



If you are looking for a politically progressive city, Lancaster, California would not make it on your list. Located in the deeply conservative Antelope Valley of north Los Angeles County, it has attracted attention by, *inter alia*, 1) electing [Pete Knight](#), one of the most vicious anti-gay politicians in the country, to a series of state legislative positions; 2) [being sued by the NAACP for a pattern and practice of discriminating against Section 8 housing voucher recipients](#) (full disclosure: my colleague Gary Blasi is the NAACP's lawyer); and 3) [insisting on beginning its city council sessions with public prayers](#), arguably violating the First Amendment. ([The city recently won a case in the 9th Circuit](#), in an opinion written by the most reliably right-wing judge in the west). Berkeley, or Boulder, or Cambridge MA, it ain't.

Which is why [yesterday's action from the Lancaster City Council](#) could potentially be so significant:

The Lancaster City Council on Tuesday voted to make the city the first in the nation to require solar panels on all new homes in an effort to make the community more carbon neutral.

The city's revised zoning code requires at least 1 kilowatt of solar capacity on the roofs of all new homes in the Antelope Valley desert community starting Jan. 1, 2014. Installation of solar systems is not required on all homes within a subdivision, as long as the builder meets the total aggregate energy generation requirement within the subdivision.

Now, it makes lots of good sense for Lancaster to do this. The Antelope Valley is located in

the high desert of southern California; it gets *lots* of sun. But that hardly shows anything. Oklahoma and most of the rest of the high plains are suffering through a horrible drought, but the region's climate denial continues apace. Texas gets a lot of sun, too, but the solar industry doesn't do much there. [As Jonathan Levine has demonstrated](#), Smart Growth represents a thoroughgoing *de*-regulatory strategy in most cases, but [the Right goes into conniption fits when it is proposed](#).

So this is a particularly welcome piece of news, because it shows the potential for a growing consciousness of reality in conservative circles. It hardly represents an effort to de-carbonize the economy for climate purposes; after all, Lancaster relies on standard sprawling land use plans. It's just a common-sense building code provision reflecting the greater ease of building solar up front rather than retrofitting. But perhaps that's its big advantage.

Those still insisting that the only way to make progress on climate is through complex and politically fraught international treaties might well take the time to visit Lancaster. It's hardly as glamorous as Copenhagen, Cancun, or Durban, and that's the whole point.

UPDATE: I should say that as a general matter, I'm not a fan of these sort of zoning mandates. Local land use is horribly overregulated, e.g. parking requirements. But as long as there is no price on carbon, this is the way in which renewables will come in. You don't want command-and-control? Then have a carbon tax. As [Gail Collins points out today](#), even a nonbinding resolution for a carbon tax failed in the Senate, [with every Republican opposed](#). Maybe the GOP Senators should visit Lancaster, too.