

## Craig, Sondra

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**From:** City of La Crosse Notices - No Reply  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 10, 2026 2:44 PM  
**To:** Craig, Sondra; Elsen, Nikki; Janssen, Barb; Kahlow, Chris; Sleznikow, Larry; Trost, Jennifer; Mindel, Mackenzie; Dickinson, Tamra; Goggin, Erin; Steele, Annette; Washington-Spivey, Shaundel; Weston, Lisa; Newberry, Aron; Bedford, Crystal; Padesky, Gary; Stine, Olivia; Northwood, Rosanne  
**Subject:** City Council Contact Form: Co-ordinated Administration

Submitted on: 2/10/2026

Name: Margaret Larson

Email Address: LarsonM2006@gmail.com

Is this related to a legislative agenda item: Yes

Agenda item number: File 26-0071

Subject: Co-ordinated Administration

Re: Coordinated Administration is Efficient, Effective, and Saves Money

Too often people think of creating a new position for a city administrator only in terms of the added cost of salary and benefits.

Instead, one could view this cost as an investment in the city. That's because a good administrator will find many ways to keep, grow and not cut services while saving more taxpayer money than the expense of his or her pay package.

In the last 50 years,

- ♣ the city's population has hovered around 50,000;
- ♣ the number of Common Council members has decreased from 21 to 13;
- ♣ 15-20 major functional departments and boards have grown to 21 departments, a few standing committees of the council, plus a plethora of subcommittees, advisory boards, and commissions.
- ♣ The 1975 capital budget focused on urban renewal such as the original La Crosse Center and the new post office. The bulk of the 2026 capital budget appears to try to repair and update infrastructure with just a few, if any, new initiatives.
- ♣ And the 2026 operating budget of \$74 million is cutting services which are popular with residents.

Fifty years later, times are tough. Government is more complex. Funding is scarce.

Today, it takes a wide range of leadership talents and strengths to lead the City of La Crosse into the future. It is unlikely to find all of these traits in just one person.

Electing a mayor to handle the public/political aspects and hiring an administrator who is responsible for the day-to-day operations and also reports directly to the elected council is a wise decision.

The responsibilities of any publicly elected municipal council or board are to adopt policies which give direction, to approve the budget which sets priorities, and then get out of the way so that staff can implement the policies within the constraints of the approved budget.

Another responsibility is to hire an administrator to ensure the city is heading in the intended direction in

efficient and effective ways.

Department heads still will make reports to the various committees and to the council as a whole. However, they will report directly to the administrator who sets goals with them, oversees their work, and provides helpful critiques. All in the name of the policy and direction set by the council.

A Bit of History for your reading pleasure

Fifty years ago county board meetings were held during the day and lasted more than a few hours. There was no administrator. County board members supervised the department heads. For example, the head of the Highway Department reported to the Highway Committee which literally inspected the county roads by driving around the county.

In the 1970s, when a handful of women were elected to the county board, one of the women wanted to join the Highway Committee. Some of the men said they would support her but then voted against her. Why, you might ask? Well, when the highway committee went on daylong inspection tours, they sometimes needed to stop to relieve themselves behind a tree. The men said they wouldn't know what to do if there was a woman with them. At the next county board meeting, the women brought in empty three-pound coffee cans with a note on top that said, "For your highway stops."

By the time La Crosse County hired its first administrator in 2003, board members no longer needed to literally carry out the work of their committee's department. The administrator coordinated the department heads which directed the staff. That doesn't mean members may not observe. But it reduced the amount of time they devoted to what was in the purview of the professional staff and gave them more time to consider the future of the county and to respond to constituent concerns.

La Crosse County's experience with an administrator has been positive, especially in terms of expense. The first administrator was innovative in finding ways to save money while not cutting services. These savings more than covered his salary and benefits each year. The current administrator and department heads continue to act effectively and efficiently while carrying out the county board's priorities.

Thank you for reading to the end of my letter,  
Margaret Larson