

Good afternoon, Environment Committee,

We'll be discussing a few timely topics at our next meeting on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Meeting Details**

**Date:** Tuesday, April 18th

**Time:** 10-11:30 a.m.

**Registration:** Please register in advance for the Zoom meeting with the link sent to Committee members.

### **Updated SolSmart Program**

We'll hear from the SolSmart team about the expansion of its [SolSmart program](#) to support and recognize local governments across the country who are taking steps to reduce barriers to solar energy access. The expanded program adds a new Platinum-level designation for the most forward-looking communities, establishes new priorities around support for disadvantaged communities, and sets a goal of designating 500 new communities by 2027. Today, nearly 500 local governments nationwide have achieved SolSmart designation at one of three levels (Gold, Silver, or Bronze) based on their level of accomplishment. [Illinois leads the nation](#) with 59 SolSmart designees. The SolSmart program has also extended its designation criteria to include solar plus battery storage, codes and standards, innovative financing, and data collection and metrics.

This presentation will be of interest to communities who have not achieved SolSmart designation and also to local governments who have achieved designation, but would like to level up and learn about the updated program.

### **Renewable Energy Siting**

Another presentation will be from the Great Plains Institute (GPI), who will discuss [The Renewable Energy Siting Campaign](#), a new partnership between GPI and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The campaign engages diverse stakeholders to identify "win-win" synergies that push clean energy development forward across the Midwest while preserving community values, protecting natural resources, and benefiting agricultural systems.

GPI is actively engaging a variety of Illinois energy and non-energy stakeholders around renewable energy siting including counties, agricultural advocates, and environmental and conservation organizations. They'll discuss working within the parameters of the new statewide siting legislation and standards, and framing the conversation around the opportunities to revise the model ordinance to reflect both the new standards and community priorities. GPI is also engaging stakeholders in discussions around renewable energy as a component of the federal and state funding available for mine land reclamation, and around the questions of integrating renewable siting and site design with agricultural protection and issues of rural economic base.

## **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Planning and Reporting**

ESG is a framework that helps stakeholders manage risks and opportunities related to environmental, social, and governance criteria. ESG uniquely affects local governments, both in terms of material risks and opportunities, because they are responsible for providing essential public services and infrastructure that are directly linked to residents' quality of life.

Environmental risks include natural disasters and climate change, with increasing compliance requirements and associated insurance costs. Social risks arise from income inequality and community safety, which affect social welfare costs and decreased tax revenues. Governance risks include transparency and accountability, which impact public trust. Unlike corporations, municipalities cannot relocate or easily diversify their operations to mitigate risks, making it critical for them to adopt sustainable and responsible practices in a proactive manner. ESG practices can have significant economic benefits for municipalities, such as increased resilience to climate-related risks. Municipalities must first create an ESG strategy, then learn about the reporting landscape, and next engage in ESG financing best practices to attract investment.

The College of Business Administration at University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is planning a two-day course on ESG focused on Illinois municipal decision makers. Instructors Lisa Bonnett, former Illinois EPA Director and Adjunct Professor, and Selva Nadarajah, Associate Professor, will present information on the ESG municipal market, give an overview of the course, discuss how to get involved, and be interested in the Environment Committee's feedback.