

PLANNING FOR SOLAR

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

THE REQUIREMENT OF PLANNING FOR SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS

The Metropolitan Land Planning Act requires that the comprehensive plan shall contain “an element for the protection and development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems” (Minn. Stat. 473.859).

THE SOLAR RESOURCE PROTECTION REQUIREMENT

In order to satisfy the solar resource protection requirement within statute, the Metropolitan Council will provide the Minnesota Solar Suitability Analysis map clipped to your community, along with calculations of your community’s gross solar and rooftop solar resource.

The map will be available within the [Community Pages](#) section of the online Local Planning Handbook. The community solar map and calculations should be included in your community’s comprehensive plan to satisfy the solar resource protection requirement of the statute.



THE SOLAR RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENT

In order to ensure success in incorporating the solar resource development requirement within the comprehensive plan, it is important to highlight a generalized comprehensive planning flow chart, for reference:



In order to satisfy the solar resource development requirement within statute, your community should include a policy or policies pertaining to the development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems within the comprehensive plan. Your community should also include any strategies needed to implement the policy or policies.

In order to formulate your community’s policies and strategies, you can begin by setting solar visions or goals within the comprehensive plan. Please see examples below of solar goals and visions, solar policies, and solar implementation strategies:

Solar Goals by Community Type

1. Urban Goal – Balance between the benefits of urban forests and the benefits of enabling solar development.
2. Urban Goal – Create local community solar garden opportunities for residents and businesses who have limited on-site solar resources or do not own land or buildings.
3. Urban Goal – Redevelopment projects will evaluate on-site solar resources and incorporate solar development into designs.
4. Suburban Goal – Encourage residential solar development that maintains community character.
5. Suburban Goal – Increase energy resilience of critical facilities such as police, fire, and emergency and hazard response centers.
6. Suburban Goal – Fairly balance the development rights of land owners with solar resource with the community character rights of adjacent landowners.
7. Suburban Goal – Protect access to solar resources in new developments and subdivisions, enabling individual land owners to choose to self-generate energy.
8. Agricultural Goal – Encourage solar garden or farm development on marginal farmland rather than prime agricultural soils.
9. Rural Goal – Enable solar garden development that enhances the community’s and landowners’ ability to limit non-rural housing or commercial development.

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Solar Goals by Plan Element

1. Economic Goal – Increase use of local energy resources to capture job creation opportunities and diversify local economic base.
2. Housing Goal – By 2030, all new housing has solar generation or is built to “solar-ready” standards.
3. Land Use Goal – Encourage solar garden development on closed landfills and brownfields.
4. Resilience Goal – Encourage investment in electric grid infrastructure and solar development that makes electric service more reliable and resilient to weather-related disruptions.

Solar Policies - Distributed (Accessory) Solar Development

1. City encourages development of distributed solar energy systems that are in keeping with the community's character and use community solar resources.
2. City supports the development of zero net energy buildings and use of local renewable and energy efficiency resources.
3. City sets a local renewable energy standard to meet 10% of community-wide electric energy use with on-site renewable energy.

Solar Policies - Solar Farm/Garden (Principal) Solar Development

1. City encourages development of community solar gardens on lands outside the MUSA that retain community character and capture co-benefits such as creation of pollinator habitat.
2. City will develop solar resources on its closed landfill sites and buffer lands around industrial uses.
3. County supports the use of local solar resources, but discourages utility scale solar development that diminishes preferred agricultural use of prime soils or conflicts with rural residential priorities.

Solar Strategies - Solar Farm/Garden (Principal) Solar Development

1. Adopt solar zoning and permitting best practices for accessory use solar development.
2. Become certified as a “solar-ready” community under the Department of Energy's SolSmart program.
3. Participate in a community solar garden project for a set amount (i.e., 30%) of public facilities' electric energy use.
4. Sponsor a community solar garden on a public building or land, for the benefit of city residents and non-profit institutions.
5. Enable and promote PACE financing for local energy efficiency and solar energy projects on private buildings.

FOR MORE RESOURCES

Metropolitan Council staff are in the process creating workshops and more Local Planning Handbook resources for community use:

- Local Planning Handbook: <http://metro council.org/Handbook>
- Resilience Plan Element: <https://metro council.org/Handbook/Plan-Elements/Resilience.aspx>
- PlanIt Training series: <https://metro council.org/PlanIt>
- Grow Solar Local Government Toolkit: <http://www.growsolar.org/toolkit/>
- SolSmart program: <http://www.gosparc.org/>
- MN GreenStep Cities: <http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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