

# Mid-America Regional Council: Solar Ready KC Initiative

March 2013

Greater Kansas City, MO region  
Population: 1.9 million  
Size: 4,400 square miles  
[www.MARC.org](http://www.MARC.org)

Since 1971, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) has promoted regional cooperation and developed innovative solutions for the Kansas City bistate region. MARC's region encompasses nine counties and 119 cities, including Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte, and Ray counties in Missouri, and Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami, and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. MARC is the metropolitan planning organization for the bistate region, providing cooperative purchasing, professional development training, research, emergency services, workforce development, environmental and energy programs, and additional services to their local governments.

## MARC and Solar

Local governments in the Kansas City region, like many other regions across the nation, have a wide variety of policies and processes related to solar energy usage. According to *Freeing the Grid: Best Practices in State Net Metering Policies and Interconnection Procedures*, inconsistency is the enemy of clean energy development. It creates customer confusion, undermines renewable energy development and increases costs.

In 2012, The U.S. Department of Energy announced the SunShot Initiative Rooftop Solar Challenge project, which aimed to achieve measurable improvements in market conditions for rooftop photovoltaic (PV) nationwide. Based on the needs of the Kansas City (KC) region to reduce the inconsistencies in their permitting and planning processes, MARC formed a partnership with a consortium of city and county governments, Kansas City Power & Light (KCP&L) and solar industry experts to respond to the Rooftop Challenge project.

“Since 2009, MARC has taken the lead in planning for energy efficiency, conservation and renewable technologies in our region. Over these four years, the conversations have been rich in developing strategic alliances, identifying best practices and positioning the region for future advancements through regionally consistent codes, processes and policies. These solar market improvements are one of the most illustrative of how regional planning councils have an important role to play in assisting local governments in the implementation of innovative practices..”

– David Warm, Executive Director, MARC

MARC's project, formally called the Solar Ready KC Initiative, sought to establish best management practices (BMPs) to streamline permitting and planning processes, offer training sessions to broad and diverse audiences, conduct a financing options inventory and recruit additional jurisdictions to joining the project. The Solar Ready KC initiative also aimed to provide local government representatives with the latest information and best practices to prepare for policy and market changes and to position their communities and the region for this new renewable energy economy.

Solar Ready KC identified BMPs in two categories: permitting process improvements and planning improvements. Permitting process improvements (standardized permit fees, incorporating utility notification) are one of the fastest and most effective methods to facilitate solar installations. Planning improvements help organize and emphasize a jurisdiction's support of a building owner's right to use solar. Removing local ordinance barriers, adopting facilitating code, encouraging solar readiness and incentivizing solar acceptance in new development fosters a community that supports individual choice.



Solar Ready KC's BMPs include:

- Streamline permitting - creates a permit checklist summarizing the necessary regulatory steps and develops permit critical outlining thresholds for "standard" installations and streamline permitting processes accordingly.
- Standardization of permit fees - recommends a fixed fee based on cost recovery for residential PV permit applications and provides the PV Permit Fee Calculator for commercial rooftop systems.
- Notification of utility - recommends a notification process when permit applications are received and electrical inspections are complete, and to conduct joint inspections with local utility and jurisdictions.
- Pre-qualify plans and installers - recommends the development of a process for pre-qualification of standard plans and a process for pre-qualification of installers.
- Improvement of solar access - recommends the incorporation of solar access priorities in comprehensive plans and the adoption of solar access ordinances.
- Improvement in solar readiness - recommends the development of a solar ready building checklist for new construction and adoption of new ordinances / building codes to promote solar ready construction.
- Engage developers and homeowners associations - create incentives for the adoption of BMPs.

Local governments can commit to different levels of the BMPs according to the immediate needs, timing of policy reviews, etc. Introducing a non-binding resolution that can be adopted by city councils or board of commissioners is a simple step that endorses the concept of the solar best practices, while also documenting support for the region-wide effort. Overtime, consistency will be achieved, as cities and counties implement the various permitting and planning practices.

## Successes & Lessons Learned

Through Solar Ready KC, local governments in the Kansas City region adopted consistent building and energy codes. Currently, Missouri and Kansas solar resources far exceed those of Germany, which leads the world in solar energy production. By the end of 2013, over 20 local governments will have adopted



either the 2009 or 2012 ICC/IECC\* codes, covering three quarters of the region's population (estimated at 1.41 million). The impact of widely consistent building codes has provided and will continue to be the impetus for consistent solar-friendly permitting, planning and interconnection processes.

With significant economic impacts, solar permitting reform represents a compelling opportunity to stimulate economic activity and generate fiscal revenue. Sustained growth in the MARC region will require a proactive focus on policy, streamlined permitting and planning processes to reduce soft costs and prepare for the new economy.

*\*The International Energy Conservation Code addresses the design of energy-efficient buildings and installation of energy efficient systems.*

More information on MARC's Solar Ready KC Initiative can be found here:  
[http://marc.org/Environment/Energy/solar\\_ready\\_kc.html](http://marc.org/Environment/Energy/solar_ready_kc.html)



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### About the National Association of Regional Councils

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) serves as the national voice for regionalism by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues. NARC's member organizations are composed of multiple local governments that work together to serve American communities – large and small, urban and rural. For additional information, please visit [www.NARC.org](http://www.NARC.org).