

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

Sustainable Community Design Assessment



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

Sustainable Community Design Assessment

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Sustainable Community Design Assessment

Goal of this Chapter

The goal of this chapter is to “make certain that principles of sustainability in the Eau Claire area are followed to improve our quality of life by meeting present environmental, economic, and social needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.” This concept not only speaks to meeting these needs locally but how our actions also affect the greater world.

Need for this Chapter

It is sometimes difficult to see how the sum of individual actions affects the Earth and humanity’s relationship to it. Take for instance, the developing world. As more nations urbanize, industrialize and improve infrastructure, these energy-intensive phases emit tremendous amounts of “greenhouse” gases. In combination with the emissions already produced from developed nations, the planet’s average temperature continues to warm gradually. The effects of this global warming can be experienced at varying places in forms of climate change, biome alteration, loss of glaciers, drought, heat waves, wild fires, floods, ocean acidification or dangerous storms.

Human civilization is at a crossroads and climate change is only one converging factor driving the sustainability movement. This chapter addresses sustainability factors as they relate to how Eau Claire sees its responsibility in protecting the environment, improving the human condition and continuing to enhance economic prosperity. It advances local awareness of the interdependence between humans and nature and may help us reduce harmful behaviors.

Planning Process

In September of 2008, the City Council determined that a chapter on sustainability should be added to the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan*. A series of public workshops were held, which drove the community input process. The Plan Commission reviewed this chapter as it was being developed and held public hearings once the workshops concluded. The City Council adopted the chapter on April 14, 2009. This chapter is unique because it also offers some educational background on key concepts that may be unfamiliar. That information builds upon and coincides with Wisconsin Smart Growth Planning legislation, the *Plan’s* overall Future Growth Strategy and other sustainable development approaches listed in earlier chapters of the existing *Plan*. Objectives and policies were developed from the major issues identified by the public participation process and form the greater part of the chapter.

Major Sustainability Issues

- 1. Energy:** What should the City do to foster local energy production, conservation, and efficiency, while increasing the use of renewable power?
- 2. Local Food:** What should the City do to promote area food production, sales, and consumption while reducing food related waste?
- 3. Environmental Conservation:** What should the City do to safeguard our eco- systems, trees, soil, and water resources?
- 4. Atmosphere:** What should the City do to reduce our contribution to global warming and minimize air pollution?
- 5. Managing Waste:** What should the City do to promote consumer product awareness, increase recycling rates, and reduce the amount of substances entering into landfills?
- 6. Strong and Healthy Community:** How should the City continue to protect its citizens from disease, promote healthy living, civic engagement, cultural and ethnic diversity, while partnering with others to provide these activities?
- 7. Sustainable Development:** How should the City guide and promote development so that buildings and neighborhoods incorporate sustainable features?
- 8. Balanced Transportation:** How should the City increase mobility choices by enhancing other forms of transportation besides that for automobiles? How can transportation infrastructure be designed efficiently, safely, with the environment in mind, and be connected to other local and regional networks?
- 9. Greener Economy:** How should the City bolster the local economy by attracting Green-collar jobs and encouraging businesses to become more sustainable?
- 10. Sustainable Government:** What should the City do to provide good government and cost-effective services, meet the needs of our citizens, protect the environment, and cooperate with other governments?



Central area redevelopment as illustrated above is a sustainable practice.

Progress Update

Since the chapter was approved in April 2009 the City has implemented various policies and projects too numerous to list herein. Some of which can also be found in other assessment sections of the *Comprehensive Plan*. The approach has been to create a staff green team to focus on internal sustainability goals that are relevant to City operations (e.g., adoption of green purchasing and anti-idling fleet policies) and to create an Advisory Commission on Sustainability to drive more external relations and projects. The City Council has also passed several important pieces of legislation:

In **November 2008** the City became an Energy Independent Community and pledged to support the State of Wisconsin vision for energy independence by generating 25 percent of electricity and 25 percent of transportation fuels from renewable resources by 2025, capturing 10 percent of the emerging national bio-industry and renewable energy market by 2030, and leading the nation in making clean energy more affordable. As of 2013, the City's own energy assessment showed 24 percent of its electric usages come from renewables. There is much progress still to be made on fuels. The City also created an Energy Independence Plan with Eau Claire County and the City of Altoona. Together, the three local governments have been improving energy usage practices, conservation, efficiency and implementation of renewable energy.

In **May of 2009**, the City became an eco-municipality, generally defined as a municipality that recognizes that issues of sustainability are key to the decisions made by government and that aspires to develop an ecologically, economically and socially healthy community for the long term through a democratic and participative community process based on the following key principles:

- Reduce dependence upon extracted fossil fuel deposits, metals, and minerals,
- Reduce dependence on harmful chemicals and manufactured toxic substances,
- Reduce encroachment upon nature and decrease those activities which harm life-sustaining ecosystems, and
- Meet the justice, safety, health, and social capital needs of the community

In **July of 2012**, the City became a Green Tier Legacy Community, a DNR program that recognizes communities going above and beyond mere environmental compliance. The program offers benefits on grants and loan forgiveness and has a sustainable strategies matrix that the City has been implementing. Progress can be found in the City's annual sustainability and bi-annual carbon footprint reports.

In **March 2013**, the Sustainable Bag Committee was created to recommend policy changes to reduce, reuse or recycle plastic and paper bags. The Council approved the recommended educational phase of the plan, which will be up for final consideration in the beginning of 2015. Some recycling of plastic film has already begun.

The Sustainable Bag Committee laid the need and groundwork for a new Advisory Commission on Sustainability (ACS) to undertake their sustainable bag work and other new projects. The City Council formed the Commission in early 2014. Since then, the ACS has also been working on a honey-bee keeping ordinance, adding decals to stormwater drains with water quality education, investigating green building and waste recovery solutions, and formulating public surveys on affordable solar community gardens.