



## Memorandum

To: Climate Action Plan Steering Committee  
From: Lewis Kuhlman, Erin Smith, and Kelly Flynn  
CC: Common Council  
Date: April 5, 2021  
Re: **Policy Goal for LEED Requirements**

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The City of La Crosse's 2009 *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* includes a goal to consider LEED-equivalent ratings in all major renovation projects and new City buildings. The purpose of this memorandum is to guide how to revise this goal for the Climate Action Plan using a SMART goal framework. SMART stands for specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, time-related. Researchers reviewed policies for LEED requirements in twenty communities and three universities to provide an outline of how to phrase related SMART goals.

The United States Green Business Council (USGBC) created [LEED](#) (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification in the late 1990s to define and measure green building. LEED certification requires that buildings be highly efficient and can also have benefits such as improved indoor air quality. The USGBC estimated that between 2015-2018, LEED-certified buildings saved a total of \$1.2 billion on energy, \$149.5 million on water, \$715.3 on maintenance, and \$54.2 million on waste. LEED certification is available for the majority of building types and is widely acknowledged as a measure of sustainability achievement worldwide.

## Specific

La Crosse's focus on new and renovated municipal buildings is in line with LEED requirements for most other municipalities. These LEED requirements almost always apply to new buildings, and sometimes include significant renovations or additions for existing buildings. They include variables such as minimum size requirements and minimum dollar amount thresholds before a minimum LEED award level is required as well. Appendix 1 lists cities with standards for municipal facilities.

One main reason for this limitation to municipal facilities is that State building codes preempt higher standards. However, private sector development that receives government funding can be required to meet LEED standards. LEED standards can also be tied to other incentives, such as streamlined permitting or development bonuses. Like municipal facility requirements above, there can be minimum size requirements and minimum dollar amount thresholds before a minimum LEED award level is required. Appendix 2 lists cities with requirements for municipally-funded projects.

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## Measurable

The main measurement is whether or not a building receives LEED certification. However, the minimum threshold for the policies vary in terms of size and cost of building before the requirements apply. La Crosse's goal was for all (any price or size) new and renovated municipal buildings. In other communities, the range for minimum building sizes includes 0 (or no minimum); 5,000; 10,000; and 25,000 square feet. The minimum dollar investment includes \$0 (or no minimum); \$200,000; and \$1,000,000. Requirements may also differ when applied to new, renovated, or existing buildings.

One last measurement to consider would be which level and categories of LEED Certification to require. Most case study communities set LEED Silver as their minimum. There are four levels: certified, silver, gold, and platinum. There are LEED categories for building design and construction, interior design and construction, building operation and maintenance, and net zero. There is even a category for LEED Cities and Communities, which [Rochester, MN](#) achieved.

## Assignable

The Common Council would pass legislation for buildings to meet LEED requirements, but municipal staff would be responsible for carrying it out. Each facility manager may be the most reasonable choice, but they would likely need the assistance of a LEED-certified staff person or consultant. A staff person may be best if a municipality frequently needs assistance, but a consultant would do if their LEED projects are less frequent. Fortunately, the US Green Building Council (USGBC) provides first time registering projects a dedicated LEED Coach for free. These coaches have years of experience with the LEED certification process and can assist with questions.

Most case study communities went further than a resolution alone and developed ordinances, design guidance documents, and training to make sure staff had all they needed to fulfill the requirements. Along with staff responsibility, there will need to be funding assigned to ensure LEED certification is carried out. This funding should be incorporated into the budget of all projects. Alternatively, a separate fund specifically for LEED certification may be necessary to preserve it. Certification costs vary but are listed on the [USGBC website](#). There is also not a definite answer on how much LEED projects would affect each project's cost, but [one study](#) suggests that budgeting anywhere from 0-21% of the project cost should cover these green enhancements. These costs will likely be at least partially or completely offset by future energy, water, maintenance, and waste cost savings.

## Realistic

There are over [730 LEED-certified buildings in Wisconsin](#). Wisconsin cities that are larger and smaller than La Crosse have LEED-certification requirements, such as [Appleton](#), [Eau Claire](#), [Madison](#), and [Stevens Point](#). Even municipalities without requirements have managed to get LEED certification, such as [Milwaukee](#), [River Falls](#), and [Cross Plains](#). There are 20 LEED-certified buildings in La Crosse, including on [UWL](#), [WTC](#), and Gundersen Health

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System campuses. Whether or not mandating LEED certification as realistic depends on political will, staff buy-in, and careful budgeting. A dedication to LEED-certification can help La Crosse gain prestige, attract private investment, grow its population, and inspire action among citizens. There is a lot of flexibility and a variety of credits available in the [LEED credit library](#).

## Time-related

Requiring LEED certification is triggered by the construction of a new building or renovation of an existing building, whether they be municipal or municipally-funded. The person requesting the funding would have to know about the requirement when making a request, and then held accountable through a design review process. While La Crosse only recommends projects *consider* LEED certification, why it was not pursued for the La Crosse Center's renovation or for the Public Safety Center is unclear. Researchers found three communities that have LEED-certified fire stations and could inform future fire station design in La Crosse - [Madison](#), [Seattle](#), and [Neenah-Minasha](#).

A few communities go a step further to address buildings that are neither new nor significantly remodeled. Stevens Point's 2008 [sustainability plan](#) sets a timeline for evaluating all existing building under the LEED for Existing Buildings criteria. Buildings with significant potential will be submitted for LEED-EB certification. A Bloomington, IN [resolution](#) called for the develop a schedule for retrofitting all existing buildings within ten years to achieve LEED Silver certification.

## Recommendation

The Common Council should adopt a resolution and ordinance requiring LEED certification for municipal facilities and projects receiving city funding, and direct staff to develop a design guide. This legislation should include the following:

- Using the most recent requirements, LEED version 4.1 for new buildings, but not requiring higher levels such as Silver, Gold, or Platinum
- New buildings that are 5,000+ square feet must get LEED v. 4.1, so smaller buildings like park shelters would not be burdened.
- Major municipal building renovation projects must get LEED v. 4.1 for operation & maintenance, and define a major renovation as one costing over half the value of the building.
- Projects receiving municipal funding of \$200,000 or more should meet LEED v. 4.1 requirements for its applicable building type.
- Assistance with offsetting the cost of the certification fees, either through a permit fee rebate or grant, up to 100% of the cost.

After ten years, La Crosse should revise its resolution and ordinance to reduce the area and cost variables. It should also move up to Silver designation as a minimum, update to the latest LEED requirements, and revise the design guide. La Crosse should pursue LEED City designation in ten years as well.

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## Appendix 1- LEED Standards for Municipal Facilities

- Minneapolis, MN has required all new facilities and major renovations of 5,000 square feet or greater achieve LEED Silver certification since 2006 (Resolution 2006R-381).
- [Madison, WI](#) has required all new municipal buildings 5,000 square feet or greater to earn LEED Silver certification since 2008. It adopted a policy that all municipal projects over \$1 million will achieve LEED for New Construction certification.
- [Northbrook, IL](#) has required all municipal construction to be at minimum LEED Certified since 2008.
- [Evanston, IL](#) has required all new municipal buildings 10,000 square feet or greater to achieve LEED Silver certification or higher since 2009.
- [Bloomington, IN](#) has required all new construction and major renovation of occupied municipal buildings achieve LEED Silver certification since 2009.
- [Stevens Point, WI](#) required all new construction projects to be registered and submitted for LEED certification since 2009. All existing buildings will be evaluated under the LEED for Existing Buildings.
- [LEED Legislation by City: See Where LEED Certification is Required](#)
  - Stamford, CT has required all city-owned buildings over 5,000 square feet and buildings where the city leases at least 50% of total space to earn LEED Silver or higher since 2007.
  - Atlanta, GA requires all major renovations and new construction of city-owned facilities over 5,000 square feet to earn a LEED for New Construction Silver Certification or greater. All existing city-owned facilities larger than 25,000 square feet are required to earn the LEED Buildings: Operations & Maintenance Certification.
  - Costa Mesa, CA was the first municipality in California to require all new municipal construction to achieve LEED Gold, with no size or cost minimums.

## Appendix 2 - LEED Standards for Municipally-Funded Projects

- St. Paul, MN has required that new projects receiving more than \$200,000 in funding from the City or the Housing and Redevelopment Authority must meet LEED for Homes Silver, LEED-NC Silver, or an equivalent since 2009.
- [Madison, WI](#) requires that any new commercial or multifamily buildings that receive public funding achieve LEED for New Construction certification.
- Bloomington, MN offers a floor area bonus for LEED certification—the higher the certification, the greater the bonus ([Chapter 19.29\(g\)\(4\)\(F\)](#))
- [Evanston, IL](#) offers expedited plan review and financial assistance for costs associated with LEED Silver projects.
- [Northbrook, IL](#) offers expedited permitting and review, and eligibility for permit fee rebates on LEED projects—the higher the certification, the greater the fee rebate.
- [LEED Legislation by City: See Where LEED Certification is Required](#)
  - Costa Mesa, CA offers priority permitting and fee waivers for all green installations and fee reductions to cover the cost of LEED certification.
  - [El Paso, TX](#) offers a Green Building Grant Program for commercial projects greater than 5,000 square feet and multi-family, multi-story residential projects that get LEED certification.