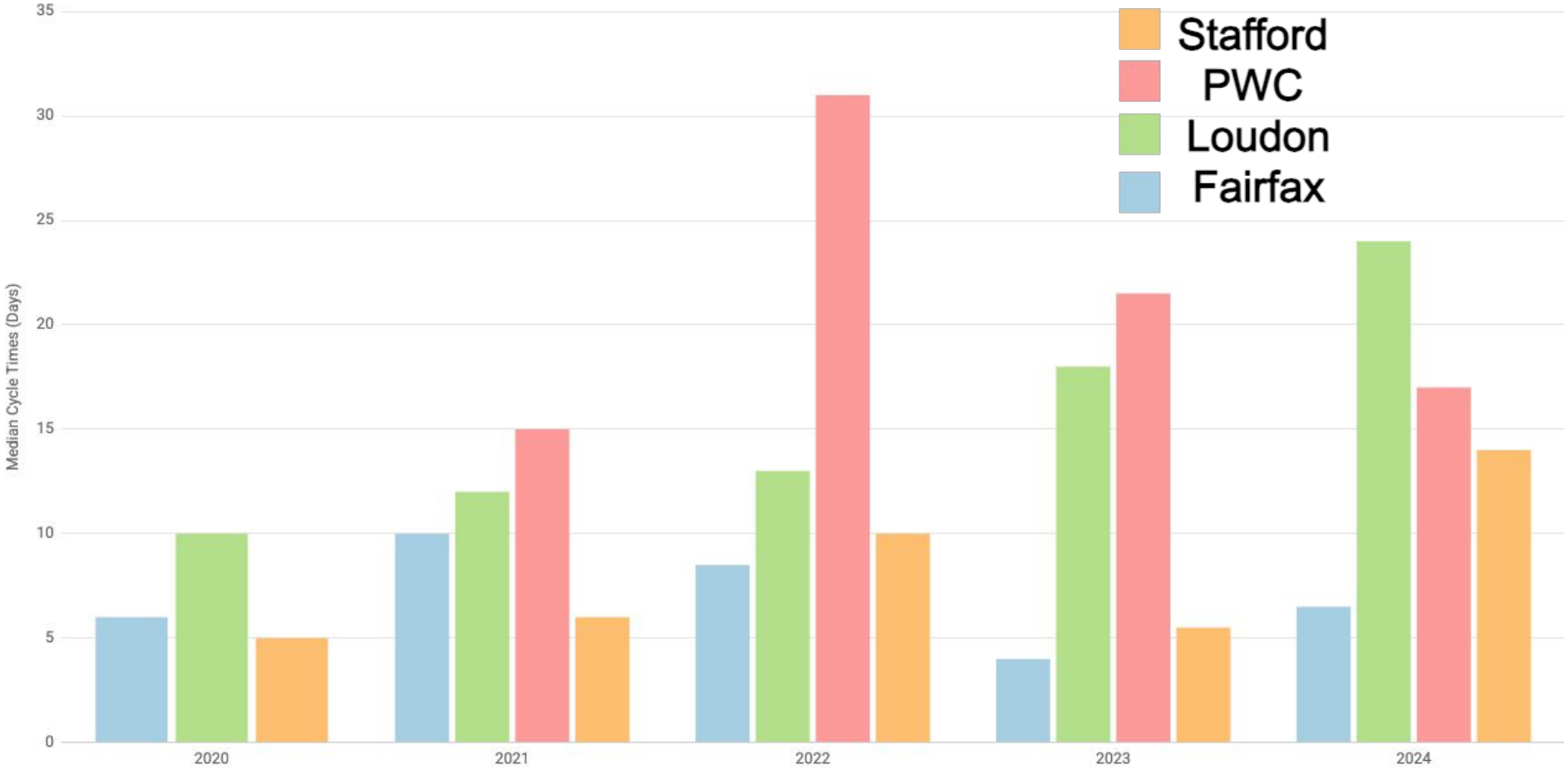
<u>SUN's Work to Improve Process</u>

- Multiple meetings with county staff, media stories, mobilized Installers/residents testimony at county commission meetings, worked with industry, engaged County Board members
- County Waives Permit Fees and Adopts Solar App + Pilot in Oct. 2023

SolarTRACE solar permits 10 kW, ~21% market



SolarTRACE solar permits 10-20 kW, ~21%



Progress on solar permitting

1. Waiving residential solar permitting fees Median cost: $586 to zero!
2. Implementing SolarAPP+
3. Decreases in median permit times
4. **Gone from “F” to C- grade**
5. More awareness/leadership from County (Thank you!!!)

SolarAPP+ Recommendations

1. **Reduce barriers to contractors to use SolarAPP+ (***Past Permit stats, other stringent requirements)*
2. **Allow for instant permits**
3. **Include energy storage as an option**

4. **Turn on additional features** *(main panel upgrade (MPU) & main breaker derate (MBD)*
5. **Compare failure rate data of non Solar App contractors W/ Solar App contractors**

Overall Recommendations

1. Achieve SolSmart Gold (requires 3 bus. day resi solar permits)
2. Implement SolarAPP+ recommendations
3. Streamline non-standard installations: Ground mount solar/standing seam/steep pitch
4. Host meeting in early 2026 to gather solar installers and discuss what is working and what is not working
5. Address disconnect between inspectors and plan reviewers.

Technical Focus Areas

Ground Mounts Systems (Nearly Impossible to Permit)

- End need for soil samples, PE to be on site during pile driving

Standing Seam Metal Roofs

- Adopt best practices from other counties for roof build integrity

Steep Pitch Roofs

- End prohibition against rafter roofs & roofs with greater than 8/12 pitch when using SolarApp+

Inspections/Plan Review

- Unify approved plans w/ inspector interpretation of code

Thank You

Contact us:

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Additional Data/Resources Addenda

Media

- Resident Letter to the Editor
- Canary Media Aug. 2023 story

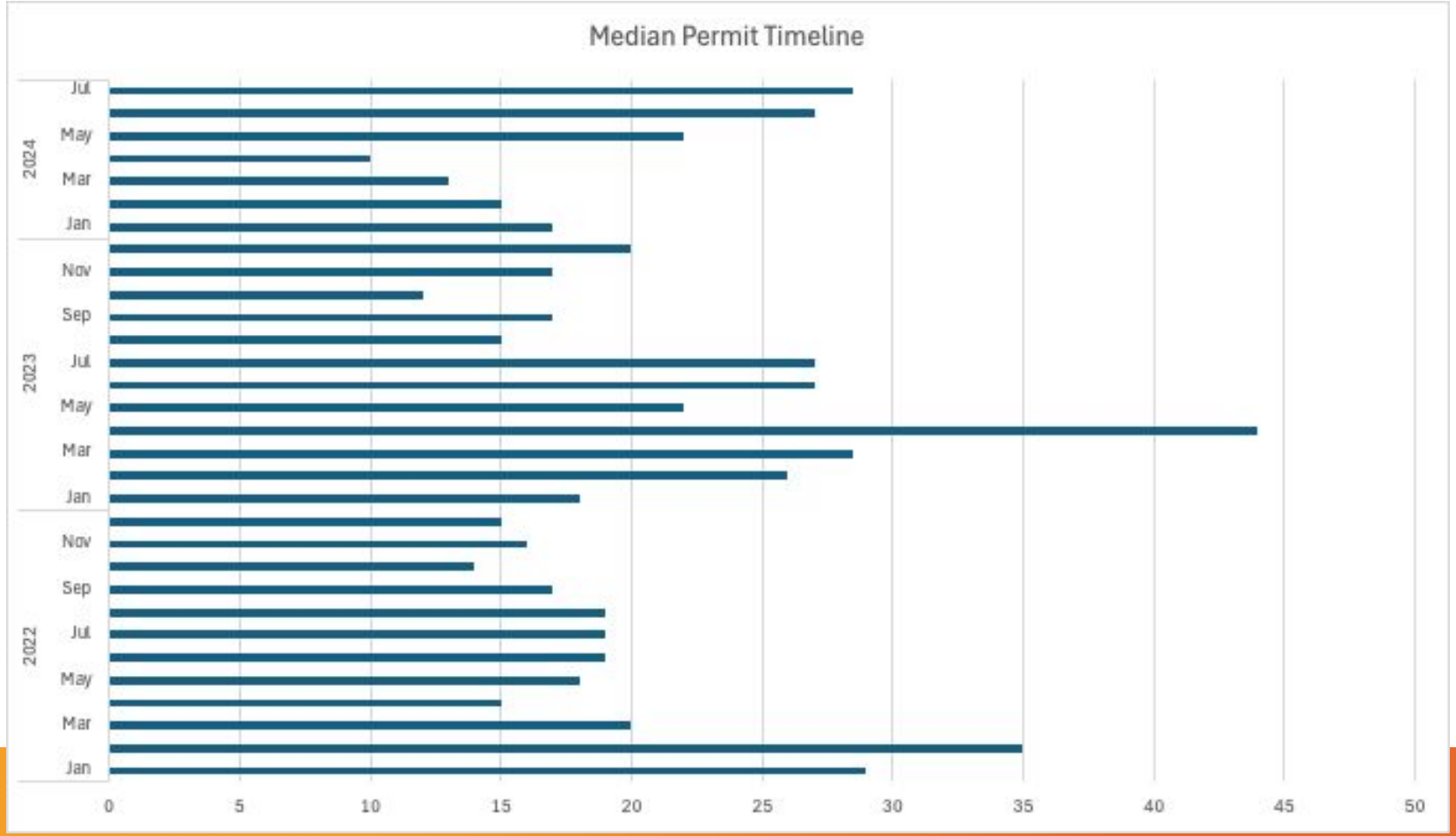
Solar Permitting Resources

- What is Solar App+
- Report :How Cutting Red Tape Can Lower Rooftop Solar Costs

SUN Resources

- Help Desk
- SUN Virginia Page

PWC median permit times, all permits



CANARY MEDIA

Can cutting fees and red tape help lure solar companies back to this Virginia county?

Prince William County, Virginia, has had some of the region's highest fees and longest delays for solar panel permits, but that's starting to change after frustrated stakeholders confronted officials.

By **Elizabeth McGowan**
17 August 2023

Prince William Times

LETTER: Prince William County must do better on solar array permitting

Feb 7, 2023 0