**Draft Community Engagement Plan**

**Comprehensive Plan Update**

September 2021

# Project Background

The intent of this project is to prepare an update to La Crosse’s Comprehensive Plan that will address the core elements as well as address The core elements include natural resources, transportation, urban design, economic development, land use, parks & open space, housing & neighborhoods, intergovernmental coordination and plan implementation. This plan is intended to provide the framework necessary to plan for growth in these areas for the next 15-20 years.

The City previously adopted their current Comprehensive Plan “Confluence” in 2002. Portions of this plan were implemented but it needs to be updated and current trends and issues need to be incorporated.

The plan must fit with the community’s vision and be responsive to the needs and desires of La Crosse’s residents, business community, and overall City objectives of improved health and livability. Community engagement is a critical element of understanding existing needs and developing strategies that will deliver these outcomes for the affected communities, neighborhoods, and businesses, and creating a highly implementable plan with actionable objectives that achieve community consensus.

## Community Engagement Plan Overview

Effective community engagement is essential for good public decision making and will be critical to understanding needs, developing land use plans, and building support for the La Crosse’s Comprehensive Plan. The Community Engagement Plan (CEP) will serve as a guide for the engagement of La Crosse’s stakeholders, residents, and businesses during the planning process. The purpose of the CEP is to document the tasks related to stakeholder and public engagement that will be undertaken during the preparation of the plan. In general, the intent of the community engagement process will be to be proactive rather than reactive, and to work closely with local communities to build on their successes and to empower people to engage in this as well as other future public initiatives.

Community engagement will consist of a team led by City staff with support from the resident panels (Community Leaders) with resources to assist in community engagement. Team members will be engaged in providing resources to the resident panels to solicit feedback, staffing in-person and/or virtual events, on-street activities, and, depending on individual skills and specific engagement strategies, may be asked to assist in the following: provide interpretation services, assist individuals in using and filling out surveys, assist with hands-on activities at virtual or public events, welcome people to public or virtual meetings, provide information, and assist in other ways to create a welcoming environment and engage people in the planning process.

Each core elements will include outreach activities will be focused around the these major stages of the planning process:

* Education/Discovery: Understanding what a Comprehensive Plan is and why it is important. Understanding what was planned and what has been done.
* Identifying Issues, Concerns, Opportunities,
* Exploring Alternatives
* Draft Document and Implementation Strategies

The specific outreach activities and the outreach tools that will be used will be customized for the Comprehensive Plan. This CEP will provide direction for outreach activities, and many of the tools described in this report will be used at each of the these stages of the planning process. However, other strategies may be used as well if they have been found to be particularly effective in a given community, neighborhood and/or cultural group.

## Community Engagement Goals

The goal of the CEP is to ensure that the concerns and issues of all citizens of all stakeholders in La Crosse (whether impact or benefit) are identified and addressed. To achieve this goal, the following will need to occur:

* Identify key stakeholders, including underrepresented populations that have not traditionally participated or involved in decision making and planning efforts.
* Engage all stakeholders in meaningful and accessible ways.
* Solicit early and with continuous involvement.
* Seek collaborative input on alternatives and evaluation criteria.
* Provide transparency during the planning process.
* Build understanding of the importance of the plan, all facets of the plan, and build support for the plan that evolves from the planning process.

# Committee Structure and Decision-Making Process

The update to the Comprehensive Plan will be led by the City with input and direction from the following committees:

* Project Management Team (PMT)
* Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (Steering Committee)
* Resident Panel (Or some form involving community leaders and trained facilitators)

The roles, responsibilities and make-up of these committees are summarized here. The PMT will direct the day-to-day work of the Comprehensive Plan update. The Steering Committee will provide guidance on the overall planning process as well as technical and non-technical input. At the direction of the PMT the Resident Panel will be solicitating input from the stakeholders. Ultimately, approval authority for the Comprehensive Plan Update rests with the City Plan Commission and City Council.

## Project Management Team

The PMT will consist of key staff from the City Planning, Development, and Assessment Department. Periodically, stakeholders with technical knowledge of the study area will be invited to participate in the PMT by providing information and feedback on draft plans. The PMT is intended to be actively involved in the day-to-day management of the Comprehensive Plan to guide the study and facilitate team coordination. The PMT is responsible for facilitating coordination among between the resident panels, any partner agencies and city staff. The PMT is responsible for oversight of all technical work, the project schedule, and City staff recommendations regarding invitations to other stakeholders not represented on the PMT. For the duration of the study, the PMT will meet weekly to coordinate plan activities and document development. The role of the PMT is to direct coordination of public engagement activities with the marketing firm, resident panels and direct coordination and development of the planning document.

The following is a list of PMT membership by contact name and City department.

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| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **CITY OF LA CROSSE DEPARTMENT** |
|
| Tim Acklin, AICP | Planning, Development and Assessment, Senior Planner |
| Jack Zabrowski | Planning, Development and Assessment, Associate Planner |
| Lewis Kuhlman, AICP | Planning, Development and Assessment, Environmental Planner |
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## Steering Committee

A steering committee of citizen, elected official, business, and non-profit organization representatives has been established for the Comprehensive Plan process.. The Steering Committee will work closely with PMT to develop and evaluate Comprehensive Plan alternatives, and make recommendations on a preferred plan. Members of the Steering Committee will also be asked to provide advice and assistance to the project team for broader community outreach to residents and businesses in the study area, as they are able and willing to do so. The Steering Committee will meet at key milestones during Comprehensive Plan development, and more frequently if needed. Membership of the Steering Committee can only change with City Council approval. Stakeholders will represent residents and neighborhood organizations, neighborhood business owners, governmental agencies and elected officials. The role of the Steering Committee is to advise and guide project planning efforts, review project deliverables, assist with community outreach and engagement efforts, provide community expertise, insight on issues and priorities throughout the process from a community standpoint. Stakeholders will be representative of a range of views and/or experiences that include Economic, Infrastructure and Urban Design.

The Steering Committee as a whole is responsible for the following:

* Ensuring community engagement in the Comprehensive Plan process.
* Assisting in the establishment of project priorities.
* Evaluating project options and alternatives.
* Creating ad hoc working groups to work on specific projects.

Individual Steering Committee members have the following responsibilities:

* Serve as stewards of the Comprehensive Plan process to the community.
* Engage thoughtfully in the issues brought before the Steering Committee.
* Represent and advocate for the interests of his/her constituency as well as the interests of the community as a whole.
* Share relevant information (historical, background) with the Steering Committee.
* Recommend appropriate avenues for cost effective engagement with the community.
* Work to identify solutions to issues that arise, and openly/objectively discuss and evaluate those options.
* If members discuss the project with the media, they should be clear that they are representing their own views and are not speaking for the Steering Committee or the Comprehensive Plan project.
* Attend all meetings and review meeting agenda packet materials prior to the meeting.
* Communicate community concerns and perspectives to City staff and project consultants.
* Help “staff” community engagement events, such as open houses, workshops, etc., attend project events, and host/sponsor engagement opportunities in the community.

Members should be committed to attending all monthly meetings with the PMT. The Steering Committee members should anticipate additional meetings and/or working sessions to review additional information if needed. The Steering Committee should also anticipate additional discussion sessions among members as needed to provide concise project recommendations and meet community goals. Monthly meetings will be held at the preferred time and day of the month determined by the Steering Committee. Steering Committee members should also commit time to reviewing meeting material prior to the meeting and to assisting with any public meetings related to the project.

Steering Committee member’s commitment to a productive and collaborative meeting should follow the following rules:

* Prioritize project goals and focus on meeting outcomes.
* Respect other points of view by being open to others’ ideas.
* Be active, listen, participate, and advocate for your position at the meeting.
* Do not interrupt other speakers.
* Do not conduct side conversations.
* Keep your commentary brief and allow everyone to participate.
* Be creative – creativity is aided by freedom, openness, and fun.
* Review and understand existing information; limit divergent discussions that require bringing in new information.
* Be prepared before each meeting.
* Turn off electronic devices during meetings.

# Other Constituent Groups

One of the initial and ongoing tasks of the study will be to identify key organizations and demographic groups to ensure that these constituents are fully represented in the study process and that a means of regular communication is identified for each one. Additional business, educational, social service, health care and advocacy groups may be added as additional constituent groups are identified. The following constituent groups are examples of those that will be engaged in the process:

1. Federal, State, and Regional Agencies
2. Study Area Businesses not already participating in the Steering Committee
3. Non-Profit Community Organizations, Institutions, and Advocacy Groups
4. Public Stakeholders: for example:
   * Residents (owners and renters) along the corridor within the study area
   * Under-represented and under-served populations (including persons with low-incomes, limited English proficiency, or disabilities)
   * Senior housing developments within the study area
   * Public and private landowners within the study area
   * Employees
   * Walkers
   * Bicyclists
   * Motorists
   * Transit riders
   * Commuters

# Potential Issues and Opportunities

The primary purpose of community engagement during the Comprehensive Plan process is to understand and respond to barriers, challenges, benefits and opportunities associated with changes in land use, housing, economic development, environmental issues, transportation, and other required comprehensive planning elements, as well as to work with local stakeholders to develop visionary plans for the city as a whole.

Issues, concerns, opportunities and constraints that are submitted through the public involvement efforts will be tracked and documented by the PMT depending on who is responsible for particular engagement activities or events. This documentation will provide a means of ensuring that there is public input in the study process and that issues raised by stakeholders are addressed as appropriate throughout the Comprehensive Plan process and beyond. Issues identified by stakeholders will be summarized in a Community Engagement report and incorporated into the technical analysis conducted for the study.

# Community Engagement Coordination

The following public engagement techniques will be used to reach a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public. Some public engagement techniques may be targeted to specific stakeholders or geographic areas in order to create welcoming opportunities for participation in the study process. Because of the wide variety of strategies that could be employed to engage the community, collaboration between the PMT, resident panels, City staff, consultant staff, and Steering Committee will be critical in order to determine who is responsible for leading a particular engagement effort or activity.

## Project Messages

The consultant team will work with the City staff and Steering Committee to develop consistent messages regarding the Comprehensive Plan. This is critical to providing the public with a good understanding of the process, why it is important, as well as ongoing motivation to participate in the study. The PMT will work with the consultant staff and the Steering Committee to develop several messages that will be developed for consistent use in project materials and communications.

## Community Engagement Activities

The following public outreach activities will be used to engage all residents, organizations, businesses, and stakeholders in the Comprehensive Plan process. These activities will take project information into the community to solicit input and feedback.

### Public Meetings

A series of public meetings, both virtual and in person will be held at key points in the planning process. These meetings will be organized by the PMT and led by the resident panel or community facilitators.

### Targeted Outreach

Working with the City, the consultant team will determine if one or more small group meetings will be held to target specific audiences that may not be easily engaged through a broader public meeting or to gain input from a particular population group. A concerted effort will be made to identify targeted locations to engage historically underserved populations.

Effective and meaningful engagement of under-represented populations will be instrumental to the success of the Comprehensive Plan. A concerted effort will be made to include people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, ethnic minority groups and organizations, immigrant groups and seniors. Strategies that will be used to reach under-served populations include:

* Engage members of the community that represent underserved populations in their respective communities.
* Utilize organizations to identify specific groups and methods for outreach. If necessary, consider including or more of these organizations to be part of the process.
* Provide public meeting notices in ethnic neighborhood-level media publications for communities represented in the study area.
* Translate meeting notices and project information for any non-English speaking populations concentrated in the study area
* Provide interpretation services and/or staff for any non-English speaking populations concentrated in the study area
* Attend meetings of established organizations that serve specific cultural/ethnic groups or business communities in the study area.
* Provide food and child care at all public engagement events.

### Traveling Displays

When possible, traveling displays (not staffed) will be provided at libraries, community/recreation centers, social service centers, neighborhood/business organization offices, and/or other key destinations in the study area during key time periods of the planning process, such as when alternative concepts have been released for review. These displays would also be timed to help publicize the public meetings as well as to provide people with information about the project and access to a project website if these strategies are considered appropriate. Opportunities will be provided for people to provide their feedback through written comment forms, and links to any possible websites or social media. The location, placement, and printing of the displays will be the responsibility of the City. The consultant team will be available to design and create the displays.

### Organization Meetings

Members of the Resident Panel or City staff will led the facilitations of discussions or presentations about the Comprehensive Plan with the identified stakeholder groups and citizen of La Crosse.

### Electronic Communications

The following electronic communications tools will be used to provide notification of project milestones and to maintain a continuous dialogue on the Comprehensive Plan process among community organizations, stakeholders and the general public.

#### Project Website

A project web page will be developed as part of the City website. The website will be maintained by City staff but the consultant team will provide content for updating the site periodically. Content will be updated at least monthly and more frequently when public events occur or major milestones are passed. The website should include the following:

* Background Community Profile
* Project news
* Sign-up for project updates
* History/Background/ Analysis
* Info about the Comprehensive Plan
* Committee overviews and members
* Notice of public meetings and other events
* Project reports
* List of Frequently Asked Questions
* Project contact information (staff, email phone)
* Ability to submit comments

#### Email Notifications

The City’s email notification system will be used to send out email notifications. Email notifications will be sent to the Stakeholder Distribution List which will be compiled and maintained by City staff for the Comprehensive Plan process and will be updated periodically. This distribution list will include all Steering Committee members, all identified stakeholder organizations, all individuals who sign up to receive the email updates either at public meetings or via the City’s website, and any other organizations, media outlets and individuals that wish to be on the list. This e-mail distribution list will be used to distribute periodic project updates and to announce public meetings, events and milestones.

**Social Media**

The project management team will work with the consulting firm to develop social media platforms to market and participate in the planning process.

## Print Communications

### Fact Sheet

A factsheet or other printed marketing piece will be created to promote the Comprehensive Plan activities and will include a description of the project, key messages about benefits, and links to the website and other social media sites. The piece can be used by all project team members and partner agencies for outreach and education and will be updated as needed as the Comprehensive Planis developed and completed.

### Display Boards

Display boards will be prepared by the consultant team for public meetings and other outreach activities as needed to clearly illustrate the concepts and alternatives that will be discussed at those meetings. The display boards may also be used as a travelling display as opportunities are available.

## Media Notifications

Draft news releases for the media will be prepared at project milestones by the consultant team and provided to City staff for review and distribution to the media.

## Presentations to Elected Officials

City staff will provide a briefing of the Comprehensive Plan at a to-be-determined milestone during the process to the City Council and other elected officials. The presentation about the recommended Comprehensive Plan will include a summary of the community engagement activities and will emphasize the ways in which community engagement informed each stage of plan development.

# Project Contacts

For all project communication, materials, and media requests, the following City staff will be listed as the project contact:

Tim Acklin, AICP Jack Zabrowski

Senior Planner Associate Planner

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# Community Engagement Documentation

At the end of the Comprehensive Plan process, the community engagement efforts will be documented and included as a part of the study. This documentation will describe the processes used for engagement, both formal and informal, and the ways in which public input was integrated into, and influenced the outcomes of the Comprehensive Plan.