



NEWS ADVISORY

Nov. 14, 2018

For immediate release

Missoula Wins SolSmart Silver for Advancing Solar Energy Growth

The Montana Renewable Energy Association presented the City of Missoula with a SolSmart Silver Designation award on Wednesday from the national [SolSmart](#) program for making it faster, easier and more affordable for homes and businesses to go solar.

This designation recognizes Missoula for taking bold steps to encourage solar energy growth and remove obstacles to solar development. For companies looking to expand, a SolSmart Silver designation is a signal that Missoula is “open for solar business.”

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 200 cities, counties and small towns have achieved SolSmart designation since the program launched in 2016.

“SolSmart designation is more than just an award,” says Chase Jones, energy conservation coordinator with the City of Missoula and the City’s primary champion for SolSmart work. “Missoula is demonstrating to local businesses, solar companies, and residents that Missoula is a great place to ‘go solar’.”

As a SolSmart designee, Missoula is helping solar companies reduce the cost of installations and pass those savings on to consumers. The City’s website solar landing page provides a solar permitting checklist that makes it easy to prepare for permitting and to understand financing and tax credits. This allows even more local homes and businesses to obtain affordable, clean

and reliable electricity through solar. In partnership with Missoula County, Climate Smart Missoula and the Missoula Federal Credit Union, Valainis and Jones also put together two solar education workshops that boosted the efforts of installers and residents. The actions the City has taken will help encourage solar companies to do business in the area, driving economic development and creating local jobs.

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. This effort is supported by local “advisors” working through the Solar Foundation.

“This program is great because it applies to any community that wants to make it easier for their residents and businesses to install solar,” says Andrew Valainis, executive director of the Montana Renewable Energy Association (MREA). MREA is Montana’s statewide advisor for the SolSmart program, helping communities across the state achieve designation. “Missoula is one of the more developed solar markets in Montana, and there are still ways to continue streamlining processes.”

The MREA presented the award on Wednesday morning to the City at a Missoula City Council committee meeting. The SolSmart designation is complementary to the City’s continued efforts to address its greater sustainability goals through its Conservation and Climate Action Plan, which included goals for using more renewable energy like solar. The City also recently announced its commitment to 100 percent clean energy by 2035.

“Thoughtful planning is an important step that lays a foundation for taking action,” Jones said. “Earning this designation is an actionable step towards greater resiliency and the improved health of our community members, our economy and our environment.”

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 gold, silver or bronze.

The City of Missoula will work toward a gold designation in coming months.

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. Interested communities can learn more at SolSmart.org.

Contacts for interviews:

Chase Jones, Energy Conservation and Climate Action Coordinator, City of Missoula
(406) 552-6389

Andrew Valainis, Executive Director, Montana Renewable Energy Association
(406) 214-9405

#

Ginny Merriam, Public Information/Communications Director, 552-6007 office; 546-7692 cell