CELEBRATING 400 SOLSMART DESIGNEES NATIONWIDE!

April 2021

SolSmart offers no-cost technical assistance to help local governments make it faster, easier, and more affordable for residents and businesses to go solar. The program is led by The Solar Foundation and the International City/County Management Association and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office.

More than 400 communities in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have achieved designation through SolSmart! Below are highlights from just a few communities that have achieved SolSmart Bronze, Silver, or Bronze.

U.S. Virgin Islands (Bronze)

As the first U.S. territory to achieve SolSmart designation, the U.S. Virgin Islands developed and implemented a streamlined, web-based distributed solar generation permitting portal. In 2020, the Virgin Islands Energy Office secured funding to develop a solar-plus-storage microgrid pilot project at the St Croix Educational Complex’s emergency shelter, and expects to replicate this project as a resiliency standard at other critical government facilities.

North Central Texas Council of Governments (Bronze)

The NCTCOG is helping communities across the Dallas-Fort Worth region go solar by providing widespread outreach and educational resources. The website GoSolarTexas.org includes solar energy tips for homeowners, best management practices for local governments, and training resources. Six communities in the region have achieved SolSmart designation, and the NCTCOG will hold a webinar in May to reach out to other North Texas communities.

Ann Arbor, Michigan (Silver)

Ann Arbor is deploying solar energy to help meet an ambitious goal for carbon neutrality by 2030. The city launched a Solarize campaign in 2020 that led to 1 MW of residential solar installed, a four-fold increase from prior years. They are working at the state level to help make this program replicable in other communities. The city has set up a resilience hub at a community action network site powered by solar and battery storage, and plans are in the works for installing 1 MW of rooftop solar on municipal buildings and affordable housing sites.

Montgomery County, Maryland (Gold)

Montgomery County has set the aggressive goal of 100 percent greenhouse gas reductions by 2035, and solar deployment will be key to reaching that goal. The county has incorporated more than 7 MW of solar at government buildings, including microgrid projects at the public services headquarters and a correctional facility. Plans are in the works for major solar projects on a decommissioned landfill and a next-generation bus depot. The county has a Solarize campaign underway that incorporates both solar and EV charging, and its green bank programs offer financing options for residents, businesses, and nonprofits.
Santa Fe, New Mexico (Bronze)

Santa Fe has ambitious sustainable development goals, and SolSmart is part of its strategy for achieving them. Santa Fe limits solar permit fees to $40, sets a three-day turnaround time for issuing permits, and makes every effort to conduct inspections within 24 hours. The city is leading by example by placing solar on government buildings, and also has an ambitious effort to decarbonize the building sector through the Architecture 2030 challenge. Santa Fe plans to launch a Solarize campaign this year that will focus on LMI populations.

Wood County, Wisconsin (Gold)

Wood County worked with a SolSmart partner to conduct several solar feasibility studies for county facilities. The initial techno-economic analysis resulted in the Nepco Park solar array, the first county-owned solar project. Another solar project from the feasibility study has been added to the county’s Capital Improvement Plan for 2022. The county will also be home to a 150 MW solar farm under construction, which will incorporate pollinator-friendly habitat.

OKI Regional Council of Governments (Silver)

The OKI Regional Council of Governments is helping communities in the greater Cincinnati tri-state area expand solar energy use. The council’s Solar Ready II program provides steps for homeowners to go solar, best management practices for local governments, and an extensive resource library. OKI also helps communities consider the promotion of clean, renewable energy in their long-range planning. The council recently hosted a workshop on the SolSmart program for area communities, which can be viewed on their website.

South St. Paul, Minnesota (Bronze)

South St. Paul became involved in SolSmart as a followup to its work on GreenStepCities, a sustainability program in Minnesota. Through SolSmart, the city was able to continue its work to adopt best practices and document its progress on solar energy. The city recently saw a new 329 kW array installed at the Kaposia Education Center, an elementary school, and plans to steadily increase the number of residential solar installations while making solar easier for the community to access.

Charleston County, South Carolina (Gold)

Charleston County is establishing itself as a leader on sustainability and resilience in South Carolina and the region. The county worked with SolSmart to develop a straightforward permitting and inspection process, making it easier for businesses and residents alike to go solar. The county is now pursuing solar energy projects on two downtown buildings connected to the College of Charleston. Recently, Charleston County worked with state partners to establish CORE-SC, a consortium that develops research and solutions on the resilience challenges facing South Carolina.

Orlando, Florida (Gold)

A national leader in solar energy deployment, Orlando installed over 1 MW of rooftop solar on city buildings in 2020 and subscribes to over 20 MW in community solar. Another seven rooftop solar projects are underway along with an EV carport lot at the city’s fleet maintenance headquarters. Meanwhile, 108 MW of utility-scale solar came online in 2020 with another 150 MW in development, and a floating solar array was installed at Orlando International Airport.
Leon County, Florida (Gold)

With over 400 PV systems installed, solar energy is becoming a popular choice in Leon County — the first community in the Florida Panhandle to achieve designation. The county achieved a 3-day permitting time for rooftop solar permits and created a solar landing page as a resource for developers and residents. The county works in close coordination with its two electric utilities to ensure a timely and efficient permitting and interconnection process.

Pulaski County, Virginia (Gold)

Pulaski County worked with SolSmart to streamline permitting and zoning processes to make it easier for residences and business to go solar. This year, the county approved a 300 MW utility scale solar project that would be one of the largest on the Eastern Seaboard. The project is expected to bring new revenue to the county and to the participating private landowners, while supporting existing industry and attracting new industries that value renewable energy. The county worked diligently to address community concerns with the project including impacts on viewshed.

Fairfax County, Virginia (Gold)

Fairfax County is ramping up for a major expansion of solar energy on county buildings, including over 120 government facilities, park facilities, and schools. This is expected to reduce electricity costs by over $60 million and reduce over 1.2 million metric tons of carbon dioxide over the next 25 years. Through its work with SolSmart, the county was able to review best practices for solar energy adoption and create new tools for community engagement, such as a solar landing page and a residential permitting checklist.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (Bronze)

Solar energy has been taking off in Oklahoma City after state policies made it easier for residents to go solar. The number of residential permits increased from only one in 2017 to 160 in 2020. In the meantime, two devastating ice storms in the past year led to prolonged blackouts and imposed hundreds of millions in costs on the local utility, likely sparking more local interest in solar energy. The city now plans to update its zoning code to define clear pathways to more solar development, which could also lead to a higher SolSmart designation.

Boca Raton, Florida (Silver)

Boca Raton first achieved Bronze designation in 2019 and moved up to Silver this year. To reach the higher designation, the city trained staff and increased local capacity to conduct inspections and assist residents with solar projects. Interest is growing in solar energy among local residents, and in the future the city plans to seek new opportunities to install solar on local government property, while also finding additional ways to educate residents about solar.

San Miguel County, Colorado (Gold)

San Miguel County completed a site analysis on using solar energy at county buildings using expertise and resources from SolSmart. The county is now on target for on-site, grid-tied solar PV to supply half of the electricity at its facilities by the end of 2021. Battery storage storage will also provide resiliency for 911 dispatch and an emergency operations center. To make access to solar energy even more easy and affordable for all, the county also collaborated with the San Miguel Power Association and other local and state partners to launch an innovative community solar project on a former county landfill site.
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