

News Release

For Immediate Release: February 11, 2020

Durham Receives National Designation for Advancing Solar Energy Growth

DURHAM, N.C. – When it comes to making it faster, easier, and more affordable for homes and businesses to go solar in the Bull City...the City of Durham receives a Gold Star.

The City has just received a [Gold designation](#) from the [national SolSmart Program](#), which recognizes communities for taking steps to encourage solar energy growth and remove obstacles to solar development. For companies looking to expand, a SolSmart Gold designation is a signal that Durham is “open for solar business.”

“This designation is an example of Durham’s strong commitment to renewable energy and sustainability,” said Mayor Steve Schewel. “We are proud to be a leader in promoting clean energy sources that support a healthy local economy, a clean environment, and a more livable community.”

As a SolSmart designee, Durham is helping solar companies reduce the cost of installations and pass those savings on to consumers. According to Sustainability and Energy Analyst Paul Cameron with the City’s General Services Department, this allows even more local homes and businesses to obtain affordable, clean, and reliable electricity through solar. “The actions Durham has taken will help encourage solar companies to do business in the area, driving economic development and creating local jobs,” Cameron said.

To receive designation, cities and counties make changes to their local processes to reduce the time and money it takes to install a solar energy system. This includes evaluating local permitting processes as well as planning and zoning procedures. SolSmart designees also develop innovations in areas such as market development and finance.

According to Cameron, the National League of Cities (NLC) guided Durham through the SolSmart process by conducting a baseline assessment of City policies and processes that impact solar energy development. NLC then provided technical assistance to help the City to achieve the SolSmart designation, including a review of the City’s zoning ordinance to discover any barriers to solar energy, and providing resources for City staff to learn about solar best practices. In order to achieve Gold designation, the City also updated the Unified Development Ordinance to clarify regulations for solar energy.

SolSmart uses objective criteria to award communities points based on the actions they take to reduce barriers to solar energy development. Communities that take sufficient action are designated either gold, silver, or bronze. As part of the SolSmart program, a team of national experts provides no-cost technical assistance to help communities achieve designation. All cities and counties are eligible to join the SolSmart program and receive this technical assistance.

SolSmart is led by The Solar Foundation and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office. More than 300 cities, counties, and small towns have achieved SolSmart designation since the program launched in 2016.

For more information about the City’s sustainability and energy management efforts, visit the General Services Department’s [webpage](#) or contact Cameron at (919) 560-4197, ext. 21244 or by [email](#).

About the City of Durham General Services Department

The [General Services Department](#) builds and maintains City properties to make Durham a great place for people to live, work, and play. Guided by the City's [Strategic Plan](#), the department's core functions include the acquisition and sale of properties, design and management of new construction and renovation projects, building maintenance, landscaping and urban forestry services, cemeteries management, sustainability and energy management, cultural and public art program management, and supporting the nonprofit [Keep Durham Beautiful](#).

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