Introduction

The City of La Crosse's Common Council adopted a Climate Action Plan in January 2023. This year one implementation plan focuses on its Top Ten Actions. Each top action is complemented with four actions that have the potential to increase their effectiveness. In total, there are fifty possible actions to begin implementing in 2023. It's important to note that implementation is an iterative process that may require adjustments over time. Regular monitoring and evaluation will help identify areas for improvement and necessary changes to ensure success.

Top Ten Climate Actions

1. *Increase bus frequency. At a minimum, extend 30-minute service on weekdays by one hour until 6:42 pm on routes 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 to provide flexibility to employees who work into the evening. (TM 2-2)*

2. *Assist private fleet operators who with grant applications for EVs and EV infrastructure; require they set EV goals of 30% by 2030 and 100% by 2040 to qualify for assistance. Goal: 10 New organization commitments annually. (TM 3-3)*

3. *Contract with an organization to reduce the cost for low-income residents to receive professional home energy audits and recommendations for energy use reduction and monitoring. Develop a program to identify and implement measures that increase the durability, safety, and efficiency of their homes. Goal: 500 households annually, each achieving 15% energy reductions. (BE 1-3)*

4. *Promote existing commercial and industrial energy efficiency audit and upgrade programs. Develop energy efficiency programs for businesses that don't own their own building. Use the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's Energy Smart program as a model. Goal: 15% of commercial/ industrial buildings by 2030 achieving a 20% efficiency increase per location. (BE 1-4)*

5. *Organize annual Residential Solar Group Purchase program for La Crosse, supported by a program administrator such as MREA or others experienced in solar group purchase programs. Goal: 70 participants and 750 KW installed annually. (BE 4-5)*

6. *Based on the City's Ground Cover, Tree Canopy, Heat Island, and Carbon Sequestration Study, identify vulnerable urban tree canopy and street tree sections and develop policies to incentivize, encourage, or require strategic tree planting for heat island mitigation. (LH 4-1)*

7. *Enhance stormwater system plans and infrastructure to handle an increase in severe weather events based on climate change projections rather than historic trends. (LH 3-5)*

8. *Use green infrastructure and other nature-based approaches (e.g., floodplain restoration) to reduce the vulnerability of buildings to flooding, with particular focus on critical facilities. (BE 5- 5)*

9. *Support existing community networks and connections led by and/or geared towards populations vulnerable to extreme weather events, including people who are elderly, homebound, disabled, isolated, or those likely to need financial assistance. (HS 3-1)*

10. *Incentivize building owners to increase the resilience of existing and new buildings. Ensure that incentive programs prioritize multi-family dwellings and improvements that benefit vulnerable populations. (HS 1-16)*

Working Groups

Using the CAP process as a model, the steering committee could form 3 working groups to help with the implementation of the top actions and complementary actions.

Working Group 1 (Transportation & businesses): 1, 2, 4

Working Group 2 (Residential assistance): 3, 5, 9, 10

Working Group 2 (Green and grey infrastructure): 6, 7, 8

1. Increase Bus Frequency

Increasing bus frequency is an important transportation and mobility improvement. It supports the Climate Action Plan's strategy to increase the share of commuters travelling by bus to 3% by 2030. As of 2019, bus riders only made up 1.6% of commuters. *[How many people are 1.6% and 3%?]*

Goal

The CAP draws on MTU's Grand River Transit Service Enhancement & Policy Plan recommendation to extend 30-minute service on weekdays by one hour until 6:42 pm on routes 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 to provide flexibility to employees who work into the evening (Pg. 6-2). La Crosse's Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) operates buses between 5:12am and 10:40pm. Before 5:42pm, buses operate on a 30-minute cycle. After that, they operate on a 60-minute cycle.

Cost

MTU estimates the annual cost of this improvement to be $111,137 for 1,300 hours of service.

Work Sequence

A. Identify funding sources in addition to those in the MTU plan in chapter 6.
B. Add to MTU's operating budget.
C. Track increases in ridership during that additional hour. This data could help gain support for further actions.

Considerations

If funding is from a one-time source, the MTU will have to identify new sources in subsequent years.

Lead

MTU

Support

Planning Dept., La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC), and transit advocacy groups.

Complementary Actions

I. Identify funding for public transit improvements and service increases. (TM 2-1)
Work with grant services consultants to find sources to fund this MTU plan recommendation and others.

II. Establish a parking cash out program, where municipal employees who do not drive to work can cash out their parking space or receive a comparable transit benefit. Provide guidance for other businesses and organizations to implement their own parking cash out program. Goal: 10 New organizations establishing programs annually. (TM 1-4)
Develop a policy based on resources from the APA and other communities. Research service providers such to help with administration.

III. Add transit-oriented development (TOD) requirements to commercial design standards; add design standards for transit corridors, including accommodations for bus stops and wider sidewalks. (TM 2-3)
Research TOD recommendations from the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU), Urban Land Institute (ULI), and American Planning Associations (APA); look at transit corridor guides from AASHTO and NAACTO.

IV. Partner with sports and entertainment organizations for free bus rides to/from events. (TM 2-6)
Reach out to the La Crosse Center, universities, Explore La Crosse, and festival operators.

2. Assist Private Fleet Operators with Transitioning to Electric Vehicles

Transitioning to electric vehicles is another important transportation and mobility improvement. It supports the Climate Action Plan's strategy to increase electric vehicle use to 20% (11,800 vehicles) by 2030. There are approximately 77 EVs in La Crosse now.

Goal

Work with ten new organizations each year.

Cost

Staff would have to estimate time commitment or cost for contracted services. Supporting materials may add to costs.

EV incentives from the Federal and State government have increased, so the city could assist organizations to identify and attain grants, tax rebate, and technical assistance to ease their fleet's transition to electric vehicles.

Work Sequence

A. Identify what EV incentives are available to businesses.
B. Develop support materials such as a frequently updated list of incentives, letters of support, and contacts with the incentivizing organizations.
C. Reach out to business organizations (LADCO and Chamber of Commerce) and large institutions to share the incentives.
D. Assist applicants or refer them to outside assistance.

Considerations

The fleet operators that are interested in help should be committed to converting 30% of their vehicle to electric by 2030 and 100% by 2040.

Lead

Planning Dept.

Support
WisDOT, LAPC, Xcel Energy, and Focus on Energy.

Complementary Actions
I. Require new development to have wiring capacity to for electric vehicle charging and reserve a percentage of new parking spots for exclusive EV use. (TM 3-9)
Research what other communities in Wisconsin require. Perhaps a good starting point would be to have capacity to charge 20% of parking spaces.

II. Collaborate with the electric utility to provide incentives for EV charger installation at small and medium-sized businesses, with a priority on areas that promote equity. (TM 3-11)

III. Develop a detailed implementation plan for EV charging infrastructure at municipal facilities. Budget for municipal EV charging station installation and upkeep. (TM 3-8)

IV. Implement the La Crosse Energy Action Plan's municipal operations EV strategies. (TM 6-1)
These strategies include learning about EVs and leasing EVs. Telematics can help identify which vehicles are the best candidates for replacement.

3. Reduce Home Energy Audits Costs
Reducing the cost for home energy audits is an important buildings and energy improvement. It supports the Climate Action Plan's strategy to reduce building energy consumption by 15%.

Goal
500 households annually achieving 15% annual energy reductions each.

Cost
Homeadvisor.com estimates the cost of a typical home energy audit to be between $200 and $700. That means meeting the goal of auditing 500 homes a year could cost between $100,000 and $350,000 annually.

Work Sequence
A. An energy audit is the first step in identifying cost-effective energy efficiency improvements in the home.
B. Show how incentive can be combined to greatly reduce the cost of improvements.

Considerations
There are likely not enough energy auditors in the area to meet that annual goal, so the city will need partners. Also, this program could also use multiple funding sources to bring homes up to code.

Lead
Planning Dept

Support
Community Risk Management Dept., US DOE, WI OEI, WHEDA, Xcel Energy, and Focus on Energy.

Complementary Actions

I. Revive/expand Mayor's Home Energy Challenge to increase weatherization projects. Fund an income-based payment system for low- and fixed-income residents to participate in energy efficiency and weatherization program(s) at little to no cost. Finance energy efficiency retrofits and renewable energy projects for all residential buildings. Establish a tiered incentive based on percent improvement to energy efficiency and income qualifications for applicants. (BE 1-5)
Review implementation of the Challenge to identify improvements.

II. Communicate available energy efficiency incentives to residents, focusing on low-income and minority residents. (BE 1-7)
Identify new and expanded Federal and State incentives for energy efficiency. Look for technical assistance with spreading the word.

III. Implement the Energy Action Plan's Energy Efficiency Strategies: 1) increase awareness of energy efficiency rebates and behavior changes, 2) host an energy challenge, 3) connect residents with free and low-cost energy assistance programs, and 11) update existing loans and grants to include energy efficiency improvements as eligible costs. (BE 4-1)

IV. Create an on-line "one-stop shop" for building and development energy efficiency and renewable energy information and resources as an expansion to the City's existing "Energy Resources" website content. Resource should include the City's anticipated Net Zero Energy Guide and checklist, Solar Ready Guide as well as content connecting residents and businesses with resources for energy efficient products, costs, rebates, incentives, contractors, etc. (BE 1-13)
This action was taken from Eau Claire and their material could be replicated.

4. Promote Energy Audits and Incentives for Commercial Buildings

Promoting commercial and industrial energy efficiency audit and upgrade programs is another buildings and energy improvement. It supports the Climate Action Plan's strategy to reduce building energy consumption by 15% as well.

Goal

15% of commercial and industrial buildings increase energy efficiency by 20%. There are 111 industrial parcels and 2,159 commercial parcels in La Crosse. There may be multiple buildings on each parcel, but 15% would be 341 parcels or about 49 per year.

Cost

Greenlinerates.com estimates the cost of a typical commercial energy audit to be between $1,000 and $15,000. To do 49 per year, the annual cost could range from $49,000 to $735,000.

Work sequence

A. Secure funding and help from a program administrator.
B. Identify potential incentives for projects.
C. Reach out to businesses directly and through business organizations.

D. Conduct commercial energy audit to identify cost-effective energy efficiency improvements.
E. Show how Federal, State, and utility incentive can be combined to significantly reduce the cost of improvements.
F. Help businesses get assistance with completing forms to qualify for incentives.

Considerations

Some considerations would need to be made for businesses that don't own their building. For example, there could be technical assistance for property owners and businesses to negotiate rents that fairly offset cost and savings without pricing the tenant business out.

Lead

Planning Dept.

Support

Community Risk Management Dept., US DOE, WI OEI, WEDC/WHEDA, Xcel Energy, Focus on Energy, Chamber of Commerce, DMI, a NLBA, LADCO, Rewiring America, ACEEE

Complementary Actions

I. Inform businesses of financing opportunities for energy efficiency improvements. Information campaigns may include Focus on Energy programs, energy efficiency performance contracting, Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing; Clean Energy Credit Unions; and Federal, State, County, Utility, and City incentive programs. (BE 1-8)

II. Promote incentives for building electrification. Goal: 5% of commercial/industrial market conversion (an estimated 25 commercial businesses, 10 industrial businesses annually) by 2030. (BE 3-4)

III. Create heat pump grant to incentivize fuel switching. Incentive could be coordinated or combined with energy efficiency / weatherization incentives. (BE 3-5)

IV. Identify and engage in opportunities to assist with accessing funding, feasibility assessments, information/educational content or other technical resources for businesses and organizations to support and promote micro-grid, and district heating and cooling projects, especially where 'waste' energy or geothermal can be utilized. (BE 1-15)

5. Organize Annual Residential Solar Group Purchase Program

Goal

70 participants and 750 KW installed annually.

Cost

Work Sequence

Consideration

Lead

Support
Program administrator such as MREA or Renew WI.

Complementary Actions
1. Organize an annual Commercial property and Industrial property group purchase program. Coordinate program with City's "Solar Top 50" effort. Goal: 30 participants with 3,000 KW installed annually. (BE 4-4)

2. Identify the top privately owned Solar PV sites within the city (including rooftop, ground mounted, and "carport" site potential). Effort should include the development of a Solar PV Site Assessment for identified with estimated installation costs, and projections for energy generation and economic payback over a minimum 20-year period. Assessments, along with a summary highlighting the economic potential should be provided to property owners. This strategy could be coordinated with the Commercial property and Industrial property Solarize program. "Solar Top 50" assessment effort could be repeated annually, particularly through 2025. (BE 4-3)

3. Develop renewable energy programs that increase on-site and community renewable energy and create benefits for low-income community members. Example programs include the City of Dubuque Low Income Solar Renewable Energy Credit (SREC), Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Community Solar for Community Action, and the Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute Community Solar Program Model. Goal: 10,000 MWh of clean energy delivered through programs annually by 2030. (LH 5-1)

4. Support the development of community solar projects that benefit all residents, particularly communities of color and low-income populations. Advocate for passage of bill SB 490. (BE 4-6)

6. Incentivize, Encourage, & Require Tree Planting for Heat Island Mitigation

Cost

Work Sequence
Identify where there are gaps or threats to the public tree canopy.

Consideration

Lead

Support
Arbor Day Foundation

Complementary Actions
1. Increase maintenance to sustain mature tree canopy, decrease tree hazards, and delay tree replacement needs. (LH 4-4)

2. Adopt a tree preservation ordinance that requires obtaining a permit for tree removal on private property (with exceptions for diseased and nuisance trees) and develop a fee structure that does not place a burden on low-income property owners. (GS 1-8)

3. Incentivize/award projects that reduce heat islands, prioritizing areas with the highest heat island coefficients as identified in the City's 2021 Ground Cover, Tree Canopy, and Carbon Sequestration Study. Incentives might include below-market loans, product rebates, grants, and giveaways. Awards can reward exemplary work, highlight innovation, and promote solutions across the public and private sectors. (GS 3-6)

4. Plant shade trees around municipal buildings to reduce indoor cooling needs, and around parks, playgrounds, and other outdoor spaces to reduce outdoor temperatures. (GS 1-2)

7. Plan for an Increase in Severe Weather Events

Cost

Work Sequence
1. Review existing plans.
2. Compare climate change projections to historic trends.
3. Identify infrastructure needs.

Consideration

Lead

Support

Complementary Actions
1. Protect and restore natural systems that protect the community from flooding, including parks, wetlands, riparian areas, and natural drainage ways/swales (LH 2-1).

2. Create a demonstration green roof, green/live wall, and/or vertical garden project, and include these categories in projects that qualify for stormwater fee credit. (GS 3-6)

3. Establish a preparedness education program and an emergency alert system that help protect the community from flooding and extreme heat events. (LH 3-3)

4. Strengthen local ordinances/regulations to better protect riparian areas, streams, and wetlands that store and filter floodwaters, and strengthen enforcement of those policies. (W 3-4)

8. Reduce Building Vulnerability to Flooding

Cost

Work Sequence

1. Identify critical facilities that could be at risk.
2. Use green infrastructure and other nature-based solutions.

Consideration

Lead

Support

Complementary Actions

1. Require and/or incentivize the use of green infrastructure such as bioswales, permeable pavement, rain gardens, rainwater catchment areas, and other pervious surface strategies to reduce flood risk and minimize sediment entry into creeks from trails and roads. (BE 5-5)

2. Increase the use of permeable pavement and other green infrastructure (e.g., swales, rain gardens, urban tree canopies) to reduce overland flow and increase detention and infiltration that address stormwater before it enters the sewer system and prioritize the use of these strategies in areas at higher risk of flooding. (W 3-1)

3. Establish incentives to encourage the use of green infrastructure and greenspace by property owners, while ensuring that these policies do not conflict with efforts to increase the city's density. (GS 1-11)

4. Promote and require urban design and redevelopment approaches that incorporate natural systems and green infrastructure into site improvements, rights of way, green corridors, and other infrastructure facilities. (GS 3-2)

9. Support Community Networks for Populations Vulnerable to Extreme Weather

Cost

Work Sequence

Target audience

Elderly, homebound, disabled, isolated, or those likely to need financial assistance.

Lead

Support

Complementary Actions

1. Adapt public facilities and develop new ones to serve as resiliency hubs (community centers that can provide resources before, during, and after climate disasters and emergencies) following guidance from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN). (HS 1-12)

2. Support the creation of call trees and block networks to check on neighbors during/after extreme weather events, particularly when they involve grid disruption. (HS 3-4)

3. Collaborate to form and maintain a public health and climate change working group, with a focus on networks for community support, adaptation, and education. (HS 3-5)

4. Ensure redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or manmade disasters. (E 3-4)

10. Incentivize Building Resilience

Incentivizing building resiliency is an important health and safety improvement. It supports the Climate Action Plan's strategy to assist the community's vulnerable population in preparing for and mitigating local climate change impacts.

Projects may include elevating HVAC and electrical equipment off basement floor, installing backflow preventers, maintaining shade trees, installing permeable pavement, conserving energy, generating renewable energy onsite, and building safe rooms.

Cost

Work Sequence

Considerations

Ensure that incentive programs prioritize multi-family dwellings and improvements that benefit vulnerable populations.

Lead

Support

Complementary Actions

1. Deploy point-in-time alert systems (e.g., Rave Alert, Nixle) to notify people of extreme weather events, periods of dangerous heat/cold, poor air or water quality, and other public health concerns, and refer them to resources on symptoms and prevention of climate-related illness. (HS 1-3)
2. Assist residents in signing up for state utility and heating bill assistance programs and home weatherization programs. (HS 1-11)
3. Aid populations vulnerable to financial strain caused by climate hazards (e.g., low-income populations, communities of color, older adults, and people with disabilities), including helping with and reducing utility costs. (HS 1-14)
4. Develop workforce training capacity to assess, train, and place laborers that can take on energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. (E 2-1)