



Legislation Text

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Date: May 16, 2019

To: Members of the Planning Commission

From: Scott Tempel, City Planner

Discussion on changes to Dark Sky regulations

Action Requested:

The Planning Commission hears a presentation from the EQC and provides input on the ordinance.

Summary Report:

The City of Northfield supports Dark Sky values and policies. According to the International Dark Sky Association, light pollution is a serious problem:

What is Light Pollution?

Most of us are familiar with air, water, and land pollution, but did you know that light can also be a pollutant?

The inappropriate or excessive use of artificial light - known as light pollution - can have serious environmental consequences for humans, wildlife, and our climate. Components of light pollution include:

- **Glare** - excessive brightness that causes visual discomfort
- **Skyglow** - brightening of the night sky over inhabited areas
- **Light trespass** - light falling where it is not intended or needed
- **Clutter** - bright, confusing and excessive groupings of light sources

Light pollution is a side effect of industrial civilization. Its sources include building exterior and interior lighting, advertising, commercial properties, offices, factories, streetlights, and illuminated sporting venues.

The fact is that much outdoor lighting used at night is inefficient, overly bright, poorly targeted, improperly shielded, and, in many cases, completely unnecessary. This light, and the electricity used to create it, is being wasted by spilling it into the sky, rather than focusing it on to the actual objects and areas that people want illuminated.

Northfield is also home to the Goodsell Observatory at Carleton College, which is very sensitive to light pollution.

In response, the City has adopted Outdoor Lighting Standards in the Land Development Code.

It is the purpose of these lighting standards to recognize the values as expressed by the International Dark Sky Association and implement lighting standards that will serve to enhance the value of dark sky and minimize ambient lighting to the degree possible. These regulations are intended to minimize the spillover of light and glare on operators of motor vehicles, pedestrians, and land uses in the proximity of the light source. With respect to motor vehicles in particular, safety considerations form the basis of the regulations contained in this section. In other cases, both the nuisance and hazard aspects of glare are the basis for these regulations.

The Environmental Quality Commission has been studying ways to improve the Dark Sky policies. Current regulations only cover new developments going through site plan review and do not address color temperature. Nor do the standards address street lighting, spillover from indoor sources or smaller development projects. The EQC is proposing changes to several codes involving lighting and is ready to involve the Planning Commission in review and implementation.