

# *Connecting Urban and Rural Populations to Open Space Lands for Recreation and Conservation*

- A. Outline priorities to help the State be a more effective partner in open space conservation.
  
- B. Provide a framework to focus existing and new State actions for open space conservation.

# *Connecting Urban and Rural Populations to Open Space Lands for Recreation and Conservation*

C. Provide guidance for managers to help them fully utilize the resources and skills from all parts and levels of the State to improve coordination.

D. Identify collaborative approaches and partnerships that support open space and conservation programs.

# In a nutshell...

- What could be the next “big idea” in open space and recreation planning and protection over the course of the next 50 years?
- What needs to be done in the near term time horizon to set the table for such ideas?

# Who to ask?

Those who are active today in planning for and creating open space networks around the state:

- State government (DNR)
- Local governments
- Private landowners (MFL, CRP, etc.)
- Land Trusts
- Others?

# How to hear from them?

We will be using focus groups to solicit, record, and prioritize novel ideas from people who work in the areas that address open space, recreation and conservation

March 25 (Friday): Roundtables at Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association Spring Training

April 14: Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance Spring Meeting (Land Trusts)

DNR and Private Land Owners TBD

# Focus Group Questions pt 1

Provide an example of when the state and your organization(s) best worked together to protect open space in Wisconsin.

Can you think generally about what made that experience successful?

How can the state change the way they do things to make those ingredients more common?

Alternatively, can you pinpoint an example when the state was not particularly helpful?

Use a past example, not focusing on whatever is going on today. What key ingredients were **MISSING** that made this a challenging experience?

# Focus Group Questions pt 2

Given these good and bad experiences, think about the following questions and write down whatever comes to your mind:

- What are the challenges for creating and maintaining open space collaborations?
- What other challenges inhibit better coordination across interested parties in Wisconsin?

# Focus Group Questions pt 3

Given previous discussion, we would like to hear all sorts of ideas about how to address various challenges and opportunities identified. These would likely fall into one of three categories:

- Ways to impair things that aren't working
- Ways to reinforce things that are working
- New ways of doing things that have not yet been tried in Wisconsin

# Focus Group Questions pt 4

Of those ideas generated in part 3, are there one or two that stand out as “keystone” ideas that deserve prioritization?

For those more critical ideas, or those with the most potential to effectively improve open space conservation: what political, social, economic and financial implications need to be kept in mind as the idea is developed further (preliminary scoping of the idea)

# Analysis and Synthesis

Focus group results are recorded and shared back with participant organizations

Comments from organizations modify raw results

Additional ideas and input via web portal?

CLUE/UWSP fills in some of the blanks with respect to political, social, economic and financial implications

Results are summarized along with priority rankings given by participating groups (high-medium-low) and preliminary feasibility (easy-medium-hard)

# Analysis and Synthesis

Results reported similarly to the recently completed report Building a More Sustainable Future in Wisconsin: Findings and Recommendations from the 2010 Sustainable Communities Public Policy Forum

<http://www3.uwsuper.edu/sustainability/>

3. Economic development policies encouraging more local production and consumption
4. Policies promoting sustainability education and local engagement
5. Policies leading to more sustainable transportation systems and regional cooperation
6. Policies encouraging clean energy, energy conservation and waste reduction

The following sections tackle these policy areas. Each section includes an introductory description, an explanation about why the policy area is important and summaries of what participants felt is working to promote community sustainability as well as what they felt is hindering local sustainability efforts. Each section concludes with a set of policy recommendations identified and prioritized by the participants.

It is important to remember these are simply lists of prioritized recommendations that resulted from a lot of discussion among groups of people across the state. They do not represent a coordinated agenda for comprehensively addressing the challenge of building more sustainable communities. They are meant to be informative rather than prescriptive and to aid discussion about the wide variety of policy ideas that can be used to move the state forward sustainably.

## 1 Policies promoting more sustainable patterns of land use and urban form

### Description

Zoning codes and subdivision regulations create the land use patterns we see today across our communities. They determine the overall form of the community by regulating the types and location of land use, as well as the density, building height and maximum allowable building footprint on a site.

Over the past several decades, our communities have been designed and built to separate land

uses from one another. We have valued the separation of housing from commercial spaces while simultaneously placing the needs of vehicles above the needs of pedestrians and other forms of transportation. These policies have encouraged the growth of auto-dependent neighborhoods that undermines efforts to promote public transportation and create more pedestrian and bike-friendly transportation options.

Our land use policies also continue to encourage urban sprawl as less dense neighborhoods are built farther and farther away from our downtowns. Many of our cities and villages are struggling to maintain their existing infrastructure, programs and services while more and more development is channeled beyond their boundaries, with a resulting loss in tax base.

### Why it is important

Designing more sustainable cities will require completely revisiting many of our existing land use and related policies. But the potential impact is great.

Embracing more sustainable land use policies may help address issues seemingly unrelated to land use. For example, by encouraging our children to walk to and from school or to and from the grocery store and providing the infrastructure to support this, we can help combat childhood obesity.

More sustainable land use policies can reduce our impact on the environment as well. By creating more compact communities we can do a better job of preserving our natural countryside and ensuring the future viability of our working farms and forests.

Better land use policies are critical to community sustainability efforts because they influence the way in which people move around, how they interact with each other, the amounts of energy and water they use, and many other aspects of community life.

## What is working

Many Wisconsin communities are consciously making efforts to plan for and construct bicycle trails and create safer pedestrian routes. Wisconsin's Safe Routes to School program is helping fund such efforts.<sup>19</sup> Larger communities are making investments in public transportation.

19. <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/saferoutes.htm>.

## What Madison is doing

In the early 2000s, forward-thinking citizens and city planners in Madison observed that rapid urban population growth was taking its toll on the capital city, which has a population of about 232,000. Their concern about potential deterioration of city services, ecosystem services and the quality of life – along with a desire to address energy-related challenges – led to Madison's Green Blueprint: Building a Green Capital City report and the city's Common Council 2005 vote to adopt The Natural Step framework for sustainability in Madison. <http://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/tns/index.cfm>.

More than 150 city employees and many community groups have been exposed to the framework through workshops and eLearning courses, the city's top 10 list of sustainability projects is already in its fourth iteration, a MadiSUN Solar Energy Program promotes solar powered electric and hot water heaters in Madison homes and businesses, and the framework is informing the city zoning code to ensure that city projects are used strategically to advance the city toward its vision of being the preeminent green capital city. A revised sustainability plan, under review by the public and city committees, is expected to be available in 2011.

Communities also are impacting land use patterns through community planning efforts. Many are engaging in conversations about smart growth versus urban sprawl. Others are focusing on the need for urban green space. Downtown and neighborhood preservation efforts are receiving added attention, as are ways to promote healthier, resilient and more livable communities.

Finally, participants described the rapid increase in local food production and local food networks as contributors to community sustainability. More and more communities are encouraging community gardens, farmers' markets and other forms of urban and local agriculture.

## What is hindering

Participants pointed out that oftentimes there are no physical connections between parts of a community except for automobile transportation. Many newer neighborhoods are built with only cars in mind. The lack of sidewalks in many neighborhoods was also seen as a hindrance, as was the continued investment in very wide streets. Added pavement creates storm water issues and encourages faster traffic patterns, resulting in less safe biking and walking conditions where no sidewalks exist.

Another hindrance cited is that while conventional forms of energy are accounted for in zoning codes, many renewable energy technologies are not. Existing codes provide for such energy infrastructure as coal-fired power plants, transmission lines, electric substations, pipelines and other facilities. However, in many communities zoning codes are silent or do not allow for renewable forms of energy production. Few communities currently address solar access, while some neighborhoods ban solar panels entirely. And although wind turbine siting is getting addressed at the state level with respect to wind farms, siting issues for all forms of distributed energy likely will continue to be a challenge.



*La Crosse serves as an example of a high-density downtown with pedestrian-friendly features.*

The public finance system was also perceived to hinder sustainable urban form and land use patterns. The reliance on local property taxes and tax incremental financing (TIF), for example, often encourage community expansion and competition between communities. As typically practiced, many of these policies do not adequately encourage rehabilitation, redevelopment and reinvestment within the urban core and existing walkable neighborhoods. Rather, public finance tools, including TIF, are often being used to support car-dependent peripheral development.

## Recommendations

Participants stated that land use patterns must be fundamentally changed in order to encourage more sustainable communities. They identified several recommendations to encourage more sustainable land use patterns and urban form.

**Revise zoning codes, subdivision regulations and other tools that affect the physical form of communities to create more sustainable physical design.**

Zoning districts should identify higher densities and be made nonexclusive by including mixed uses. Subdivision regulations should require complete streets<sup>20</sup> as a way to put less emphasis on the automobile and an increased emphasis on walking and biking.<sup>21</sup>

**Promote high density downtowns and creative design for enhanced mobility of people.**

The types of modifications described above are appropriate for this recommendation. In addition, adding language to create complete streets can accomplish increased mobility. Complete streets approaches place an emphasis on sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> Communities receiving Department of Transportation funds or technical assistance should be required to create and pass complete streets legislation to ensure this objective is met.<sup>23</sup>

**Revise zoning codes to allow for food production within municipalities.**

Communities should encourage more creative food production and more flexible animal unit regulations.<sup>24</sup> For example, they should reserve

20. For more information about complete streets, visit the website of the National Complete Streets Coalition: <http://www.completestreets.org/>.

21. See "Sustainability Community Development Code and Reform Initiative" for more information: <http://www.planitex.org/resource/rmlui-sustainable-community-development-code-framework>.

22. See "Sustainability Community Development Code and Reform Initiative: Complete Streets" for more information: <http://law.du.edu/documents/rmlui/sustainable-development/Complete-Streets.pdf>.

23. See "Complete Streets: Model State Legislation" for more information: <http://www.completestreets.org/changing-policy/model-policy/model-state-legislation-options/>.

24. See "Sustainability Community Development Code and Reform Initiative: Food Production and Security" for more information: <http://law.du.edu/documents/rmlui/sustainable-development/Food-Production-and-Security.pdf>.

a portion of their land base for food production and/or allow community gardens and backyard chicken production across different types of land use. In terms of promoting wild areas within the community, the parks and recreation department should create managed-yet-natural areas in large parks. Such policies can promote biological diversity and lessen the need for extensive lawn cutting.

**Develop enforceable urban growth boundaries or other mechanisms to limit expansion of cities and villages, while encouraging higher densities and mixed land uses within those jurisdictions.**

The state's Smart Growth legislation aims to curtail urban sprawl and promote higher density mixed-use development. However, continued effort is needed to achieve those policy goals. Retrofitting the existing built environment, including downtowns, is seen as critical in terms of promoting the overall sustainability of the community.<sup>25</sup>

**Create new infrastructure for alternative fuel vehicles, including electric vehicles.**

A Focus on Energy publication<sup>26</sup> suggests that attention is needed in order to prepare for a large transition to plug-in electric vehicles. Utilities will need to create electric distribution systems sufficient to handle high numbers of plug-in vehicles. Policies may need to be developed in order to regulate the time and length of plug-in.

**Require an independent analysis of new development that projects, over the long term, the costs of that development to the affected municipalities in terms of long-term tax burden, cost of services, replacement/cost of infrastructure, traffic impact and impact on ecosystem services.**

Communities need to develop a better under-

25. See "Sustainability Community Development Code and Reform Initiative: Urban Form Conservation and Development" for more information: <http://law.du.edu/documents/rmlui/sustainable-development/Historical-Preservation.pdf>.

26. <http://www.focusonenergy.com/Enviro-Econ-Research/Research-Expositions/June2010.aspx>

standing of the true costs of development in order to avoid potential fiscal stress. While the lure of short-term increases in the local tax base often encourages costly public investments in infrastructure, communities must do a better job of weighing the long-term costs and benefits of these investments.<sup>27</sup>

**Promote systems of trails within and between communities.**

Many participants identified trail system development as a high priority. Trails can help integrate previously disconnected neighborhoods to nearby shopping and to community facilities such as parks, schools and government centers. Trail system development can also stimulate local tourism and economic development efforts.<sup>28</sup>

**Identify incentives for communities to work together.**

Better intergovernmental cooperation was seen as critical for improving land use decision making. Communities need to work more effectively together in order to develop integrated policies promoting more sustainable urban form.<sup>29</sup>

## 2 Policies improving government leadership on sustainability and sustainable decision making

### Description

Community leadership is critical when it comes to promoting community sustainability. However, many of our local and state elected officials either do not embrace the principles of sustain-

27. See "Community Guide to Development Impact Analysis" for more information: [ftp://ftp.wi.gov/DOA/public/comprehensiveplans/ImplementationToolkit/Documents/Impact\\_Analysis.pdf](ftp://ftp.wi.gov/DOA/public/comprehensiveplans/ImplementationToolkit/Documents/Impact_Analysis.pdf).

28. See Greenways and Community Trails for additional information: <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/greenways/index.html>.

29. See UW-Extension's Local Government Center (<http://lgc.uwex.edu/Intergovt/index.html>) and Center for Land Use Education (<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/elementguides.html>) for more information.