



CITY OF HARRISONBURG PUBLIC WORKS

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Harrisonburg's hard work earns SolSmart Silver designation

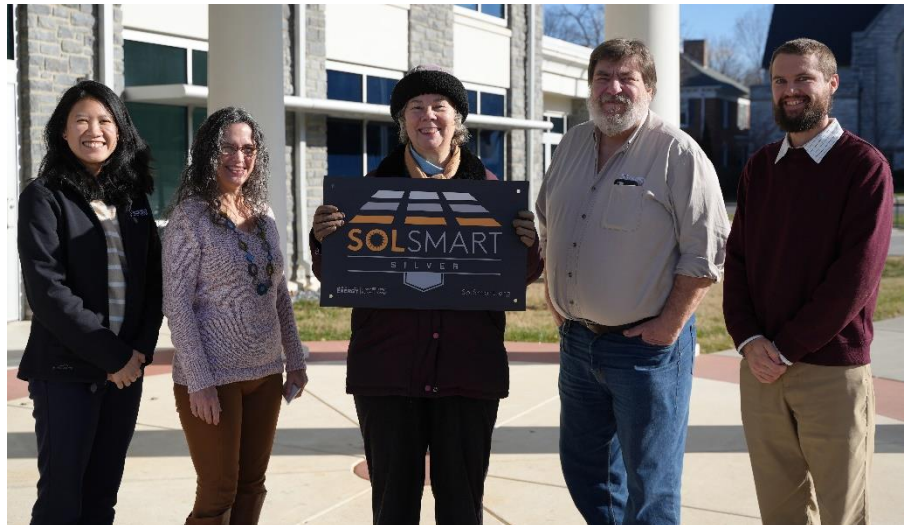
HARRISONBURG, Va. – The City of Harrisonburg has earned a new recognition as part of its work toward community resiliency and the natural environment – the SolSmart Silver designation.

SolSmart Silver acknowledges Harrisonburg for adopting nationally recognized best practices to advance solar market growth. To grow from the Bronze-level designation (earned by the City in 2022) to the Silver-level designation, Harrisonburg staff worked with SolSmart's no-cost technical assistance team to increase local understanding of solar energy so the entire community can benefit.

The recognition is a testament to the hard work of City staff to help further the goals of Harrisonburg City Council toward protecting the region's environment. The City's 2043 Vision Plan calls for Harrisonburg to prioritize protection of natural assets such as air, streams, mountains, trees and open space – in part through investments in sustainable assets and infrastructure. Additionally, the City's Environmental Action Plan outlines steps the City can take to implement sustainability visions and principles within the organization.

"We are excited for the advancement of SolSmart designation from Bronze to Silver - the Silver status celebrates Harrisonburg's support and participation in more sustainable practices by making it easier for the community to access these renewable energy resources," Harrisonburg Public Works Sustainability and Environmental Manager Keith Thomas said. "Participation in these efforts and programs make a positive impact on our environment and helps reduce our carbon footprint."

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. Nearly 500 cities,



(Above, from left) Harrisonburg Community Development Deputy Director Thanh Dang, Community Development Office Manager Nyrma Soffel, Harrisonburg City Council Vice Mayor Laura Dent, Community Development Building Official Mike Williams, and Harrisonburg Public Works Sustainability and Environmental Manager Keith Thomas with the SolSmart Silver plaque outside Harrisonburg City Hall.

towns, counties and regional organizations have achieved SolSmart designation since the program launched in 2016. To receive designation, organizations 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 and inspection processes, as well as planning and zoning procedures. SolSmart designees also develop innovations in areas such as community engagement, government operations and solar market development.

The City first achieved SolSmart Bronze designation after forming local and regional partnerships with other agencies interested in sustainability, and creating a solar webpage that featured an updated permitting process and the rollout of the SolarApp. The advancement to Silver was achieved by taking additional steps that include having Community Development Department Building Inspections staff complete training suggested by the SolSmart program that increased their knowledge of solar plan review and inspections. Also, a Zoning Determination letter that clarifies staff's interpretation of where solar PV can be installed by right is now posted on the City's website.

After the successful completion of solar panel installation to Harrisonburg City Public Schools Central Office and Bluestone Elementary earlier this year, Harrisonburg's Public Works department is looking forward to the installation of solar panels on the department's new administration building that is currently under construction.

The City plans to continue partnerships with organizations such as the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) and Solar United Neighbors on their solar campaigns and continue participation in promotional opportunities at local events such as the annual JMU Rocktown Energy Festival.

The City's Building Inspections staff plan to refresh their training every two years with a goal of making it as easy as possible to obtain permits to install roof mounted solar arrays while maintaining adherence to relevant codes.

*The **City of Harrisonburg** is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 55,700 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.*

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