

## La Crosse County Sub-Area Meetings: Implementation Results

Wisconsin's comprehensive planning law (Wisconsin Statute Section 66.1001) requires the preparation of an Implementation Element as part of a nine-element comprehensive plan. For the La Crosse County plan, implementation strategies will also include assignment of tasks and a timeframe for implementation. Before these tasks are assigned, county officials sought public input on policy approach. Through county staff and the efforts of participating communities, six sub-area meetings were held in summer 2007 to discuss alternative policy approaches and solicit feedback. Date, location, and attendance for each meeting is listed below:

Group	Municipalities	Meeting Location	Date	# Attendance
1	T. Burns, T. Farmington, V. Bangor, V. Rockland	Burns Town Hall	6/28/2007	10
2	T. Bangor, T. Greenfield, T. Washington	Bangor Town Hall	6/27/2007	30
3	T. Barre, T. Hamilton, V. West Salem	HBL Memorial Library, West Salem	6/26/2007	30
4	T. Holland, T. Onalaska, V. Holmen	Holland Town Hall	6/27/2007	31
5	T. Campbell, T. Medary, T. Shelby	Medary Town Hall	6/28/2007	20
6	C. La Crosse, C. Onalaska	Onalaska City Hall	7/18/2007	4*

\*All staff, no public attended

### Executive Summary

Attendance at the sub area meetings was low overall, but spirited conversations helped define general preferences for implementation of the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan. Generally speaking, participants preferred carrots to sticks, but recognize the need for formalized regulations to provide consistency.

Farmland preservation is a countywide concern. The problem is how to equitably ensure lands are preserved for active agricultural use while balancing landowner rights to develop agricultural land when they want to. The PDR option drew many comments, most concerning cost. However, all tools were considered important with some less feasible than others.

In terms of land use, rural areas agreed there needed to be increased cooperation with their neighbors – especially where issues of annexation are prevalent. There seemed to be some disagreement over whether a boundary agreement was the best tool to maintain town boundaries, especially since incorporated communities can balk at establishing a committee to enact a boundary agreement if they so choose. Many respondents were unfavorable to “impact fees” or other methods that would increase taxes or slow development review processes.

Conversations and comments seem to consistently identify density as a big issue. Many sub areas considered the housing tools to be “urban” issues, especially “landlord licensing” which has not been a concern in most rural areas. Many respondents noted substandard housing conditions do exist in both rural and urban communities and access to programming is important.

The attitudes toward cultural resources preservation can best be summed up this way – either you think historical and cultural resources are worth spending money to protect, or you don't. Many respondents feel that historical character is essential for creating a sense of place within a community, though this is primarily for areas such as hamlets or villages where there is enough structural density to identify a theme.



Natural resource preservation efforts should be for larger, contiguous tracts of land. The protection of Class I and II soils was also mentioned. Rules that protect the environment are necessary for adherence in some issues (such as shoreland protection) but this approach is not favorable for all natural resources. If cluster zoning or density bonuses are allowed for new development in an effort to preserve natural areas there should be well-defined standards for how many units per acre are allowable.

The topic of private property rights is pervasive in rural areas where development pressure is mounting. Many landowners would like to minimize government involvement where possible. Most concerns seem to indicate that policies enforced by large governmental entities (including the DNR) are less preferred to local control. A new landowner education program was mentioned in several areas to minimize the conflicts between farm and non-farm uses in developing areas.

Task and Methodology

Policies being developed for the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan will either be incentive based (“carrots”) or more regulatory in nature (“sticks”). The sub-area presentations discussed some of the approaches below in greater detail. Participants at each meeting were asked to select the policies that made the most sense to them on a worksheet that was provided.

Each section of the worksheet began with a La Crosse County goal and objective statement that requires an implementation strategy. Some examples of implementation tools were subsequently provided. The information below provides the goal that was being explored followed by the policy or tool that was proposed to address the goal. The percentage next to each policy or tool represents the total number of respondents who selected the approach as “acceptable”.

Methodologies respondents used to record their opinions differed, so “acceptable” answers were those recorded as a ranking of “1” or “2” out of a possible four, or selected outright. Respondents identified “unacceptable” policies or tools by crossing them out, explaining their preference in the comments section of each worksheet, or by ranking them with a “3” or “4” out of a possible four. The total number of respondents differed for each policy or tool, so each was recorded using its own universe (n=85 low, n=102 high) depending on the total number of responses.

Goals, percentage of “acceptable” response, and comments collected at the sub area meetings are detailed below.

**Farmland Preservation Goal:** Direct growth away from prime farmland and protect productive agricultural operations from the encroachment of incompatible uses. Evaluate and utilize programs and initiatives that support this goal.

<b>Carrots</b>	<b>Sticks</b>	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">23%</span> Purchase of Development Rights Program	Exclusive Ag Zoning	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">19%</span>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">30%</span> Promotional Agriculture Programming	Development Restrictions	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">27%</span>

Results:

Farmland preservation is a countywide concern. The problem is how to equitably ensure lands are preserved for active agricultural use while balancing landowners rights to develop agricultural land when they want to. The PDR option drew many comments, most concerning cost. However, all tools were considered important with some less feasible than others. Many suggested promoting



cooperative ventures (UWEX, etc.), and ensuring there is a sufficient workforce to sustain agriculture within the county. There is no strong indication that the carrots or sticks listed are preferable to one another.

Public Comments:

- Develop less valuable agricultural land first.
- Update zoning to reflect development pressure.
- Need incentives for younger/beginning farmers.
- Encourage Voluntary Conservation Easements (MVC).
- PDR is too cost prohibitive.
- “Ag A” zoning is not specific enough.

**Property Rights Goal:** Utilize consistent policies and implementation tools that provide equity and fairness to landowners while preserving public health, welfare, and the community character.

<b>Carrots</b>	<b>Sticks</b>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">40%</span> Increase Tool Box Options	Increased Enforcement <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">16%</span>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">37%</span> Expedited Review Process	Litigation <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">7%</span>

Results:

This topic is popular in rural areas where development pressure is mounting. Many landowners would like to minimize government involvement where possible. Most concerns seems to indicate that large governmental entities with jurisdiction (including the DNR) where less preferred to local control. Many commented that development will happen, and should not be stopped, but that there should also be some control as to how growth occurs. A new landowner education program was mentioned in several areas to minimize the conflicts between farm and non-farm uses in developing areas. More respondents preferred carrots to sticks, with “litigation” often mentioned as a “last resort”.

Public Comments:

- There will never be complete happiness – many issues democratically decided.
- Keep small town character.
- Preserve farmland if desired.
- Educate new landowners about rural living.

**Natural Resources Goal:** Preserve and protect the overall beauty and natural resources of the County as these areas contribute to quality of life and are a critical component of the County’s economic development strategy. Protect features including bluffs, coulees, wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, rivers, streams, woodlands, remnant prairies/grasslands, open spaces, and groundwater recharge areas.

<b>Carrots</b>	<b>Sticks</b>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">33%</span> Cluster Zoning/Density Bonus	Shoreland Zoning <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">19%</span>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">25%</span> Purchase of Development Rights	Erosion/Stormwater Ordinances <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">23%</span>



Results:

Many respondents commented that preservation efforts should be for larger, contiguous tracts of land. The protection of Class I and II soils was also mentioned. PDR was a contentious issue with respondents either very excited about or resolutely against this program. If conservation easements could be gained without spending public dollars there was less opposition. Rules that protect the environment are necessary for adherence in some issues (such as shoreland protection) but this approach is not favorable for all natural resources. If cluster zoning or density bonuses are allowed for new development in an effort to preserve natural areas there should be well-defined standards for how many units per acre are allowable. Carrots were marginally more favorable than sticks for natural resources preservation.

Public Comments:

- Encourage private conservancy easements.
- Keep large tracts of land intact.
- PDR for large clocks of forestland and bluffs too.
- Promote voluntary conservation easements.
- Carrots are good here, but sticks are necessary.
- Density needs to be well-defined; each town has their own preference.

**Cultural Resources Goal:** Preserve the artistic, cultural, historic, and archeological resources as these features add to the area’s quality of life and its rich cultural heritage.

<b>Carrots</b>	<b>Sticks</b>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">37%</span> Historic Preservation Designation	Archaeological Ordinances <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">16%</span>
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">28%</span> Tax Exemptions/Incentives	Design Overlay Zoning District <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">19%</span>

Results:

The attitudes toward cultural resources preservation can best be summed up this way – either you think historical and cultural resources are worth spending money to protect, or you don’t. Many respondents feel that historical character is essential for creating a sense of place within a community, though this is primarily for areas such as hamlets or villages where there is enough structural density to identify a theme. Carrots were favored to sticks, and many programs that are available for historic and cultural resource preservation rely on voluntary participation to implement.

Public Comments:

- Don’t raise taxes for this.
- All are important tools.
- Should be up to the property owner to decide.
- Important for identity.

**Housing Goal:** Ensure that the County has an available housing supply that is adequate, affordable, and well-maintained, which meets the needs of all income levels, ages, special-needs populations, and household types.



Carrots		Sticks	
35%	Density Bonus	Inclusionary Zoning	18%
28%	Education of State/Federal Incentives	Landlord Licensing/Apartment Stnds.	19%

Results:

Conversations and comments seem to consistently identify density as a big issue. Further, that density is reflected in subdivision design options. This connection should be noted since many local policies don't currently allow for mixing densities or uses that may affect overall density. Many sub areas considered many of these "urban" issues, especially "landlord licensing" which has not been a concern in most rural areas. Many respondents noted substandard housing conditions do exist in both rural and urban communities and access to programming is important. Meeting attendees seemed to prefer carrots over sticks to implement the housing goal.

Public Comments:

- Density needs to be concentrated near existing resources such as water.
- Don't like dense housing – it promotes low-income housing.
- Need more resources to update and maintain homes
- A lot of these seem to be for urban areas.

**Land Use and Growth Management Goal:** Work in partnership with area communities to manage and guide future growth, recognizing that land is an irreplaceable resource. Enhance the quality of life by protecting both natural resources and farmland and by promoting urban infill and redevelopment. Guide growth to developed areas where public facilities and services can be economically provided.

Carrots		Sticks	
32%	Promote Alternative Subdivision Design	Site Plan Regulations	23%
33%	Cooperative Boundary Agreements	Impact Fees	13%

Results:

Rural areas agreed there needed to be increased cooperation with their neighbors – especially where issues of annexation are prevalent. There seemed to be some disagreement over whether a boundary agreement was the best tool to maintain town boundaries, especially since incorporated communities can balk at establishing a committee to enact a boundary agreement if they so choose. Many respondents were unfavorable to "impact fees" or other methods that would increase taxes or slow development review processes. "Agricultural A" zoning district was specifically mentioned as problematic and in need of revision. There were more meeting attendees who preferred carrots to sticks, but many realized there needed to be some regulations for development.

Public Comments:

- Fix "Ag A" zoning – it is a catchall which allows potential multifamily homes in the middle of a rural farm area.
- Growth only in predetermined areas; Cooperative Boundary Agreements important.
- Offer incentives to develop through streets over cul-de-sacs.
- Develop in areas with sufficient infrastructure to support.
- Good site regulations with alternative design choices plus boundary agreements will preserve towns.

