



# City of Laramie

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## LARAMIE PLANNING COMMISSION January 24, 2022

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### RECOMMENDED MOTION:

No motion required. This is an informational item only.

### BACKGROUND:

SolSmart is a national designation program recognizing cities, counties, and regional organizations that foster the development of a mature local solar markets. Led by the International City/County Management Association and the Interstate Renewable Energy Council, along with a team of partners with deep expertise in solar energy and local governments, SolSmart uses objective criteria spanning 5 categories to designate communities that have successfully met these goals. These 5 categories include;

- Permitting and Inspection,
- Planning and Zoning,
- Government Operations,
- Community Engagement,
- Market Development.

Though many who have installed solar panels are finding that solar drastically reduces utility costs and provides extra security in the face of electric grid failure, “soft costs” significantly impact the affordability of solar energy systems. “Soft Costs” refer to business processes or administrative costs that can increase the time and money it takes to install a solar energy system, which is then passes down to customers. To address solar soft costs at a local level, SolSmart provides technical assistance and national designation with funding allocated from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Solar Energy Technologies Office.

While City staff believes that prior efforts to include solar on City facilities as well as additions, updates and modifications to the Unified Development Code have improved the feasibility of solar in the community, it recognizes that there are opportunities to improve. The technical assistance provided by SolSmart will allow city staff to consult with industry leaders to ensure the implementation of industry best practices in city processes which will improve the likelihood of residential and commercial solar within the community.

In order to start this process, the City Council indicated their commitment to supporting solar development within their community through City Council Resolution 2021-62 that recognized a commitment to:

- Reduce barriers to solar installation
- Reduce community wide carbon emissions
- Improve community resilience by diversifying energy systems
- Promote Laramie as a Solar Community

Following the completion of the program the City will track key metrics related to solar energy deployment, such as installed solar capacity and the number of installations across sectors. Please review the following link called the "[SolSmart Program Guide](#)" for more information and detail about this program.

In addition to the technical assistance provided by SolSmart, City Staff and SolSmart Consultants have begun work on evaluating the Laramie Community related to the 5 categories noted earlier in this memo as part of the "Zoning Scorecard". The evaluation related to the "Scorecard" is currently underway, with staff working on some other items noted in our review in order to achieve one of 3 designations; Bronze, Silver or Gold. Based on Laramie's existing solar codes, processes, review times and other factors, staff believes we will achieve Silver designation at the conclusion of the evaluation process.

Related to the "Scorecard" one item needed to achieve silver status within the SolSmart program is presentation of the Laramie Zoning Review; a technical assistant memo put together by SolSmart that provides a review of Laramie Codes related to Solar related topics. The zoning review is intended to help assist local governments by showing them where they are doing well and where improvements could be made related to solar initiatives. The complete zoning review is attached with the purpose of presenting an overview of the findings to Planning Commission. Generally, you will see in the review, the City of Laramie has taken significant steps towards having a solar zoning code that is accommodating and promotes "good" solar practices. Additionally, there are items that could be addressed, which would improve the code if we choose to make those changes in the future. At this time, this information is for your review and to update you on the progress the City is making towards designation in the SolSmart program. In the future city staff may take up recommended changes or make other policy changes that will help further promote solar goals in our community.