



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Meeting Agenda - Final

### City Administrator Working Group

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Wednesday, June 25, 2025

12:00 PM

Grandad Conference Room  
City Hall

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*This meeting is open for in-person attendance and will also be available through Zoom.*

*Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81699247288?pwd=habDkwa4ktGM2lhklrN8Z3GNFyd9NG.1>*

*Join by phone: 312-626-6799 US (Chicago) | Meeting ID: 816 9924 7288 | Passcode: 868487*

#### Call to Order

#### Welcome

#### Roll Call

*Erin Goggin, Barb Janssen, Lisa Weston, Chris Kahlow, Larry Sleznikow*

#### Approval of Minutes

*Minutes of June 11, 2025*

#### Agenda Items:

[24-1585](#)

Proposed City Administrator position.

- Review Daniel Foth's latest edits to the city administrator information paper and one-sheet document and approve them.
- Discussion of Mayor Shaundel's proposed city administrator panel discussion and roundtables.
- Develop a plan for creating what is needed before beginning public engagement sessions.
- Establish agenda items for the next meeting.

#### Adjournment

*Notice is further given that members of other governmental bodies may be present at the above scheduled meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision-making responsibility.*

*NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY*

*Requests from persons with a disability who need assistance to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk's office at (608) 789-7510 or send an email to [ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org), with as much advance notice as possible.*



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

**File Number: 24-1585**

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**Agenda Date:**

**Version: 1**

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** City Administrator Working Group

**File Type:** Review

**Agenda Number:**



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 24-1287

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**Agenda Date:** 10/10/2024

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Recommended to be  
Adopted

**In Control:** Common Council

**File Type:** Ordinance

**Agenda Number:**



## CHARTER ORDINANCE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

A CHARTER ORDINANCE to create Section 19 of Appendix A of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse creating the position, duties and responsibilities of the Office of the City Administrator and removing duties from the Office of the Mayor.

The COMMON COUNCIL of the City of La Crosse do ordain as follows:

**Sec. 19. – Office of the City Administrator**

- (a) OFFICE OF THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR. In order to provide the City of La Crosse with a more efficient, effective and responsible government under a system of a full-time Mayor and a part-time Common Council at a time when City government is becoming increasingly complex, there is hereby created the Office of City Administrator for the City of La Crosse.
- (b) APPOINTMENT, TERM OF OFFICE AND REMOVAL The administrator shall be appointed on the basis of merit with due regard to training, experience, administrative ability and general fitness for the office, by a majority vote of those present and voting of the Common Council. The administrator shall hold office for an indefinite term at the pleasure of the Council subject to removal at any time by an affirmative vote of three-fourths of all the members of the Council. The Council may establish other employment terms and conditions consistent with the provisions of this ordinance or the Municipal Code of the City of La Crosse.
- (c) RESIDENCY The administrator shall become a resident of the City of La Crosse within three (3) months following the date of appointment, unless this requirement is specifically waived or varied by the Common Council, and entered into with the administrator, covering the terms and conditions of residency.
- (d) QUALIFICATIONS The ideal qualifications for the administrator will include Bachelor of Arts or Science Degree and a Master's Degree in Public Administration, Public Finance or closely related field from an accredited university and have at least five (5) years of experience in City or County government as a City Administrator, City Manager, or County Administrator.
- (e) FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES OF THE ADMINISTRATOR The administrator, subject to the limitations defined in resolutions and ordinances of the City of La Crosse and Wisconsin State Statutes, shall be the chief administrative officer of the City, responsible only to the Common Council for proper administration of the business affairs of the City, pursuant to the statutes of the State of Wisconsin, the ordinances of the City of La Crosse, and the resolutions and directives of the Common Council, with power and duties as follows:
  - (1) General Duties
    - (a) Carry out policy directives of the Common Council established by resolution or ordinance which require administrative implementation, reporting promptly to the Common Council any difficulties encountered herein;
    - (b) Be responsible for the administration of all day-to-day operations of the City government including the monitoring of all city

ordinances, resolutions, council meeting minutes and state statutes;

- (c) Prepare a plan of administration, including an organizational plan, which defines authority and responsibility for all nonstatutory positions of the City; and submit it to the Common Council for adoption as the official organization and administrative procedure plan for the City;
  - (d) Establish administrative procedures to measure and to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of City government according to current practices in local government, not inconsistent with subsection (c) above or policy directives of the Common Council which are established by resolution or ordinance;
  - (e) Serve as ex-officio non-voting member of all boards, commissions and committees of the City, except as specified by the Common Council or Wisconsin State Statutes;
  - (f) Keep information concerning current federal, state and county legislation and administrative rules affecting the City and submit appropriate reports and recommendations thereon to the Common Council;
  - (g) Keep informed concerning the availability of federal, state, county and nonprofit grants and funds for local programs and initiatives. Assist Department Heads and the Common Council in obtaining these funds under the direction of the Common Council;
  - (h) Represent the City in all matters involving legislative and intergovernmental affairs as authorized and directed as to that representation by the Common Council;
  - (i) Act as public information officer for the City with the responsibility of assuring that the news media are kept informed about the operations of the City and along with the City Clerk and City Attorney that all open meeting rules and regulations are followed;
  - (j) Establish and maintain procedures to facilitate communications between citizens and City government to ensure that complaints, grievances, recommendations and other matters receive prompt attention by the responsible official, and to ensure that all such matters are expeditiously resolved;
  - (k) Promote the economic well-being and growth of the City through public and private sector cooperation.
- (2) Responsibilities to the Common Council.
- (a) Attend all meetings of the Common Council, assisting the Council as required in the performance of its duties.
  - (b) In coordination with the Common Council, Mayor, City Clerk and City Attorney, ensure that appropriate agendas are prepared for all meetings of the Common Council, all Council committees, and all other appropriate committees and commissions of the City, together with such supporting material as may be required; with nothing herein being construed as to give the administrator authority to limit or in any way prevent matters from being

considered by the Council, or any of its committees or commissions.

- (c) Coordinate the preparation of ordinances and resolutions as required by the Common Council and Department Heads.
- (d) Keep the Common Council regularly informed about the activities of the administrator's office by oral or written report at regular and special meetings of the Council.

(3) Personnel

- (a) Be responsible for the administrative direction and coordinator of all employees of the City according to the established organization procedures.
- (b) Consistent with the statutes of the State of Wisconsin, recommend to the Common Council the appointment, promotion, and when necessary for the good of the City, the suspension or removal of Department Heads.
- (c) In consultation with the Director of Human Resources see that complete and current personnel records, including specific job descriptions, for all City employees are kept; evaluate in conjunction with Department Heads the performance of all employees on a regular basis; recommend salary and wage scales for City employees not covered by collective bargaining agreements; develop and enforce high standards of performance by City employees; ensure that City employees have proper working conditions; work closely with Department Heads to promptly resolve personnel problems or grievances;
- (d) In cooperation with the appropriate Department Heads and Director of Human Resources and after following City policies and procedures, make a recommendation to the appropriate City officers regarding the appointment, promotion, and when necessary for the good of the City, the suspension or termination of employees below the Department Head level.
- (e) Manage and assist in labor contract negotiations and collective bargaining issues.
- (f) Work closely with Department Heads to ensure that employees receive adequate opportunities for training to maintain and improve their job-related knowledge and skills and act as the approving authority for requests by employees to attend conferences, meetings, training schools, etc., provided that funds have been budgeted for these activities.

(4) Finances, Budgeting, and Purchasing

- (a) Be responsible for the preparation of the annual City operating budget, including capital budget, in accordance with City

Ordinances and guidelines as may be provided by the Common Council and in coordination with Department Heads, pursuant to state statutes, for review and approval by the Common Council.

- (b) Administer the budget as adopted by the Common Council.
- (c) Report regularly to the Common Council on the current fiscal position of the City.
- (d) Supervise the accounting system of the City and ensure that the system employs methods in accordance with current professional accounting practices.
- (e) Administer the City's purchasing ordinance, policies, and procedures including all purchasing and contracting for supplies and services subject to the purchasing ordinance and procedures established by the Common Council and any limitation contained in the Wisconsin State Statues.

(5) Cooperation

- (a) All officials and employees of the City shall cooperate with and assist the administrator so that the City government shall function effectively and efficiently.

SECTION II: The provisions of this ordinance shall be deemed severable and it is expressly declared that the Common Council of the City of La Crosse would have passed the other provisions of this ordinance irrespective of whether or not one or more provisions may be declared invalid; and if any persons or circumstances is held invalid, the remainder of the ordinance and the application of such provision of other persons or circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

SECTION III: This charter ordinance specifically removes those duties from the Office of Mayor to oversee the day-to-day operations, management and administration of the City of La Crosse that are found under § 62.09 (8) (a), Wis. Stat. Any charter provision or any previously enacted ordinance or charter ordinance inconsistent or in conflict with this ordinance is expressly repealed.

SECTION IV: This charter ordinance shall take effect sixty (60) days after its passage and publication subject to the provisions of Section 66.0101(5) Wis. Stat.

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Mitch Reynolds, Mayor

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Nikki M. Elsen, City Clerk

Passed:  
Approved:  
Published:



# ***CITY OF LA CROSSE***

**400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601  
(608) 789-CITY  
[www.cityoflacrosse.org](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org)**

## LEGISLATION STAFF REPORT FOR COUNCIL

File ID                      Caption

Staff/Department Responsible for Legislation

Requestor of Legislation

Location, if applicable

Summary/Purpose

Background

Fiscal Impact

Staff Recommendation

## Craig, Sondra

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**From:** Carol Herlitzka <cherlitzka@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 12, 2024 1:46 PM  
**To:** ZZ City Clerk External  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** City Administrator

Some people who received this message don't often get email from cherlitzka@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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I recall the last Mayor(Mr Johnsrud wanted this and also an ambulance service!!!) Let me see, where did he go, after we did not vote him  
In again? Johnson creek, wi?  
We need less government, lower taxes, people with a brain, common sense, maybe normal citizens working for the people. This liberalism  
Does not seem to be working!!? We had the coulee region humane society, picking up lost pets. Now we have a woman (\$80.000) added,  
A person watching the homeless (\$140.000) I think there may be another person helping Mr sampson? The police helping the dog catcher??  
Where does this stop?? More taxex, more construction, more bike lanes, I have yet to see those bike lanes filled with riders? Maybe  
The high schoolers should start riding there bikes, instead of cars.

Thank you

Carol Herlitzka  
Tax payer

**From:** Randy <czarh1@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 12, 2024 12:14 PM  
**To:** ZZ City Clerk External; Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** Mitch and City council

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Attention Mitch and City Council,

This email is to oppose you voting and hiring of a City Administrator. If the Mayor cannot handle the duties of his position that has been this way for many years then I suggest he resign and we get another vote to get another Mayor who can do the work. Many companies are working with less and many people are doing more in their positions. Our city must do the same. I also do not believe we are in the financial status to be hiring for a City Administrator. also this position would now be hired and not able to be voted in by the people. That takes the voice away from the tax payers. Always remember the tax payer of this city is where you get the money from and we need to keep it this way. I sure hope others in this community are giving you their voice on this issue and we keep it the way it is.

Thank you,  
Baylee,  
A concerned citizen,

**Elsen, Nikki**

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**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator/Mayor

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**From:** McGinnisCasey, Diane <[Diane.McGinnisCasey@sheboyganwi.gov](mailto:Diane.McGinnisCasey@sheboyganwi.gov)>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 5:26 PM  
**To:** Trane, Andrea <[tranea@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:tranea@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** Re: City Administrator/Mayor

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Andrea,

All is well here on the east side of the state.

I know this is getting to you a little later than you wanted so I am not sure if it will be helpful now or not.

One of the biggest pros of an administrator is consistency. Regardless of elections, you have a leader within the organization that can provide continuation of vision while elected officials change. The other big advantage is you have a boss that is over department heads (outside of elected positions) that can address problems with individual department heads and between department heads. The budget process was also easier with an administrator because he/she has the final say on what is presented to council. This simplified the process greatly.

On the flip side, one of the largest challenges is when the Mayor and Administrator do not agree. Then as a department head it can be difficult to navigate when you are receiving conflicting direction. At a minimum you need to educate the council and mayor on their roles and ultimately everyone needs to understand that employees report to the administrator and not elected officials. If you don't have a strong person in the administrator role, this would be very difficult to navigate.

Those are some high level thoughts. If you want more, let me know.

Thanks,

Diane McGinnis-Casey  
Director, Planning and Development  
City of Sheboygan  
920-459-3383



**Elsen, Nikki**

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**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator/Mayor

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**From:** Caroline Gregerson <[cityadmin@wabasha.org](mailto:cityadmin@wabasha.org)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 2:36 PM  
**Subject:** RE: City Administrator/Mayor

*Benefits of an Administrator versus Mayor*

- I think for La Crosse, if the Department Heads were under the management of the City Administrator, they (City Administrator) could play a positive role to ensure departments were consistently working together. I would definitely recommend all departments are under the management and oversight of the administrator or manager.
- A good city administrator focuses in on the vision of Council and Mayor and then can ensure various departments are able to be given the resources and authority to coordinate the vision and work together on the vision. There can be competing priorities for each department, so they have a role in moving forward with the right option and bringing staff consensus. They ensure everyone is “rowing in the same direction”.
- One major role they have is oversight on personnel and management issues for department heads. Those can be challenging issues at times. Our policy makers are very thankful not to have a role in that. I take in any complaints about staff and manage those.
- Focus on employee engagement and addressing employee concerns by bringing in background in organizational leadership. Many city administrators, including myself, focus on time making sure their department heads receive leadership training.
- The system helps the Mayor and Council to be able to focus on policy direction.
- The professionalized management and background in municipal governance and budgets can be helpful. This position can strategize around how to bring resources to the table to advance the policy makers goals and with a strong background in budgeting and financial planning, can help them realize those goals.
- We worked on a strategic plan together my first year, mission statement, and so we have a pretty clear path and agreement on their strategic goals and measure progress against the goals. Every budget year, we look at the strategic plan and progress. That’s sets some benchmarks to measure success for Council and the Administrator. <https://www.wabasha.org/strategicplan/>
- Mayors still play an important role in advancing projects important to them or championing an idea and then having the City Administrator execute the idea.
- Council has the option to provide a City Administrator annual performance reviews and also has the option to hire/fire this individual with a majority vote. This ensures accountability to Council.

The benefits of the Mayor for La Crosse that I see are that I think the Mayor of La Crosse is compensated at a much lower rate than a traditional administrator. I do think the current system in La Crosse does correctly put a lot of leadership capacity in the hands of individual departments. For example, issues that I might handle in my current role, are done by HR Director or Finance Director in La Crosse. I do think the role of “Mayor” brings weight to any conversation. La Crosse has a strong tradition of Mayoral leadership. I think a lot of the effectiveness of either system, can also depend on the individual.

I am sure it’s going to be a good discussion!

Kind Regards,

*Caroline Gregerson*

**Caroline Gregerson, City Administrator**

City of Wabasha

**Office Line:** 651-560-4860

**Work Mobile:** 651-412-5553

**Email:** [cityadmin@wabasha.org](mailto:cityadmin@wabasha.org)

900 Hiawatha Dr. E, Wabasha, MN 55981

**Elsen, Nikki**

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**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: testimonial request

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**From:** Mayor Shawn Reilly <[sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 2:41 PM  
**To:** Reynolds, Mitch <[reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** RE: testimonial request

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Mitch;

I am of the opinion that a City Administrator is best for larger municipalities as compared to those with just an elected Mayor. My position is based upon my experience. I was a municipal attorney for 23 years prior to being elected as Waukesha's Mayor. I have been a student of local government for most of my life. I have been Mayor of Waukesha for more than 10 years. There are times I wish I was a "Strong" Mayor, for my own selfish purposes. I truly believe however that the "Weak" Mayor/City Administrator model is what works best for the wellbeing and continuity of a city over time. (I am leaving out any comments regarding the City Manager form of government).

The two main reasons I have this opinion is that a City Administrator is insurance that professionalism and expertise in running the city has a high baseline at all times. The other main reason is that the Common Council generally will have its policy decisions followed more directly if there is a City Administrator/Mayor than if there is just an elected Mayor (without any City Administrator).

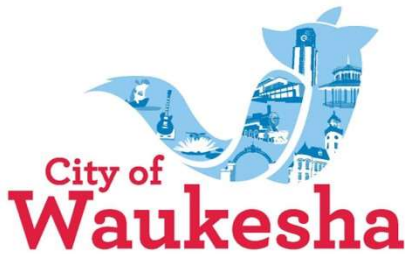
Continued professionalism and expertise are essential for a city to thrive. Elected Mayors can be good or bad. With a good Mayor, the city can thrive and be run professionally without any major problems. I recognize that many elected Mayors have the skills needed to run a large operation with many employees and large budgets. Often however, the elected Mayor lacks some (or all) of the needed skills to direct a large number of employees and run a complex and large organization. There are many examples where a Mayor was elected that did not have professionalism or expertise. At some point, I think every municipality makes the wrong choice as to whether it elected the best person for the job. We can all recall situations where the elected Mayor was a continual detriment to the well being of the community. If there is an Administrator, the bad Mayor problem is not cured but the overall damages to the integrity and reputation of the city are minimized because there is a professional individual with the authority to continue running the city day to day. Without a City Administrator, if there is a Mayor that actively creates detrimental issues, the Common Council should step in to take over more responsibility of the day to day running of the city. This is extremely difficult both procedurally and in practice. The Common Council needs to publicly step in and remove aspects of the authority of the Mayor. Besides figuring out how to accomplish this, it takes time. While this is occurring, the administration of the city is in a free fall. It can then take years for the city to get back on track. If there is a City Administrator, the process of blunting the bad actions of an incompetent Mayor are much easier and the fallout will never be as severe.

I also am a firm believer that the ultimate policy maker for municipalities is the majority vote of the Common Council. Whether a Mayor is good or bad, if there is a City Administrator, the policy decisions of the Common Council are more efficiently carried out if there is a City Administrator. Without a City Administrator, the Mayor is

in charge of carrying out the Common Council policy decisions. If the Mayor does not agree with the majority decision on policy decisions, the stand alone Mayor is easily able to slow walk any decision he/she disagrees with. The Mayor can pretty much ignore the Common Counsel policy decisions until he/she is called out on it. Even then, the Mayor can create impediments to the will of the Common Counsel almost indefinitely. When there is a City Administrator, the policy decisions of the Common Council will be followed. The City Administrator answers to the Common Council, not the Mayor.

Let me know if you want to discuss this further. If any of your Alders want to talk to me about this, I will be happy to make that happen.

Mayor Shawn Reilly



**Shawn N. Reilly**

Mayor  
City of Waukesha

P: 1-262-524-3700

E: [sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov)  
[waukesha-wi.gov](http://waukesha-wi.gov)

201 Delafield St., Waukesha, WI 53188



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**From:** Reynolds, Mitch <[reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:reynoldsm@cityoflacrosse.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 1:41 PM

**To:** Mayor Shawn Reilly <[sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov)>

**Subject:** Re: testimonial request

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Can you just write down everything you said in that roundtable and send it to me? That was spot on

Mitch Reynolds

Mayor

City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, USA

608.789.7500

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**From:** Reynolds, Mitch

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 11:35:45 AM

**To:** [sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov) <[sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov](mailto:sreilly@waukesha-wi.gov)>

**Subject:** testimonial request

Hey Shawn,

Hope things are going well for you in Waukesha. Really appreciated your presentation in Milwaukee and was inspired to do a five-year budget projection of my own. Man, that makes everything seem really bleak.

Also hoping you can help me with something. I will have an ordinance change in front of the city council in a couple of weeks to add a city administrator. Currently, the plan is to maintain the mayor as a full-time position. One of the things I have been asked is how the role of mayor changes with an administrator in place and whether having a full-time mayor under the new leadership structure makes sense. Since you are one of just a few with that form of government, I was hoping I could get some sort of short overview/testimonial from you that I can share with a council executive meeting for a meeting on Monday.

Look forward to hearing from you.

m.

## Mitch Reynolds

Mayor  
City of La Crosse  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
(608) 789-7500  
[www.cityoflacrosse.org](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org)

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**From:** Bob Gollnik <rgollnik@lacrossecounty.org>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 27, 2024 2:37 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen; ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** Comments: Proposal to create a City Administrator position for the City of La Crosse, WI

Some people who received this message don't often get email from rgollnik@lacrossecounty.org. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Members of the Common Council –

My name is Bob Gollnik, Executive Director of the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC), and a transportation planner with over 20 years of experience working across the United States. Our agency focuses on regional transportation planning for the La Crosse-La Crescent area, with the City of La Crosse as our largest member. Our policy board consists of the highest elected officials from 10 area member communities and the La Crosse County Board Chair. We also have two committees that involve multiple City of La Crosse technical staff.

Since becoming Director in 2023, I've had the privilege of working with Mayor Reynolds, who has been an excellent collaborator, fostering many conversations that have benefitted our regional efforts. His leadership and vision has highlighted the importance of professional city management, regardless of who holds office. I agree with Mayor Reynolds that a City Administrator in La Crosse is perhaps more urgent than ever, and long overdue. Cities of La Crosse's size—and even smaller municipalities—commonly have this role to ensure consistent, effective governance. While many points have been outlined for the council, I would like to emphasize a few key areas most relevant to our work and the benefits a City Administrator could bring to La Crosse's growth and development:

1. **Professional Leadership and Continuity:** A city administrator can provide expert leadership to navigate La Crosse's unique opportunities, balancing natural resources like the Mississippi River with sustainable urban growth and other pressing issues. With experience working with public agencies across the area (and state), we see how professional management leads to effective decision-making and sustainable development. An Administrator also provides continuity among departments and external collaborations despite political seasons.
2. **Efficient Resource Allocation:** In cities across the U.S., I've observed that city administrators can excel in maximizing public resources. La Crosse, with its focus on sustainability and community-driven initiatives, would benefit from a administrator who could strategically direct tax dollars, grants, and operational resources among departments and toward high-impact projects such as infrastructure upgrades, housing, and public safety.
3. **Policy Implementation:** La Crosse's recent and ambitious plans—ranging from riverfront development to expanding transit options—require dedicated oversight. A city administrator could streamline the execution of these plans, ensuring they are carried out efficiently and in line with the city's long-term visions.
4. **Day-to-Day Operations:** Managing the complexities of La Crosse, including public safety, environmental challenges like flooding, and a vibrant tourism sector, requires dedicated administrative focus. A city administrator could handle these operational details, freeing the mayor and council to prioritize strategic policy decisions and community engagement.

5. **Long-Term Planning:** Drawing on state and national best practices, a city administrator would help guide La Crosse through strategic growth, including economic development, affordable housing, homelessness concerns, and sustainability. This role would be crucial in planning for the city's future while maintaining a high quality of life for current residents.
6. **Non-Partisan Leadership:** As someone with experience working in diverse political environments, I have seen how a city administrator's non-partisan role ensures that decisions are based on professional expertise and community needs rather than political cycles. La Crosse could benefit from this continuity in leadership. The administrator also serves as a valuable resource in acclimating new administrations to key processes and initiatives within the city.
7. **Improved City Council Functionality:** A city administrator would allow La Crosse's city council to focus on legislation and community engagement, ensuring that administrative functions, such as budgeting and staff management, are professionally handled.
8. **Crisis Management:** From flooding to economic shifts to tourism-related events, La Crosse faces its share of challenges. Having observed city administrators in similar cities, their ability to coordinate rapid, efficient responses in times of crisis ensures better protection for residents and businesses.
9. **Community Engagement:** City administrators in other regions have proven effective at fostering meaningful dialogue between residents, businesses, and local governments. La Crosse, with its strong community identity, would benefit from a city administrator who facilitates this engagement, ensuring that public input drives decision-making.
10. **Accountability and Performance:** The city administrator is accountable to the council and public, La Crosse would see greater transparency and measurable performance in city operations and within city departments. This structure ensures that goals are met and that public trust remains strong.

I believe the role of a City Administrator would significantly enhance La Crosse's governance, providing stability and professional management to address the city's current and future needs while expanding collaborative opportunities with regional partners like us.

Please contact me if any of you would like to discuss further, and I strongly encourage you to consider this important ordinance.

Sincerely,

Bob Gollnik

**Bob Gollnik**

Executive Director – La Crosse Area Planning Committee (MPO)

Phone 608-785-5977/612-720-1852 Email [rgollnik@lacrossecounty.org](mailto:rgollnik@lacrossecounty.org)

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**Craig, Sondra**

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**From:** Kelly <kellysueleibold@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 1, 2024 6:56 AM  
**To:** ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** Fwd: Support for City Admin in La Crosse

Some people who received this message don't often get email from kellysueleibold@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Good morning City Council members! Please see the forwarded message below.

I saw a great LTE in the Tribune this morning from an Aron Newberry that I'll steal a quote from: "This investment in professional management will pay dividends by creating a more efficient, stable, and prosperous community for all La Crosse residents."

When I was on the City Council in my hometown, a community in southeastern Minnesota of under 4k people, I assumed having a City Administrator was the norm. Even though we had our political differences (as a healthy democracy should), having this leadership position allowed City business to run much more smoothly, and as Aron said, allowed elected officials to focus on long-term vision.

I hope you'll support this at J+A tonight. Thanks for all you do!

You can read the full letter here [https://lacrossetribune.com/opinion/letters/la-crosse-needs-consistent-professional-leadership---aron-newberry/article\\_6bd11530-7ec7-11ef-8174-97834a746b1d.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawFownFleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHdSwACx2\\_p015OC2BKbH-pMwqmpF4Av7lBDqr2SA3jonXG3dCCUE3S73ug\\_aem\\_Rt30Sry9rG\\_Ll1v-RbcuFw](https://lacrossetribune.com/opinion/letters/la-crosse-needs-consistent-professional-leadership---aron-newberry/article_6bd11530-7ec7-11ef-8174-97834a746b1d.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawFownFleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHdSwACx2_p015OC2BKbH-pMwqmpF4Av7lBDqr2SA3jonXG3dCCUE3S73ug_aem_Rt30Sry9rG_Ll1v-RbcuFw)

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Kelly <kellysueleibold@gmail.com>  
**Date:** Thu, Sep 26, 2024, 3:02 PM  
**Subject:** Support for City Admin in La Crosse  
**To:** <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>

Good afternoon Kristen,

I am writing to express my full support for creating a City Administrator position. I appreciated the comprehensive breakdown of the "rationale" on the City website, too.

As a newly elected supervisor on the La Crosse County Board, I've really enjoyed getting to know our Admin Jane Klekamp and to see how the flow of communication between department heads to her to the Board works. La Crosse County also has the opportunity to work collaboratively with the City on the Pathways Home plan, and you're well aware of the road bumps we've recently had to navigate.

I think an admin in La Crosse would be a huge benefit to the City. Perhaps with more consistency the Mayor's job would be less overwhelming from the start of onboarding and orientation. My small hometown in southeastern Minnesota has had an admin for years, and when I was on Pine Island City Council from



2018 to 2022 I saw firsthand how having an admin kept things internally organized so externally we could provide the best services to our community members.

Hope you're doing well and staying safe. Thanks for all you do.

**Kelly Leibold**

507-272-5408

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:26 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator NO date: 9/25

**From:** Paul Pierce <munchkinusnavy@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 25, 2024 8:38 AM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator

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I vote NO to a city administrator. However, I believe the decision is a done deal and it will happen regardless the wishes of the citizens.

The Mayor will then become a figurehead and his duties reduced to groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremonies. The Mayor's salary should then become a part time position with a substantial reduction in pay.

Paul Pierce  
Life Long La Crosse Resident

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:28 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** City Admin or Mayor but not both Date 9/25/24

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To Whom it may concern,

It seems to me that this position is another costly redundancy, especially at a time when we are cutting services like Libraries and Swimming pools.. Either have a City Administrator or a Mayor-not both. Also if we hire an administrator- combine it with any similar positions involving communications public and interdepartmental. Maybe then someone will oversee departments calling citizens back in a timely fashion.

Sincerely  
Mark Flottmeyer  
La Crosse Resident and tax payer

You have never been in this exact moment before, so you don't need to pretend you know what to do -  
Brian Andreas

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:28 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator - Yes Date: 9/25/24

**From:** Gerald Reichert <outlook\_CE5D8961F830C3C6@outlook.com> **On Behalf Of** Gerald Reichert  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 25, 2024 12:52 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator

You don't often get email from [gkreichert@charter.net](mailto:gkreichert@charter.net). [Learn why this is important](#)

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I am 100% in favor of a City Administrator!!!!!!

Sent from Mail for Windows

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:29 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Manager Position - Yes date: 9\_25\_24

**From:** Michael Kopski <medk557@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 25, 2024 3:54 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Manager Position

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Good Afternoon

My feelings on the new City Managers position is a positive, as I believe La Crosse has grown to a size where people who have ran, and won for Mayor don't have the knowledge, and background to manage a city of our size. I also believe the Mayors position should be a position of being a tie breaker for the Common Council, and a Ambassador for the City of La Crosse only . If the average salary of a City Manager is around 185,000.00, and the current Mayor is at 77,000.00, I believe the Mayor's position being non managerial should be shaved to 50,000.00, with an expense account of 25,000.00 as an Ambassador for the City, so he can ride in all the area parades, and festivals.

Sincerely  
Michael Kopski  
1811 Market  
La Crosse, WI.  
[medk557@yahoo.com](mailto:medk557@yahoo.com)

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:30 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** City Admin NO 9\_25\_24

schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org  
Office: 608.789.8696  
Cell (preferred): 605.413.7596

**FOR NEWS AND UPDATES SIGN UP FOR E-NOTIFICATIONS [HERE](#)**

**From:** randy kemp <kemps2112@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 26, 2024 9:24 AM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** The idea of hiring a City Administrator is another big waste of tax payers money. Most of the job descriptions are duties the Mayor is supposed to be doing. If the Mayor can't or won't do his job, and wants to foist it off on someone else, maybe he sho...

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**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2024 11:31 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** City Admin Yes 9\_26\_24

**From:** Kelly <kellysueleibold@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 26, 2024 3:03 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** Support for City Admin in La Crosse

You don't often get email from [kellysueleibold@gmail.com](mailto:kellysueleibold@gmail.com). [Learn why this is important](#)

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Good afternoon Kristen,

I am writing to express my full support for creating a City Administrator position. I appreciated the comprehensive breakdown of the "rationale" on the City website, too.

As a newly elected supervisor on the La Crosse County Board, I've really enjoyed getting to know our Admin Jane Klekamp and to see how the flow of communication between department heads to her to the Board works. La Crosse County also has the opportunity to work collaboratively with the City on the Pathways Home plan, and you're well aware of the road bumps we've recently had to navigate.

I think an admin in La Crosse would be a huge benefit to the City. Perhaps with more consistency the Mayor's job would be less overwhelming from the start of onboarding and orientation. My small hometown in southeastern Minnesota has had an admin for years, and when I was on Pine Island City Council from 2018 to 2022 I saw firsthand how having an admin kept things internally organized so externally we could provide the best services to our community members.

Hope you're doing well and staying safe. Thanks for all you do.

**Kelly Leibold**  
507-272-5408

**From:** Aron Newberry <newberry54601@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 1, 2024 3:13 PM  
**To:** ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** Agenda Item 24-1287 Support letter for County Admin.

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As La Crosse continues to grow, it's time to consider the benefits of hiring a professional city administrator to manage day-to-day operations and ensure efficient, transparent governance. Cities and counties nationwide, big and small, including local examples like the city of Onalaska and Trempealeau County, have successfully hired administrators to streamline services, improve accountability and save taxpayer money.

A city administrator brings professional expertise in public finance, urban planning and service coordination — skills critical to our community's sustainable growth. This role would allow our elected officials to focus on leadership and long-term vision while ensuring city operations run smoothly and effectively.

This model would benefit local businesses, community organizations and residents alike. Supporters include small business owners, the chamber of commerce, neighborhood associations and nonprofit groups that recognize the value of consistent, professional management. A city administrator can help us attract investment, improve infrastructure and provide better services to residents without the political pressures that often complicate decision-making. This investment in professional management will pay dividends by creating a more efficient, stable, and prosperous community for all La Crosse residents.

Vote Yes on approving a City Administrator position.

Sincerely,

Aron Newberry

913 6th St. S.

La Crosse, WI 54601



**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 1, 2024 8:50 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator - Yes 10\_1 \_24

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As a former personnel director for the city, I would agree that a City Administrator would be appropriate for a city the size of La Crosse provided a well qualified professional is selected. The Administrator must be of course kept free from the political arena with removal for cause only.

Jerome Rusch  
La Crosse, WI

If you want to speak on an agenda item, please sign up at least 10 minutes before the start of the meeting.

Registration slips are not collected once the meeting begins but will be made part of the record.

## MEETING REGISTRATION

Name: Paul Borsheim Date: 10-1-24  
PLEASE PRINT

Municipality of Residence: Nellisville

Representation: Borton Construction  
If you are representing an organization or person other than yourself at this meeting.

Agenda Item #: 24 - 1287  
Please fill out a separate sheet for each piece of legislation in which you are registering.

---

**Do you support or oppose the agenda item?**

- ☒ Support  
☐ Oppose  
☐ Neither support nor oppose

**Do you want to speak?**

- ☒ Yes, I want to speak.  
☐ No, I do not want to speak.  
☐ I do not want to speak, but I am available to answer questions.

If you want to speak on an agenda item, please sign up at least 10 minutes before the start of the meeting.

Registration slips are not collected once the meeting begins but will be made part of the record.

## MEETING REGISTRATION

Name: BILL HARDEN Date: 10/1  
PLEASE PRINT

Municipality of Residence: La Crosse

Representation: Myself  
If you are representing an organization or person other than yourself at this meeting.

Agenda Item #: 24-1287  
Please fill out a separate sheet for each piece of legislation in which you are registering.

Do you support or oppose the agenda item?

☐ Support

☒ Oppose

☐ Neither support nor oppose

Do you want to speak?

☒ Yes, I want to speak.

☐ No, I do not want to speak.

☐ I do not want to speak, but I am available to answer questions.

If you want to speak on an agenda item, please sign up at least 10 minutes before the start of the meeting.

Registration slips are not collected once the meeting begins but will be made part of the record.

## MEETING REGISTRATION

Name: Andrew Ericson Date: 10/1/24  
PLEASE PRINT

Municipality of Residence: La Crosse

Representation: \_\_\_\_\_  
If you are representing an organization or person other than yourself at this meeting.

Agenda Item #: 24-1287  
Please fill out a separate sheet for each piece of legislation in which you are registering.

---

**Do you support or oppose the agenda item?**

- ☒ Support  
☐ Oppose  
☐ Neither support nor oppose

**Do you want to speak?**

- ☒ Yes, I want to speak.  
☐ No, I do not want to speak.  
☐ I do not want to speak, but I am available to answer questions.

# GUNDERSEN

## HEALTH SYSTEM®

October 1, 2024

City of La Crosse  
Common Council  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter in support of the charter ordinance to create section 19 of Appendix A of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse creating the position, duties and responsibilities of the Office of the City Administrator and removing duties from the Office of the Mayor.

Many of the core issues our community faces—both the challenges and the opportunities—are long-term issues. These are conditions we will face for decades, not months or even years. A community our size needs operational guidance and certainty to advance addressing these issues as directed by the elected Council and the Mayor. The creation of a City Administrator position would allow for continuity in daily operations of the city and would bring expertise and professional training in the operations of critical services in local government including emergency services, public safety, intergovernmental relations, and community development. A City Administrator has the potential to further the efficiency and effectiveness of services in the City of La Crosse, allowing for continued leadership in the region and beyond. La Crosse is poised to continue its rise as a premier community in the Upper Midwest. Implementing a full-time City Administrator will help advance that rise, allowing our elected leaders to focus on vision and policy while the Administrator manages operations. This will help city government be even more responsive to all citizens.

Gundersen Health System—becoming Emplify Health—experiences firsthand many ways municipal services and operations of the City of La Crosse impact our patients, staff, and the community. I appreciate your thoughtful attention to this request and ask you to support and advance this proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Heather Schimmers  
President, Emplify Health, Gundersen Region

**From:** Wendy Butler <wbwb2@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 2, 2024 12:55 PM  
**To:** ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** City administrator

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Dear City Council Members,

I strongly support approval of item 24-1287 to hire an administrator for the city of La Crosse. A professional with expertise in planning, finance, and service coordination will be a strong support for our department heads and will save taxpayer money. I also support continuing our mayoral position - full time or part time to be determined in the future.

Aaron Newberry's recent letter to the La Crosse Tribune succinctly states my views.  
Please support the hiring of a city administrator.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of La Crosse.

Wendy Butler  
1224 Heritage Court  
La Crosse  
68 317-8865  
Sent from my iPad

Dear Mayor and Common Council,

RE: Professionally trained and experienced Administrator

I am writing this letter to underscore the crucial need for a professional Administrator in the City of La Crosse. The role of an Administrator is pivotal in ensuring the smooth functioning of the city's operations. Below, I present my thoughts and comments on this matter.

No matter the organization, be it a non-profit, educational institution, governmental body, small business, or corporate enterprise, many factors contribute to the organization's health. The organization's health allows for adaption to change, creates the culture, determines production outputs, maximizes allocation of financial resources, and creates the greatest service for the customer. While there are many factors in creating healthy organizations, three main factors are Leadership, Structure, and Professional Skill Requirements. Working on your organizational health is a pursuit in which improvement always exists, change is constantly necessary, and creating the proper focus is absolute. Like many of you working in various roles in different types of organizations, I have learned to ask a fundamental question with both little issues, conflict resolution, and significant decisions that question is "What does great look like?" Once "great" is defined, putting the pieces to pursue that objective becomes relatively easy. From my vantage point of view, "What does great look like?" for the City of La Crosse operations platform, it is easy to define that our city has a structural issue that causes a skills gap. Below, I will define some of these issues from my perspective, with the caveat that there is no silver bullet to improving an organization. It is constantly focused on intentional work "on" the organization versus working "in" the organization. We must recognize these issues and work towards change and improvement in our city's operations.

In the case of a city, the vision is the will of the people (which in written form is all the plans sitting on the shelves, some of which may be lacking implementation); the leadership is based on whom they choose to represent them. We choose to have an elected administrator (mayor) handling day-to-day operations; we elect a new administrator every 6.2 years since Mayor Medinger was in office. Then, we expect this person to have all the skills required to administer the city's business. I often joke that every 6.2 years, the whole City of La Crosse gets on a giant airplane, then we elect one of us as our pilot and hope like heck they have enough skill to get it off the ground and, more importantly, land the plane with most of us surviving. The probability of electing someone with the skills required to manage the complexity of a city is as close to zero as you can get. To make matters worse, this "newly elected administrator" manages the city's day-to-day operations but has zero authority to get the work done, as that lies with our common council. Fundamentally, our structure creates an administrator without professional skill, then provides a work environment in which they have no authority. This is not what great looks like. We need a collaborative effort to address these issues and create a better future for our city.

Having worked in many communities, my experience in working with communities with a professional Administration there are many benefits. Three recent projects we have worked on are as follows:

1. Professional administrators implement plans effectively. We did a \$18 million project approximately three years ago; we were selected via RFP in mid-April. By August 1st, we had completed all entitlements, and excavators were moving dirt for the project. Our team spent less than 4 hours in public meetings. This project also included approximately \$1M in public

sector projects that we completed in our scope of work. How? The administrator managed the process with professional skill, and the whole team at the city knew their marching orders and timeline for getting work done. This administrator's plans were not on a shelf; the team was implementing the people's plans, and the council was exceptionally well informed and received updates on the process; they knew the city business. This administrator knew the city economics so well that they provided us with the market rate rent projection with examples; additionally, due to the public-private partnership, they also knew the support needed to make the project work. This administrator and staff "knew their numbers." We are starting another project in the community in 2025. This community is the benchmark for what does great look like.

2. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, we broke ground on a \$32 million public-private partnership, including a new public library, community center, and 78 residential units. This collaborative project included many partners, including the school district, senior center, library board, several community members, vision groups, and our development team. This comprehensive project with significant deal structure complexity falls on the skill of one person, a first-time city administrator who worked his way up the ladder and was professionally educated and trained. The city administrator has managed this process with timelines and specifics, laid out steps to finish, facilitated vital community input, and managed the outside professional services required for a successful project. The mayor and council were active in this project's public meetings, engaged in the vetting process, and, most importantly, championed this great new addition to the community's urban core and its lasting impact. In La Crosse, we closed libraries.
3. The final project will be very familiar. An experienced administrator led it at the time, taking place in the core of the City of La Crosse. At the time of construction, it was one of the larger dollar-volume projects in the city's core. This project was led by the County Administrator and included a county administration building, Belle Square Block, and The Hub on the 6<sup>th</sup>. These three projects changed our urban core and turned parking lots into residential housing and business use, converting a minimally used bank building and repurposing it for county offices and turning an asbestos-infused office building to be repurposed for housing, which includes condos. The role of the administrator was critical; I think you would be hard-pressed to "elect" the required professional skill needed to put this project together.

Other strategic differences between our current structure and that of a city administrator, from my experience, are as follows:

1. Having a trained professional administer the duties associated with the day-to-day management of a city allows elected officials to be more impactful in their service to the community. An effective administrator will provide thoughtful expertise, excellent communication, good training, and a comprehensive approach to supporting the vision of the elected officials/community, which causes and empowers more of the people's vision to be done. An administrator managing day-to-day details strengthens the voice of the people.
2. The number of people willing to run for office will increase as it will not be a full-time job. I appreciate the work our current and past council have put into running our city, but let's face it, it is a considerable time commitment that most people can't do. This time commitment is a prime example of structural deficiency in the city operations. I serve on non-profit boards, but



only if they have paid professional staff, which allows me to contribute to my area of expertise without an extra full-time or part-time job.

3. A professional administrator will create an environment where all department heads can focus on the production needed to complete the community's vision with the authority to make necessary changes. Currently, our mayor has responsibilities/duties to perform. Still, the reality is the council manages those department heads, and the authority to replace department heads lies in the hands of the council, which creates a work environment in which a department head does not have to listen to our weak mayor. We have a lot of excellent department heads in the city; we also have department heads who choose not to follow the direction of the Mayor, as I have witnessed over the years. In essence, our mayor has responsibility with no authority, which is a broken operating platform, leading to a workplace that is less than desirable. With candor, our workforce deserves a trained, professional, and competent supervisor.
4. Communities need capital from the private sector to complete projects and facilitate economic development. In essence, our community is competing with other communities for that capital. I recently spoke at the Economic Development Association of Minnesota Summer Conference. After the presentation, I met several professional staff and administrators working to move their communities forward; I did not meet a single mayor. They are not even in the game.
5. Our current structure creates a void in leadership in day-to-day operations as our typical modern-day mayor's tenure is 6.2 years; the first half or more of their tenure is just figuring out the job and developing professional skills. When you have this void in leadership, it creates an environment of a de facto administrator. For many years of my early career, this role was served by our Director of Planning, Larry Kirch. Larry, in essence, served as a City Administrator. I don't think he asked to be in the role; he was just willing to do the work and filled the void the best he could.
6. By having a professionally trained Administrator, the mayor can more effectively lead in implementing the people's vision. For a couple of reasons, but typically, in most organizations, the visionary and implementer are not the same person, and the skills required are different. Let the Mayor be the champion voice and visionary of the people's will. Let a qualified, trained, and professional Administrator excel in the operations and implementation of the people's business.
7. Regarding the cost of this new position, the cost is what you will pay for an administrator. You will get the value by fixing the broken operating platform. A simple 1% savings in efficiency in a 75-million-dollar budget will more than pay for this position, but the real value lies in unrealized opportunity cost. To see this in action, what was the net benefit of new tax revenue, homes created, and economic impact in example 3 above?

I could continue regarding the value and benefits of a city administrator in creating a healthy organization focusing on Leadership, Structure, and Professional Skills. But I will end by saying that I believe this decision is the most critical to come before the council during my time working in the city. Now is the time to act and work "on" the structural problems within the city by hiring a city administrator to implement the vision created by our elected body.

As always, if I can help in any way, I will. Thank you for reading this letter. I am cheering you on in this decision.

Marvin Wanders

## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 3:27 PM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator Salary 10/8/24

---

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 3:24 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator Salary

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The considered salary of the possible City Administrator for the City of La Crosse is more than DOUBLE that of the Elected, publicly chosen Mayor of La Crosse, Wisconsin.  
It is time for the La Crosse City Council to make reasonable and acceptable decisions for non-elected persons of POWER!

James W. Sheffer, Behavioral Science, R.N.

Sent from my Aspire ES 15

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: CityAdministrator 10\_08\_24

---

**From:** Gretchen Burns <[gobvol@gmail.com](mailto:gobvol@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 3:46 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <[schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** CityAdministrator

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I am in favor of a city administrator. The mayor's race in the recent years has been merely a popularity contest with most being unqualified and unable to meet the many needs of our city. Once elected we discover the inadequacies of the mayor and are unable to remedy it until next election cycle. I don't see why we should have both. Perhaps so the mayor can be a meet and great and ceremonial head. If we have both then the mayor's salary should be decreased to help defray the administrator's salary and the mayor would have fewer responsibilities. We are at a crucial point in the survival of the quality of our city. It is very difficult to compete with our neighboring cities in many categories and we need an intelligent and motivating leader. Perhaps a city administrator is an answer.



# Human Resources

400 La Crosse St., La Crosse, WI 54601 • Tel: (608) 789-7595 • Fax: (608) 789-7598  
www.cityoflacrosse.org HR@cityoflacrosse.org

TO: Common Council  
Mayor Reynolds

FROM: Rebecca Franzen, Director of Human Resources

DATE: October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

RE: Anticipated Costs for City Administrator

Please find below the anticipated wages and benefits for the City Administrator position, should it be approved by Common Council.

As previously stated, the recommendation by McGrath Human Resources Group is that the City Administrator position be compensated at approximately 20% - 25% higher than department head positions to maintain an appropriate level of separation between the positions. Additional costs related to the position that have been assumed include (1) WRS employer contributions of 6.95%, (2) FICA Tax, (3) Health Insurance, (4) Life Insurance/Income Continuation Insurance, and (5) Non-Personal Expenses such as travel, training/registrations, memberships, and office supplies.

## Based on 20% Higher Than Current Highest Paid

	City Administrator	Notes
Contract Paid		
Hours	2080	
Hourly Rate	\$ 89.73	
Subtotal	\$ 186,645.89	
WRS (6.95% of Salary)	\$ 12,971.89	21.2% Insurance Rate and 3% COLA for 2025 assumed; both subject to change based on final budget.
FICA (7.65% of Salary)	\$ 14,278.41	
Health Insurance	\$ 17,552.87	
Life/ICI Insurances		
(.006% of Salary)	\$ 1,119.88	Based on the highest paid employee as of 9.5.24 at Grade 19, Step 10
Non-Personal Expenses*	\$ 10,000.00	
	<u>\$ 242,568.94</u>	

## Based on 25% Higher Than Current Highest Paid

	City Administrator	Notes
Contract Paid		
Hours	2080	
Hourly Rate	\$ 93.47	
Subtotal	\$ 194,422.80	
WRS (6.95% of Salary)	\$ 13,512.38	21.2% Insurance Rate and 3% COLA for 2025 assumed; both subject to change based on final budget.
FICA (7.65% of Salary)	\$ 14,873.34	
Health Insurance	\$ 17,552.87	
Life/ICI Insurances		
(.006% of Salary)	\$ 1,166.54	Based on the highest paid employee as of 9.5.24 at Grade 19, Step 10
Non-Personal Expenses*	\$ 10,000.00	
	<u>\$ 251,527.94</u>	

\*Non-Personal Expenses: Travel, Training/Registrations, Memberships, Office Supplies

Rebecca A. Franzen, SHRM-CP  
Director of Human Resources  
Gwendolyn A. Benish  
Human Resources Generalist

Audra M. Bloom  
Employee Benefits Specialist  
Angela M. Berget  
Human Resources Assistant

Angela R. Leisso  
Sr. Human Resources Generalist  
Heidi L. Stein  
Wellness Coordinator

The City Administrator's wages and benefits will be paid by the General Fund (50%), Enterprise Fund (45%) and TIF Admin (5%).

Based on the hiring plan that is proposed, we likely will not fill the role until July 2025. Below is an estimated budgetary impact for 2025. The Director of Finance and I are anticipating a cost of **\$121,284.47** - **\$125,763.97** for 2025.

Based on 20% Higher Than Current Highest

Paid Employee

General Fund	50%	\$	60,642.24
Enterprise Fund	45%	\$	54,578.01
TIF Admin	5%	\$	6,064.22
			<u>\$ 121,284.47</u>

Based on 25% Higher Than Current Highest

Paid Employee

General Fund	50%	\$	62,881.99
Enterprise Fund	45%	\$	56,593.79
TIF Admin	5%	\$	6,288.20
			<u>\$ 125,763.97</u>



# Human Resources

400 La Crosse St., La Crosse, WI 54601 • Tel: (608) 789-7595 • Fax: (608) 789-7598  
www.cityoflacrosse.org HR@cityoflacrosse.org

TO: Common Council  
Mayor Reynolds

FROM: Rebecca Franzen, Director of Human Resources

DATE: October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

RE: Draft Hiring Plan for City Administrator

## The Hiring Team:

To properly facilitate the hiring process of **City Administrator**, it is the Director of Human Resources recommendation that the hiring process is facilitated by a team referred to as the *City Administrator Search Team* with two sub teams: (1) the core team and (2) the selection team. The core team's role is to manage the logistics of the process which includes outreach planning, time-lining, crafting position advertisements, etc. The members of the core team would be members of the Human Resources department and the recruitment firm.

The selection team's role will be to participate in the screening process (i.e. resume review, virtual interview, in-person interviews and any other necessary subsequent interviews or public listening sessions). This team will be responsible for the final candidate selection.

The City Administrator Search Team will consist of at least 6 members. To ensure we have fair representation in the selection process, the selection team will be at least one (1) Finance and Personnel Committee member, at least one (1) Executive Committee member, the Mayor, at least two (2) department heads and the Director of Human Resources.

## Announcing the Position:

With the help and partnership of an executive recruitment firm, the position will be announced via numerous sources to ensure that a qualified, diverse pool of applicants is reached.

The Core Team will announce and advertise the position via the following channels:

- Recruitment firm reaching out to individuals and organizations on an outreach list.
- Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Wisconsin City/County Management Association job board
- Specialized mail advertising by recruitment firm
- City's website
- Governmentjobs.com job board
- Any other locations recommended by the executive recruitment firm

The core team will monitor how frequently the job opening pages are visited and if we become concerned that we are not generating enough interest in the position, we will re-evaluate our approach and/or extend the application window.

**Rebecca A. Franzen, SHRM-CP**  
Director of Human Resources  
**Gwendolyn A. Benish**  
Human Resources Generalist

**Audra M. Bloom**  
Employee Benefits Specialist  
**Angela M. Berget**  
Human Resources Assistant

**Angela R. Leisso**  
Sr. Human Resources Generalist  
**Heidi L. Stein**  
Wellness Coordinator

### Screening the Candidates:

The Director of Human Resources will input all applicants into a tracking spreadsheet. The tracking spreadsheet will include a list of desired and required competencies that the screening team will use to review resumes and cover letters. The screening team will review all cover letters, resumes and key information about each candidate in the tracking sheet. Candidates will be rated red/yellow/green on how well they match the competencies listed in the job description/ordinance.

The screening team will have a virtual interview with all candidates that have been classified as green. Candidates classified as yellow will be revisited if we have any concerns about the strength of the green candidate pool. Candidates in the red pool will be sent regret notices.

Currently, the Director of Human Resources is anticipating at least two in-person interviews with the selection committee. Although this is subject to change based on how the interviews progress and if there is a need for further clarification from any candidate or the entire Common Council would like to host a special meeting and interview the candidate(s).

### Hiring Timeline:

Date	Task
By December 31 <sup>st</sup>	City Administrator Search Team is established with members from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Executive Committee</li><li>▪ Finance and Personnel Committee</li><li>▪ Department Heads</li><li>▪ Mayor</li><li>▪ Director of Human Resources</li></ul>
January 1 – January 31	Director of Human Resources gathers information on executive recruitment firms and brings a recommendation forward to the City Administrator Search Team.
March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Job posting goes live on all forms of marketing (i.e. website, social media, specialty organizations, etc.).
April 4 <sup>th</sup>	End of Application Period
April 4 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup>	Resume screening with selection team
April 28 <sup>th</sup> – May 9 <sup>th</sup>	Virtual Interviews with Candidates
May 19 <sup>th</sup> – May 30 <sup>th</sup>	First Round of In-Person Interviews with Candidates
June 9 <sup>th</sup> – June 20 <sup>th</sup>	Second Round of In-Person Interviews with Candidates <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ This will include a tour of the City with the La Crosse Chamber of Commerce's First Friend Program</li></ul>
Week of June 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Make Contingent Offer to Candidate <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Contingent on background check</li><li>▪ Pre-Employment Drug Screening</li></ul>
July 10 <sup>th</sup>	Candidate selection confirmed by Common Council
Week of July 28 <sup>th</sup>	City Administrator Hired

*\*Any breaks between dates on the schedule are intended to provide notice to the candidate to ensure availability and scheduling for potential travel to and from the City of La Crosse.*

*\*\*This is a tentative schedule and subject to change. We may add additional interviews with the full Common Council or additional department heads but that will be determined by the City Administrator Search Team.*



# Human Resources

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www.cityoflacrosse.org HR@cityoflacrosse.org

## Selection of the Candidate:

The candidate selected for the role of City Administrator will be selected based on their education, qualifications and responses throughout the interview process.

The selection team will convene after each round of the screening process to review the candidates and determine which individuals will move forward to the next round and ultimately are extended a contingent offer.

The candidate selected for a contingent offer will be granted based on a majority vote of the City Administrator Search Team. The selection will be confirmed by the full Common Council.

Once a candidate is selected, the Director of Human Resources will work with the selection team and the executive recruitment firm to determine a wage offer for the candidate and create a contract with the partnership of the legal department. The candidate will undergo a background check, and a pre-employment drug screening conducted by a third-party.

## Onboarding:

Once the candidate has accepted the City's offer, all further onboarding will be handled by the Human Resources Department per usual City practice.

**Rebecca A. Franzen, SHRM-CP**  
Director of Human Resources  
**Gwendolyn A. Benish**  
Human Resources Generalist

**Audra M. Bloom**  
Employee Benefits Specialist  
**Angela M. Berget**  
Human Resources Assistant

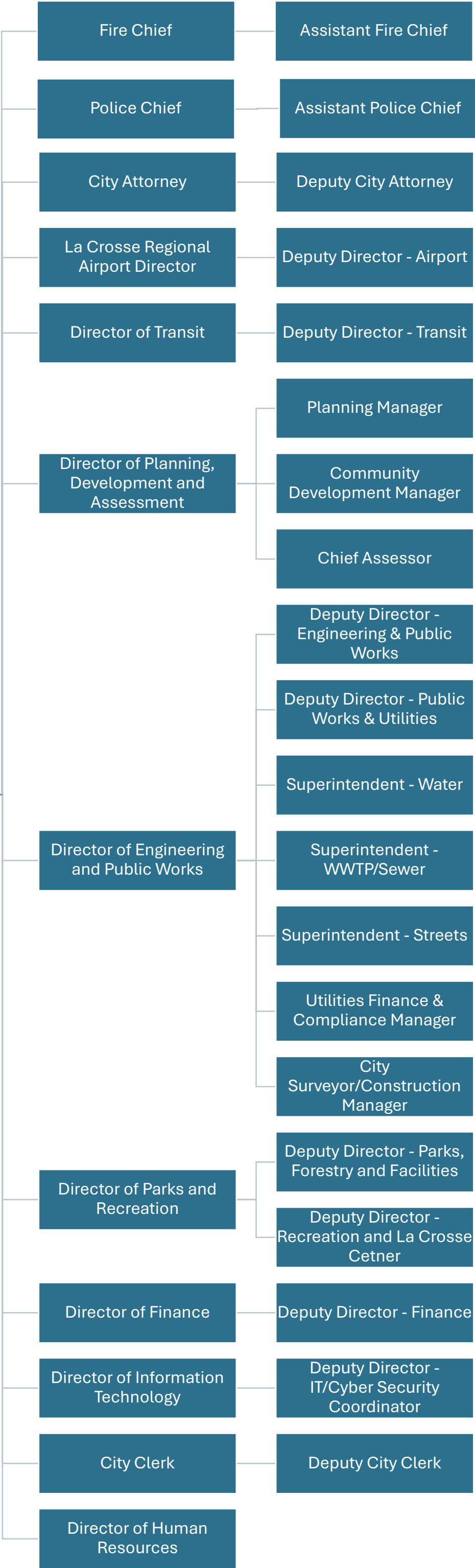
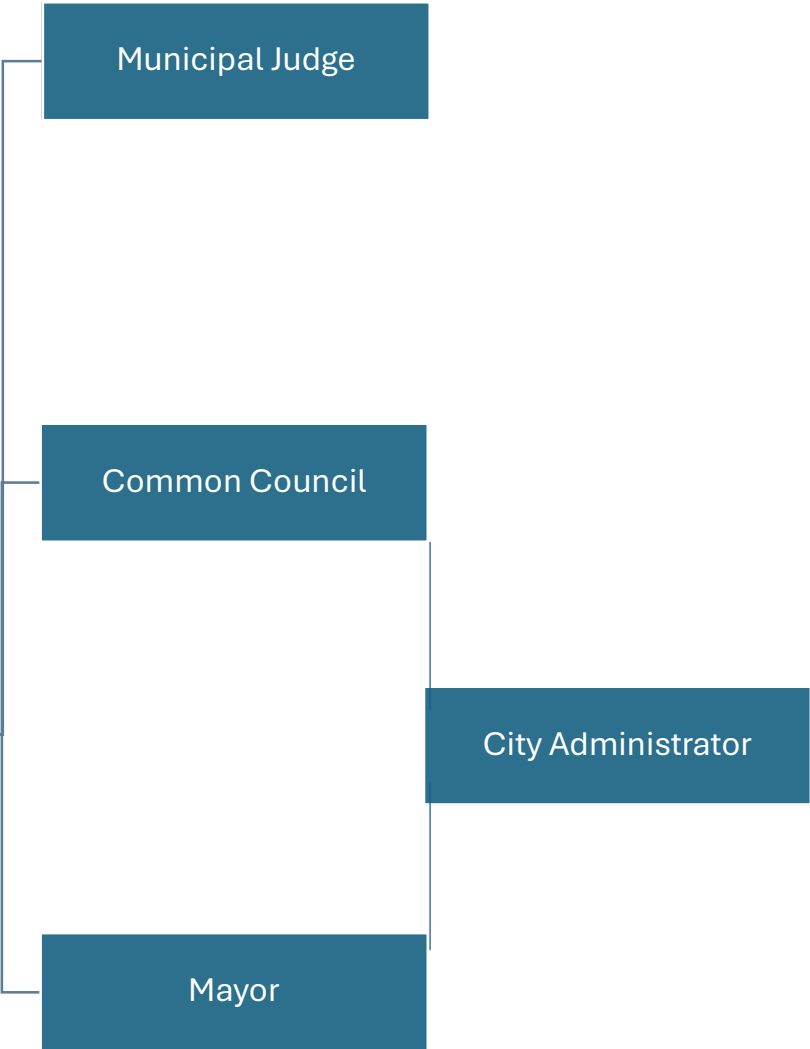
**Angela R. Leisso**  
Sr. Human Resources Generalist  
**Heidi L. Stein**  
Wellness Coordinator



Voters

NOTE: the Library Board directly oversees the Library Director and staff of the La Crosse Public Library system. Boards/Commissions are not listed on this organizational chart.

NOTE: the Police and Fire Commission have authority over the Police Chief and Fire Chief for staffing (hiring, firing and discipline), but the City Administrator would have operational authority over the Police and Fire department. Boards, Committees and Commissions are not listed on the organizational chart.



## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 10:08 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator Position 10\_09\_24

---

**From:** Paul Pierce <munchkinusnavy@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 9:00 AM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator Position

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I vote NO to a city administrator. However, I believe the decision is a done deal and it will happen regardless the wishes of the citizens.

The Mayor will then become a figurehead and his duties reduced to groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremonies.

The Mayor's salary should then become a part time position with a substantial reduction in pay.

Paul Pierce  
Life Long La Crosse Resident

## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 6:25 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator 10\_8\_24

---

**From:** Ruth Kurinsky <rkurin2@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 5:09 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator

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I am not in favor of adding a city administrator. We don't need both a mayor and city administrator. Have one or the other not both.

## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 6:24 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator Input 10\_8\_24

---

**From:** Anna Sprague <[sprague.anna@gmail.com](mailto:sprague.anna@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 9:19 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <[schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** City Administrator Input

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Dear Mx. Schadeberg and Council Members,

I am writing as a citizen residing at 1715 Barnabee Rd in La Crosse, WI, to express my support of adding a public administrator into the La Crosse's City Government. My personal and professional experience with the City of La Crosse has provided many opportunities to see where this position would benefit the City and its citizens. There are a number of silos that I have experienced between the various departments and depending on who you talk to at the City, you may get somewhat different answers or not be made aware of other resources available. Having someone with the daily oversight and authority to project manage the various departments in alignment with the goals set by the Mayor and Council would create efficiencies both within and across departments and externally with partner organizations.

I understand this can feel like a tremendous change and budget update but this is one of those moves that will allow for positive growth and will undoubtedly bring new opportunities as well as cost savings from the success of having a qualified administrator keeping the beat for everyone to work in tandem instead of against each other. Many other cities have shown what a successful working relationship can be with a city administrator, mayor and council, and I believe La Crosse is in a great position to see these benefits as well.

I'm happy to speak more about my experiences, and I encourage the City to support this new position from the mindset of an opportunity for growth.

Thank you,

Anna Sprague

## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 6:24 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** FW: Public Comment: Proposal to Create a City Administrator 10\_8\_24

---

**From:** Trevor Sprague <tcsprague@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 9:33 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** Public Comment: Proposal to Create a City Administrator

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Good evening,

I am writing in support of creating a city administrator position for La Crosse. A municipality of our size maintains a considerable workforce across numerous departments that requires greater coordination for day-to-day operations than we currently experience.

As an elected political official, the mayor is in the position to have more direction in policy and working with the common council. Individuals elected to the role of mayor often have no background in public administration, or even business administration, whereas a qualified City Administrator candidate would bring that experience directly to bear on the work of the city. An administrator free from the political process can provide consistency and efficiency in daily operations, provide more complete information and timely information to aid the mayor and council, and improve services for the entire community.

I believe the proposal is a good idea that would bring much needed support to our city employees, find and create efficiencies in the city's operations, and provide consistency among personnel changes in the common council and mayor's office.

Thank you,

Trevor Sprague  
1715 Barnabee Rd.  
La Crosse

## Elsen, Nikki

---

**From:** Schadeberg, Kristen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 6:23 AM  
**To:** Elsen, Nikki  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Mitch  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator Position 10\_8\_24

---

**From:** David Buroker <peabody59@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 8, 2024 5:16 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org>  
**Subject:** City Administrator Position

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To Whom It May Concern:

I led the City of La Crosse Human Resources Department for 5 years. After the conclusion of my first year in my position, the Mayor at that time, Tim Kabat, asked me to write a summary of my first year and provide any thoughts I had about how the City could do things more efficiently. My first suggestion was to add a City Administrator position. My rationale for this addition was the position would take the politics out of managing the operations of the city and it would help it run more effectively and efficiently.

The comparison I made at the time was to envision the Mayor being the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the city and the City Administrator being the Chief Operating Officer (COO). The Mayor would be the person providing their vision for the City and the City Administrator would be the one overseeing the operations.

In addition, since the City Administrator would be a city employee (not an elected official), it would also add consistency to the operations should there be turnover in the Mayor position.

This is a model that has proven to be very successful in other communities throughout the US. I strongly support Mayor Reynolds' recommendation in adding this position.

Sincerely,

David Buroker  
2208 Main Street  
La Crosse, WI  
Former Director of Human Resources

**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: In support of a City Administrator position 10\_9\_24

---

**From:** Natalie Heneghan <[natalie.heneghan@gmail.com](mailto:natalie.heneghan@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 2:47 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <[schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** In support of a City Administrator position

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Hello,

I'm writing to express my support of the proposal to create a City Administrator position for the City of La Crosse.

An administrator would bring more clarity and oversight to day-to-day processes. The person hired could effectively delegate and execute on Council's policies. This is an exciting prospect for taxpayers, local businesses, nonprofit agencies, and others who rely on a strong local government.

In both personal and professional situations, I've been frustrated by a lack of cross-departmental communication, clear over-burdening of city staff, and avoidable inefficiencies within La Crosse's city government. It's concerning to see all the missed opportunities and miscommunication. Many city staff I interact with fully acknowledge the gaps. I am confident the cost of hiring a City Administrator would immediately be offset by more efficient use of staff (and taxpayer) time and resources.

La Crosse must step up and join the ranks of municipalities across Wisconsin and throughout the nation that understand local government must be run efficiently, effectively, and transparently--and that it takes a talented executive to make that happen. Thank you for considering this proposal and reading my comments.

Thanks,  
Natalie Heneghan

**From:** Andrew Ericson <ericson.andrew777@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 10, 2024 9:03 AM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen; ZZ City Clerk External  
**Subject:** City Administrator Support

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**Mayor Reynolds and Common Council,**

I am writing to express my strong support for the creation of the City Administrator position in La Crosse.

As I mentioned during the J&A meeting last week, I fully endorse this initiative. Since Mayor Reynolds first brought up the idea in his State of the City address last January, I've been giving it a lot of thought. Initially, I was unsure, as I hadn't heard much about the role before. But the more I learned, the more it made sense. It's a smart, practical solution for a city like ours. Frankly, it was surprising to realize that we don't already have a "COO" type role. As I've come to understand the broad and nearly impossible responsibilities currently placed on the Mayor, it makes me wonder why we've waited so long to act.

Reading our comprehensive plan fills me with excitement for what this wonderful city can grow into. But if we truly want to reach that vision, we need to be serious about how we manage our operations now. I believe the best way to set us up for future success is by bringing in a City Administrator as soon as possible.

I understand the concerns about adding expenses to an already tight budget. For a moment, that gave me pause as well. But then I realized that part of the reason we're facing these budget challenges is due to short-term thinking and decision-making. This budget situation should serve as a wake-up call—an opportunity to bring on a City Administrator who can help us plan for the long term and manage our human, financial, and capital resources more effectively in the face of difficult headwinds.

I appreciate that La Crosse isn't breaking new ground with this discussion. The City Administrator role has been successfully implemented in municipalities across Wisconsin.

Looking ahead to the next mayoral election, I've been considering the difficult decision that city residents will have to make. On one hand, voters are looking for a mayor with a clear vision for the city's future in a shifting political environment. On the other hand, the role requires someone capable of managing the day-to-day operations of the city. It's almost impossible for voters to assess whether a prospective mayor would excel as a "COO" without the kind of thorough interview process and reference checks you'd expect for such a role. We need to separate these two functions.

In conclusion, I want what is best for La Crosse, and I firmly believe that creating a City Administrator position is the best path forward for our city.

**Respectfully,**  
Andrew Ericson  
La Crosse



**Elsen, Nikki**

---

**From:** Elsenn@cityoflacrosse.org  
**Subject:** FW: City Administrator 10\_09\_24

---

**From:** Troy Nedegaard <[tnedegaard21@gmail.com](mailto:tnedegaard21@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 9, 2024 7:45 PM  
**To:** Schadeberg, Kristen <[schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:schadebergk@cityoflacrosse.org)>  
**Subject:** City Administrator

You don't often get email from [tnedegaard21@gmail.com](mailto:tnedegaard21@gmail.com). [Learn why this is important](#)

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Given the opportunity to express my opinion I am not in favor of a proposed City Administrator. This is a waste of City financial resources (Tax payers dollars). This is taking away powers of the City residents that have a right to vote in a mayor that needs to do his or her job, which is both to act as a political figure and as an administrator.

To all council members please do not vote in favor of the City Administrator position.

City resident,

Troy Nedegaard

# Proposal to create a City Administrator position for the City of La Crosse, WI

## City Council to consider at October 10, 2024 meeting

Post Date: 09/24/2024



**Legislation has been introduced to add the position of City Administrator in the City of La Crosse.**

The information presented here is designed to provide some background on the nature of the position, how the addition may change operations of city government, and fiscal impacts of adding the position.

See [Proposed Ordinance](#)

[Professional Municipal Administrators - FAQs: Wisconsin City/County Management Association](#)

Please review and help guide decision-making of the Common Council and Mayor on this issue with your comments.

### Rationale

Local governments are complex organizations that require expertise in community development, public safety, public works, emergency preparedness, planning, personnel, finance, customer service, intergovernmental relations and an administrative structure that encourages and supports overall team organization.

Additionally, communities throughout Wisconsin are increasingly facing global economic competition. Their abilities to compete depend not only on private sector initiatives, but on sophisticated and aggressive public efforts as well. The need for professional municipal administration is not a matter of a failure of local government, but rather adapting to changing condition by increasing the capacity of a municipality to provide effective and efficient services.

A publication of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities states that “as the need for full-time municipal management becomes greater, there has been a significant trend among Wisconsin municipalities toward hiring professional administrators.” An administrator acts as the chief administrative officer of the municipality.

## **Procedure**

Cities operating under Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 62 can establish the position of administrator by charter ordinance (2/3rds vote) or simple ordinance. The duties of the administrator can be tailored to meet the needs of the city, although there are certain responsibilities that should be included in all ordinances, especially in the areas of personnel and budgeting.

The position of the Mayor remains, except the responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the city is transferred to the administrator.

## **Expertise/skill levels of a municipal administrator**

Municipal administrators are trained to operate local governments. They are professionals in the same way that company executives, school superintendents, doctors and attorneys are professionals. There is a body of knowledge associated with their profession. Increasingly, the standard for professional administrators is that they have Master’s degrees in public administration, with training in budgeting, finance, personnel, labor relations, intergovernmental affairs, public works, community and economic development and public safety. They can gain administrative experience in other communities before they are ready to assume the position of City Administrator.

With focused education, training and prior experience, an administrator is already up-to-speed at the point in their careers when employment opportunities with larger municipalities become attainable. On the other hand, elected officials serving in administrative capacities do much of their learning while on the job. Administrators are part of a network of expertise and know where to go to get correct answers. They are committed to municipal administration as a career.

The community’s success is their success and, consequently, they have a very strong interest in doing the best job possible. Responsive Organizational Structure Administrators are responsible for the day-to-day operations of their municipalities. It is their responsibility to bring coordination to the provision of municipal services. They work to build a municipal team of department heads and other employees. They establish and enforce policies in the areas of personnel, purchasing, cash management, risk management, planning, and employee development. They are evaluated on their ability to provide more efficient and effective government. Administrators are responsible for advancing the organization in terms of overall performance and effectiveness. The administrator accomplishes this by bringing the council, mayor and staff together to set the priorities and to establish a framework for achieving the governmental mission of cost-effective quality services to the community.

Having an administrator provides more direct accountability to the council for the proper operation of municipal services. Elected officials know who is responsible. A dissatisfied council can easily dismiss the administrator. Stronger Council Elected councils benefit in several ways from an administrator. First, they can spend more of

their valuable time focusing on policy issues, community goals, and major projects rather than on administrative details. Second, they get better and more comprehensive information and analysis from the administrator in a staff role to enable them to make more informed decisions. Third, the changing role of the council may encourage more citizens to seek the office. Finally, the administrator can provide continuity when new persons are elected.

### **Duties of the Mayor and the Relationship with an Administrator**

The Mayor is the chief executive officer of the City. In this role, the mayor is responsible for the general welfare of the city. This responsibility is exercised in both a policy-making role by recommending policies to the council, breaking tie votes, and vetoing legislation; and an executive role by seeing that laws are enforced, and that city officers and employees properly do their jobs.

The responsibilities are mandated by state statute (Chapter 62.09 (8)) and consequently apply to mayor with and without administrators. The difference is in the manner in which the mayor exercises their executive responsibilities. In municipalities without administrators, the mayor exercises this responsibility directly by supervising day-to-day conduct of city activities.

- Department heads report to the Mayor and receive their assignment from the mayor.
- Department heads also receive assignments from the Council and are often asked by individual council members to perform tasks and projects.

Conflicting assignments and unclear reporting responsibilities can be avoided with an administrator. In municipalities with an administrator, the mayor exercises the executive responsibility indirectly by monitoring activities of the administrator and the various departments of the city government. The administrator is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city government including the supervisions of department heads. The duties of a mayor in a municipality with an administrator are as follows: The mayor shall serve as the chief executive officer of the city, performing executive responsibilities by monitoring the activities of the administrator and the various departments of city government to see that city ordinances and state laws are enforced. This requires knowledge of ordinances and laws and a procedure for monitoring city activities.

1. The Mayor shall serve as the policy leader for the community, providing policy information and recommendations to the Council.
2. The Mayor shall preside over the Council.
3. The Mayor shall vote in the event of a tie vote by the Council.
4. The Mayor shall have the authority to veto ordinances passed by the Council.
5. The Mayor shall serve as the chief representative of the city in relations with the media.
6. The Mayor shall represent the city in meetings with and presentations to other governmental groups, businesses, community groups and others.

7. The Mayor shall work with residents of the city in receiving their comments and complaints and seeking appropriate responses, in conjunction with the administrator and, if desired, the Council.

8. The Mayor shall perform any other duties not specified here that are defined in Chapter 62.09 (8).

### **Duties of Administrator in a Municipality with a Mayor**

1. The Administrator coordinates and prepares the operating budget as a key policy document and presents the budget to the Council.

2. The Administrator establishes governmental effectiveness and performance measures/outcomes.

3. The Administrator coordinates and supervises a cooperative and interdisciplinary team of professionals serving the varying needs of the community.

4. The Administrator ensures that the organization is a high performing and learning organization.

5. The Administrator is responsible to the Council for the overall coordination and direction of the day-to-day operations of City government.

6. The Administrator is charged with providing the Council policy information and recommendations and implementation of Council policies.

7. The Administrator ensures that there is a fair and uniform application of policy between all departments within the city organization.

### **Myths about the City Administrator Position**

A. Hiring an administrator means giving up your right to elect your leader. **False.** The elected council members are the policy makers, and the administrator reports to them. The administrator is responsible for carrying out the policies on a day-to-day basis. The administrator can be terminated at any time by the Common Council.

B. Hiring an administrator takes power away from the Common Council. **False.** It will strengthen the position of the governing council to make key decisions. It will, however, result in adjustments in who is responsible for what.

C. Administrators costs too much. **Not so true.** Although the salary range is currently between \$170,000 and \$190,000 per year, efficient management will likely pay for itself within a short period of time.

D. Administrators don't stay very long in one community. **False.** In Wisconsin, the average is about seven years and experiences over fifteen years are not uncommon.

E. Full-time mayors are the same as administrators. **False.** Mayors are elected for their political leadership, not their experience and education in administering the day-to-day operations of the municipality. Some mayors may have administrative skills; others may not.

### **Additional Resources:**

UW-Oskosh Whitburn Center for Governance and Policy Research - Professional Management in Wisconsin Municipalities

City	Type of Management	Population
Eau Claire	City Manager	69,737
Fond du Lac	City Manager	44,339
Janesville	City Manager	65,911
Oshkosh	City Manager	65,948
Sheboygan**	City Administrator	49,773
Wauwatosa	City Administrator	47,289
West Allis**	City Administrator	58,950
Onalaska	City Administrator	18,975
Beloit	City Manager	36,449
Kenosha**	City Administrator	98,484

\*\*Also has elected mayor

Compensation range from City of La Crosse Finance Department:

The salary range we are recommending is \$186,645.89 - \$194,422.80 based on current staff salaries but may increase if COLA are approved and/or step increases are provided prior to filling this position.

## **Resources Related to Hiring a City Administrator**

### **Wisconsin City/County Management Association**

<https://www.wcma-wi.org/>

### **Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator**

<https://wcma-wi.org/DocumentCenter/View/1594/ICMA-Recruitment-Guidelines-Handbook-Update>



Date: January 10, 2025

To: Rebecca Franzen, Human Resources Director

From: Malayna Halvorson Maes, Senior HR Consultant

Re: 2025 City Administrator

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### Salary

In 2024, the City requested recommendations on the City Administrator salary range. The firm collected salary ranges and incumbent rates for city manager/city administrator positions from the comparable organizations used in the 2022 study. The following comparable organizations were surveyed:

Eau Claire	City Manager
Fond du Lac	City Manager
Janesville	City Manager
Oshkosh	City Manager
Sheboygan	City Administrator
Wauwatosa	City Administrator
West Allis	City Administrator
Onalaska, WI	City Administrator
Rochester, MN	City Administrator
Winona, MN	City Manager
Beloit	City Manager
Kenosha	City Administrator
La Crosse County	County Administrator

At that time, we offered the City two very similar salary range options to tie the range to the existing compensation structure. We recommend approximately a 20%- 25% separation.

The range recommendations have now been trended by 2.75%, which would result in the range of \$153,921-\$201,879. Now, the City does not need to have a salary range. It can simply use this range to give the City Council salary range parameters for an employment agreement.

With that said, I understand the highest paid department director is just under \$160,000 per year effective with the 2025 salary increases. The City should be conscious of that and anticipate an annual base salary of between \$190,000-\$200,000 per year, which retains that 20%-25% separation from the highest compensated director.

In 2024, monthly car allowance, phone allowance, and deferred compensation contributions were also noted. Car allowance ranged from \$250-\$500 for 46% of the comparables. Cell Phone allowance ranged from \$78-\$120 per month for 30% of the comparables, and two (2) communities reported deferred compensation as a flat amount or percentage of base, although this is becoming more popular. It should be noted that the IRS limit for Deferred Compensation for 2025 is \$23,500. These are added items that may be discussed and included in the total compensation offer for the position.



### Responsibility Change

The City also inquired if the City should expect any change in salary at the department director level, due to the creation of a City Administrator. The Market does not distinguish a difference in these forms of government. The position of a director will continue to work on the strategic direction of a department, have oversight of operations, budget management, personnel management, policy management etc. They will all continue to have their industry market we will align their positions to. A City Administrator will have broad authority to lead the organization, ensuring the policy decisions of the council are carried out, strategic planning, preparing the annual budget, serving as a key advisor to the elected officials, lead and supervise the department directors, and ensuring operational and administrative functions are complete. The City Administrator does not carry out day to day department operations; rather this is a function of the department directors, who are hired to be the subject matter experts in their field of expertise. Given the size and level of complexity of municipal government for organizations of the city's size, I would not envision this to change.

Should you wish to discuss further as the City continues its planning, please let me know.

**From:** Chavalas, Mark <mchavalas@eagle.uwlax.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, March 3, 2025 11:03 AM  
**To:** ZZ Council Members  
**Subject:** re: City Administrator

Some people who received this message don't often get email from mchavalas@eagle.uwlax.edu. [Learn why this is important](#)

\*\*\* **CAUTION:** This email originated from an external sender. **DO NOT** click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. \*\*\*

Hello:

We are opposed to the hiring of a City Administrator for the following reasons:

1. It creates another paid government position for a job that should already be done by the Mayor and current staff of employees.
2. It provides a powerful leadership position that the citizens of La Crosse do not vote on. Thus we cannot vote the person out, like we can the Mayor and City Council.
3. The City of La Crosse is not much larger than it was in 1940 (about 42,000), but our administrative staff is much larger.

Thank you,  
Sincerely,

Mark and Kimberlee Chavalas  
114 19th St. South,  
La Crosse, WI. 54601

## Compilation of Department Head Interview Responses Concerning a City Administrator

### What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Continuity, consistency, stability
  - Avoid having to train and educate a new mayor
  - Clear line of accountability and authority
  - Management of long-term projects to completion so the time invested in them is not lost
  - Establish priorities
  - Construct the budget
- Knowledge and experience
  - City administrator would be hired for their expertise, knowledge, and experience, not popularity via election (Mayor)
  - Better approach to a long-term vision for City operations
  - Could help collaboration between department heads
  - Need a CEO to run a \$70 million+ organization
- Focus on operations
  - Currently the Mayor's duties are split between public interaction and City operations
  - Takes politics out of the agenda (x3)
  - Can evaluate departments for proper level of staffing and hold them accountable and evaluate performance
  - Better long-range planning
  - Having someone that is a professional in all of the things a department head is not – currently department heads have dedicated their working adult life to becoming experts in their profession but maybe not in budgeting or other essential things that happen in the city. Hiring a city administrator would be able to bring that experience and professionalism
  - Clear lines of accountability and authority
  - City administrator would have more time to interact with department heads
  - Can provide a clear and reliable reference point for private sector promoters to contact and interact for the development of beneficial partnerships.
- Can enhance communication between citizens and city government
- Government administrators are common in local governments
- A city administrator would be able to have a better perspective if something would go to referendum and if so would have the time to look into that and research that (right now no one has that job)

### What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Hiring the right person for the job
  - The relationship between elected officials (mayor and council members) and the administrator must be particularly cooperative, respectful and clearly defined/established.
  - The hire of an administrator with proven professionalism, communication skills, and abilities for collaboration with politicians will be particularly important for the first hire of an administrator for the City of La Crosse as the practical patterns of this alteration in the form of local government are established.
  - The administrator should have exceptional communication skills. How much responsibility will the administrator have for educating the citizenry about governmental activities? How will these educational responsibilities relate to and coordinate with the political responsibilities of the elected officials.
  - This hire should not be anyone who works in La Crosse government currently.

- How do we measure success of having a city administrator and how often? What are the benchmarks?
- How would the addition of a City Administrator to the City's organization potentially affect the level of responsibilities, job descriptions and remuneration of current staff leadership positions?
- The position may bring to the forefront needed efficiencies or standards of operations that department heads may not want or like to hear leading to fiscal accountability and cuts.
- Cost
  - Annual salary and benefits
  - Executive assistant salary and benefits?
  - Office space (waiting list for space in City Hall) and remodeling cost
  - How will the position be paid for? (x3)
  - What support staff will be necessary? (x3)
  - Viability of the expense – right now there are many more staff needed in each department already that we are getting denied that would improve our city so it is tough seeing those getting denied and adding a city administrator
- City administrator turnover
  - Typical 5-7 years for a city administrator at a medium sized municipality
- Will voters feel that their votes now have less influence with the addition of a city administrator?

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- With a city administrator would we need a full-time mayor?
- As a department head – what does that mean for me? Many unanswered questions so far.
- Consider having an assistant city administrator to fill in when city administrator is on vacation or during job vacancy
- Will seasoned department heads and staff be part of the hiring process, i.e. participate in interviews, tours of departments
- Will the selection process be completed internally, externally. (third party recruitment and hire?)
- The legislation as presented does not seem complete
- Hiring a person before we have a clear job description doesn't make sense
- Will new/incoming Council members elected in April be able to digest the gravity of this issue?
- Will the Mayor's role be more clearly defined?

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Consider hiring a consultant to evaluate the need for a city administrator and hold public information sessions
- Having a city administrator may be helpful in situations where someone of authority (above dept head) would be influential in a mtg or negotiations (because of their role and expertise)
- Is this process being rushed?
- Do the citizens of La Crosse want this?

## Uncompiled Department Head Interview Responses Concerning a City Administrator

### What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Continuity-lots of time onboarding new Mayors—train and educate on city govt
- Administrator should have the knowledge/experience already for job duties (high level functions) which just leaves learning the specifics re: City of La Crosse...i.e. similar to Dept heads—hired based on expertise not popularity
- Accountability without micromanagement
- We can do better: More collaboration, teamwork and dept head/staff support

### What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?

- Hiring the “right” person
- Transition & Uncertainty—will the administrator take on any of the dept head responsibilities?
- Will Dept heads feel they are being micromanaged?
- Full time mayor—needed ????
- Citizen buy in—perception of some members of the public-- will lose power/influence (voting) by adding Administrator vs only a Mayor

### Do you have any other questions/comments?

- NA

### Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?

- Office space---City Hall is full—waiting list

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Ideally an experienced city administrator could benefit the City by collaborating effectively with the Mayor, department heads, and staff to improve operational efficiencies and fiscal responsibility.

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

The annual salary and benefits for a city administrator, potential executive assistant, and possible deputy administrator would be significant. There would also be the cost of remodeling a space in City Hall to accommodate the city administrator and staff.

For the next four years there would be an overlap of duties between the Mayor and city administrator. Can they work and collaborate together productively for the benefit of the City?

How will the city administrator interact with department heads? Would department head job responsibilities change and will they have their salaries reduced?

It is very important to have the best search, screen, and interview process possible for hiring a city administrator. We need the right person.

Since the City is facing necessary upcoming budgetary reductions, how would a city administrator approach finding the necessary cost savings?

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

How would the success and effectiveness of having a city administrator be measured? What benchmarks would be used?

If a city administrator is hired, would the Mayor's position remain full-time or changed to a part-time position when possible?

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Continuity-lots of time onboarding new Mayors—train and educate on city govt
- Administrator should have the knowledge/experience already for job duties (high level functions) which just leaves learning the specifics re: City of La Crosse...i.e. similar to Dept heads—hired based on expertise not popularity
- Accountability without micromanagement
- We can do better: More collaboration, teamwork and dept head/staff support

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Hiring the “right” person
- Transition & Uncertainty—will the administrator take on any of the dept head responsibilities?
- Will Dept heads feel they are being micromanaged?
- Full time mayor—needed ????
- Citizen buy in—perception of some members of the public-- will lose power/influence (voting) by adding Administrator vs only a Mayor

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- NA

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Office space---City Hall is full—waiting list

**What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Leadership
- **Clear direction** and focus—currently Mayor position pulls person in 2 directions (public vs time focused on city hall)
- Continuity
- Forced to be more responsive, better communication
- Clear lines of accountability and authority
- More oversight—consistently checking in with dept heads—how are things going? How can I assist?
- Reduce silos and departments working so independently
- Prioritize
- **Consistency** with less transition of staff/mayor, council members

**What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- People don't like change-dept heads, staff, public
- Abuse of power (up to Dept heads to speak up if this is an issue)
- High turn over—trend for city administrators
- Resistance from staff, dept heads, public—administrator would need to build relationships

**Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- Consider the idea of having an Assistant City Administrator (Dept head), they would attend high level mtgs and be in the loop to fill in the absence of the City Administrator (vacation or job vacancy)
- Involve seasoned dept heads and staff in hiring process—interview, tours of their dept, gather input from staff

**Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Administrator could be helpful in situations where someone of authority (above dept head) would be influential in a mtg or negotiations (because of their role and expertise)



### **Benefits of City Administrator:**

- Need a CEO to run a 72-74million dollar entity (X2)
- Takes politics out of the agenda (X3)
- CA can look at departments and see where they may be heavy. Hold departments accountable to their budgets. Employee/staff performance
- Enhance communication efforts between citizens and City government
- Removes the boundaries of incoming/outgoing elected official-establishes relationships that can flourish from Administration to Administration
- Established priorities
- Support department heads with and within governmental framework
- Most popular form of government in the US
- Construct the budget
- Frees up Mayor to be more public facing.

### **Barriers/Challenges to City Administrator position:**

- The wrong person and lack of operational capacity could cripple a city
- The position may bring to the forefront needed efficiencies or standards of operations that we may not want or like to hear
- Fiscal accountability will lead to cuts. It will get ugly.
- Should not be anyone who works in La Crosse government currently.
- New CA would be expected to hold directors and department heads accountable and work in collaboration. Some may not like this. If the wrong person is hired it could cause adversarial and damaging relationships that could harm the city.
- The legislation as presented does not seem complete
- Hiring person before we have a clear job description doesn't make sense

### **Questions about City Administrator position:**

- Is there going to be a push for a public referendum. If so, will the Council cede to the public's position or will they vote the way they think it should be?
- Are new/incoming Council Members elected in April – be able to digest the gravity of this issue
- Will the Mayor's role be more clearly defined
- Will the CA hold departments accountable to legislation and ordinances on the books – not done with consistency now
- How will this position be paid for (X3)
- How do we now what kind of support staff they will need (X3)
- Will the selection process be completed internally, externally. (Third party recruitment and hire?)
- Do the citizens/taxpayers of La Crosse want this? Are we doing it right? Are we rushing into this?

### **What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- Add stability
- Having another staff is general is a benefit to the city
- Having someone take the time to see a project from start to finish - project manager - maybe we would be better off getting multiple project managers
- Sometimes department heads spend 100s of hours working on a project for a mayor and then when there is a change in the mayor that project gets dropped and all of that time was wasted
- This person would be able to have a better perspective if any department should go to any referendum and if so would have the time to look into that and research that (right now no one has that job)
- We could have a longer vision plan – where are we going in 5 years and how are we getting there – right now department heads need to be so into the day to day it is tough to do any long-term planning
- Have a long-term plan of how we are getting out of this budget crisis
- Having someone that is a professional in all of the things a department head is not – currently department heads have dedicated their working adult life to this profession and are experts but maybe not in budgeting or other essential things that happen in the city – a City Admin would be able to bring that experience and professionalism
- Bringing in a City Admin is a better way to run the city – not because the current system is broken or department heads don't know what they are doing – but because we can be better than we are
- Assist local government to run more effectively and efficiently
- This person could assist in things like being the in between with the union in some ways – when it comes to pay we currently have our department heads working on representing their employees while having to consider what is best for the city – that is a tough spot to be in
- A leader that can help steer the ship long term – strategic plan?
- Someone that can guide collaboration between department heads!

### **What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

- As a department head – what does that mean for me? Many unanswered questions so far.
- Who do we answer to – Mayor, commissions, administrator, and council? It is going to look different at each city and maybe for each department but that is an unknown
- Don't see a world where we need both a full-time mayor and a full-time city admin
- What is council and mayor are not on the same page – that is tough to balance for a department head – what happens when there is a third person thrown into that mix?
- Viability of the expense – right now there are many more staff needed in each department already that we are getting denied for that would improve our city so it is tough seeing those getting denied and adding a staff like this
- Is this another political layer? Strong mayor and weak mayor – would this have an impact on the city admin

### **Do you have any other questions/comments?**

- I know some cities have done it well and some have done it bad!

### **Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

- Have we considered a consultant to explore this as an outside source? This consultant could take a look at the city of lacrosse and get a better understanding of what a City Administrator could come in and do – have that consultant answer the unanswered questions (non-bias) and hold public information sessions. Then bring that information to the council to vote on.

- La Crosse has a deep history – including having strong and weak mayors and how do we get beyond that and that is a piece of all of this
- What is the real picture of a financial expense of adding this – will they need an assistant? Most likely and what will that cost be?
- Logistically where will they have an office? Currently a list of plenty of people looking for an office space – there would most likely need to be some renovations – cost of that?
- Internally – what does the city really need? Job description is very vague and maybe a consult could help us see what we really need first
- A good city admin would be able to see what holes they could fill so maybe it is a benefit to having the job description be vague but concerning – do we actually need more boots on the grounds people?
- Depending on the city admin background this could look very different for each department – like if they have a background in a certain area do we also need that dept head?
- Concerns about the current timeline with a new mayor and partial new council possibly – what does this mean if we pass it in May – is that the best time?
- Is there something else we could look into like a deputy mayor?
- What is the exact need? Where can we even cut?
- What are some of the big issues in La Crosse? Example – floodplain is one of them and we are looking at hiring a city admin possibly and we can't even pay a floodplain manager well enough to stay

**1. What are the benefits of a City Administrator based on the job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Continuity of Departmental Projects: City Departments establish projects that are long range and not directly related to specific elected officials' terms in office, but rather relate to the achievement of multiyear and multidecade City plans. Departmental projects result in the appropriation of resources (both of personnel and budgetary allocations). The Office of the City Administrator [Sec 19 (a)] would target *a more efficient, effective and responsible government*. The professional organization and coordination of citywide resources would be facilitated by the professional and specifically trained skills of a municipal administrator.

The Fact that Local Government Administrators are Common: As local governments on county and municipal levels establish for themselves appointed (non-elected) positions to function as Chief Operating Officers (COO), this fact weighs in favor of the office being recognized as advantageous to deal effectively with the increasing complexity of the function of local government.

*Promote the economic well-being and growth of the City through public and private sector cooperation* [Section 19 (e) (1) (k)] The office of administrator can provide a clear and reliable reference point for private sector promoters to contact and interact with local City government for the development of beneficial partnerships.

**2. What are the challenges/barriers of a City Administrator based on job description legislation as posted on Legistar?**

Cooperation: The Functions and Duties of the Administrator [Section 19 (e) (5) (a)] *All officials and employees of the City shall cooperate with and assist the administrator so that the City government shall function effectively and efficiently.* For this to be achieved it is a priority that a careful selection for the hire of the administrator be performed. The candidate for hire must have a proven track record for professional management of local government. The elected officials and departmental leadership must be able to readily gain confidence in the administrator's character, skills and knowledge base. The cost for hiring such a qualified person at real market rates should not be a hindrance to the selection of the best candidate for the job.

The relationship between elected officials (mayor and council members) and the administrator must be particularly cooperative, respectful and clearly defined/established. The hire of an administrator with proven professionalism, communication skills, and abilities for collaboration with politicians will be particularly important for the first hire of an administrator for the City of La Crosse as the practical patterns of this alteration in the form of local government are established.

Finances, Budgeting, and Purchasing [Section 19 (e) (4) (a, b, c, d, e)] Will the hire of a City Administrator result in the need for an alteration in the job description of the Director of Finance. Will the limits and expectations of responsibilities for those two roles be clearly demarcated?

Regular Basis: The ordinance for creation of the Office of City Administrator makes reference to the performance of certain duties on a *regular basis*. [Job performance review, Section 19 (e) (3) (c), and report to Common Council, Section 19 (e) (4) (c)] What does this specifically mean in terms of regularity?

**3. Do you have any other questions/comments?**

How would the addition of a City Administrator to the municipal staff organogram potentially affect the level of responsibilities, job descriptions and remuneration of current staff leadership positions?

The administrator should have exceptional communication skills. How much responsibility will the administrator have for educating the citizenry about governmental activities? How will these educational responsibilities relate to and coordinate with the political responsibilities of the elected officials.

**4. Is there anything that you think/feel that we are missing?**

Small word choice questions:

Section 19 (e) (1) (j) “Establish” to replace “Established”

Section 19 (e) (3) (a) “coordination” to replace “coordinator”

In order to find the right good quality candidates for consideration to hire, it is important to advertise the search in good places.

So the 1st question that was posed is, **What is the origin of the city administrator, job description as posted in Legistar?**

So the origin of this job description was pulled from really what was created in 2011, I believe, when the concept of a city administrator was proposed. So I pulled information from that. I've also surveyed other municipalities for job descriptions within their communities for either city manager or city administrator. I certainly also reviewed this and kind of how it correlates to our city staff as well. So, I've made some minor adjustments just based on our organizational structure and chart.

The second question is, **With all the information received from department head interviews do you see changing the city administrator job description moving forward?**

Yes, I think job description should be adjusted based on feedback. I think they can be adjusted also based off of our structure. I look at job descriptions as a working document because our work changes. So certainly, if there are things that need to be adjusted on it, I'm open to that. Or if we find examples from other communities that we like and we think best fits our community and the needs. Certainly, we can look at that as part of this process. As we look to potentially add this position. In fact, if I could follow up on that since you have access to sort of generalized department interview questions.

**Did anything strike you as something that should be addressed that currently wasn't addressed?**

I don't think I've delved into that too much. Yet I don't know if I can answer that.

The next question is, **How do we determine the salary for the city administrator?**

So with this we use a consulting firm called McGrath. We've used them dating back a few years now when the city did its paid class study, so I felt they were best suited to evaluate this position as well, since we continue to work with them on new positions and reclassifications. And so I do have a letter that I can share with this committee, if you'd like. That goes through their recommendation. Essentially, the salary was based on their recommendation that the city administrator should be paid 20% to 25% higher than our highest paid employee. So currently, for our highest paid employees, we have two positions that sit at a grade 19 step 10. And so then we look at adding 20% to 25% to that to give us our hiring range. Obviously, it is still up to the Common Council which you would like to hire this individual at, but that would give us a competitive range in order to hire the best talent that we could for this position. So that gives us a salary range of anywhere from about \$190,000 to \$200,000. But we do also need to consider that there is going to be benefit costs. There's also going to be non-personnel expenses that we're trying to add in there, just to make sure that we're covering things. So office supplies, potential trainings, memberships and subscriptions, kind of those things that get thrown into the bucket that we also want to account for to make sure that we're again being as transparent and have that information available. So, if we're looking at the 20%. Roughly, we would have the 6.95% goes to the pension. So that would be about \$13,000.

There would be Federal income taxes that we're obligated to pay, which is 7.65%. That's approximately \$14,000. Health insurance this year is approximately \$17,500. Life insurance is about \$1000. And then in conversations with our Director of Finance, we put \$10,000 in there for those non-personal expenses. So again, subscriptions, membership training, mileage, cell phone, all those sort of additional expenses. So if we're looking at about \$190,000 salary plus those benefits, the total we'd be looking at is about \$248,000.

The next question is, **If a city administrator is hired, will salary re-evaluations be necessary for the Mayor and department heads?**

I did not feel it was appropriate for me to evaluate department heads, as I am a department head myself, so I also utilized McGrath for this to ask them their professional opinion on what other cities are doing, and what was indicated to me was McGrath did not recommend any changes to department head salaries. Again, that is stated in the letter that I can share with this group the rationale behind. That is that essentially the responsibilities of department heads are still going to be the same. We can't task a city administrator with doing the duties of department heads because they're so vast and so detailed and also meeting that subject matter expert that we've hired each of these department heads for what we're looking to have that city administrator do is really be that operational person over those department heads and steer everything, but not looking to have them necessarily take on the task of that department. So it is not the recommendation of our consultant to reevaluate or essentially reduce the salaries of department heads, or potentially increase either. Unless there's significant changes to that person's position that would fall under our general classification compensation plan for reclassification. If there were significant changes as far as the Mayor, I think that's really more up to the Common Council to decide how they would like to address the Mayor's position. I think a lot of that would depend on if it's part time, full time, what the new responsibilities or changes and responsibilities would be for that Mayor. I think that's hard for me to necessarily say.

The next question is, **How would adding a city administrator position affect department head responsibilities and salaries?**

I kind of touched on this a little bit. But ultimately, from my perspective I don't see my responsibilities, at least in HR changing. I still will oversee contract negotiations. I will still oversee recruitment. I will still oversee benefits administration. I don't anticipate that a city administrator would be doing those tasks. So I don't anticipate my responsibilities significantly changing. I anticipate that's going to be pretty similar with other departments, that we will all still own and facilitate all of those tasks that we have and supervise the same level of staff. It's just going to be we have a city administrator essentially funneling the direction of our Common Council to us, so that we can all be succinct and on the same path.

The next question is, **What are the nuts and bolts of the best way to go about recruiting?**

So I did reach out to some colleagues throughout different municipalities in the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota to ask how they went about their recruitment process, because many of them have successfully hired city managers and city administrators. And a majority, I want to say at least 75% of the ones that I spoke to, use a recruitment firm to assist them with the process. And that has been my recommendation since the beginning. I think if we're going to cast a large net and try to get the most talented individual that we can to come forward for this position it would be best to have a recruitment firm that has access nationwide to the best individuals for that job. A few of them did use internal resources and just have their HR department manage it with the assistance of department heads. But again, that was a very small amount. And it typically was the smaller communities, more on the 30,000 population or less that did that anyone close to our population size did use a recruitment firm.

And then the next question is, **Who is involved in the hiring process?**

I asked other municipalities who was involved in their recruitment process. Primarily they stated that it was members of their Common Council, and it was their department heads, and in some circumstances, they did involve the Mayor. What I found very interesting is that quite a few of them had different approaches to community involvement when it came to their recruitment process. Some would have their final interview in their Council chambers and members of the public could be present for that final interview. They were not permitted to ask questions just in order to keep an environment where the candidates could answer questions. But they could submit questions to their Council person ahead of time, and that Council person could ask questions of that candidate during that interview. Others would record the finalist interview, and they would release it to the public, so the public could at minimum see the interview of the finalists. Others would hold public receptions for the finalists so members of the public could come in and also meet those candidates as part of the interview process. So there's a lot of really creative ways we could go about the process as well. There were also opportunities for employees to sit in and essentially watch the interview. They again weren't participating, but it would be Common Council members asking questions about employee involvement at all levels. So when it comes to the process, we really could get as creative as we wanted to with our interviewing.

**Is it typically only one finalist or could there be more than one finalist?**

I've seen multiple ways. I've actually been watching quite a bit out on LinkedIn. I'm seeing articles posted by other communities that are recruiting city administrators. I've seen anywhere from two to four finalists. So I think kind of that's the sweet spot when we're coming to finalists. I would say more commonly on when they're releasing names to the public and are doing public receptions or public involvement interviews, it's typically a top two.

Other ways as part of the interview process, I've been seeing communities interact with social media. So some candidates may post a statement to the community that we can post out to social media to introduce themselves to the community really leveraging social media, I'm seeing is also a



popular avenue which makes a lot of sense with the utilization of social media. So I think we can get very creative with that and involve our community in a lot of different ways.

The next question is, **Will there be a review of the proposed organizational chart?**

Always happy to do that. I think if there's changes that we want to make, we certainly can. We can evaluate those. If there's certain positions where it makes more sense. They report directly to Common Council versus city administrator. If they're reporting to a board versus a city administrator, I think we can review all of that. I definitely try to take all that into consideration when putting the proposal together but certainly that can be reviewed.

The next question is, **What about the overlap of duties of the Mayor and a city administrator? If a city administrator is hired during the next four years, how would that be handled?**

In my opinion and what I'm learning is it just seems to be a shift in focus. So it seems to me the Mayor is going to focus on the public outreach and public engagement. Have that be the primary focus at maybe a state level if there's different advocacy work that they're going to do. Whereas the city administrator will certainly still have involvement in our community. But the focus is going to be those internal operations, making sure that we're using taxpayer dollars the best way, and that we are operating in the best fashion to serve our community the best way. So really, I think if the administrator is hired, it's just shifting some of that Mayor's focus a little differently with that assistance of the city administrator.

The next question is, **What will physical logistics be for this new position and potential added staff they may need?**

Logistics is a concern. I think that's a concern for us now even without a city administrator. City Hall is pretty tapped for space. We don't have a lot of available office space. If we were to even add new positions that are needed for our community, we do struggle with that. So, I think that's something that we're going to have to get creative on and what that looks like. So I don't have the perfect answer for that. I think that's going to be this group and others coming together to figure out what that looks like as far as additional staff. Initially, I don't see a necessity for additional staff. The reason I say that is the addition of potentially what I see in other communities is an assistant city administrator. If we were to hire a city administrator, I think they need to determine if that's a need or not. I think it's something we should be aware of and know that there's the potential for that. But I don't see that as an initial item that we should be looking to accomplish with the same task. As far as an administrative assistant goes, I think we'd have to do an evaluation but we do have an executive assistant to the Mayor. There is the potential we'd have to look at that individual's capacity, see if they'd be able to assist, but that could be a resource for the city administrator, or we have to. That could be the one position I might see there'd be justification for some sort of administrative or executive assistant. But again, that would take us needing to do an evaluation of

the workload, and what the necessity is. But that would be hard to judge initially until someone's in the role. And we understand again what that need is. I think it's hard to determine in advance.

**Have you anticipated any unforeseen consequences or costs of adding this position?**

Definitely, the logistics like we previously discussed. I think that's going to be a challenge for us of where this individual has office space available to them. Just because of our current office space availability. Like I had stated earlier we did put that additional \$10,000 into our estimates for cost. So we tried to, as best we could, cover what those additional expenses may be. And again, those are things like training, travel, memberships, and different things that that individual may need. Again, that might be more than is needed or the right amount. That was just something that the Director of Finance and myself thought may be sufficient for a budget.

And then I guess an additional consequence, and I don't want this to appear negative at all, it is not, is the adjustment that everyone will need to go through by adding a city administrator. It's just new, and everyone just has to go through the adjustment phase of adding that new position and what that looks like. Again, it's not a negative, it's just it takes time to adjust to things. And so I would think if we properly onboard the individual, if we properly notify staff, if we properly share with staff what an organizational chart would look like, and what the future holds, and even if HR, Council, or the Mayor held informational sessions with staff to let them know what this transition period looks like, I think we could set ourselves up really successfully with a little bit of pre work.

**Would HR be the department that would coordinate the onboarding?**

Yes, we would. In most circumstances we would, and in this one, we certainly would be involved in in that onboarding process.

**The next question is, What would the performance review of a city administrator look like and how will they effectively be measured, and how often, and against what metrics?**

So, this one again I reached out to some cities and asked what they do. Really, this would be determined by the Common Council, and if we go the route of an employment agreement or an employment contract it should be outlined in that contract what the performance evaluation will look like. So it could be once every three months for the first year, once a year, really, however, the Common Council feels they want to evaluate this individual. Some cities have gone the route of having an outside firm evaluating the performance of the city administrator from a metrics perspective from public engagement perspective to get the most.

I don't know. To get the widest range of responses to the person's performance, I guess the best way I can describe it. Others have had their Common Council create their own form. And by form I mean essentially the questions the metrics that they're going to be measured against in partnership with the HR department and we help facilitate that. Some will have the performance evaluation done in closed session. Others will have it done in open session with public being able to be present. I was

seeing it in multiple fashions. But again, I think that is what needs to be outlined in that employment agreement with that individual ahead of them actually beginning work with the city. Others simply have them on the same performance evaluation process and cycle as their department heads. And I do have examples that I can certainly share what other cities put in their employment contracts. I do have seven examples of employment contracts from other cities that we can use should we move forward with the city administrator to help draft our own, and obviously in partnership with legal.

The next question is, **What things would be on the table for contract negotiations?**

So with the contract negotiation or the employment agreement for a city administrator. Primarily, when I was reviewing them, the items that I was seeing was salary, auto allowance, moving or relocation expenses, professional development allowance. And then I do have a letter as well from like, I said from McGrath, who did our in-class study, and they indicated what they are seeing in their recent studies is a again a monthly car allowance, phone allowance, and then deferred compensation contributions. And that is typically a percentage or up to the IRS maximum, which is currently \$23,500. So that could be something that they may want to initiate right now. We do not contribute to deferred compensation for staff because they have the WRS or pension contribution.

So the next question is, **If necessary, what is the termination process?**

What I am seeing with other cities, it is clearly defined in the employment contract. And by clearly defined, what I mean is, it will specifically state what is the cause that would indicate or be indicative of a termination of their employment. Some can simply say at the discretion of Common Council, others will specifically outline what is for cause. But again, it will be very clearly defined in their employment contract. What we would determine to be insufficient performance, or if there were behaviors inside or outside of work that would be deemed for termination.

**Did you get a sense in the research that you've done what other communities may be doing related to them?**

Yes, I do have examples. And so, one city, for example, the cause they specifically list, if there's a conviction of a felony, if there's performance of endangering property or personal safety of themselves or another person, violation of any lawful official order or failure to obey any law, insubordination, or disgraceful conduct, use of threatening behavior, or unreasonable amount of absences, so they specifically outlined. Again, other communities just simply stated at the will of the Common Council. That would definitely come with investigation. We would make sure we thoroughly investigate and substantiate claims brought forward by that individual or for that individual. But most I'm seeing do not specifically state, because it's very hard to capture all events that may result for a termination. So it can go either way. But some specifically state.

The next question is, **How would the city administrator interact with the police and fire commission?**

What I envision is no different than how the Mayor interacts now, follow state statute. So, I don't see that relationship changing, I think they can certainly work with the chair of the Police and Fire Commission if there's questions or concerns but at the end of the day we follow State statutes that are outlined for police and fire commission and respect the group that oversees that work.

The next question is, **How would the city administrator position affect the City Council and their interaction with department heads? Will Council members be allowed to talk directly with department heads or will the city administrator need to be involved in those conversations as well?**

From my professional opinion I believe that elected officials should have the ability to talk to department heads as they wish. I don't think, or I don't see an issue with them directing questions to the subject matter experts of the city. I think that just creates efficient government work. I would recommend that if Council members are asking department heads to take on a project or a task that they do that in collaboration with the city administrator to ensure we're all aligning and having the best use of our resources but asking clarifying questions, learning more about a process. There should be open and fluid conversations between department heads and Council, in my opinion. But that really, again, should be something we define in a job description or expectations for the city administrator coming in. That the Common Council and department heads want to be able to have those fluid conversations and not have an extra layer necessarily to have to go between when it's something like clarifying questions or needing more information to be able to make a decision at a Council meeting.

**So was that in the current job description that was put before Council previously? Was that something that was alluded to or considered or is that something that would be an addition?**

I think it should be clarified in the current or the proposed job descriptions as it's today, I think if that's a concern of the Common Council or of this group, I think it would be best to just be clear on that, to make sure that it doesn't become a problem later.

**I guess an associated question with job descriptions. If it seems down the road three, four months after the hire of the city administrator and that job description be modified, who can do that and what approval process is necessary to make that change?**

I think it would depend on how it's written in the employment contract. I think we may want to have, and this may be where we have to lean on legal to ask their opinion. If I'm discussing how we treat any job descriptions now for city employees. HR has the ability to update those job descriptions as long as they don't create substantial duty and responsibility changes that would constitute a reclassification of their position. However, with the city administrator what I would recommend is if we do need to make job description changes it would go through how any other personnel changes

happen now where it gets approved by Finance and Personnel Committee, and then by Common Council. But again, we may want to lean more on legal and ask that question, or have it clearly defined, or both, in the employment contract.

The next question is, **Have you already reached out to other municipalities to ask how they did their hiring of a city administrator? And then regarding the need for public engagement about adding a city administrator position to the City of La Crosse do you have any information on how other municipalities educated or informed their residents about hiring a city administrator?**

So yes, I've already kind of alluded to when this original, this idea originally was brought up by the Mayor. I had started reaching out to some of my colleagues across the State of Wisconsin, and a few I knew in the State of Minnesota to just ask questions and educate myself. I previously have worked under a city manager before, so I have experience in that area but wanted to just learn more about adding one, because that would be new, a new process for all of us here. So I have been doing that. As far as public engagement goes, the challenge that I'm running into is quite a few of the communities who are engaging with me and responding, have had a city administrator or a city manager for quite some time.

So the education to the community arguably is there because they've already had it in their communities, some of them, since the 1960s, seventies, eighties. So it's just been something that's been a staple in their community for quite a few years. So that's a challenge that I've had. When asking however, a number of them said, if I do need to recruit for a city administrator in the future, I know I will need to do community engagement. Because for some they'll need to better understand what this position is responsible for. Some ideas could potentially be educational videos we put out on social media the difference between what a Mayor would be doing and city administrator.

But I also want to respect the idea that not everyone has access to social media or a computer frankly, and I want to make sure that everyone can get the same information. So it would be nice to potentially do some information sessions here, even at City Hall, where Council members could be present to answer questions for the community, or, if they're unable to answer the question, take the information, and be able to come back at a later session to then have an answer for the community.

It seems that the combination between social media and in-person and in writing which we do have information out on the city's website kind of that three-prong approach to communication, I think, would help educate our community on what we're looking to do.

And then the next question, **Just as these are all rather encompassing questions from the City Administrator Working Group, what is the drive to get this position now?**

I don't have a response to that. This has been something more, a task I guess, to the HR Department to kind of research and work through. So, I think the drive from what I'm hearing is creating efficiencies and really having professional management oversee our city as many others do, could

create great benefit for the city. If I'm going to say what my observations have been and what I have heard. Those are kind of two themes I've heard, efficiency, and that professional level management that we haven't had as far as having an actual city administrator.

The next is, **What is the actual need we are trying to fill?**

I think that goes along with my first response. Again, that efficiency and professional level management.

**And then what is the public's appetite for this at the present time?**

I don't think I'm the right person to answer that.

**Have you heard at all from the public related to a question about the city administrator? Has anything been directed to HR about the need or interest, or anything like that?**

I have had no engagement from the public. All questions have been from staff.

# **Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper**

## **Introduction & Purpose**

This paper intends to provide information for La Crosse Residents and others regarding the benefits and challenges of

- a. The Mayor-Council form of administration, where the mayor is both the Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Operating Officer, and
- b. The Mayor, Council Administrator form of administration, where the Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer and the Administrator is the Chief Operating Officer.

The University of Wisconsin Extension's Local Government Education Program prepared this Information Paper utilizing information from the following sources:

- a. City of La Crosse City Administrator Work Group
- b. Research and Interviews
  - i. City of La Crosse Department Heads (anonymous interviews provided by Working Group)
  - ii. Research specifics are noted throughout this information paper.
  - iii. Interviews with Rebecca Glewen, Former Mayor of Beaver Dam and currently County Administrator/Human Resources Director, Trempealeau County, WI; Jerry Deschane, Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, and Sarah Diedrich Kasdorf, Director of Outreach & Member Engagement, Wisconsin Counties Association.
  - iv. Citizen and Others' comments and input. (provided by Working Group)

## **Background Information**

### **a. City of La Crosse City Administrator History**

- i. The City of La Crosse faced this question in the past, most recently in 2012 when the voters defeated a ballot question.
- ii. Former Mayor Mitch Reynolds introduced the need for a City Administrator in his State of the City address on January 11, 2024.
- iii. A Charter ordinance creating a City Administrator was introduced on October 10, 2024.
- iv. The Common Council, through a resolution, created a City Administrator Working Group on November 14, 2024, with a charge to report back to the Common Council by May 2025.

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

b. WI Cities/Villages with an Administrator or Manager - *Source: UW Oshkosh Whitburn Center*

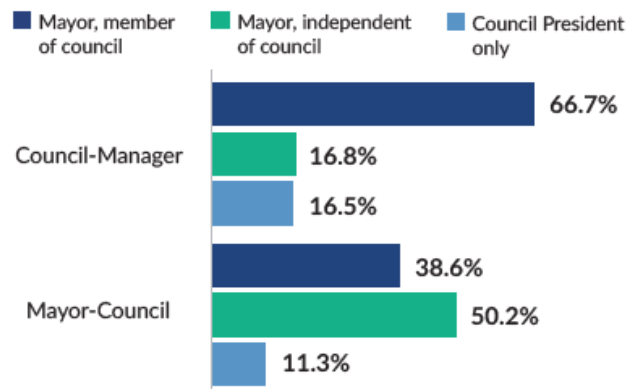
Wisconsin Cities	Totals	City Manager	Administrator
City Manager or Administrator	190	10	91
Wisconsin Villages	Totals	Village Manager	Administrator
Village Manager (all in SE-WI) or Administrator	415	9	54

## 2018 ICMA Municipal Form of Government Survey

Form of Government	Number	Percent
Council-Manager	4,386	40.0%
Mayor-Council	4,166	38.0%
Commission	1,302	11.9%
Town Meeting	1,056	9.6%
Representative Town Meeting	59	0.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,969</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Data are based on extensive research and verification conducted by ICMA staff. Sources consulted include the ICMA Form of Government Survey, state association directories, historical data published in *The Municipal Year Book*, and state and local statutes.

### Chief Elected Official Structure by Form of Government



## Definitions

### a. Definitions - *International City/County Manager Association*

- i. **Mayor-Council Form of Government:** Elected council or board serves as the legislative body. The chief elected official (e.g., mayor) is the head of government, with significant administrative authority, and generally elected separately from the council.
- ii. **Council-Manager (administrator) Form of Government:** Elected council or board and chief elected official are responsible for making policy with advice of the chief appointed official (e.g., administrator/manager). A professional administrator appointed by the board or council has full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the government.



# Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

- a. **Comparable Municipalities List** as defined by the City of La Crosse City Administrator Working Group

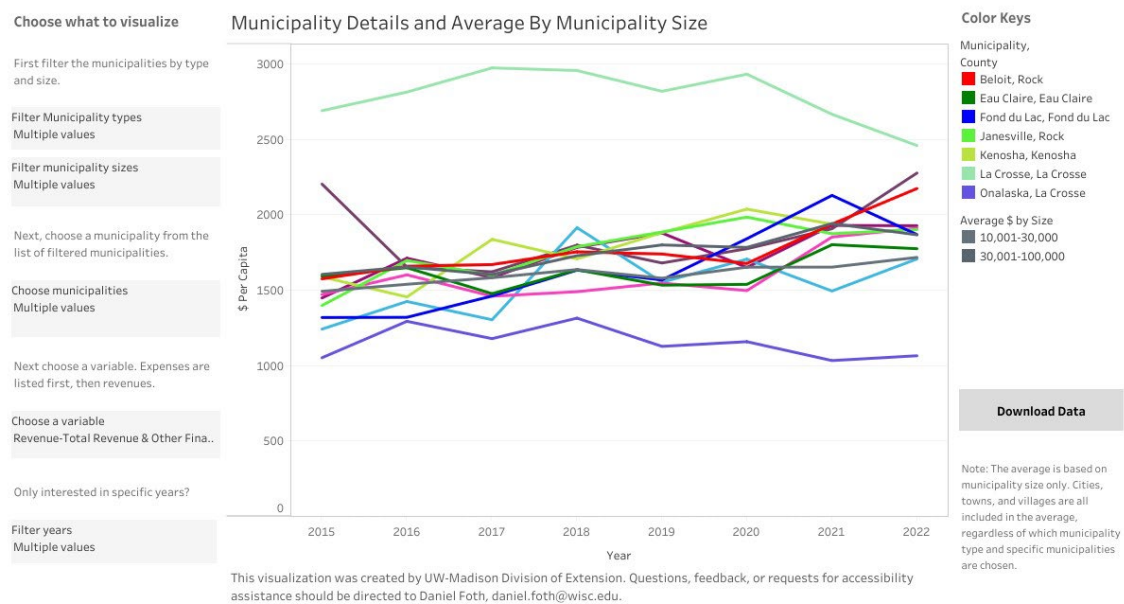
Comparison Cities	Type of Management	Mayor	President / Council	Mgr.-Adm. Appointed by Council	Population
Onalaska	City Administrator	Yes	No / Council	Yes	18,975
Beloit	City Manager	No	Yes	Yes	36,449
Fond du Lac	City Manager	No	Yes	Yes	44,678
Wauwatosa	City Administrator	Yes	Yes	Yes	47,289
Sheboygan	City Administrator	Yes	Yes	Yes	49,773
West Allis	City Administrator	Yes	No / Council	Yes	58,950
Janesville	City Manager	No	Yes	Yes	65,911
Oshkosh	City Manager	Yes	No / Council	Yes	65,948
Eau Claire	City Manager	No	Yes	Yes	69,737
Kenosha	City Administrator	Yes	No / Council	Yes	98,484

## Comparison Cities -Total Revenue and Other Financing (2022 Data)

Note that La Crosse is the light green line. DOR Data as shown in the LGE Graphing Expenditures and Taxes database. All comp ities are noted in graph, the color key is limited to 7 vs. 10 comps.

### General Revenue, Expenditures, and Taxes

Select one or more municipalities and a variable to visualize your data.



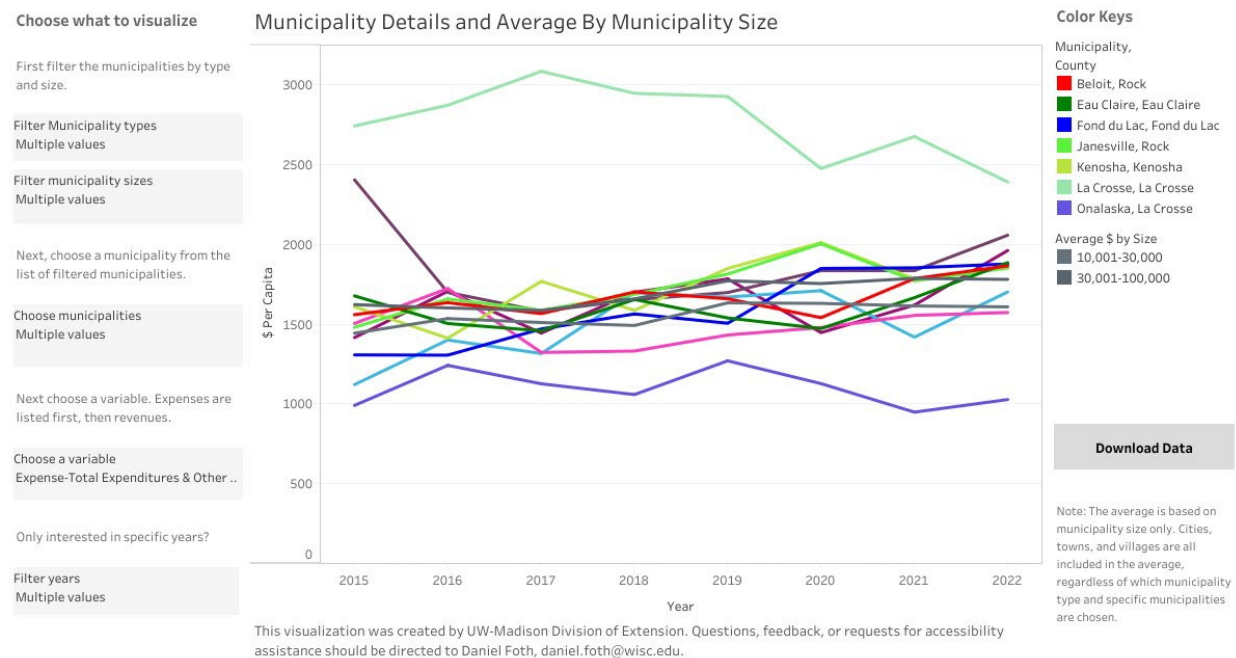
# Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

## Comparison Cities - Total Expenditures & Other Financing (2022 Data)

Note that La Crosse is the light green line. DOR Data as shown in the LGE Graphing Expenditures and Taxes database. All comp cities are noted in graph, the color key is limited to 7 vs. 10 comps.

### General Revenue, Expenditures, and Taxes

Select one or more municipalities and a variable to visualize your data.



b. **Mayor** - Wis. Stat §62.09(8) (defines the Mayor's position):

Defines the mayor's position as the chief executive officer, observes and enforces city ordinances and state laws, and all city officers and employees discharge their duties, presides at the meetings of the council, has veto power as to all acts of the council, subject to override.

The La Crosse Municipal Charter additionally defines the Mayor's position.

Sec. 2-59 - The office of Mayor shall be the full-time principal occupation for the holder of said office. The Mayor shall have all duties and powers permitted by law.

c. **Administrator** – The Proposed Charter Ordinance **Sec. 19. – Office of the City Administrator**, generally provides the Administrator duties to include: Efficient, effective, and responsible government, by carrying out the Common Council's policy directives, responsible to the common council, administers day-to-day operations, prepare, then administer the annual operating budget as approved by the Common council, receive cooperations from all officials and employees so that the City government shall function effectively and efficiently.

The Mayor's administrative duties will be given to the City Administrator

# Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

## Interviews

**Rebecca Glewen**, Former Mayor of Beaver Dam and currently County Administrator/Human Resources Director, Trempealeau County, WI. A discussion summary follows.

- When she was the City of Beaver Dam Mayor, she initiated and led the effort to reduce the role of the mayor and to hire a City Administrator.
- The City of Beaver Dam had hired a Director of Administration who primarily served as the Finance Director with some administrative duties, but the role did not fully address the broader needs of the city government.
- Her view was that the City was stagnating, not moving forward.
- Transitioning from a full-time mayor to a part-time role was challenging, as it required stepping back from day-to-day operations and trusting others to lead. Success in this structure demands a willingness to give up some control, both from the mayor and the council, to allow the administrative team to manage the city's operations effectively.
- Public engagement was conducted through radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, and mayoral listening sessions.
- The Council voted for the position change, and with the organizational change, the mayor's salary was reduced by two-thirds.
- After the organizational change, she continued serving as a part-time mayor for one year before stepping down with one year remaining in her term to pursue an administrative career as the County Administrator/Human Resources Director for Trempealeau County, Wisconsin.
- As County Administrator, Rebecca has led improvements in communication among department heads, staff, and the community; achieved \$98,000 in insurance savings in her first year through budgeting efficiencies; streamlined departments and services through organizational changes; and strengthened employee culture to boost retention and promote a positive, engaged workplace.

**Jerry Deschane**, Executive Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities. A discussion summary follows.

- The League of Wisconsin Municipalities has no formal position on Mayor/Council versus City Administrator.
- City Administrators have been around for over 100 years.
- Potential benefits include stability, the Separation of politics and administration, the administrator presents options for council review and approval and is a neutral implementer of council policies.
- A successful City Administrator/Mayor/Council relationship is founded on clear lines of authority.

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

**Sarah Diedrich Kasdorf**, Director of Outreach & Member Engagement, Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA). A discussion summary follows.

- The WCA actively assists its members in providing information on the benefits of implementing the three state statutory approaches. County Executive, Administrator, or Administrative Coordinator.
- WCA provided questions, presentations, and other research it uses to assist their members who are addressing this issue.

**City of La Crosse Department Heads** – the Working Group conducted interviews with the Department Heads and provided their comments anonymously. Common comments include:

- Need a CEO to run a \$70 million-plus entity.
- Administrator will provide continuity, consistency, and stability.
- Need to hire the “right person.”
- Better department collaboration
- Concerns about cost and where to put them, the City Hall is full.
- Department head impact
- Citizen buy-in
- How will the Full-Time Mayor and Administrator work together?
- Change will need to be managed.
- Frees the Mayor to be more public-facing.
- Continuity of department projects, avoid spending time on projects going nowhere.

### What the Research Says:

This paper also utilized the following research.

*Does Government Structure in Wisconsin, Does Form Matter, Nollenberger and Simmons, University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, 2016.* This research surveyed 141 municipalities with a population over 5,000, and found:

- Concluded that there are few clearly identifiable differences between cities with differing governmental forms - *Page 83.*
- Where the Mayor (versus council) appoints the Administrator, greater degrees of conflict and less cooperation exist – *Page 85.*
- Also, concluded that the administrator position has brought professionalism to cities and villages that added the position – *Page 86.*

*Smarter, Faster, Cheaper, IBM Global Business Services, Edwards, 2011*

- Researched 100 American Cities – *Page 1.*
- Concluded that Cities with city manager forms of government are nearly 10% more efficient than cities with strong mayor forms of government – *Page 8.*

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

*Professional Management in Wisconsin Municipalities, Whitburn Center for Governance and Policy Research, 2024*, Used research gathered from 188 Wisconsin cities (excluding Milwaukee and Madison) notes the following:

**Table 1: Fiscal Characteristics of Cities with and without Administrators**

Cities All Administrator Chapter 64- Manager Non-Administrator

Cities	All Administrators	Chapter 64- Manager	Non-Administrator
Property Tax Per-Capita	\$ 594.02	\$ 543.87	\$ 528.79
Spending Per-Capita	\$ 1,860.55	\$ 1556.77	\$ 1,877.23
Law Enforcement Per-Capita	\$ 297.18	\$ 256.72	\$ 267.55
General Obligation Debt Per-Capita	\$ 1,821.59	\$ 1,852.27	\$ 1,437.39
General Gov. Spending Per-Capita	\$ 195.98	\$ 125.76	\$ 205.00
Shared Revenue Per-Capita	\$ 195.09	\$ 210.27	\$ 250.34
Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) Per-Capita	\$ 153.59	\$ 112.73	\$ 144.12

Table 1 notes that non-administrator cities have overall higher spending per capita, lower property taxes, lower law enforcement spending, and lower debt (perhaps due to less capital investment), and reduced use of Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) debt service.

**Table 3: Agreement with Governance Statements**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree?

Item	Administrator	Non-Administrator
This local government has utilized strategic planning to frame its mission	3.43*	3.09
This local government has a clear emphasis on treating the citizen as a customer	3.81	3.67
This organization has successfully developed clear measures of program/service performance	3.37*	3.09
We view the executive as a full partner in the governing process	3.94*	3.76
Organized interest groups have significant influence over, board/council decisions	2.21	2.37
Board/Council members do what they say they will do	3.48*	3.29
Board/Council members willingly try new things without fear of ridicule	3.30*	2.93
Board/Council members willingly try new things without fear of retribution	3.39*	2.99
Board/Council members are open about how they feel about other members' preferences	3.37*	3.19

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

Table Three illustrates that.

- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities have higher functioning councils (less destructive conflict types)
- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities report higher levels of reform adoption.

### *Table 4: Agreement with Human Resource Statements*

To what extent do you agree with the following statements, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree? Administrator Non- Administrator

Statement	Administrator	Non-Administrator
I have the necessary resources to do my job well	3.57	3.42
I have the opportunity to “reward” employees that I supervise when they do an outstanding job	2.93*	2.62
Organizational culture is a barrier to attracting new employees	2.38	3.04*
Work/life balance is a barrier to attracting new employees	2.67	3.09*
Employee quality is a barrier to retaining existing employees	2.78	2.92

\*Statistically different at the 95% level of confidence.

Table Four illustrates that.

- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities report lower staff turnover rates.

### **Benefits and challenges with the Mayor/Council operations form.**

This table was developed using identified research, and comments received from citizens and Others. No attempt was made to verify this information.

Mayor – Council Benefits	Potential Limitations with Mayor as Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
a. The current La Crosse Mayor-Council system has been in place since 1856.	a. A Mayor can be elected without any local government knowledge or experience to run a large complex municipality
b. Direct accountability to residents	b. Time it takes to “learn” what s/he needs to know

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

c. Committee, Commission, and Department head appointments by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council	c. potential for silos and individual departments influence their committees and Mayor
d. City staff works within the current system	d. Concentrated Executive and Operations power in one person

### Benefits and challenges with the City Administrator's operations form.

This table was developed using identified research and comments received from citizens and Others. No attempt was made to verify this information.

City Administrator Benefits	City Administrator Challenges
a. Mayor as CEO and Council Policy Focus	a. City Administrator Salary, benefits, and support staff will increase the current operations cost
i. Council and Mayor retain authority over the administrator	b. The Council may not choose the most qualified candidate
ii. Mayor/Council continue to monitor budget and operations performance	b. Confusion as to Roles and Responsibilities
iii. City Council confirms Department head hire(s)	c. A poor Administrator may harm the City more than a poor Mayor
iv. The Mayor still appoints Committee and Commission appointments, and confirmed by the Council	d. The administrator may not stay long; thus, the replacement time and cost could be significant.
v. The Mayor and Council have one direct report, the City Administrator, versus all department heads	e. Change brings its own set of issues.
vi. Policy – Mayor and Council improved ability to focus on long-range policy	f. Unlike a mayor who often serves as the public face of the city, city managers typically operate more behind the scenes. This can make public communication and rallying support for initiatives more difficult.
vii. Collaboration – Mayor and Council improved ability to work with the council, other governments, and residents to effect policy	g. Administrators are not trained to be political leaders. This may lead to less ambitious or visionary leadership compared to a strong mayor who can campaign and push a political agenda.
viii. Less focus on staff issues	h. A city administrator is appointed by the city council and is not directly elected by the public. This can create a sense of distance between executive decision-making and voter input, as citizens don't have a direct say in the manager's hiring or removal.

## Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper

City Administrator Benefits	City Administrator Challenges
ix. Budget becomes a policy discussion	i. Because city administrators are accountable to the council rather than the public, conflicts may arise if political divisions exist within the council, potentially limiting their effectiveness.
b. Administrator – COO	
i. Reports and are responsible to the Mayor and City Council	
ii. Specific Training and Expertise in Municipal Operations	
iii. Expertise in implementing Mayor/Council policy	
iv. Stability – bridge during Council and Mayor changes	
v. Collaboration - Potential Increase focus on efficiency and operations optimization	
vi. Budget oversight – administrator provides an overall budget review compared to department by department	
vii. Risk Management through better issue understanding and risk identification (short and long term)	
viii. Budget becomes a policy implementation effort	
ix. Potential for lower costs due to better efficiency, collaboration, risk assessment/mitigation, and improved staff collaboration	
x. Provides city-wide quality control and legal adherence by all departments	
xi. Improved understanding of City Policy and staff implementation	

### What are La Crosse Citizens' Saying?

This table reflects resident and other comments received in November/October 2024.

In Favor	Against	Against having both a Mayor and Administrator	Process concerns	Non-Resident - Commentary in favor	Totals
19	8	2	2	4	35



## **Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper**

### **What would be the Policy versus Operational Role?**

This information was developed through research, citizen and other comments.

#### **Mayor/Council – Policy role**

- Policy creation;
- Budget creation, prioritization, and approval;
- Organization-level goal setting;
- Serving as a bridge between residents and local government;
- Deciding the scope of services to be provided;
- Program creation;
- Approving legislation; and
- Evaluating the administrator

#### **Administrator – Operations role**

- Oversight of day-to-day operations.
- Managing, hiring, and firing staff;
- Deploying resources across the organization;
- Developing and implementing budgets; and
- Implementing the Council's policies.
- Reporting on goals;
- City spokesperson

### **If the City Council Votes for a City Administrator -Now What?**

This information was developed through research, citizens, and other comments.

- **What Needs to be Done First?**
  - Ensure that clear lines of communication and operation are agreed upon and established between the Mayor, Council, and Administrator position.
  - Updating of city policies.
  - Decide whether to use a search consultant to assist the hiring process.
  - Hiring a qualified Administrator.

## **Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper**

**Frequently Asked Questions** – *This is a start of such a document – need to discuss if wanted or needed.*

Q - What will the Mayor do under the City Administrator operations approach?

*A – The proposed ordinance moves the mayor’s administrative responsibilities to the City Administrator. The Mayor is still a member of the Common Council and retains his Executive responsibilities (running meetings, policy champion, veto, and community engagement.*

Q – Why does La Crosse need a Mayor and an Administrator?

*A – The Mayor’s role will continue to be that of Chief Executive Officer, and the City Administrator will be the Chief Operating Officer. This approach allows the Mayor and Council to focus on long-term policy and the Administrator to focus on day-to-day operations and policy implementation.*

Q - How can the City fund a full-time administrator at a cost range of \$186,646 to \$194,423 with the City’s current budget deficit of \$ \$3,000,000?

*A – The expectation stated in numerous public comments and the research indicates that the City Administrator’s professionalism, continuity, expertise, and education focused on the City’s operations and budget are expected, over time, to fund the Administrator’s salary.*

Q - Will having a full-time position increase the property tax levy

*A – Not necessarily, the property tax levy is fixed by state law, and can only be increased by an increase in Net New Construction, borrowing, or a taxpayer referendum.*

Q - Is this position needed? The Mayor-Council form of government has worked well since 1856; why does it need to be changed now?

*A - The only qualification that a person needs to be Mayor is to be a resident of La Crosse, 18 years old, and elected. Whereas a City Administrator brings significant expertise, experience, and capabilities to run a City of 50,000 people, with a \$75 million budget.*

Q - Hiring an administrator means giving up your right to elect your leader.

*A - The elected mayor and council members are the policy makers, and the administrator reports to them. The administrator is responsible for implementing the policies on a day-to-day basis. The administrator can be terminated at any time by the Common Council.*

Q - Hiring an administrator takes power away from the Common Council.

*A - It will strengthen the position of the governing council to make key decisions. It will, however, result in adjustments in who is responsible for what.*

Q. Administrators do not stay long in a community.

*A - In Wisconsin, the average is about seven years, and experiences over fifteen years are common.*

## **Draft 4-25-25 v.4 City of La Crosse - Mayor vs. City Administrator Information Paper**

Q - Full-time mayors are the same as administrators.

*A - Mayors are usually elected for their political leadership, not their experience and education in administering the day-to-day operations of the municipality. Some mayors may have administrative skills; others may not.*

# DRAFT – City of La Crosse Public Engagement Effort-

## Mayor-Council or Mayor-Council-City Administrator Government Form

### ***Goal: Seek to hear from citizens and others directly impacted***

- Residents and property owners
- Businesses
- Non-profits
- Others as identified

#### **1. Citizen Survey - Online**

- Narrative regarding gauging citizen interest and opinion on LaCrosse Mayor-Council vs. Administrator
- Six questions & a comment space
  - Are you a citizen of La Crosse? Yes - No
  - Do you have a business or property located in La Crosse? Yes - No
  - Have you previously lived in a municipality with an administrator? Yes - No
  - Are you happy with the City of La Crosse services & operations? Yes – No  
i.e., water/sewer/ police, streets, snow plowing, other?
  - Will an administrator improve services and operations? Yes - No
  - Please add any questions or comments here

#### **2. Citizen Meetings – in-person/virtual**

- Information presentation (One-pager flyer and presentation)
- Neighborhood meetings
- Citizen input (at the meeting, and encouraged attendees to use the online survey)

#### **3. Web Page & Social Media**

- Webpage for La Crosse Administration Discussion
- Determine other social media (if any – use to drive people to the Survey)
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions page
- Survey results summary page
- Citizen comment folders

#### **4. Information Document & Information Presentation**

- Grounding documents for all public engagement noted above
- Create a one-page (front and back) information paper
- Create an Information presentation – (eight to ten slides)

#### **5. Time Frame**

- Start by May 15, 2025
- Complete by October 31, 2025