



Local Government Guidance for Large-Scale Solar Development

Large-scale solar systems are becoming increasingly common throughout the United States as costs go down and solar becomes competitive with fossil fuels. Local governments are important stakeholders in the large-scale solar development process for permitting, inspection, planning, zoning, and tax regulations and processes. Local governments can encourage the growth of solar projects by providing developers with clarity, consistency, and transparency in regulations and processes. With the right strategies in place, local governments can provide maximum siting options for large-scale solar while preserving the community’s character and its cultural and ecological resources.

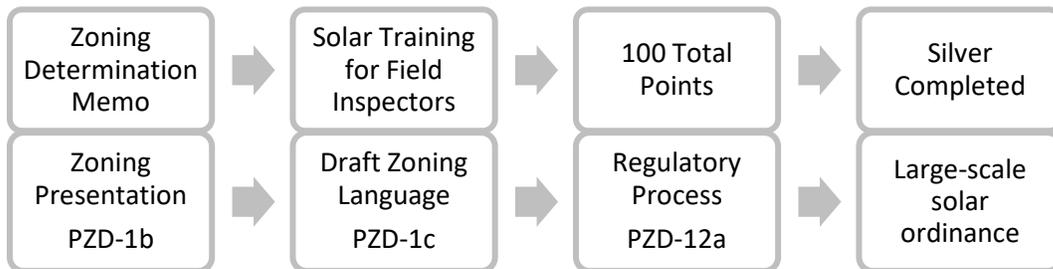
SolSmart is a national program offering no-cost technical assistance to help communities expand solar energy development. For interested communities, SolSmart provides assistance focused on reviewing and improving the planning and zoning processes for large-scale solar systems. The chart below outlines how communities can meet the official criteria to achieve SolSmart Silver designation, with an emphasis on large-scale solar. For more information, visit us at SolSmart.org or contact us at info@solsmart.org.

Requirements for SolSmart Bronze

(Bronze pre-requisites must be completed to be awarded Silver designation)



Requirements for SolSmart Silver



*See full credit language below for a process to develop a large-scale solar ordinance

Prerequisite credits with an emphasis on large-scale solar

Zoning Review (PZD-1a): Review zoning requirements and identify restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development. Compile findings in a memo. (Required for Bronze)

- *Specifically identify if zoning regulations address large-scale solar energy.*

Zoning Determination Memo (PZD-2a): Post an online document from the Planning/Zoning Department that states accessory use solar PV is allowed by-right in all major zones (e.g. via a zoning determination letter). (Required for Silver, if PZD-2b isn’t achieved)

- *Identify zoning regulations and processes that are applicable to large-scale solar development such a special or conditional use permit process. (Required for Silver)*

Priority Credits to address large-scale solar

PZD-1b: Present PZD-1a memo findings to planning commission or relevant body.

PZD-1c: Draft proposed language for changes to zoning code based on PZD-1a memo and PZD-1b dialogue. Involve planners and/or local zoning experts in the creation of the draft language.

PZD-3a: Review existing planning documents and identify new opportunities (not already included) to integrate solar PV into planning goals. Compile findings in a memo.

PZD-3b: Draft proposed language and a timeline for the inclusion of solar PV in existing and/or future plans. Involved planners in the creation of draft language.

PZD-5a: Include quantifiable metrics and/or specific actions for solar PV development in the most current version of relevant local plans (e.g. energy plan, climate plan, comprehensive plan).

PZD-5b: Develop a primary use solar PV assessment that identifies all feasible sites for large-scale solar PV development within a jurisdiction.

PZD-9: Train planning staff on best practices in planning and zoning for solar PV. Training must have occurred in the past five years.

PZD-11: Post an online factsheet that provides an overview of what zoning allows for solar PV under what conditions (e.g. types and sizes of solar arrays permitted, the processes required, and other relevant information).

PZD-12a: Ensure that the zoning ordinance establishes a clear regulatory pathway for primary use solar PV (e.g. through a special use permit or through inclusion among allowed conditional uses).

PZD-12b: Ensure that the zoning ordinance establishes solar energy zones and/or solar overlays for primary use solar PV.

Additional credits to consider for large-scale solar development

U-5a: Launch or support a utility-provided community solar program.

CE-7: Conduct feasibility analysis for solar PV on brownfields and/or other under-utilized properties.

CE-8: Install or lease land for solar PV development on brownfields and/or other under-utilized properties.

MDF-4: Conduct feasibility analysis for solar PV installations on/at local government facilities.

MDF-5: Install solar PV on/at local government facilities.