

Strategic Plan for Sustainability Review

Introduction

This report summarizes the implementation of La Crosse's 2009 *Strategic Plan for Sustainability*. It provides the implementation status of the plan's recommended actions. The plan is organized by the four system conditions identified in *the Natural Step*. Each system condition includes goals to fulfill that condition, and each goal includes actions to meet the goal. The plan includes 20 goals. Most have concrete and quantifiable measures, which are tracked in an annual Sustainability Indicators Report. The 97 actions supporting these goals can be a bit less concrete and difficult to quantify, and they have not been formally reported on in the last few years.

Action Implementation

Actions below are organized by System Condition, Goals, and then whether they are completed, in progress or incomplete. Related actions have been grouped together, so there will be fewer than 97 bullet points.

System Condition 1: Nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances from the earth's crust.

Goal 1A: By 2025, the City will reduce overall energy consumption as measured per square foot within City facilities from 2007 by a minimum of 25%.

Actions completed

- The *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* has established a baseline consumption amounts of electric and natural gas usage within all municipal facilities.

- Occupancy sensors for lighting have been installed in many municipal facilities.

Actions in progress

- Municipal staff are working with Johnson Controls, Inc. (JCI) to determine what energy efficiency projects can be implemented. This includes upgrading HVAC systems, retrofitting lighting to LEDs (and understanding their pay-back period), and recommissioning controls of facilities' energy usage.

Actions incomplete

- A municipality-wide energy conservation policy has not been extensively promoted, taught, or acted on in the last few years. There are not signs asking staff to turn off computers since the Information Technology Department has disallowed turning off computers. There have been signs to turn off lights, but they are no longer needed because most lights have sensors. There are no signs to take the stairs for energy saving purposes, because elevators don't use much energy.
- There has not been a systemic effort to reduce phantom power in the last few years.
- Staff has not audited all electric and gas meters and accounts serving City facilities and buildings. The Sustainability Indicators Report tracks them, but doesn't verify they are accurate. Typically, this would be done by the utility provider.

Goal 1B: By 2025, at least 25% of the City's energy needs in City facilities will be generated from renewable resources.

Actions completed

- There is a solar water heater at the Black River Beach Neighborhood Center.

Actions in progress

- The municipality is purchasing and using renewably produced electricity through Xcel Energy. Xcel's energy mix incorporates over 25% renewable energy.
- JCI is installing photovoltaic arrays on municipal facilities; 4 have been completed.

Goal 1C: The City will consider LEED equivalent ratings in all major renovation projects and new City buildings.

Actions completed

- The multi-family residential and commercial design review process includes a LEED checklist, but its impact is unclear. LEED buildings in La Crosse include the State Office Building, 4 Western Technical College buildings, and 3 University of Wisconsin-La Crosse buildings.
- Recycled shingle materials from the County's shingle recycling program have been used in some projects, such as road repaving.

Actions in progress

- The Fire Dept. continues to learn more about building materials to improve building and fire codes to balance environmental benefits with acceptable levels safety.

Actions incomplete

- It is unclear how many municipal projects substituted recycled construction materials for materials extracted from underground.
- A construction and demolition ordinance that requires all buildings to recycle materials and reduce the amount of demolition materials that are landfilled has not been introduced because the Landfill and waste haulers do not have the

capacity to handle it. This would take more regional buy-in, possibly from as far away as Eau Claire.

Goal 1D: By 2025, the City will consume at least 25% less fossil fuel for its transportation fleet.

Actions completed

- The Strategic Plan for Sustainability establishes a baseline amount of fuel consumption including diesel and gasoline.
- Due to COVID-19, teleconferencing and telecommuting is common for most employees that are able to do so.

Actions incomplete

- The municipality has not yet developed (or at least publicized) policies about carpooling to meetings, inspections, and other services; reducing idling times of vehicles; or maximizing mileage through vehicle maintenance programs.

Goal 1E: By 2025, at least 25% of the fuel consumed for the City's fleet will come from renewable sources and alternative fuels.

Actions complete

- Segways and bikes have been used in the Police and Public Works Departments.
- Most police SUVs use natural gas (propane) for fuel.

Actions incomplete

- The municipality does not yet require that 25% of fleet vehicle purchases to be hybrids, NEV's, CNG's and Flex vehicles.
- Fleet managers have not purchased bio-diesel and likely have not been following bio-diesel production, technology advancements, and cost changes. Between 5-20% of biodiesel is mixed in with low-sulfur diesel fuel currently.
- The Fire Dept. has not tested alternative fuels for fire safety design nor researched hydrogen fuel and solar technology as an alternative

energy source. It may make more sense to rely on outside research.

Goal 1F: City will consider policies to reduce the amount of fossil fuel used by employees in order to get to and from work.

Actions completed

- Employees are encouraged to live in the city, but this action is vague and needs definition.
- The 2012 *Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan* considers more bike paths, bike lanes, showers, racks and preferred parking to promote bicycling to work.
- MTU Works program has been expanded to include all employees.
- The Common Council established a complete streets ordinance.

Actions in progress

- Planners are working with community organizations to develop a bicycle sharing program.

Actions incomplete

- Staff has not develop an employee car pool program or incentive for ride-sharing.
- The municipality has not established or sponsored a car-sharing program.

Goal 1G: The City will enhance our community's transportation system.

Actions in progress

- The MTU developed a plan in 2014 with the La Crosse Area Planning Committee to improve the transit through more convenient and available service.
- La Crosse's 2015 Transportation Vision highlights the opportunity to turn Pearl St into a shared street, but it has not been implemented.
- The 2020 parking study includes recommendations promoting the use of existing parking ramps and facilities; the Neighborhood Revitalization Commission is advocating for eliminating parking minimums and introducing parking

maximums that would reduce surface parking lots.

- Engineering is working to improve timing and operation of traffic control lights.

Action incomplete

- Governor Walker put the kybosh on the Midwest High Speed Rail in 2010.
- Staff hasn't required the use of the La Crosse Municipal Airport for any City sponsored air travel such as attendance at meetings and conferences. The environmental benefit of this is dubious.

System Condition 2: Nature is not subject to systematically increasing concentrations of substances produced by society.

Goal 2A: By 2025, the City will replace 50% of purchased products with environmentally preferred products. We will use up the product we have on hand first.

Actions completed

- The *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* includes a baseline of products including pesticides and chemicals, etc. that are currently purchased and used.
- The City has planted native perennial plants to demonstrate the reduction of the need for fertilizers, pesticides, watering, mowing, etc.

Actions in progress

- While there may not be an explicit policy to minimize the use of salt and sand for winter snow and ice control, the Streets Dept. has adjusted their salt use and explored alternatives.

Actions incomplete

- While sharing about municipal employee use of alternative products and equipment has not been well-promoted, reviewing everyday consumer products for alternatives would be duplicative of resources widely available online.

- The Parks Dept. stopped using a particularly dangerous pesticide and began using an alternative within the last two years. There is not a publicized policy for facilities to go chemical-free, nor is there a policy for landscaping with native plants, reduce watering, and reduce mowing. The Parks Dept. does not have policies to reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides, etc. for the maintenance of our golf course and parks.
- Identifying environmentally-preferred alternative products and equipment is not been widespread. The purchasing buyer has pursued buying less-polluting energy on the market.
- La Crosse has a subscription to Slipstreams Sustainability Tracking Software to review vendors. There is not yet an environmentally-preferred purchasing policy, though.
- There is not a chlorine free and/or solar-heated municipal swimming pool.
- While safe winter driving techniques are important, they may be beyond the scope of a sustainability plan.
- The Finance Dept. has not yet developed a full-cost and life-cycle accounting policy for all purchasing decisions

Goal 2B: The City will make more efficient use of high impact products such as laptop and personal computers, wireless devices, personal digital assistants, etc.

Actions completed

- The IT Dept. has investigate extending the replacement cycle on all electronic equipment.

Action incomplete

- Municipal staff has not been encouraged to use fewer electronic devices. This goal may conflict with the action to use more technology to reduce paper waste. Budget policies of “use it or lose it” can work against this goal as well.

System Condition 3: Nature is not subject to systematically increasing degradation by physical means

Goal 3A: By 2025, the City will reduce the total amount of waste it generates by at least 25% and of the waste that is generated, the amount that is recycled will increase by at least 25%.

Actions completed

- The *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* establish a baseline of waste generated.
- The County has conducted a community-wide comprehensive assessment of its solid waste and recycling system.
- Waste haulers serving La Crosse Study recycles some plastics.

Actions in progress

- Other than including recycling bins, there is no publicized program to reduce, reuse, and recycle for at facilities.

Actions incomplete

- Municipal staff has not conducted a waste audit in the last few years.

Goal 3B: The City will reduce its paper consumption by at least 10% each year for five years. (subject to review)

Actions completed

- The *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* established a baseline amount of paper usage and cost for each department for 2008.
- Finance uses electronic payroll, billing, time-keeping, accounts receivable, and purchasing
- Printers are set to double-sided printing by default, and copying can be done in duplex.

Action in progress

- Some Human Resources Dept. paperwork has not been converted to electronic documents, but more has been converted since the pandemic started.

Action incomplete

- Overall, municipal paper use has not been reduced by 10% each year overall. It is also a challenge for Finance to account for paper by department.
- Chlorine-free, 30% post-consumer content is typically not purchased in place of regular office paper, because purchasing decisions prioritize lowest cost.
- Increases in electronic communication and information management are difficult to quantify.
- Wireless device maximization is also difficult to quantify, and may conflict with encouraging employees to use fewer devices.

Goal 3C: The City will strive to preserve and enhance its natural resources, including: wildlife habitat, forests, water, wetlands, and bluffslands.

Actions complete

- The Stormwater Utility has levied stormwater fees and created ways for property owners to get credit for water conservation.
- La Crosse has established a comprehensive stormwater management program. There are rain barrels, rain gardens, and pervious pavement at some municipal facilities.

Actions in progress

- La Crosse's in the process of updating its 19-year old comprehensive plan and is implementing a number of different small area plans; efficient land use and natural resource preservation are important parts of all these plans.
- While the Parks Dept's relationship has changed with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, it has continued to purchase and preserve bluffland.
- Plans to reduce the spread of the Emerald Ash Borer have decimated boulevard tree planting efforts, but the boulevard restoration program continues. Tree planting throughout La Crosse has increased.

- The Parks Dept. and WisCorps have education program that promote conservation and enhancement of our natural resources

Actions incomplete

- Most development related to natural resources are regulated by the State. City officials are reluctant to further restrict development.
- There needs to be a wellhead protection plan or some other policy justification for the establishment of a wellhead protection overlay zoning district.

System Condition 4: There are no structural obstacles to people's health, influence, competence, impartiality and meaning.

Goal 4A: City facilities will be healthy environments in which to work for all employees (air quality, ergonomics, mental health, etc.).

Actions completed

- La Crosse offers health risk assessments.
- There is an informal interdepartmental green team that helps to identify projects for the performance contract with Johnson Controls, Inc.

Actions in progress

- Working from home has become more prevalent since the pandemic-related closures began in March 2020. Some employees have been able to take advantage of flex-time as well.
- Green team members are not yet responsible for assessing sustainability plan action progress within their departments or communicating to staff.

Actions incomplete.

- An employee sustainability policy has not been established nor is sustainability part of new employee orientation.
- Employees have not been surveyed about sustainability practices at work in the last few years.

- An ergonomic workstation program has not been in progress for the last few years. Most workstation improvements are ad-hoc.
- There is not an off-duty municipal staff study circle. However, the wellness program offers frequent wellness-related materials and education.
- There is not a recognition program for reducing resources and increasing recycling amounts or challenges and friendly competitions amongst departments.
- The four system conditions have not been posted on every floor of every municipal building.

Goal 4B: Support the availability of local food.

Actions in progress

- Municipal facilities host farmers markets.
- La Crosse has increased food grown within the city by creating victory gardens and supporting community gardens. However, there is little agriculturally-zoned land.
- The city has lost at least one community garden since 2009, but has started 4 victory gardens. Most community gardening growth efforts are happening through GROW La Crosse at schools.
- The common council has passed ordinances to allow chicken-keeping and beekeeping in the city. Gardening allowed, but largely unregulated. There is not much land available for larger scale urban agricultural activities, except for composting sites.

Goal 4C: The City will continue to offer a range of housing that is of high quality and affordable.

Actions completed

- La Crosse has 2 community development corporations to focus on housing and redevelopment projects.
- The Common Council passed ordinances for multi-family design standards.

- La Crosse has programs to encourage owner-occupied rental properties.

Actions in progress

- La Crosse is increasing the number of affordable housing units through Housing Replacement and Housing Rehab Programs.

Action incomplete

- It is unknown whether La Crosse's socio-economically integration of housing is increasing, decreasing, or holding steady. This action is a bit vague and may need to be more defined.

Goal 4D: The City will work to ensure that neighborhoods are safe, integrated, and have a sense of community.

Actions complete

- The Parks Dept. has refurbished neighborhood parks city-wide.

Actions in progress

- La Crosse has programs to re-establish more single-family housing units within its neighborhoods. However, the environmental benefit of this action is dubious since single-unit detached homes take up more space and resources than multi-unit attached residences.
- Housing & Community Development staff are addressing pockets of poverty by a review of housing, workforce development, and education programs. They also advocate for redevelopment of blighted areas by providing grants and incentives.

Action incomplete

- La Crosse has not reduced the quantity or size of surface parking lots. Minimum parking standards have not been reduced yet.

Goal 4E: The City will foster community-wide knowledge of The Natural Step framework.

Actions complete

- La Crosse has been a member of the Sustainability Institute and MPower cohort. Planners have been engaged with sustainability classes, projects, and internships with universities.
- La Crosse's website and newsletter have been upgraded. www.sustainablelacrosse.org is hosted and managed by the La Crosse County.

Actions incomplete

- La Crosse does not have a formal informational program to keep the public informed of the sustainability practices it is implementing. However, the media had followed the Sustainable La Crosse Commission and its work.
- There has not been an information packet on the *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* in the past few years, nor has there been public open house presentations and reviews of the plan yet.

Goal 4F: The City will work to implement the Strategic Plan for Sustainability.

Actions complete

- La Crosse has identified the Environmental Planner as the staff person responsible for overseeing Plan implementation, various sustainability projects, education, and community resources.
- Staff produces an annual report to measure progress on Plan implementation including the common set of sustainability indicators.

Goal 4G: The City will encourage economic development including the green economy sector.

Actions complete

- The Common Council amended the economic development ordinance to incorporate sustainability measures in 2020.

Actions in progress

- The La Crosse Center staff are developing procedures, policies, and marketing to encourage and promote itself as a sustainable conference destination.

Goal 4H: By 2025, at least 25% of the City's residents' energy needs will be generated from renewable resources.

Action in progress

- There is not a comprehensive energy conservation, efficiency and educational program for residents and home owners, per se. However, the Home Energy Challenge promoted energy audits. La Crosse also worked with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association on a solar group buy program that included solar assessments. There is a lack of energy auditors in the area. Very few homes had good solar potential due to the alignment and structural capacity.

Conclusion

There is nearly an even number of complete and incomplete action bullets, 35 to 37. There number of actions in progress are not far behind with 24. A few factors will help decide whether revise or remove these actions for the plan update. Actions that start with phrases like "research," "look into," or "consider" should be done before or during the planning process. An analysis of an impact vs. effort will also help. Actions will need to consider of the capacity, flexibility, and buy-in of the staff charged with implementing them. Planners will continue to gather research on these actions for the Climate Action Plan Steering Committee to make their recommendations.