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MEMORANDUM

TO: City of La Crosse Plan Commission
City of La Crosse Planning Department

FROM: GRAEF
Mary Kramer, Planning Consultant
Brianna Fiorillo, Planning Consultant

DATE: July 28, 2022

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan Update Community Engagement Update

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The City of La Crosse Comprehensive Plan community engagement process is underway and scheduled to continue through October 2022. Engagement began in April 2022.

This memo is intended to provide the Plan Commission and City Staff with an update on community engagement efforts and general trends. It is not intended to provide a detailed analytical report – this will be provided once the surveys have officially closed and stakeholder sessions have concluded.

II. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODULES & STATISTICS

Social Pinpoint currently offers the following modules to solicit community feedback, accessible via the “Forward La Crosse” project website (<https://forwardlacrosse.org/>):

- **Community Survey:** This survey asks respondents a series of questions about their views and preferences on various aspects of the community including quality of life, services, resources, recreation, housing, transportation, downtown amenities, and more. The survey also includes optional demographic questions.
 - 885 responses
- **Guiding Principles Survey:** This survey asks respondents to rank the previously established guiding principles in order of priority. The survey also includes an optional space for respondents to submit their own guiding principle.
 - 154 responses
- **Visual Preference Survey:** This survey asks respondents to react to different example images of various urban design elements including bike lanes, signage, multi-family housing, parks, and more.
 - 294 responses
- **Comment Map:** The comment map allows respondents to drag and drop a themed “pin” onto a virtual map of the City. Respondents can leave comments, upload photos, and upvote/downvote other comments.
 - 500 comments



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- **Voting Game:** The voting game asks respondents to allocate up to 5 virtual “votes” across 12 different categories that the City could prioritize in the Comprehensive Plan.

Accessibility:

- All modules are accessible via Google Translate in over 100 languages and via text-to-speech for the visually impaired.
- Library Station: access to both hard copy surveys and a computer terminal to complete surveys electronically.
 - In addition, a library staff member is available to field questions and written instructions are provided to aid public interested in completing the surveys.
- Advertising at major park and recreation facilities: Postcards, posters and sandwich board posters were posted at many facilities.
- An insert promoting participation in the comprehensive planning process was included with the City’s water quality reports. They were sent to all La Crosse residents on June 21, 2022.

III. OVERVIEW OF DIVERSITY OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

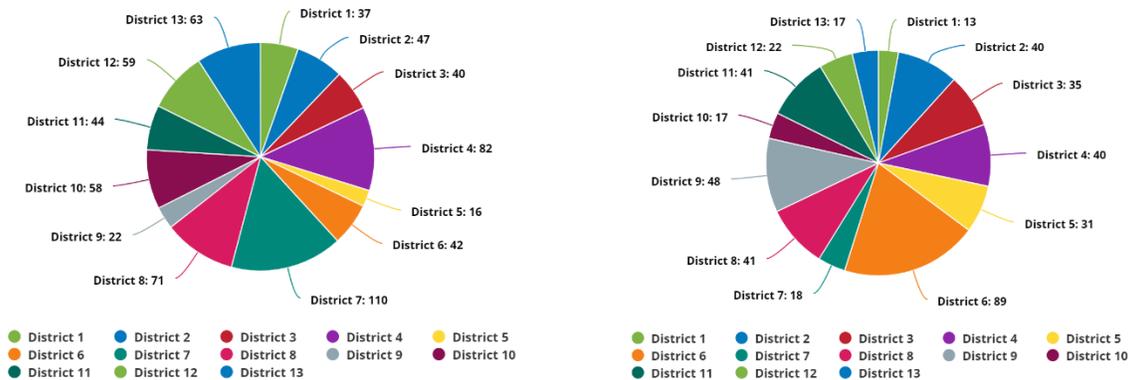


Figure 1 (left) shows the Council Districts where respondents live, and Figure 2 (right) shows the Council Districts where respondents work

IV. SURVEY RESPONSE COMPARISON

To evaluate the survey response rate for the Forward La Crosse Comprehensive Plan project, GRAEF created a comparison of comprehensive plan survey responses from other communities in Wisconsin. These communities also incorporated surveys during their comprehensive planning processes. Notably, these communities incorporated only one survey element, whereas La Crosse offers three (community survey, guiding principles survey, visual preference survey). For the purposes of this comparison, all survey responses for La Crosse are included.



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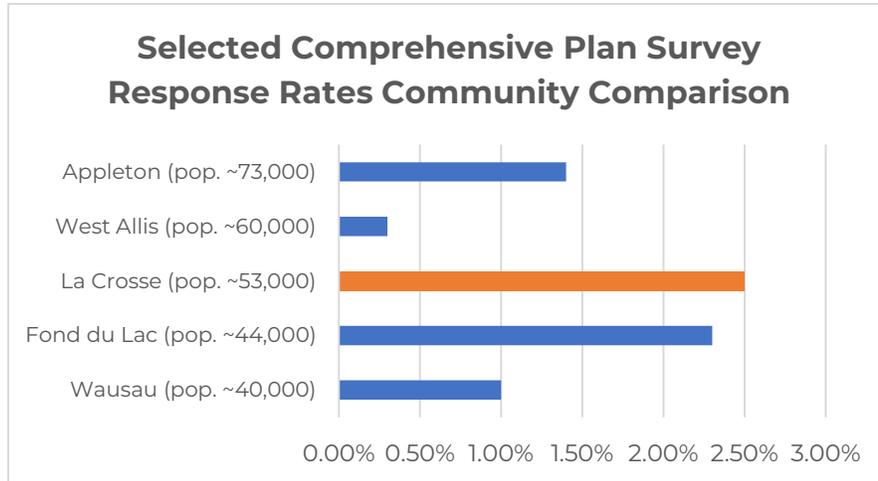


Figure 3: Selected Comprehensive Plan survey response rates

V: GENERAL SURVEY TRENDS TO-DATE

The following is an observation of general trends expressed by the community through the survey modules. *Community survey trends will be presented via slideshow.*

• **Guiding Principles Survey:**

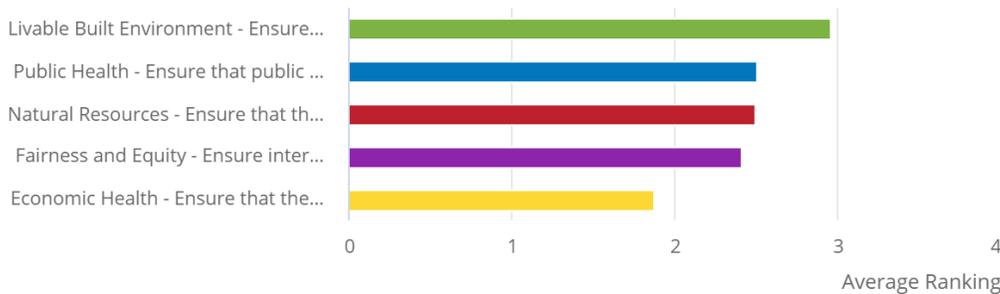


Figure 4: Guiding Principles Survey average ranking results

• **Visual Preference Survey:**

- For the City’s urban neighborhood, respondents generally prefer a mix of modern and historical styles that incorporate local architecture/character.
- For the City’s main streets, respondents generally favor a mix of modern and colorful, restored storefronts and buildings. Respondents generally favor maximizing walkability over more space for cars.
- For the City’s parks, respondents generally favored areas of open green space with mature trees, limited play equipment, and gathering spaces.
- For public art, respondents generally favored beautification of existing spaces with color and interactivity to amplify the City’s character and personality.



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- For multi-family housing, respondents generally expressed a preference for designs that fit with the historic look and feel of the downtown with appealing architectural features and greenspace over “boxy” style buildings.
- For alternative transportation options, respondents generally favored separate space for bicycles and cars to promote safety.

VI: COMMENT MAP & VOTING GAME TRENDS TO-DATE

The Comment Map offers six different themed “pins” for respondents to select. To-date, almost 50% of the 475 pins are focused on bike, pedestrian, and transit topics, as can be seen in Figure 4. Comments are relatively evenly distributed across the City, as can be seen in Figure 5.

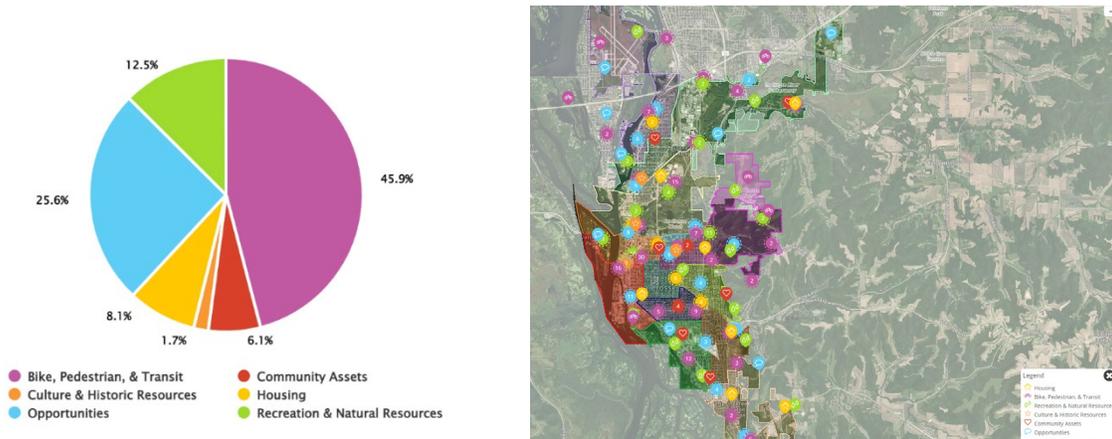


Figure 4-5: Breakdown of comment types on the community map and distribution of comment “pins” on the community map

The Voting Game has received 271 responses. Among the 12 categories, the highest rated to-date include:

- High quality surface water and groundwater (168 votes)
- City-wide climate action (158 votes)
- Conserve open space and biodiversity (154 votes)

VII: STAKEHOLDER SESSIONS

Session 1: City Staff Leaders/Public Servants

- Group Summary: Invitations extended to representatives with City of La Crosse Municipal departments and Public Safety, La Crosse Municipal Transit, Regional Airport, and the Public Library.



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- Below is a sampling of answers to the question: **“What is most important to accomplish over the next 5 years?”**

Climate Action Plan	Continue improving roads	Reduce CO2 emissions
Redevelop older housing stock	Fill vacant buildings and continue rehab projects	Replace aging infrastructure
Create a welcoming, inclusive community	River Point District development	Increased housing affordability/options

- A sample of responses to the question: **“In a few words, what are the top goals of your department? What are your goals between departments?”**
 - Expanding access, especially to the underserved. Contribute to sustainability through tool library, develop our small business/nonprofit incubator
 - Line up our transit service with future development or needs of the community. Help support regional transportation
 - Continued engagement with all community members neighborhood groups businesses and provide a safe environment for all to live, work, and play
 - Keep as much green space as possible
 - Street reconstruction and maintenance
 - Library dept works closely with the school districts
- Initial Themes:** Participants were able to identify specific programs and projects that have succeeded and failed and were able to detail short-term and long-term goals. Some major themes that began to develop broadly included:
 - Continued and robust public outreach across all departments
 - Continue and advance interdepartmental coordination
 - Develop and advance public programs that achieve interdepartmental goals
 - Develop goals and programs that foster community pride

Session 2: Housing and Land Use

- Group Summary:** Invitations were extended to representatives from the real estate development community, low-income development community, La Crosse County, and a City homelessness staff member. In addition, attendees included a representative from Friends of the Marsh and several Plan Commission members. During introductions, many participants described their interest in the meeting and their affiliation’s priorities regarding housing and land use within the City.
- The following responses were given to the question: **“What are things that make people want to live in La Crosse?”**
 - Compact layout is efficient; I can get to work quickly
 - Amenities: Mayo Clinic, food, worship, higher education, nature
 - City’s history
 - Community for all ages: great for students, families, aging in place; “these are definitely parts of our community that aren’t well represented”



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- In addition, discussion focused heavily on the following question: **“What are some of the barriers residents face for access to housing?”** One-word responses to the question included:

Cost	Condition	Landlocked City	Availability
High taxes	Limited types	Minimal transit	

- Some additional comments focused on building political support for incentive programs like tax-increment financing, and “not in my backyard” or “NIMBY” responses to change in standards or status quo (such as higher densities, taller buildings, parking reductions, form-based zoning changes). If there isn't political support, developers will go where it's easier. Other comments included:
 - New construction costs have skyrocketed, making affordable housing difficult. High amount of substandard quality of housing and limited amounts of public programs to address this, or they are not marketed well.
 - Clearing property is expensive and low property values outweigh clearing/tearing down.
- Initial Themes: The group's conversation began to highlight several broad housing and land use ideas, including:
 - Review and update zoning and form-based codes to allow for more density, less parking, and other land development requirements/minimums/maximums
 - Market existing programs and implement additional incentive programs to help affordable projects, as well as dilapidated and infill development.
 - Maximize political support to promote community appetite for development changes, that may be perceived as unfavorable.

Session 3: Economic Development

- Group Summary: Participants invited to this session included County and City employees, members of business and development associations, local chamber of commerce, workforce community, and Downtown Mainstreet Inc.
- In response to the question “What single issue do you feel is the biggest challenge facing economic development in La Crosse?”, the following responses emerged:
 - Lack of diversity
 - Lack of available/affordable childcare
 - “Brain drain”/retaining educated workers
 - Lack of housing availability, particularly in higher-income brackets
- Initial Themes: Several major themes emerged and will be further discussed in subsequent sessions focused on economic development, including:
 - How can the City incorporate/promote diversity among the workforce?



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- How can the City expand housing and job opportunities for recent graduates to keep living in La Crosse post-graduation (both high school and college/university)
- How can housing opportunities for a variety of workers be expanded?
- How can more childcare opportunities be offered?

Session 4: Transportation, Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning

- Group Summary: Participants invited included City transportation officials, bike/ped steering committee members, a Committee for Citizens with Disabilities representative, MTU and Airport representatives, and members of transportation advocacy groups.
- A sample of comments from the question: **“What prevents La Crosse from being pedestrian-friendly?”**

Cars/trucks	Unyielding cars	Surface parking
Parking	Highways	Ice
Speeding traffic	Missing sidewalks	Unsafe Drivers
Lack of enforcement on speed/high speed roads	Fire dept. is opposed to traffic calming efforts	Bump-outs (good for slowing traffic but problematic for pedestrians and cyclists)

- Initial Themes: Some distinct themes began to form, in particular the idea of managing and reducing car use. Some other broad themes included:
 - Develop infrastructure for people not cars; end car dominance
 - Continue and expand infrastructure improvements using a multi-disciplinary team and addressing all users
 - Advance transportation projects that consider sustainability among other goals
 - Develop and market education programs, such as “rules of the road”

Stakeholder Session Next Steps: These four initial and live sessions initiated the stakeholder session engagement process. Subsequently, additional stakeholder meetings are being scheduled and will focus on remaining comprehensive plan categories:

Natural resources, open space, parks	Institutions (higher education & healthcare)	Committee for Citizens with Disabilities (8/18)
Recreation	Implementation	Historic preservation
Public utilities/community facilities	Water transportation/recreation	Bicycle-pedestrian advisory committee/bike/ped community (8/16)
Neighborhoods	Airport	