



New Report Highlights Vast Potential for Large-Scale Solar in Southwest Virginia

Washington, D.C. and Norton, VA, December 16, 2020 – A new playbook for local governments will help Southwest Virginia communities develop large-scale solar energy projects, taking advantage of the region’s widespread and largely untapped potential for solar development.

The report, *Large-Scale Solar Development: A Playbook for Southwest Virginia*, will guide municipality and county governments that seek to facilitate large solar projects in their communities, bringing new opportunities for economic expansion and job growth. Southwest Virginia, a region with a long history of coal production, is primed for the expansion of solar energy with several major projects already underway.

This playbook was authored by The Solar Foundation in partnership with the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia. Funding was provided by the national SolSmart program, which has helped over 380 local governments reduce barriers to solar energy growth. Other partners include the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy (DMME) and the University of Virginia (UVA) Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. The Playbook was created as a part of a broader effort that was funded by GO Virginia’s Region One.

“The Solar Playbook that has been developed is priceless,” said **Ernie McFadden, chairperson of the Russell County Industrial Development Authority**. “Southwest Virginia has a long history in the energy sector and we are confident that solar energy will play an important role in the future. Working with great partners such as the Solar Workgroup, SolSmart, and The Solar Foundation, we hope to capitalize on our assets and build a significant solar presence in Southwest Virginia.”

The playbook includes a detailed, step-by-step guide for how municipalities and counties can encourage utility-scale or commercial solar projects in Virginia. It includes guidance on engaging stakeholders; identifying and resolving barriers; reviewing development proposals; and adopting local planning and zoning regulations to facilitate solar energy. It also offers an overview of the state and local permitting process for solar projects, along with information on local tax revenue options, financing incentives, and solar on brownfields and previously mined lands. The full playbook can be found at <https://swvasolar.org/swva-solar-playbook/>.

“The Solar Workgroup was formed to help jumpstart a locally rooted solar industry in Southwest Virginia to catalyze economic benefits,” said **Adam Wells, Regional Director of Community and Economic Development for Appalachian Voices, project lead and co-convenor of the Solar Workgroup**. “This tool helps to maximize local economic and social impact from large-scale solar, ensuring the coming wave of solar development benefits our communities as much as possible. We are grateful to GO Virginia

for funding the overall project, and to The Solar Foundation for their incredible work and investment in making this particular resource.”

Virginia is poised for very rapid growth in solar energy following the passage of several new state laws in 2020, including the Virginia Clean Economy Act, which sets new mandates for clean energy development. Other new laws offer new opportunities for local governments to reach agreements with solar developers that provide additional tax revenue, or fund important community priorities such as broadband development.

“The DMME is diligently working toward a Clean Energy Virginia across the Commonwealth and Southwest Virginia is an untapped market for increased renewable energy presence,” said **DMME Director John Warren**. “Our agency has been working in the region for decades with coal, natural gas, and mineral mining operators, and we have assets to bring to the table when it comes to ensuring that large-scale solar is deployed here.”

Currently, a number of large-scale solar energy projects are already under development in Southwest Virginia, including a 3.0 MW project on abandoned mineland that will power the Mineral Gap Data Center in Wise County. The Solar Workgroup recently announced a new industry partnership that aims to install 12 MW of commercial solar in the region by 2023, while providing new employment and training opportunities.

“We’re very proud to release this playbook as the latest tool from our SolSmart program to help local governments reduce barriers to solar energy growth,” said **Ed Gilliland, senior director at The Solar Foundation and co-author of the report**. “Southwest Virginia is a very promising region for solar development, and we hope this playbook will be a useful tool to help cities and counties take advantage of this outstanding economic opportunity.”

SolSmart is a national program led by The Solar Foundation and the International City/County Management Association, and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office. The program offers no-cost technical assistance to help cities, counties, and small towns achieve national designation for encouraging solar market growth.

In Virginia, DMME and the UVA Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service are serving as SolSmart Advisor organizations to communities across the state. Any municipality or county is eligible to join SolSmart and obtain no-cost technical assistance to achieve designation. More information for Virginia communities can be found at <https://dmme.virginia.gov/de/solsmart.shtml>.

About SolSmart

SolSmart is a national designation and technical assistance program that recognizes leading solar communities and empowers additional communities to expand their local solar markets. Funded by the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office, SolSmart strives to cut red tape, drive greater solar deployment, and make it possible for even more American homes and businesses to access solar energy to meet their electricity needs. More than 380 local governments in 41 states and the District of Columbia have achieved SolSmart designation, representing over 90 million Americans. SolSmart is led

by The Solar Foundation and the International City/County Management Association. Learn more at SolSmart.org.

About The Solar Foundation®

The Solar Foundation® is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to accelerate adoption of the world's most abundant energy source. Through its leadership, research, and capacity building, The Solar Foundation creates transformative solutions to achieve a prosperous future in which solar and solar-compatible technologies are integrated into all aspects of our lives. Learn more at TheSolarFoundation.org.

About the Solar Workgroup

The Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia comprises nonprofit and community action agencies, colleges, state agencies, planning district commissions and other interested citizens and businesses seeking to develop a robust renewable energy industry in the seven coalfield counties of Southwest Virginia. The workgroup was co-convened in 2016 by the UVA-Wise [Office of Economic Development & Engagement](#), [People Inc.](#), and [Appalachian Voices](#), with facilitation assistance from [Dialogue + Design Associates](#). Additional background information is available at www.swvasolar.org.

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