

# Is Local Government Blocking Solar Development in Orange Beach?

900 words

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History shows us an innovative mind, creating a glimpse of what is possible in the future, founding the basis of solar technology, salting the earth with monikers like climate change is real, prompting reactions ranging from exasperation to outright dismay.

"In 1839, Alexandre Edmond Becquerel discovered that certain materials produced small amounts of electric current when exposed to light," according to a report in Course Hero (<https://www.coursehero.com/file/17859583/1-What-is-Solar-Energy/>).

Fast-forward to 2018, and we find ourselves with thriving solar industries, producing everything from panels for your roof to driveway lights, being both efficient and affordable. Alternative energy enthusiasts in the western part of the United States have dedicated their lives to using solar power in their homes, and passing on this knowledge to their friends, and their communities, but not in Orange Beach.

"As a solar power proponent for the last thirty five years on land and sea, I am baffled by the reluctance of people to avail themselves of the opportunity to engage something as dependable as the sunrise each day. Even my fellow Electricians and Instrument Technicians have lost hard earned money every day they put off this common sense means of saving for their own futures. The simplest grid tie systems I have developed in California and Utah have long since paid for themselves in utility savings, as well as through the Federal Tax Credits and rebates that are available for the asking. The cost of panels per watt has dropped to 1/3 of the prices in 2001, and though sales of panels have been surging, it appears from my Western States observation point that it is *The Utility Companies* [sic] that are buying them up," said Rick Gustavson in an email from St. George, Utah, having built two solar homes with his wife Jean.

The dilemma for solar homeowners in Orange Beach is unfettered regulation, because our local-electrical supplier Baldwin EMC (Electricity Membership Cooperative) is an electricity re-seller, making them beholding to their upstream vendor.

According to documentation obtained in an email from Greg Gipson, Manager of Business Development, Energy Services, and Advanced Metering at Baldwin EMC, the electrical provider requires liability insurance and upgrade-payment guarantees from EMC's solar customers. This procedure insulates their suppliers from financial exposure by pushing additional expenses for solar connectivity down onto the solar homeowner (EMC's "Members Guide to Interconnected Distributed Resource", pg. 8-9).

The City of Orange Beach also has specific building codes about installing solar panels on your roof. "Probably a Miscellaneous Application (from the Building Department) with wind rating info on [the] panels," said Howard Stuart, Plans Examiner at Community Development in an email.

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Then there is insurance. Depending on the underwriter, they may or may not require re-certification, ensuring your roof is up to city standards. "Currently [our] carrier does not require a new certificate if you install solar panels in [the] roof. The credit for fortified gold would not be removed. However, for any reason other than insurance purposes, you would need to consult with IBHS [Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety]," said Cindy Vines, Account Executive, South Shore Insurance Agency, in Daphne, Alabama in an email.

Minimizing buyer's remorse from complicated permitting and regulations is offset by tax credits, rebates and solar reliability, strengthening financial arguments for using alternative energy in your home.

"The federal solar tax credit, also known as the investment tax credit (ITC), allows you to deduct 30 percent of the cost of installing a solar energy system from your federal taxes," according to a report from Energy Sage (<https://news.energysage.com/congress-extends-the-solar-tax-credit/>).

Although Orange Beach does not provide tax incentives for solar a full-tax credit is available from the Federal Government.

"To receive the full tax credit, you must have federal income tax liability that's at least equal to the value of the tax credit. This credit may be carried over to future tax years," according to a report from Tesla Solar Roofs (<https://www.tesla.com/solarroof>).

Building a solar-powered home in Orange Beach is burdened with man-in-the-middle profit margins, encumbering the project with provider-imposed regulations; possibly arguing the added trouble is not worth the effort.

Do not think Baldwin EMC is overly bureaucratic, demanding so much extra cash from solar-energy homebuilders. Their primary-power supplier is the real puppeteer, hamstringing potential-solar customers.

"The Member (read: EMC customer) may be compensated for the power [on solar projects] that flows onto the distribution system," according to EMC's "Members Guide to Interconnected Distribution", pg. 7, being conspicuously vague as to how much credit is given for each watt of solar generated, and the City of Orange Beach looks on as if at a passing summer cloud.

Our city leaders made a definitive choice about climate change. Instead of insisting the new school (2017) run on solar, as an example to the rest of the state, the Council decided to pay \$4 million for ball fields, and \$4 million for a performing-arts center, powered in the traditional way, perhaps by coal-fired power plants. It is an opportunity lost, demonstrating the unintended consequence of uninformed decisions, affecting generations to come.

ENDS.