



# SolSmart NOPEC Cohort

Join us to receive FREE Solar Planning, Zoning, and Permitting Support

The Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) is partnering with [SolSmart](#) (a national, non-profit program funded by US-DOE) this spring to help Ohio municipalities establish smart solar zoning and permitting at the local level. The **SolSmart NOPEC 2025 Cohort** includes:

- **Monthly virtual workshops, peer-to-peer learning, customized one-on-one support** from a SolSmart technical assistance provider
- An independent **Zoning Review**, detailing how your current policies align with best practices for planning and zoning small and large-scale solar arrays, including support and templates to draft new solar zoning code if desired.
- Support to create and post a **Permitting Checklist**, making it easier for residents and contractors to find and adhere to your current requirements
- Help identifying **opportunities for improvement** and **next steps** toward possible changes in local solar zoning, planning, and permitting
- A **SolSmart Bronze designation** for communities who complete the program

[Learn more at our Informational Session, Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup> at 11et. Register here.](#)

Ready to join the SolSmart cohort? Enrollment is open until June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025. We will begin working on Zoning Reviews as soon as we receive your enrollment. More information will be provided at the information session.

## Questions?

Contact Debra Perry, Solsmart Program Director, [dperry@icma.org](mailto:dperry@icma.org) / ph. 202-962-3694 and Deepa Vedavyas, Director of Resiliency and Sustainability, NOPEC, [dvedavyas@nopec.org](mailto:dvedavyas@nopec.org) / ph. 440.249.6479

## Program Timeline

June	July	September	October
Sign up to initiate your zoning review	Meet the cohort, review statewide trends, and begin your permitting checklist	Participate in planning & zoning training; learn best practices for rooftop and large-scale solar; and discussion with peers and experts	Learn how your community can maximize benefits of solar development and additional strategies including hosting and procurement.

**SolSmart NOPEC Cohort will be recognized in November at NOPEC's General Assembly Meeting.**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why should I do this?

Ohio has risen to be a national leader in solar development. With nearly 5MW of solar already installed and an additional 8MW expected in the coming 5 years ([SEIA](#)).

While state and federal policy is shifting, solar and energy storage continue to be an important part of the solution set to generating local and reliable power to meet the projected growth in energy demand. Local governments have a critical role to play in planning and regulating solar projects to ensure these projects are installed safely and deliver local benefits.

Receiving SolSmart designation helps you access free technical assistance and ensure your community is implementing best practices to guide solar development and realize the benefits of solar energy.

### Who can participate?

Participants can be municipal staff, elected officials, and/or volunteers from local planning, zoning, or energy committees. We need at least one participant from each municipality to commit to the cohort on behalf of their community. We recommend participants inform their municipal leadership of their participation and keep those leaders apprised of their learning and progress. If you have any questions or concerns, contact Debra Perry at [dperry@icma.org](mailto:dperry@icma.org) and Deepa Vedavyas at [dvedavyas@nopec.org](mailto:dvedavyas@nopec.org).

### What will you get out of this?

1. **A Zoning Review**, completed by the independent experts at SolSmart, with a report detailing how your current solar zoning compares with best practices.
2. **A Permitting Checklist**, documenting your solar permitting requirements in one place for residents and their contractors.
3. **Free one-on-one and small group support** from experts at SolSmart and NOPEC to understand your Zoning Review, identify next steps, and initiate discussions with town staff, commissions, and leaders.
4. **A chance to learn alongside peers throughout the state**, helping you understand how your community compares with others and developing relationships you can lean on for years to come.

5. **SolSmart Bronze Certification**, a nationally recognized credential that will signal to residents and the solar industry that you have the appropriate systems and policies in place to support smart solar development.

## Who are NOPEC and SolSmart?

**SolSmart** is led by the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office. The program provides no-cost technical assistance to help local governments follow national best practices to expand solar energy use in their jurisdictions. SolSmart also recognizes and celebrates these communities with SolSmart designations of Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze.

**NOPEC** is a governmental energy aggregation in Ohio that uses the bulk buying power of over 240 member communities to negotiate exclusive electric and natural gas rates for hundreds of thousands of residential and small business customers. Since 2001, NOPEC has saved its customers hundreds of millions of dollars on their energy costs, provided education opportunities for Ohio students and residents, and helped protect Ohio consumers by advocating for consumer-friendly energy policies to protect against unfair utility rate increases.

## What if we don't have a solar zoning ordinance?

No problem! You can still participate even if your community doesn't already have a solar zoning ordinance. SolSmart will begin by sending you a report about best practices for solar ordinances, why you might want to consider creating a solar ordinance, and what you might want to include in it. You'll have opportunities during this process to work with experts and peers to decide whether you want to create a solar ordinance and start working on a draft.

## Can more than one person participate from a single community?

Yes! There is no limit to the number of participants from each community that can engage with the cohort, though we recommend that one person serve as the consistent community representative and coordinate the flow of information among your local partners. For example, you might invite certain people into specific cohort meetings or training as needed.

## What is the time commitment?

This cohort is designed to proceed at a slow and steady pace, recognizing that many participants will be volunteers or busy municipal staffers. Each month you can expect:

- One virtual meeting with the entire cohort, which will be recorded if you cannot attend in real time. The meetings run from July to October 2025. (We may not meet in August).

- Some between-meeting work that we want you to focus on (e.g. reviewing resources, identifying current policies/procedures in your town, sharing findings at a commission meeting)
- Several optional, virtual opportunities to get additional help (e.g. one-on-one meetings and drop-in sessions with the SolSmart technical assistance team, small group discussions with peer communities)

If you are concerned about the time commitment, let us know. We can work with you to get the most out of this experience even if you can't follow the "normal" track.

## Does this cost anything?

No. This program is completely free. SolSmart technical assistance is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy.