

DarkSky Neighborhood Recognition Program

HOA Procedure & Audit Tool

A Step-by-Step Guide for Homeowners Associations

Produced by Kerr County Friends of the Night Sky. Aligned with DarkSky International, DarkSky Texas & Lighting Zone Standards

About This Guide

This guide is designed to help any Homeowners Association (HOA) — regardless of lighting expertise — understand, evaluate, and improve outdoor lighting to meet the standards of DarkSky International's recognition framework. Following this guide will position your community to dramatically reduce light pollution while improving safety, protecting wildlife, and preserving the beauty of the night sky.

The guide incorporates the Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting (DarkSky International & IES), DarkSky Texas guidance, Texas regulatory context, current Lighting Zone (LZ) standards, and the DarkSky Model HOA Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions (CC&Rs) framework.

No engineering degree required. If you can walk your neighborhood with a clipboard, you can use this tool.

Version 1.0 | Based on DarkSky International Guidelines (updated 2025)

Sources: darksky.org | darkskytexas.org |

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Section 1: Understanding DarkSky International

1.1 What is DarkSky International?

DarkSky International (formerly the International Dark-Sky Association, or IDA) is the world's leading authority on light pollution. Founded in 1988, the organization works to protect the night sky through education, advocacy, and recognition programs that promote responsible outdoor lighting.

Light pollution — the brightening of the night sky caused by artificial lighting — affects human health, disrupts wildlife, wastes energy, and diminishes our connection to the natural night sky. DarkSky's mission is practical: good lighting is achievable, and communities of all sizes can make a meaningful difference.

Why does this matter for your HOA?

Over-lit or poorly aimed outdoor lighting is the #1 cause of neighborhood light pollution. HOAs are uniquely positioned to implement community-wide standards that protect health, save energy, and preserve the natural environment — all while reducing neighbor disputes over light trespass.

1.2 The Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting

In 2020, DarkSky International and the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) jointly published the Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting. These principles are the foundation of all DarkSky programs. They are intentionally simple — no technical expertise required.

1

USEFUL | Only light what needs lighting

Ask whether a light is truly needed before installing it. Consider how it will impact people, animals, and the surrounding area. If the purpose is unclear, the light may not be necessary.

2

TARGETED | Direct light only where needed

Use fully shielded or "full cutoff" fixtures that aim light downward, not upward or sideways. Light that escapes beyond its intended area creates glare, trespass, and sky glow.

3

LOW LEVEL | No brighter than necessary

Use the lowest effective light level for the task. Brighter is not always better — excessive brightness reduces visibility and wastes energy. Reflective surfaces can amplify light, so be mindful of your surroundings.

4

CONTROLLED | Only when it's needed

Install timers, motion sensors, or dimming controls so lights are active only when needed. Lighting that runs all night when no one is present is a key driver of light pollution.

5

WARM-COLORED | Limit blue-white light

Choose LED fixtures with a color temperature of 3,000 Kelvin (K) or lower — these emit warm, amber-toned light. Blue-white light (above 4,000K) is more disruptive to wildlife, human sleep patterns, and night sky visibility.

1.3 Recognition Pathways for HOAs

Understanding DarkSky International recognition pathways helps your HOA choose the right goal:

Pathway	Description	HOA Eligible?	Status
International Dark Sky Community	Formal recognition for legally organized communities (towns, cities, HOA-governed neighborhoods) that adopt and enforce a quality outdoor lighting ordinance.	Yes — if HOA governing body can adopt binding lighting rules	Active (current best path)
Model HOA CC&Rs	DarkSky's model Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions for HOAs — less formal, but establishes community standards. Approved by DarkSky's Public Policy Committee.	Yes — primary tool for most HOAs	Active (recommended first step)
Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment (HOLA)	Individual property self-certification program from DarkSky. Each homeowner assesses their own lights using the Five Principles checklist and can receive a 'Dark Sky Friendly' decal.	Yes — individual homes within HOA	Active (great community engagement tool)

Texas Note from DarkSky Texas

Texas law restricts municipal authority to regulate outdoor lighting — EXCEPT for communities already certified or actively seeking International Dark Sky Community designation, or those authorized to regulate lighting near large observatories or military installations. This makes pursuing DarkSky recognition especially valuable for Texas HOAs and municipalities.

The Texas Model Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (available at darkskytexas.org) meets the requirements for IDA's International Dark Sky Community nomination and is an excellent reference for CC&R language.

Section 2: Lighting Zones — Where Does Your HOA Fit?

2.1 What Are Lighting Zones?

"Lighting Zones" (LZ) are a standard framework developed by the International Commission on Illumination (CIE) and adopted by DarkSky International and the IES (Illuminating Engineering Society). They describe the desired ambient light level of a given area — not what exists today, but what the community wants to achieve.

Lighting zones are used to set appropriate standards for lighting intensity, control requirements, and permissible uplight. Most single-family residential HOAs fall in LZ1 or LZ2. Understanding your zone helps you select the right audit thresholds and CC&R language.

Zone	Level	Typical Areas	HOA Relevance
LZ0	No Ambient Light	Wilderness, dark sky preserves, areas near observatories. No permanent lighting expected.	Unlikely for most HOAs; applicable near observatories (e.g., West Texas)
LZ1	Low Ambient	Single- & two-family residential, rural town centers, business parks with limited nighttime activity.	MOST residential HOAs should target LZ1 as minimum standard
LZ2	Moderate Ambient	Multifamily residential, schools, churches, hospitals, mixed-use neighborhoods with evening activity.	Appropriate for denser HOA developments or those with amenity facilities
LZ3	Moderately High	Commercial corridors, town centers, high-use recreational facilities, regional shopping areas.	Generally NOT appropriate for residential HOA neighborhoods
LZ4	High Ambient	High-intensity entertainment or commercial districts. Special cases only.	Not appropriate for residential HOAs

Recommendation for Most Residential HOAs

Target LZ1 (Low Ambient Lighting) as your community standard. This allows lighting for safety, security, and convenience while protecting the natural night environment. All common area lighting, street lighting, and CC&R requirements should be calibrated to LZ1 unless your HOA includes significant commercial or multi-family components.

2.2 Quick Self-Assessment: Identify Your Zone

Answer these questions to confirm the most appropriate lighting zone for your HOA:

Question	Recommendation
• Is your community primarily single-family or two-family homes?	LZ1 is your baseline target.
• Does your HOA include a clubhouse, pool, or similar amenity with evening programming?	That specific area may warrant LZ2; the rest remains LZ1.
• Are you within or near a rural or semi-rural area, or in proximity to a state or national park?	Consider LZ1 strictly, or even LZ0 for any undeveloped open areas within the HOA.
• Are you near a major observatory (e.g., McDonald Observatory in West Texas)?	CIE guidelines recommend LZ0 or LZ1 within 100 km of major optical observatories.

Section 3: Phase 1 — Getting Started

3.1 Form Your DarkSky Committee

DarkSky recognition begins with motivated people, not technical experts. You need a small group willing to walk the neighborhood, talk to neighbors, and present findings to your HOA board.

Recommended Committee Composition (3–6 people)

- HOA Board representative (to ensure buy-in and authority)
- 1–2 homeowners interested in the night sky, environment, or community improvement
- Optional: someone with basic photography skills (for documenting fixtures)
- Optional: a neighbor who has experience with HOA rules or legal documents

Your First Meeting Agenda

1. Review this guide together as a group.
2. Watch DarkSky's online introductory resources at darksky.org/resources.
3. Walk a sample block of the neighborhood at night and observe existing lighting.
4. Identify your lighting zone (see Section 2).
5. Set a target date for completing the Neighborhood Audit (Section 4).

3.2 Educate Your HOA Community

Community support is essential for successful implementation. Before the audit, consider:

- Sending a newsletter or email explaining the DarkSky program and why your HOA is pursuing it.
- Hosting a 30-minute community presentation — DarkSky Texas offers free speaker requests at darkskytexas.org.
- Sharing DarkSky's "Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment" (HOLA) with individual homeowners — this free resource at darksky.org/get-involved/home-lighting-assessment allows each resident to self-assess and earn a Dark Sky Friendly window decal.
- Framing benefits clearly: lower energy bills, reduced light trespass disputes, protection of wildlife, better sleep for families, and preservation of the night sky.

3.3 Document Baseline Conditions

Before you audit, take a "before" snapshot of your community's current lighting. This helps measure progress and supports your DarkSky recognition application.

1. Walk the neighborhood after dark (9–10 PM works well) and take photos of common area lights, entrance lights, and any particularly bright or glaring fixtures.

2. Use a free smartphone app (e.g., Globe at Night, Loss of the Night, or Sky Map) to record sky brightness at one or more points in the neighborhood.
3. Note the number of common area and street light fixtures and their approximate type (floodlight, post light, wall sconce, etc.).
4. Log any neighbor complaints about light trespass or glare — these are documented proof that lighting problems exist and that improvement is needed.

Section 4: Phase 2 — The Neighborhood Lighting Audit

The audit is the core of this process. It systematically evaluates all lighting in your HOA against DarkSky standards. Complete one audit form per distinct area (common areas, streets, entrance features, amenity facilities). Individual homeowners are encouraged to self-audit using DarkSky's HOLA tool.

How to Use the Audit Tables

Walk each area at night with this guide. For each lighting feature, check the criteria and mark Pass, Needs Work, or N/A. Take a photo of any Needs Work fixture. After completing the audit, total your pass rate and use Section 5 to plan improvements.

Audit Form A: Common Area & Entrance Lighting

Location: _____

Date: _____

Auditor: _____

Lighting Feature	What to Look For / Check	Assessment
Fixture Shielding	All fixtures are fully shielded — no light visible above the horizontal plane (no uplight). Light directed downward only.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Color Temperature (CCT)	Fixtures emit warm light: 3,000K or lower (warm white or amber tone). No cool blue-white light (4,000K+). Check fixture label or manufacturer spec.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Light Level / Brightness	Lighting provides sufficient visibility without excessive brightness. Lit surfaces are not washed out. No intense glare visible from normal viewing angles.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Controls (Timers/Sensors)	Lights use timers, photocells, or motion sensors to limit operation to when needed. Lights do not run all night unnecessarily.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Light Trespass	Light from HOA common area fixtures does not spill onto adjacent private properties, streets, or natural areas beyond what is needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Fixture Purpose	Each fixture serves a clear, identifiable purpose (safety, wayfinding, security). Purely decorative fixtures that create glare or sky glow have been reviewed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Lighting Feature	What to Look For / Check	Assessment
Uplight / Sky Glow	Standing in common area, looking up: no bright glare from fixtures; no visible haze or orange glow above the neighborhood.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Signage / Monument Lighting	Entrance signs lit from above (top-down), not from below (uplighting). Sign lighting is the minimum needed to identify the community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Landscape / Path Lighting	Path and landscape lights are low-profile, shielded, and aimed downward. No exposed bulbs creating glare. Lumen output is low (path lights ideally <200 lumens each).	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Flag Pole Lighting	If a flag is illuminated at night, it uses a narrow-beam, top-down fixture aimed at the flag only — not flooding the surrounding area.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Notes / Fixtures Needing Action:

Pass Rate for this area: _____ of 10 items passing = _____ %

Audit Form B: Street & Roadway Lighting

Location / Street(s): _____

Date: _____

Lighting Feature	What to Look For / Check	Assessment
Street Light Type	Street lights use full-cutoff or "shoebox" style fixtures with no exposed bulb, directing all light downward onto the roadway.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Color Temperature	Street light color temperature is 3,000K or lower. Warm amber or warm white appearance. (Note: Many utility-owned street lights are 4,000K+ — document these for future replacement request.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Mounting Height	Street lights are mounted at an appropriate height for the road width. Taller poles may require lower-output fixtures to avoid excess sky glow.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Spacing	Street lights are spaced to provide adequate illumination without significant overlap or wasted light between poles.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Dimming / Curfew	Street lights dim to a lower output after midnight (or after a curfew hour set by HOA) when pedestrian activity is minimal.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Backlight / Side Spill	Light does not spill significantly to the sides or rear of the fixture onto adjacent yards or natural areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Utility Ownership	If street lights are utility-owned (common in Texas), note the utility company and pole ID numbers for future improvement requests. Utility-owned lights are often outside HOA control initially.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Notes / Fixtures Needing Action:

Pass Rate: _____ of 7 items passing = _____%

Audit Form C: Amenity Facility Lighting

Facility Name: _____ (Pool, Clubhouse, Tennis, Trails, etc.)

Lighting Feature	What to Look For / Check	Assessment
Operating Hours / Controls	Facility lights are on a timer or motion sensor. Lights automatically shut off when the facility is not in use (e.g., pool closes at 10 PM — pool lights off at 10 PM).	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Fixture Shielding	All facility lights are fully shielded. No floodlights pointed upward or at angles that create excessive glare beyond the facility boundary.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Color Temperature	Facility lights are 3,000K or lower. (LZ2 facilities such as sports courts may have higher output but should still prioritize warm CCT.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Minimized Light Beyond Boundary	Light from the facility stays within the facility boundary. Neighboring homes are not lit by spillover from the pool, tennis courts, or clubhouse.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Security / Surveillance Lighting	Security cameras and sensor lighting are low-output, motion-activated, and do not create permanent bright zones. Sensors are aimed at entry points, not into the sky.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Parking Area Lighting	Parking area lights are full-cutoff pole-mounted fixtures aimed straight down. Illumination is adequate for safety but not excessive.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Pass Rate: _____ of 6 items passing = _____%

Audit Form D: Individual Property Spot-Check

This form is for a voluntary spot-check of individual home exterior lighting. For a full individual assessment, encourage homeowners to use DarkSky's free Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment (HOLA) at darksky.org/get-involved/home-lighting-assessment.

Lighting Feature	What to Look For / Check	Assessment
Front Porch / Entry Light	Fixture is shielded (no bare bulb visible from the street). Bulb is 3,000K or lower. Ideally on a motion sensor or timer — not burning all night.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Garage Light	Garage or driveway light is aimed downward. No flood-type fixture pointing at neighbors. Motion-activated is preferred.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Landscape / Garden Lighting	Landscape lights are low-profile and downward-aimed. No spike-mount uplights shooting light into trees or sky. Lumen output is low and warm.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Security / Floodlights	Any floodlights are motion-activated (not on continuously), aimed at the property (not neighbors), and use a warm-colored bulb.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Light Trespass to Neighbor	From the sidewalk or adjacent property, light from this home does not obviously spill onto neighboring yards, windows, or the street beyond what is incidental.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Work <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Audit Summary Scorecard

After completing all applicable audit forms, use this scorecard to summarize your community's results.

Audit Area	Items Checked	Items Passing	Pass Rate %
A — Common Areas & Entrance	10		
B — Street & Roadway	7		
C — Amenity Facilities	6		
D — Individual Properties (sample)	5		
OVERALL COMMUNITY SCORE	28 total		

Score	Status	Recommended Next Steps
90–100%	DarkSky Ready	Document your results. Develop CC&Rs to formalize standards. Contact DarkSky International to begin recognition application.
70–89%	Mostly Compliant	Address Needs Work fixtures in common areas first. Develop CC&Rs while making improvements. Plan for full compliance within 12 months.
50–69%	Needs Improvement	Prioritize common area and street lighting upgrades. Begin CC&R process. Set a 12–24 month improvement timeline. Engage homeowners with HOLA self-assessment.
Below 50%	Significant Work Needed	Start with quick wins (swap bulbs to 2700–3000K, add motion sensors). Engage DarkSky Texas for guidance. Plan a phased improvement program over 2–3 years.

Section 5: Fixture Quick Reference

When replacing or upgrading fixtures, use this reference to ensure all new lighting meets DarkSky standards. These are the same criteria used by DarkSky's Approved Luminaires program (updated March 2025).

5.1 The Four Non-Negotiable Fixture Criteria

<p>COLOR TEMPERATURE 3,000K MAX Warm white or amber. Never cool blue-white.</p>	<p>UPLIGHT ALLOWED ZERO No light above horizontal. Full cutoff required.</p>	<p>DIMMING REQUIRED ≤10% of full Must be dimmable for motion/timer control.</p>	<p>RESIDENTIAL OUTPUT MAX 1,000 lumens Per DarkSky Approved Residential Luminaire standard.</p>
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5.2 Fixture Type Reference Guide

Fixture Type	Description	DarkSky Compliant?	Common Issues to Fix
Full Cutoff / Shoebox	Flat-bottom fixture aimed straight down. Zero uplight.	YES — ideal for streets, parking, common areas	Ensure CCT is 3,000K; add dimming control
Post Top / Globe	Round globe on a post; light emits in all directions.	ONLY if fitted with internal shield & low CCT	Globe style creates significant uplight and glare; replace or retrofit
Wall Sconce (Shielded)	Mounted on wall; quality versions direct light downward only.	YES — if fully shielded; no exposed bulb	Unshielded or open-bottom sconces cause glare
Floodlight	Broad-beam fixture, often adjustable.	ONLY if motion-activated, aimed downward	Fixed-on floods pointing up or sideways are major violators
Path / Step Light	Low-profile lights along walkways.	YES — if <200 lumens, downward facing	Spike-mount uplights are not DarkSky compliant
Landscape Uplight	Spike-mount fixture aimed upward into trees/plants.	NO — violates Targeted principle	Replace with downward-aimed or silhouette lighting
Pendant / Lantern (open bottom)	Decorative hanging or post lantern with exposed bulb.	ONLY if <1,000 lumens, ≤3,000K, with shade	Exposed Edison-style bulbs visible from a distance create sky glow

5.3 Simple Bulb & Fixture Swap Guide for Homeowners

Many common lighting problems can be fixed without replacing entire fixtures. Here's a plain-language guide for homeowners:

Step 1: Check your bulb color temperature

Look on the bulb package or existing bulb for 'K' (Kelvin) rating. If it says 4000K, 5000K, or 6500K — it's too blue. Replace with a bulb labeled '2700K' (preferred) or '3000K.' These are available at any hardware store and look warm/yellow-white like a traditional incandescent.

Step 2: Check if the bulb is exposed

From the street or a neighbor's yard, can you see the bright bulb directly? If yes, the fixture lacks shielding. Look for a replacement fixture with a downward-facing shade or frosted lens. Or add a "lamp shield" adapter available from hardware stores and lighting vendors.

Step 3: Add a motion sensor or timer

For porch, garage, and driveway lights that burn all night, install an in-socket motion sensor adapter (available for under \$15 at hardware stores) or replace the switch with a timer. This alone dramatically reduces light pollution and saves energy.

Step 4: Look for DarkSky Approved fixtures

When buying new fixtures, look for the DarkSky Approved label or search the product database at darksky.org/what-we-do/darksky-approved. These products are certified to meet all Five Principles.

Section 6: Phase 3 — Updating Your HOA CC&Rs

Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions (CC&Rs) are the legal rules that govern an HOA community. Adding outdoor lighting standards to your CC&Rs is the most effective long-term tool for maintaining dark sky-friendly lighting, because the rules bind all homeowners — current and future.

DarkSky International's Public Policy Committee has approved model CC&R language specifically for HOAs. This language is rooted in the Five Principles and intentionally avoids technical jargon so homeowners can easily understand and comply.

6.1 What to Include in Your CC&R Language

1. Purpose statement — briefly explain why the HOA adopts lighting standards (preserve night sky, protect wildlife, prevent light trespass, reduce energy waste).
2. Color temperature limit — all new or replacement exterior fixtures shall have a CCT of 3,000K or lower.
3. Shielding requirement — all exterior fixtures shall be fully shielded, directing light downward, with no visible light above the horizontal plane.
4. Brightness limit — fixtures shall use the minimum lumens necessary for the intended purpose. Residential fixtures: 1,000 lumens maximum for permanent installations.
5. Controls — permanently installed exterior fixtures shall include a timer, photocell, or motion sensor. Lights shall not operate continuously all night unless specifically approved.
6. Prohibited fixtures — list specifically prohibited types (e.g., landscape uplights, unshielded globe fixtures, mercury vapor or metal halide lamps, blue-white LED fixtures above 3,000K).
7. Light trespass — light from any fixture on a homeowner's property shall not spill onto adjacent properties in a manner that creates a nuisance.
8. Variance / exception process — establish how homeowners can request an exception (e.g., holiday lighting, special security circumstances).

Obtaining the DarkSky Model CC&R Document

The full Model HOA Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (2020) document is available as a free PDF download from DarkSky International at:

darksky.org/resources/guides-and-how-tos/homeowners-associations/

The Texas Model Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (2022) from DarkSky Texas provides additional language calibrated to Texas law and meets IDA's International Dark Sky Community nomination requirements. Available at:

darkskytexas.org/common-sense-solutions-resources/

6.2 Process for Amending CC&Rs

CC&R amendment processes vary by state law and your HOA's governing documents. Generally:

1. Review your existing CC&Rs and bylaws to understand the amendment process — typically requires a supermajority vote (e.g., 67% or 75% of homeowners).
2. Consult your HOA attorney to draft or review any new lighting language before presenting to the community.
3. Present the proposed language at a community meeting, allowing homeowners to ask questions and provide input.
4. Conduct a formal vote according to your HOA's procedures.
5. Record the amended CC&Rs with the appropriate county office if required by your state (required in Texas).

Note: Even if formal CC&R amendment takes time, your HOA board can often adopt interim lighting standards through a Board Resolution or updated community guidelines while the CC&R process proceeds.

Section 7: Phase 4 — Pursuing Formal Recognition

7.1 Choosing Your Recognition Goal

There are three complementary levels of recognition your HOA can pursue:

Recognition Level	Who Does This?	How to Pursue
HOLA — Individual Home Certification	Individual homeowners self-certify their home's lighting meets the Five Principles.	Complete the free self-assessment at darksky.org . Sign the pledge. Receive window decal. Community goal: 50%+ of homes certified.
HOA Model CC&Rs — Community Standard	The HOA board adopts DarkSky model lighting language into CC&Rs or bylaws.	Use Section 6 of this guide. Download model language from darksky.org . Adopt and enforce rules.
Hill Country Alliance — Night Sky Friendly Neighborhood	The HOA board adopts HCA County Subdivision and Night Sky Friendly Neighborhood Policy	See Section 9 of this guide - Hill Country Alliance Night Skies
International Dark Sky Community — Formal Designation	The HOA community (if legally organized) applies for formal DarkSky place recognition.	See Section 7.2 below for application steps.

7.2 Applying for International Dark Sky Community Designation

This is DarkSky International's highest recognition for HOA-governed communities. It requires demonstrated commitment through adopted lighting policy, community education, and ongoing sky quality monitoring. Steps:

- Step 1: Contact DarkSky International — Reach out to the Dark Sky Places Program Manager at darksky.org/about/contact to confirm your community qualifies and to understand current application requirements.
- Step 2: Adopt a qualifying outdoor lighting ordinance or CC&R — The Texas Model Outdoor Lighting Ordinance has been verified to meet this requirement.
- Step 3: Develop a community education and outreach plan — Document how you have educated and will continue to educate residents about responsible outdoor lighting and the dark sky mission.
- Step 4: Establish night sky quality measurements — Conduct baseline SQM (Sky Quality Meter) measurements at representative points in your neighborhood. DarkSky Texas maintains a statewide SQM Dashboard at sqm.darkskytexas.org.
- Step 5: Submit written application — Work with DarkSky International staff to compile your application, documenting your adopted lighting policy, photographic evidence of compliant lighting, outreach activities, and sky quality data.
- Step 6: Ongoing commitment — Designation is not permanent; communities must maintain standards and engage in continued education to retain their status.

Section 8: Glossary of Key Terms

This section defines the key terms used in this guide in plain language.

Term	Definition (Plain Language)
CC&Rs	Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions — the legal rules governing a homeowners association. Amendments require homeowner votes and are legally binding.
CCT (Correlated Color Temperature)	Measured in Kelvin (K). Lower = warmer/more amber (2700K–3000K = good). Higher = cooler/more blue (4000K–6500K = problematic for dark skies).
CIE Environmental Zones	International Commission on Illumination framework for classifying environmental sensitivity to light. The basis for DarkSky's LZ0–LZ4 Lighting Zone system.
DarkSky Approved	A certification mark from DarkSky International for outdoor light fixtures that meet all Five Principles criteria, including CCT ≤ 3,000K and zero uplight.
Full Cutoff / Fully Shielded	A fixture that emits no light above the horizontal plane (no uplight). All light goes downward or sideways below 90 degrees. Required for DarkSky compliance.
HOLA (Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment)	DarkSky International's free self-certification program allowing individual homeowners to assess and improve their home's outdoor lighting and earn a 'Dark Sky Friendly' window decal.
IES	Illuminating Engineering Society — the professional society for lighting engineers. Co-publisher (with DarkSky) of the Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting.
K (Kelvin)	Unit of measurement for color temperature of light. For dark skies: use 2,700K–3,000K bulbs. Avoid 4,000K and above.
Light Trespass	Light from one property that falls unwantedly onto another property or into the night sky. A legal basis for nuisance complaints and a key target of HOA lighting rules.
LZ (Lighting Zone)	A zoning designation (LZ0–LZ4) reflecting the desired ambient light level of an area. LZ1 (low ambient) is the recommended target for most residential HOAs.
Lumens	The measure of light output from a fixture. More lumens = brighter light. For residential fixtures, DarkSky Approved standards limit output to ≤1,000 lumens. Path lights should be much lower (under 200 lumens).
Sky Glow	The brightening of the night sky above urban and suburban areas caused by artificial light scattering in the atmosphere. Visible as an orange or white glow on the horizon from miles away.
SQM (Sky Quality Meter)	A device or app used to measure the darkness of the night sky in magnitudes per square arcsecond (mpsas). Higher numbers = darker skies. Used to document baseline conditions and measure progress.

Term	Definition (Plain Language)
Uplight	Any light emitted upward (above 90 degrees from directly below the fixture). Zero uplight is required for all DarkSky Approved fixtures and recommended in all residential CC&Rs.

Section 9: Key Resources & Contacts

DarkSky International

Website: darksky.org

- Five Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting: darksky.org/resources/guides-and-how-tos/lighting-principles/
- Guidance for HOAs & Model CC&Rs: darksky.org/resources/guides-and-how-tos/homeowners-associations/
- Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment (HOLA): darksky.org/get-involved/home-lighting-assessment/
- DarkSky Approved Products Database: darksky.org/what-we-do/darksky-approved/
- Lighting Zones Guide: darksky.org/resources/guides-and-how-tos/lighting-zones/
- Apply for Dark Sky Place Designation: darksky.org/what-we-do/international-dark-sky-places/apply/

DarkSky Texas (Formerly IDA Texas)

Website: darkskytexas.org

- Texas Model Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (2022): darkskytexas.org/common-sense-solutions-resources/
- Texas Outdoor Lighting Codes & Regulations: darkskytexas.org/texas-outdoor-lighting-codes-regulations/
- SQM Sky Quality Dashboard: sqm.darkskytexas.org
- Request a Speaker for your community: darkskytexas.org/request-a-speaker/
- BOLD Initiative (Bringing Outdoor Lighting into the Dark): darkskytexas.org/bold-initiative/
- Texas Dark Sky Places: darkskytexas.org/texas-dark-sky-places/

Additional Resources

- IES (Illuminating Engineering Society): ies.org — co-publisher of the Five Principles
- Hill Country Alliance Night Skies: hillcountryalliance.org/our-work/night-skies/ — Texas-specific ordinance examples
- Globe at Night (sky brightness measurement app): globeatnight.org
- DarkSky Texas SQM Dashboard: sqm.darkskytexas.org
- Kerr County Friends of the Night Sky: kernightsky.com

Together, we can protect the night sky — one neighborhood at a time.

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