



MEMORANDUM

P.O. Box 4100 ♦ FRISCO, COLORADO 80443

TO: MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL
FROM: EMMA HETH, PLANNER I
KATIE KENT, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
RE: WORK SESSION DARK SKY LIGHTING
DATE: MARCH 26, 2024

Summary and Background: Local dark sky advocates reached out to Town staff in 2023 to encourage the Town to consider pursuing an International Dark Sky Community certification through DarkSky International. Several mountain communities, including Crestone, Ridgway, and Westcliffe, are certified. Other municipalities are working on their certification, including Breckenridge, Estes Park, and Durango.

Town staff met with local dark sky advocates in January 2024 to learn more about the certification and potential paths forward. Given the requirements involved in certification, staff concluded that an outreach and education campaign encouraging voluntary compliance would be a good place to start.

A DarkSky certification would involve additional regulations on outdoor lighting and require all lighting to come into compliance within 10 years. To pursue a certification, the first step would be to submit a request to join the DarkSky International application “pipeline,” costing \$250. Once in the pipeline, the Town would be eligible for technical assistance from the State of Colorado and nonprofit DarkSky Colorado.

At the March 26, 2024 work session, Staff is seeking feedback from Council regarding a proposed outreach campaign and strategy for promoting dark-sky lighting. Specific discussion points include:

- Does the Council support an outreach campaign to promote dark skies and dark-sky compliant lighting?
- Does the Council support pursuing a Dark Sky Community certification by entering the application pipeline and accessing technical assistance?

Analysis: Dark skies improve bird migration, human sleep cycles, energy efficiency, and more. Glare from exposed light fixtures and excessive light can worsen safety and security. In addition, many visitors to Frisco appreciate seeing stars that may not be visible in urban areas. Increasing compliance with DarkSky International’s guidelines – whether through voluntary compliance, code amendments, or certification – would improve dark sky visibility. If certified, Frisco could use the Dark Sky Community status in marketing materials.

The Frisco Unified Development Code currently supports outdoor lighting that is appropriate for the visual task, safety, and security while minimizing the undesirable effects of excessive illumination, such as glare, sky glow, and light pollution. Current code requires exterior light fixtures to be fully shielded to minimize light projecting upward or onto neighboring properties and encourages other steps to extinguish outdoor lights when not in use.

Pursuing a Dark Sky Community certification would involve code amendments to require soft color lightbulbs; extinguishing outdoor lights at night and/or outside business hours; and motion sensors, timers, and/or curfews. A code enforcement officer would need to work at night to enforce the changes. The Town would retrofit all publicly owned lighting within 5 years, and all private lighting would need to comply within 10 years. For reference, Breckenridge's multi-year plan for certification and compliance is estimated to cost \$3.6 million ([Summit Daily article, 9/30/23](#)).

Before pursuing a Dark Sky Community certification, code amendments, and enforcement, staff recommend an outreach campaign to build community support for the effort and encourage voluntary compliance. Outreach efforts could include events at the Historic Park, flyers for homeowners, information passed out in schools, and identifying locations in town for optimal dark-sky viewing. If Council wants to pursue a certification, the Town could enter the application pipeline in 2024 to potentially access the [Colorado Dark Sky Certification Mentor Program](#) in 2025.

Points for the Council to consider:

- Building community support through an outreach campaign would improve Frisco's dark skies and prepare the community for future code amendments and potential certification.
- If Council is interested in pursuing a certification, entering the DarkSky International certification pipeline opens access to technical assistance to support staff with assessing lighting infrastructure and darkness levels in the community.

Financial Impact: A specific financial impact has not been determined; however, for 2024, the anticipated financial impact will be the \$250 application fee (if the Council directs Staff to pursue) and marketing dollars that are yet to be determined but will fall within the 2024 approved budget.

If Council wishes to pursue a Dark Sky Community certification, there is a \$250 application fee. Compliance would have associated costs in future years to retrofit public lighting and enforce new codes.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: The recently adopted 2023-2026 Strategic Plan includes the strategic objective "We provide progress-driven Quality Core Services" through the following pillars:

- Environmental stewardship and reducing the effects of climate change
- Maintaining and enhancing infrastructure
- Providing essential public safety services

Dark sky-friendly outdoor lighting supports Frisco's Quality Core Services by improving Frisco's environmental stewardship and enhancing our public infrastructure to improve safety and quality of life for residents and wildlife.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends increasing the community's awareness of the importance of dark skies through education over the next few months. After the Comprehensive Plan is completed, and further direction is provided, then the Town could consider moving forward with implementation through becoming certified and/or making modifications to the outdoor lighting regulations in Town Code, Chapter 180.

Reviews and Approvals: This report has been reviewed and approved by:

Diane McBride, Assistant Town Manager
Tom Fisher, Town Manager
Leslie Edwards, Finance Director

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – International Dark Sky Community Program Guidelines