



Agenda Item Report

Legislative Board: City Council
Date: May 19, 2026
Contact: Will Parrish
Agenda Item ID / Number: 2026-396- / J.5

ITEM TITLE: Presentation with the potential for City Council to provide direction regarding the Dark Sky Friendly initiative (Development Services Assistant Director Will Parrish) [PUBLIC TESTIMONY]

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff will provide a presentation and update regarding the Dark Sky Certification process.

DarkSky International works to restore the nighttime environment and protect communities from the harmful effects of light pollution through outreach, advocacy, and conservation.

The State of Texas recognizes Dark Sky International and the Legislature has tied certification efforts to municipal regulation of outdoor lighting.

The City of Buda's established Dark Sky Certification as an element of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Action Plan for implementation.

- Goal 1: Community
 - Objective 6: Maintain a forward thinking outlook on sustainability and resilience
 - Strategy 10: Complete the International Dark Sky Association's (IDA) application process to become a certified International Dark Sky Community, then adjust codes and ordinances accordingly

2. BACKGROUND/HISTORY

This discussion item was requested by Councilmember Monica Davidson.

The Dark Sky initiative began in 2016 when the City Council created the Sustainability Committee. The City established new lighting regulations as part of the 2017 UDC. The lighting ordinance was substantially modified in 2020 to meet the standards in place at the time.

The 2021 Texas Legislative session restricted the authority of municipalities to regulate outdoor lighting except for ordinances adopted by a governmental entity that is already certified as a Dark Sky Community by the International Dark-Sky Association or one that had declared it is seeking this designation, or an entity authorized to regulate outdoor lighting around a large observatory or military installation (see memo from City Attorney attached).

- The City's first application was submitted in 2021. Since that original application, the City has been in discussions with DSI to work through amendments to the code in order to achieve status.
- The City of Buda previously amended the lighting standards of Section 2.09.12 in 2020 and 2024 and 4.02.05(F) Sign Standards in 2025 in order to seek the Dark Sky Community designation. Additionally, the 2024 Comprehensive Plan identified Certification as an element

of the implementation Action Plan

At the April 15, 2025 City Council Meeting, City Council expressed concern with one of the standards, which required that signs may only be illuminated during the time that the associated activity is taking place, and that commercial signage must be extinguished during the hours that a business is closed.

- Council Members expressed concern that there would be a negative impact to business owners due to the reduced ability to advertise at night.

Staff has been working with representatives from the International Dark-Sky Association to resolve conflicts between the last Dark Sky Certification Standards and the desire to protect the ability of commercial interests to advertise at night, consistent with the investments they have already made in their signage.

In response to our discussions, Dark Sky International has proposed a Pilot program with the City of Buda for a new Dark Sky's International Certification for Cities that are negatively impacted by the light pollution from adjacent communities.

Proposed new Certification would have:

- Reduced requirements for regular annual reporting;
- Allow for business to keep signs illuminated outside of business hours; and
- Allow for private lighting fixtures to come into compliance as the existing fixtures age out, rather than at a fixed point in the future

3. ANALYSIS

Please refer to presentation.

International Dark Sky Association: <https://darksky.org/what-we-do/international-dark-sky-places/dark-sky-places-faq/>

From the IDA:

International Dark Sky Communities

A town, city, municipality, or other legally organized community (such as urban neighborhoods and subdivisions) that has shown exceptional dedication to the preservation of the night sky through the implementation and enforcement of quality lighting policies, dark sky education, and citizen support of the ideal of dark skies.

Eligibility criteria

Management — The Community will coordinate with the local level of authority to write and adopt a [lighting policy](#). Unincorporated or otherwise informally organized communities are eligible for Community status if their governing jurisdictions enact public policy consistent with the requirements of the Community Guidelines and which are legally binding in at least the territory of the community.

Nighttime public access — Outreach events are made available to both residents and visitors to the Community.

Night sky quality — There are no night sky quality requirements for a Community. However, the Community will still participate in monitoring night sky quality to assess changes in this resource and as a way to further drive community engagement.

Resources

The Community demonstrates its commitment to dark skies and quality lighting by:

1. [Retrofitting all publicly owned lighting within five years](#)
2. Encouraging residents and businesses to participate in the dark sky movement with the use of, for example, flyers, events, informative websites, public service announcements, and funding of lighting upgrades
3. Providing examples of success in light pollution control with private lighting or new development
4. Presenting opportunities to learn about and engage with the night sky

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

The City will have costs to retrofit publicly owned lighting that is non-compliant. The City has been slowly retrofitting lights with compliant lighting as fixtures need replacing.

5. STRATEGIC PLAN/GOALS

EXCEPTIONAL CITY SERVICES

6. STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES

Deliver City services consistent with our City of Buda mission and core values

7. PROS AND CONS

Pros: Certification will allow the City to regulate outdoor lighting within City Limits:

- Reducing light pollution
- Conserve energy and resources
- Safeguard human health and wellness
- Limiting Sky Glow
- Reducing glare
- Limiting light trespass
- Protect nocturnal habitats
- Limit impacts on bird migration, insect populations, and trees.

Cons:

- Existing businesses will need to replace outdoor lighting with dark sky compliant lighting as fixtures need replacing
- City will have to update all public fixtures within 5-10 years (this process has already been underway for several years)

8. ALTERNATIVES

The City has taken strides to meet the

9. REQUESTED ACTION / SUGGESTED MOTION / RECOMMENDATION

Attachments:

5.19.26 City Council Presentation Final.pdf
Buda, TX IDA Application 2026_Criteria Summary.pdf
2024-50 UDC Lighting Amendments_202604201712092565.pdf
2025-27 UDC amendment - Signage to conform with International Dark Sky regulations (2).pdf
2021-R-19 Certified Dark Sky Resolution.pdf
2020-33 UDC 2.09.12 Lighting - dark sky.pdf