

# FALCON HEIGHTS

## LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

### ENCOURAGING SOLAR ENERGY INSTALLATIONS BY REMOVING OBSTACLES IN THE LOCAL ORDINANCE

As a small community of about 5,000 people in 2 square miles, the City of Falcon Heights is supportive of solar energy as an important clean, natural, renewable energy source. In 2012, solar panels were installed on the roof of the City Hall and now solar accounts for 40- 60 percent of the building's power. In addition to having solar installations on this City-owned facility, the City encourages solar installations in its residential areas.

The City's comprehensive plan includes a goal of becoming a sustainable, energy efficient community and it promotes safe, effective and efficient use of solar energy systems to reduce consumption of fossil fuels. The comprehensive plan addresses the protection and development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems as required by the Metropolitan Land Planning Act and indicates that it will protect solar access by enforcing and strengthening its ordinance. The City discovered that their ordinance initially had unintended barriers for solar implementation and needed to be updated. The ordinance had solar access as a conditional use and the City wanted to develop better guiding standards.

Armed with good resources and examples, Falcon Heights modernized their solar energy ordinance, which included eliminating the requirement for a conditional use permit and made solar energy a permitted accessory use in all zones. The updated ordinances also provide for standards for setback, height, visibility, and location. In addition, it ensured a reasonable permit fee for solar installation and the City also signed up for a discount program that makes solar more affordable for its homeowners. The City ensured that the comprehensive plan language and zoning served as the foundation for implementation of solar to take place and takes protection of solar access into consideration for future development or redevelopment.

The resulting [solar ordinance](#) update was unanimously approved and without opposition. The updated ordinance has removed obstacles that could hinder the potential installation of residential solar panels and provides a streamlined process that is clear. Solar applications that meet the design requirements go through administrative approval. This small change was easy for the City and makes a big difference in helping to successfully implement solar within the City.

## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

**COUNTY: Ramsey**  
**POPULATION: 5,321**

Falcon Heights is home to:

- University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus
- University of Minnesota Research Farms
- Minnesota State Fairgrounds

### CONTACT THE CITY:

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### OTHER RESOURCES:

- Model Solar Ordinance
- Minnesota Solar Energy Challenge
- MetroClean Energy Resource Team
- Green StepCities
- Regional Indicators Initiative
- B3 Benchmarking



In 2012, Falcon Heights had solar panels installed on the roof of the City Hall. Solar power now account for 40-60% of City Hall power.



The City sees solar use as a long-term benefit for sustainability with reduced future cost.



The City has a 40k open system through Dakota Electric supplementing the utility. The City initially leased the panels and will own them in the future.

## WHAT MAY HELP OTHER COMMUNITIES?

### Good Resources

The City described the process of updating their solar ordinance as being easy and without conflict. Part of this was due to the valuable resources provided through [Minnesota Solar Energy Challenge](#), including a [model solar ordinance](#). The City used the model solar ordinance guide to determine which updates were needed. In addition, solar ordinance of neighboring communities were reviewed. City evaluated the updates to make sure the changes didn't create unintended conflicts. When developing the updated ordinance, the City found that it was important to have good definitions, including definitions for active and passive solar systems.

### DEBORAH JONES; FORMER PLANNING ZONING DIRECTOR

The change to remove barriers from our local solar ordinance was easy and without opposition.

### Education/Opportunities

To encourage solar installations, the City hosted workshops to share information about solar resources. These workshops were in partnership with the [MetroClean Energy Resource Team](#) and discussed basics of solar power systems, provided tools and information to residents and businesses about incentives and rebates for installing solar as well as common misperceptions. The workshops also included a panel of people that discussed how solar has worked for them. The City has been researching ways for residents in areas of limited solar access to participate in a cooperative solar garden.

### Partnerships/Participation

Partnerships and participation with [GreenStep Cities](#), [Regional Indicators Initiative](#), and [B3 Benchmarking](#) all contribute to the City's goals in the comprehensive plan of adopting and encouraging best practices to energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Falcon Heights was selected as one of five pilot cities participate in the Minnesota GreenStep Cities project, which helps cities achieve sustainability goals through the implementation of best practices focused on cost savings, energy use reduction, and innovation.

In addition, Falcon Heights was a pilot city for the Regional Indicators Initiative (RII), which measures annual performance metrics for 22 Minnesota cities committed to increasing their overall efficiency and level of sustainability. The Mayor has indicated the importance of being able to measure and track the City's efforts towards sustainability and greenhouse gas reduction to assess progress. The RII information can be used to determine which new policies or actions are needed to reach the next level of reducing a community's carbon footprint.



Solar panels are on the roof an apartment complex at Fairview and Larpenteur in Falcon Heights: Within the City there are solar installations on single-family, multi-family, and City-owned buildings.

The City also participates in the State of Minnesota's B3 Benchmarking, which is an energy tracking, benchmarking, and reporting system developed to help manage, improve, and monitor the energy efficiency of existing public buildings. This information is shared and communities can compare their buildings with others across the state. Falcon Heights City Hall with its solar panels, ranks well in its energy performance and scores. Participation in GreenStep Cities, RII, and B3 Benchmarking all contribute to achieving the City's sustainability and resiliency goals through implementation of best practices focused on cost savings, energy use reduction, and innovation.

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

- Step3 GreenStep City
- Regional Indicators Initiative Participant
- B3 Benchmarking Participant

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