



TOWN OF CARRBORO

NORTH CAROLINA

TRANSMITTAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT

DELIVERED VIA: HAND MAIL FAX EMAIL

To: Board of Aldermen
David Andrews, Town Manager

From: Randy Dodd, Environmental Planner

Thru: Patricia McGuire, Planning Director
Christina Moon, Planning Administrator

Date: June 12, 2017

Subject: Overview of Town Participation in the DOE SolSmart Program

Summary

This memo is being prepared to provide an overview of the Town's participation in the SolSmart program. Town staff have worked with the SolSmart program and Chapel Hill and Orange County staff to pursue designation as a SolSmart community. Bronze level designation was awarded on April 29, 2017. If the Town amends the Land Use Ordinance (LUO) to address SolSmart criteria, the Town will be in position to receive Gold level designation.

Information

In the summer of 2016, Chapel Hill and Orange County staff invited Carrboro staff to look into participation in the [SolSmart](#) program, a new national recognition and no-cost technical assistance effort to help local governments take key steps to address local barriers to solar energy and foster the growth of mature local solar markets. SolSmart is funded and administered under the U.S. Department of Energy [SunShot](#) and Solar Powering America by Recognizing Communities ([SPARC](#)) initiatives. The program primarily seeks to address "solar soft costs," or business process or administrative costs that can increase the time and money it takes to install a solar energy system — costs which are then passed on to solar customers. Local government procedures such as permitting, planning, and zoning are the source of some soft costs. The view of [SolSmart](#) is that local governments are in a unique position to soft costs and take action to promote the use of solar locally. The program is intended to provide high-profile, national recognition for communities that have made it cheaper and easier for solar customers to invest in solar energy. In addition, achieving designation sends a signal to solar companies that a community is "open for solar business". To date, 58 communities have received designation, with Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Orange County being the only North Carolina communities.

A key element of the program is the opportunity for participating communities to apply to host a SolSmart Advisor – fully-funded, experienced staff recruited to help communities achieve designation. Advisors evaluate existing local government programs and processes and apply industry-leading best practices to keep the community moving toward designation. SolSmart advisors have been chosen for the current cycle to assist 30 communities through engagements lasting up to six months, with advisors receiving stipends. In 2016, the 3 local jurisdictions jointly applied for an advisor and at the start of 2017, SolSmart chose the North Carolina Clean Energy Technology Center ([NCCETC](#)) to serve as the advisor to Orange County, Chapel Hill, and Carrboro, with the work period ending in mid-July.

[SolSmart](#) participation and movement towards designation is based on accumulating points under 6 separate categories. Prerequisites exist for different levels of designation. As part of the initial intake to the program, Carrboro was able to receive credit for 150 points and significant progress towards not only bronze but higher levels of designation. Examples of activities that received credit include: the Carrboro Solarize program, establishment of the Climate and Energy Task Force, completion of the Community Climate Action Plan, installation of the solar array at the Town Commons, documented efficiencies with permitting of photovoltaics, and the ordinance section limiting HOA restrictions on solar. The Town completed several additional steps in the winter/spring of 2017 to achieve the necessary prerequisite credits for bronze designation. The LUO currently has limited provisions directly addressing solar installations; the inclusion of provisions that explicitly allow solar as an accessory use and by right are needed as a prerequisite to silver level designation. It is likely, but at the SolSmart programs discretion, that draft ordinance changes will satisfy this prerequisite and in all likelihood also qualify for gold level designation because of other credits that have been achieved.

A summary of the crediting for the Town’s participation in the program is provided in the appendix.

Recommendation

It is recommended that this memo be included in Public Hearing materials for June 27, 2017.

Appendix: Summary of Carrboro Participation in SolSmart

	Credit Type	Points	Status
Bronze Prerequisites*			
Online checklist detailing permitting process for PV (P-1)	Permitting	P	Completed
Require no more than one application form for a residential rooftop solar PV project (P-4)	Permitting	5	Completed
Demonstrate that permit fees reflect national best practices (P-5b)	Permitting	5	Completed
Review permitting process for efficiency; reduce processing time to 10 days or less (P-6)	Permitting	10	Completed
Review solar provisions in LUO (PZD-1)	Planning/Zoning/ Development	P	Completed
Draft proposed LUO changes (PZD-1a)	Planning/Zoning/ Development	5	Completed
Integrate solar and/or shared solar into relevant local plans (PZD-5)	Planning/Zoning/ Development	10	Completed
Provide an online handout with overview of what development regulations allow (PZD-11)	Planning/Zoning/ Development	5	Completed
Silver Prerequisites*			
Implement ordinance adjustments identified through the LUO review (PZD-2)**	Planning/Zoning/ Development	20	Under review
Provide cross-training of inspection and permitting staff on solar PV (I-1)	Inspections	20	Under review
Gold Prerequisites*			
Provide a permitting pathway for small PV systems turn-around of no more than 3 days (P-2)	Permitting	20	Completed
Other Credits*			
Review solar permit fees (P-5a)	Permitting	5	Completed
(P-8) Train permitting staff on solar best practices.	Permitting	10	Under Review
Train fire and safety staff on best practices (P-9)	Permitting	10	Under review
Solicit procedural recommendations from the solar installer community (P-10)	Permitting	10	Completed
Make permit data accessible to other departments (P-12)	Permitting	5	Under review
Require no more than 2 inspections for accessory-use solar PV (I-2)	Inspections	10	Completed
Complete inspections promptly (I-5)	Inspections	10	Completed
Conduct review of state policies on property/solar system owner's rights to install solar and right to sunlight on property. Make this information available (SR-1)	Solar Rights	5	Completed
Provide consumer protection resources to help with solar PV purchasing decisions (SR-2)	Solar Rights	5	Under review
Engage homeowners associations to discourage restrictive PV requirements (SR-5a)	Solar Rights	10	Completed
Convene an active task force or solar working group (CE-1)	Community Engagement	10	Completed
Create a solar landing page on local government's website (CE-2)	Community Engagement	10	Completed
Support or host a community-group purchase program (CE-4a)	Community Engagement	20	Completed
Host a solar workshop explaining solar PV opportunities and policies (CE-5a)	Community Engagement	5	Completed
Establish partnership with nonprofit (CE-5c)	Community Engagement	5	Completed
Encourage community solar projects or solar PV projects on community facilities (CE-5d)	Community Engagement	5	Completed
Engage community robust discussion around climate, energy, or sustainability plans (CE-5e)	Community Engagement	5	Completed
Provide resources on active installers and/or local incentives for solar (MDF-1)	Market Development & Finance	5	Under review
Complete feasibility analyses of solar installations on public facilities (MDF-4)	Market Development & Finance	10	Under review
Install solar capacity on local facilities (MDF-5)	Market Development & Finance	20	Completed

*: Specific credits needed for bronze are indicated. Silver & gold designation require points beyond prerequisites (100 for silver, 200 for gold).

P: This credit is required for SolSmart participation, and accrues no points.