



(https://use1.smartadserver.com/click?

imgid=40127138&insid=12594985&pgid=1350201&fmtid=34984&ckid=802291598668880476&uii=41095543294180467&acd=1740601f  
down-the-lights-and-turn-up-conservation-  
benefits%2f&cappid=802291598668880476&scriptid=99057&opid=ea62c16d-f7ea-465f-b345-  
1b84e5830c87&opdt=1740601863707&bldv=2676&eqs=a8bd115f993d89858ce8ea931a84ad3e421504b7&go=https%3a%2f%2fshop.pla



[Join \(/join/\)](#)

[Log In \(/login/?next=/planning/2024/apr/turn-down-the-lights-and-turn-up-conservation-benefits/\)](#)



MENU

Enter keyword or phrase

Search

[Home \(/\)](#) > [Knowledge Center \(/knowledgecenter/\)](#) > [APA Publications \(/publications/\)](#) > [Planning Magazine \(/planning/\)](#) >

PLANNING MAGAZINE

# Turn Down the Lights and Turn Up Conservation Benefits

*How a Florida city became the state's first DarkSky-certified community through planning leadership, thoughtful policy creation, and ongoing community engagement.*

[INNOVATIONS \(/PLANNING/SECTION/INNOVATIONS/\)](#) ENVIRONMENT



The Milky Way shines brightly in Groveland, Florida, thanks to the city's efforts fighting light pollution. Photo by Steven Miller/Steven Miller Photography.

**April 11, 2024**

By REBECCA SUSMARSKI

Groveland, Florida, lives by its brand — the "city with natural charm." Located 30 miles west of Orlando in a county with hundreds of lakes, the eco-agrarian city of about 24,000 people prioritizes (<https://groveland-fl.gov/514/Conservation>) preservation of its natural resources. In 2017, the growing city added protecting its view of the night sky to the list of conservation efforts.

To curb light pollution from new residential developments, advocates negotiated for a developer of a housing project to install outdoor lighting fixtures in accordance with standards set by DarkSky International (<https://darksky.org/>), a recognized worldwide authority on light-pollution mitigation. DarkSky recommends (<https://darksky.org/what-we-do/darksky-approved/>) lighting fixtures be fully shielded to direct light downward and reduce the amount of light thrown upward toward the sky.

But continued community interest in DarkSky practices drove the city to embark on a larger initiative to achieve DarkSky certification (awarded if the city mandates responsible outdoor lighting practices), which Groveland included as a conservation goal in its 2022 strategic plan. The three-year initiative culminated in the city becoming Florida's first (<https://darksky.org/news/city-of-groveland-named-first-international-dark-sky-community-in-florida/>) International Dark Sky Community last June.

Andrew Landis — then the city's planning and zoning division manager and currently the conservation and strategic initiatives division manager — led the DarkSky initiative with help from community members. The result was an adaptable model for light-pollution mitigation rooted in thoughtful policy creation and widespread community engagement.

"I think what makes Groveland's initiative unique is the community support that we've had throughout," Landis says. That buy-in was no accident. "We've fostered a lot of that. We've gone to great lengths to continually educate the community, to build a base of community support."

## Using the 'best of the best'

Landis found early supporters in Marty Proctor, a Groveland resident and DarkSky advocate, and Steven Miller, chapter director for DarkSky's Central Florida chapter. Miller proved key in helping to develop Groveland's new lighting ordinance ([https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/community\\_development\\_code?nodeId=ART7DASKLI\\_S7.3LIST](https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/community_development_code?nodeId=ART7DASKLI_S7.3LIST)), which was designed to be a model for other communities across the country. Landis and Miller researched 24 ordinances from around the world to create a modern, holistic policy that featured "the best of the best" standards, Landis says.

Landis and Miller wanted it to reflect advancements in technology and remove outdated standards. For instance, they wanted to create defined lighting standards for streetlights, which DarkSky International says produce most of the light pollution on the planet. But some of the older ordinances Landis and Miller found exempted streetlights from DarkSky standards in accordance with recommended practice and available technology at the time. Other cities' ordinances — like Santa Fe, New Mexico's — only required streetlights to have basic shielding, whereas Groveland's streetlight standards include color temperature specifications and light-trespass limitations.



A downtown building has fully shielded, low-Kelvin streetlights to protect the night sky. Photos by Steven Miller Photography.



Streetlights in new residential developments in Groveland, Florida, are now required to meet DarkSky International requirements.

"We were kind of judging [the ordinances] in terms of their progressiveness, but also, different-sized municipalities have different needs," Landis says. "Some of these small towns might not have [many] streetlights because they're so rural."

Groveland's comprehensive ordinance defines permitted light levels for development across categories — from general types, such as residential and industrial, to specific-use developments like athletic fields and greenhouses. Landis and Miller took inspiration for the latter from parts of Canada and the Netherlands.

"[Groveland] really wanted to do something all-encompassing to cover all angles so that no matter how the city grows, at least on the lighting side of things, it's covered, and it can grow responsibly," Miller says.

Meanwhile, as part of the DarkSky International certification process, Groveland needed to educate its residents about the causes of light pollution and how DarkSky lighting standards and fixtures could help mitigate it.

"It's not intuitive that you can make lighting something fun or worth discussing," Landis says. "So, how we do that in different, unique ways is really what has gotten the community involved."

For example, DarkSky recommends low-level, warm-colored, and fully shielded lights aimed at specific locations only at times when the light is needed. The benefits of DarkSky-compliant lighting include reduced glare at night, which improves safety for drivers and nondrivers; greater protection for wildlife, including birds and sea turtles threatened by unnatural light at night; and lower energy costs.

To drive those points home, Landis turned to visual aids to show the difference between how the night sky used to look compared to today. During virtual workshops, Landis, Miller, and Proctor also used maps that showed the intensity of light pollution in different parts of Florida based on the Bortle scale, which measures the sky's brightness.



A requirement of the DarkSky International certification process, Groveland hosts community outreach programs — like the Star Party held earlier this year — to educate the public about light pollution and the importance of preserving the night sky. Photo by Mike Fried/Sonacity Photography.

But the most effective visual aid was the night sky itself. Earlier this year, Groveland hosted a [Star Party \(https://grovelandstarparty.com/\)](https://grovelandstarparty.com/), an outdoor event Landis coordinated that drew around 1,000 attendees. Jessica Ulloa, public works administrative coordinator for Oakland, Florida, attended to gain inspiration for her town's DarkSky initiative. She was "wowed" when she saw the contrast between Groveland's dark night sky and the more polluted sky over nearby Clermont — without needing a telescope.

"Just showing what the sky can be and what it is compared to, I feel like that's important in showing the effects of pollution," Ulloa says. "I come from Miami, and we have no stars out there. I'm just so used to the sky being lit up that I didn't think anything of it."

The education didn't focus on just the adults in the community. When Proctor volunteered at the Star Party, he says kids came up to him and told him what they knew about DarkSky lighting and the negative effects of light pollution. It left him overjoyed.

"I've never had that experience before," he says. "The message is getting out. ... Something's working, and I'm not going to stop [promoting DarkSky], because something's working."

## 'An ongoing commitment'

Landis says "easily a dozen" Florida communities have reached out for guidance on either achieving DarkSky certification or crafting lighting ordinances, including Oakland, which hopes to become Florida's second International Dark Sky Community. Ulloa hopes that Oakland and Groveland working together will start a cascade of other Florida communities becoming certified to make the sky as dark as what she saw in Groveland at the Star Party.

In the meantime, Landis continues to work with community partners to address light-pollution mitigation in Groveland.

"It didn't end with the certification," Landis says. "It really *began* with the certification, because it really is an ongoing commitment."

---

Rebecca Susmarski is an award-winning journalist and advocate for stronger, healthier communities.

---

## RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



### INNOVATIONS

Why Urban Canopies Are Growing as Key Climate Infrastructure (</planning/2023/summer/why-urban-canopies-are-growing-as-key-climate-infrastructure/>)

**July 13, 2023**



### INTERSECTIONS

The Year Earth Changed Offers Environmental Lessons and Optimism (</planning/2022/winter/the-year-earth-changed-offers-environmental-lessons-and-optimism/>)

**Jan. 7, 2022**



### INNOVATIONS

Green Means Go: Seattle's AI Solution to Reduce Stoplight Idling (</planning/2024/mar/green-means-go-seattles-ai-solution-to-reduce-stoplight-idling/>)

**March 14, 2024**



### TOOLS

5 Housing Trends Planners Can Influence Now (</planning/2023/summer/5-housing-trends-planners-can-influence-now/>)

**Aug. 10, 2023**

SIGN UP FOR PLANNING EMAILS

Receive Planning featured articles and recent content in your inbox

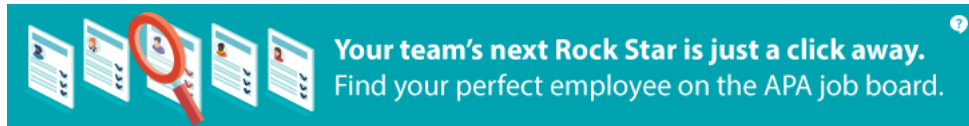
**Subscribe**  
(/planning/email/)



DOWNLOAD PLANNING MAGAZINE

Access the most recent issue. Download the digital version now.



**Log in to download**  
(<https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9303411/>)



**Your team's next Rock Star is just a click away.**  
Find your perfect employee on the APA job board.

([https://use1.smartadserver.com/click?  
imgid=39988408&insid=12551244&pgid=1350201&fmtid=34985&ckid=2333844985497300870&uii=5211583546885347070&acd=1740-down-the-lights-and-turn-up-conservation-benefits%2f&cappid=2333844985497300870&scriptid=98681&opid=6ce51467-5158-4e60-9a39-0c441724bc37&opdt=1740601863707&bldv=2830&eqs=f79cdc367d83d1fd18329b04ec685798795bdae0&go=https%3a%2f%2fplanning.org](https://use1.smartadserver.com/click?imgid=39988408&insid=12551244&pgid=1350201&fmtid=34985&ckid=2333844985497300870&uii=5211583546885347070&acd=1740-down-the-lights-and-turn-up-conservation-benefits%2f&cappid=2333844985497300870&scriptid=98681&opid=6ce51467-5158-4e60-9a39-0c441724bc37&opdt=1740601863707&bldv=2830&eqs=f79cdc367d83d1fd18329b04ec685798795bdae0&go=https%3a%2f%2fplanning.org))

 (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanPlanningAssociation>)  (<https://www.youtube.com/user/AmericanPlanningAssn>)  ([https://twitter.com/APA\\_Planning](https://twitter.com/APA_Planning))

 (<http://instagram.com/americanplanningassociation>)  (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/24456/>)



**Back to Top**

[Log In \(/login/?next=\)](/login/?next=/) [Contact Us \(/customerservice/\)](/customerservice/) [Privacy Policy \(/apaatagrance/privacy.htm\)](/apaatagrance/privacy.htm)

© 2025 APA. All Rights Reserved (</apaatagrance/copyright.htm>) | [Privacy Policy \(https://planning.org/privacy/\)](https://planning.org/privacy/) | [Advertise \(/advertise/\)](/advertise/)