

ITEM #: 16  
DATE: 01-28-25  
DEPT: ADMIN

## COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: ENERGY READY PROGRAMS: SOLSMART AND CHARGING SMART**

### **BACKGROUND:**

Energy Ready is a Department of Energy (DOE) funded technical assistance and recognition program administered by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), among many other supporting partners. The Energy Ready suite consists of three programs: SolSmart, Charging Smart, and Wind Smart.

**Energy Ready provides technical assistance to municipalities to streamline installation and reduce the soft costs of solar panels and electric vehicle (EV) charging. Soft costs in the City's purview to control include permitting, zoning, inspection, and interconnection. The program involves hands-on engagement with industry experts who will assist the City in identifying best practices and efficiencies to make it easier for residents and businesses to install solar and EV charging.**

Each program also maintains a set of scoring criteria that can result in a bronze, silver, gold, or platinum designation. Scoring is based on the best practices that are already in place or implemented throughout the program engagement. **Staff is seeking authorization to participate in the SolSmart and Charging Smart programs. There is no cost to participate in these programs.**

### **SOLSMART:**

In 2017, City staff participated in the SolSmart program and received a silver designation. This was a joint effort across multiple departments and resulted in process improvements, zoning text amendments, and overall more efficient procedures making it easier and cheaper to install private solar in Ames. Staff is seeking to build on the previous work done and achieve gold designation. Staff has met with SolSmart and reviewed the scoring criteria, and most requirements for gold designation have already been met through improvements implemented since 2017. SolSmart scoring categories include:

- Permitting and Inspection
- Planning & Zoning
- Government Operations
- Market Development
- Community Engagement

### **CHARGING SMART:**

Unlike SolSmart, Charging Smart is a new program and endeavor for Ames and it is unclear which level of designation the City will pursue. While staff has met with Charging Smart to learn about the program, formal engagement is initiated by approval of the attached commitment letter (Attachment A). Following formal approval, Charging Smart will evaluate Ames policies, procedures, and programs that impact the development of electric vehicle charging equipment. This includes a review of *Municipal Code* to identify any inadvertent barriers to EV charging, or any opportunities to further enable EV chargers. Charging Smart will present the results of this review and any recommendations to staff from City Manager's Office, Planning and Housing, Inspections, and Electric Services. Staff will evaluate the results and make an effort to implement best practices recommendations.

The engagement will also result in an EV charging landing page on the City website. This page will provide all relevant information needed for a local resident or organization seeking to install EV charging infrastructure. The Charging Smart scoring categories include:

- Planning and Zoning
- Regulation
- Utility Engagement
- Education and Incentives
- Government Operations
- Shared Mobility

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Authorize staff to participate in the Energy Ready suite of programs for SolSmart and Charging Smart.
2. Do not authorize staff to participate in the Energy Ready suite of programs.

**CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**Participation in the Energy Ready program for SolSmart and Charging Smart aligns with the Climate Action Plan by streamlining installation of solar and EV charging throughout Ames. Enabling solar will reduce GHG emissions and lower costs for residents. Additional availability of EV charging in Ames enables the transition to low-emissions transportation. There is no cost to the City for participation in the program.** Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

[Attachment A: Charging Smart Commitment Letter.pdf](#)