

# Building a More Sustainable Future in Wisconsin:

## Findings and Recommendations from the 2010 Sustainable Communities Public Policy Forum



Developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Sustainability Team

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## Introduction

This report summarizes policy ideas generated through the Sustainable Communities Public Policy Forum hosted by the University of Wisconsin Colleges and University of Wisconsin-Extension March 25-26, 2010, at UW-Fox Valley, Menasha. The forum was the third in a series of Wisconsin Idea Forums designed to focus University of Wisconsin System resources on the state's most vexing economic, social and environmental challenges.

The basic idea was fairly straightforward. Since Wisconsin is, in many ways, at the cutting edge of grassroots community-level sustainability, what better source of expertise to tap than people leading the way across the state? Organizers designed the forum to collect and synthesize their ideas and to achieve the following participant outcomes:

- Deepen understanding of the concept of sustainability.
- Understand the linkages between sustainability theory and practice.
- Identify and share best practices and success stories.
- Identify local and state policy needs.
- Identify education, research and outreach needs surrounding sustainability.

UW-Extension and local partners launched the project by hosting six February-March 2010 roundtables in Central Wisconsin, Green Bay, Waukesha, the Chequamegon Bay, the Chippewa Valley and Rhinelander. Participants identified factors helping or hindering local sustainability efforts across the state. They also came up with a set of policy ideas to further support community sustainability efforts.

More than 500 individuals, including community leaders, community development professionals, planners, business people, consultants, faculty, students, local elected officials and citizen activists from across Wisconsin attended the regional roundtables and subsequent two-day conference.

On the first day of the conference, several knowledgeable and respected speakers highlighted exemplary Wisconsin and out-of-state community case studies. Roundtable input on sustainability opportunities and barriers guided group discussions during the second day.

The next step in the forum process was development of a web-based survey shared with participants from the roundtables and the conference, as well as other interested parties around the state. More than 200 individuals responded to the survey, helping prioritize a long list of policy ideas that had been generated.

Policy ideas gathered through this structured process were sorted into the following themes:

1. **Policies promoting more sustainable patterns of land use and urban form**
2. **Policies improving government leadership on sustainability and sustainable decision making**
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, water conservation and waste reduction**

The observations and ideas expressed in this report are not the product of statewide random sampling or formal survey analysis. Participants engaged in this process because they had an interest in community sustainability. The report, by design, is meant to be informative rather than

prescriptive and to aid discussion about the wide variety of policy ideas in this area.

UW Colleges and UW-Extension hope this summary from around the state will help identify local and state policy gaps, as well as educational and outreach priorities for both the University of Wisconsin System and the broad array of non-profits and other groups working to promote community sustainability in Wisconsin.

### The challenge of building more sustainable communities

In today's complex world, communities face a host of challenges. They are buffeted by various megatrends,<sup>1</sup> many beyond local control. These trends interact and are interrelated, influencing a community's ability to implement sustainable policies and practices. Therefore, a critical challenge facing communities and the state as a whole is how to creatively anticipate and respond to these trends.

#### Energy

As one of the top five coal-dependent states in the country, Wisconsin is more energy insecure and reliant on fossil fuels than ever.

Only 4.5% of energy produced in the state comes from renewable sources. Wind and solar, although on the rise, still make up less than 0.5% of the energy produced in Wisconsin. Meanwhile, between 1980 and 2005, vehicle miles traveled in Wisconsin increased at a rate nearly five times that of population growth.

While energy consumption has increased over time, production has not. From 1970 to 2005, the state's overall energy consumption increased by 55%. However, over the same period, population growth increased by 25%. While all sectors consumed increasing amounts of energy since 1970,

1. For more on the Wisconsin Land Use Megatrends series, upon which this section is based, visit the Center for Land Use Education website: <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/megatrends/>.



iStockphoto

*Wind and solar comprise less than 0.5% of the energy produced in Wisconsin.*

the largest increases have been in the commercial (139%) and transportation sectors (61%).

Our current energy consumption pattern requires Wisconsin to import nearly \$15 billion annually in fossil fuels from out of state. Comparatively, the total state budget in 2008 was \$27.3 billion.

#### Climate change

Before the century ends, average summer temperatures are projected to increase by as much as 8 to 18 degrees and average winter temperatures may rise from 6 to 11 degrees. Temperature increases are projected to be greater in northern parts of the state. In southern Wisconsin, an 8-degree increase in temperature would push average daytime highs from the low 80s to 90 degrees or higher for 31 days each summer and nudge them above the freezing mark all winter long.

Changes in temperature also pose threats to roads, bridges, airports and railroad tracks. As the number and intensity of severe heat waves during summer months increase, concrete and pavement likely will expand beyond engineered specifications, leading to road buckling, pavement softening, bridge cracking and rail-track deformities.

The current range, density and type of forest species may be reduced and eventually replaced by plant communities more suitable for that climate. The acreage of Wisconsin's northern forests of hemlock, spruce and fir, as well as birch and jack pine, are likely to shrink and possibly disappear from the landscape altogether.

Other likely climate change impacts include increased number and intensity of severe storm events, delivering large amounts of rain in very short time periods. These events likely will significantly strain landscapes, crops, storm water systems and individual structures. The widespread flooding in 2008, which caused \$765 million in damage and was the most expensive natural disaster in Wisconsin's history, showed the potential financial implications associated with severe storm events.<sup>2</sup>

## Housing

From 1982 to 1997, Wisconsin converted 670 square miles of undeveloped land into developed land, an area roughly the size of Eau Claire County. Since 1970, our sprawling settlement pattern has contributed to a doubling of vehicle miles traveled. The energy used for transportation, at 25% of the state's energy use, is slightly higher than residential energy use. Commuting is responsible for 28% of all miles traveled.

Our current mode of housing development is paving over our farmland, eroding our rural landscapes and undermining our ability to develop mass transit and other transportation

options besides the car. Meanwhile, many of our existing cities and villages are struggling to maintain the aging and expensive, yet underutilized, infrastructure that is already in place.

## Forests

More than 46%, or approximately 16 million acres, of the state is forested. Approximately 63%, or 11.6 million acres of forest, is privately owned.

This natural resource base is an important part of Wisconsin's economy. Wisconsin has been the number one paper-making state in the nation for 50 years, and the forest products industry is the second-largest manufacturing employer – providing one in every six manufacturing jobs in the state. Direct employment in this industry translates into 15% of the state's total manufacturing wage and salary income, for a total of almost \$3.2 billion annually.

However, forest land is becoming fragmented by small parcels and subsequent development. Between 1980 and 2000, housing increased in forested counties by 35,335 units. This represented a 17% increase over the previous time period. If continued, this pace and pattern of housing development may jeopardize key industries such as paper and wood product manufacturing.

## Agriculture

Over the last 25 years, Wisconsin lost more than 800,000 acres of prime farmland. Nevertheless, agriculture remains an important part of the state's culture and its economy. There are currently about 78,000 farms in Wisconsin producing \$9 billion in sales on 15.2 million acres of land. Average farm size is 195 acres, down from a peak of 222 acres in the early 1990s.

Another key trend is the loss of what is referred to as "agriculture in the middle." These are the mid-sized farms one thinks of as the typical Wisconsin dairy farm. While the number of these

2. For more on the likely impacts of climate change in Wisconsin, visit the website of the Wisconsin Impacts of Climate Change Initiative: <http://www.wicci.wisc.edu/>.

farms has declined, the number of very large industrial scale farms has grown. The number of smaller farms also has increased in recent years, including many smaller organic farms.

By 2007, organic agriculture in Wisconsin constituted approximately 1% of the farms and agricultural acres in Wisconsin, as well as 1.5% of agricultural sales. While organic agriculture continues to grow, it still represents a tiny fraction of the state's agricultural output.

The face of farming in Wisconsin also is changing. Between 1982 and 2007, the average age of farmers increased from 47 to 53. Nearly one in four farmers is age 65 or older. According to a 2009 study, immigrants now make up about 40% of the state's dairy labor force, up from 5% a decade ago.

These trends represent just a few key issues and opportunities related to community sustainability efforts. Local and state leaders, along with business and educational interests, will need to creatively address these challenges in order to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable society.

### Planning for community sustainability

Across Wisconsin, more and more communities are responding to these challenges by taking steps to promote sustainability. Community leaders and citizen groups are calling on all levels of government to make informed decisions and investments that take economic, environmental and social considerations into account. They are doing so through various creative approaches.

Some communities taking a narrower approach are focusing explicitly on reducing municipal energy consumption. Other communities are looking more broadly to plan and implement policies related to local food production, renewable energy, green infrastructure, water re-use and conservation, and many other topics.

Ultimately, the breadth and depth of a community's sustainability agenda depends upon the community's overall priorities and level of commitment. Successful sustainable development efforts at the local level are characterized by strong political leadership, a shared understanding of the benefits of sustainability at the local level and a set of strategies to achieve those benefits.<sup>3</sup>

Stephen M. Wheeler<sup>4</sup> identifies five characteristics of successful sustainability policy and practice.

#### A long-term perspective

One of the fundamental concepts of sustainable development is the need to base decisions on a longer-term perspective rather than business as usual. This perspective is necessary because natural systems ebb and flow on a much different time scale than do human-made systems. By focusing on short-term returns on investment, for example, communities may undermine their long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability. Effective decision making, therefore, requires community leaders to understand and anticipate the long-term implications of current policies and investments.

#### A holistic outlook

Planning for sustainability emphasizes a systems approach to understanding and addressing critical issues. Unlike traditional decision making narrowly focused on one or more sectors or systems within a community, sustainable decision making focuses on relationships among environmental, economic and social policies and investments. This holistic approach improves understanding of key issues and yields policies and solutions that leverage related responses to

3. Dernbach, John C. "An Agenda for Sustainable Communities." Widener Law School Legal Studies Research Paper No. 09-28, 2009. Available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1527451](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1527451).

4. Wheeler, Stephen M. *Planning for Sustainability: Creating Livable, Equitable, and Ecological Communities*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

achieve integrated community goals. A holistic approach also considers how local policies fit into and inform state, regional and federal policies.

### Acceptance of limits

Plans and policies promoting sustainability often recognize the concept of limits. For example, many analysts have argued that the planet is physically limited in providing resources and in absorbing pollution and waste. The International Panel on Climate Change<sup>5</sup> suggests such a limit to the amount of greenhouse gases that can be placed in the atmosphere, roughly equivalent to a concentration of 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide.<sup>6</sup> We have already reached an atmospheric concentration of 392 parts per million. Impaired Wisconsin waterways also exemplify the concept of limits: 1,216 are polluted to the point they no longer support full use by humans, wildlife, fish and other aquatic life.<sup>7</sup>

### A focus on place

Discussions around sustainable development often emphasize self-sufficiency and community (or system) resilience. Sustainable decision making recognizes the uniqueness of individual communities and regions and values their existing and potential contributions to a more sustainable society. Sustainable planning and investment leverages those local assets to meet local needs. Agriculture and energy are two good examples. In both cases, sustainability policy seeks to leverage existing local assets to achieve greater self-sufficiency. Resilience refers to a community's ability to retain its integrity and to function despite changes and external shocks.

5. IPCC. *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, Pachauri, R.K and Reisinger, A. (eds.)]. Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2007.

6. For more information visit <http://www.350.org/>.

7. See Wisconsin's Impaired Waters Program <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/wqs/303d/>.

### Active involvement in problem solving

Sustainability planning calls for participation of a broad community cross-section, including voices typically under-represented in the policy-making process. Broad active involvement is critical because transitioning to a more sustainable society requires an enormous scale of change. Actively engaging citizenry in problem solving recognizes individuals' power to make a difference and contribute to positive local change. Local involvement also results in local ownership and support of community-based solutions.

The complexity of sustainable decision making and the challenges of sustainable development are clear. No universal blueprints exist for successfully tackling these issues at the local level. Still, interest in moving toward sustainability continues to grow. Communities across Wisconsin are experimenting with different approaches and using various methods to plan, implement and evaluate efforts along the way.

### Frameworks for sustainable community development

Wisconsin has more than 1,923 units of local government including counties, cities, villages and towns. Other publicly-owned facilities include 26 University of Wisconsin two- and four-year campuses, the Wisconsin Technical College System and hundreds of K-12 schools throughout the state. How are communities planning and implementing sustainability policies? How are they addressing the issues? How do their approaches differ? How do they relate to one another?

One approach to sustainability is to focus on the organization itself and its facilities – such as a school system, a county government or other type of public entity. Many communities consider this a logical place to start their sustainability journey. A common justification for beginning with an organizational focus is that we should “walk the talk” before asking others to do the

same. The organizational approach is often quite straightforward, and success may not depend on a large amount of citizen input or external assistance. This approach looks at the organization's functions and asks questions such as: How can we improve our operations in order to become more sustainable? How can we better satisfy our customers or our citizens by adopting more sustainable practices?

A second approach to sustainability is to focus on the community as a whole. This approach extends well beyond the internal policies and operations of a local government. The focus is on analyzing the entire community to identify challenges and opportunities for becoming more sustainable as a community. This approach often involves both revisiting existing policies and developing new ones. Therefore, it requires tremendous political leadership and broad stakeholder involvement to effectively balance a wide array of community interests.

Organizational and community approaches to sustainability can have narrower or broader scopes in terms of the issues addressed. Narrower approaches may focus on a single topic or issue, while broader approaches address multiple issues simultaneously. Many communities mix and match approaches to fit local needs. The key point is that a spectrum of options exists, ranging from a purely organizational approach focused on one or two key issues all the way to a community approach focusing on multiple issues and involving many stakeholders.

The organizational approach is similar to the way many businesses plan for sustainability. The emphasis is on creating more sustainable modes of operation. The driving force is often the pursuit of cost savings associated with a more efficient use of material resources such as energy, water and paper. A narrow organizational approach would be one that focuses solely on municipal energy consumption, for example. A broader organizational approach would be the development of a municipal sustainability plan that goes beyond resource efficiency to include

sustainability strategies related to, for example, investments, human resources and municipal green buildings. Although broader than an approach focused solely on energy, the impact of a strictly organizational approach to creating sustainable communities is, by nature, still limited.

In contrast, the community-based approach to sustainability extends well beyond the local unit of government or organization to include, ideally, the entire community. The emphasis is not only on leading by example or saving money but also on influencing and involving the residential, commercial and industrial sectors of the community.

More narrowly defined community-based approaches might include Wisconsin's 25 x '25 Energy Independent Communities program. Pilot communities developed and are implementing plans to achieve the 25 x '25 goal of 25% renewable energy use by 2025. Broader community-based approaches to sustainability include comprehensive planning efforts that use sustainability as the overarching theme for the plan itself. This approach integrates sustainability concepts across the entire community, covering a wide range of topics and issue areas.

### **Promoting sustainability in Wisconsin communities**

Communities across Wisconsin are engaged in various approaches to promote sustainability. They include, but are not limited to, community-based approaches aligned with international organizations and frameworks as well as a state-level organizational approach with an energy-specific focus.

### **Eco-municipalities and The Natural Step**

In 2005, Washburn became the first community in the nation to pass an "eco-municipality" resolution. "An eco-municipality aspires to develop an ecologically, economically and socially healthy

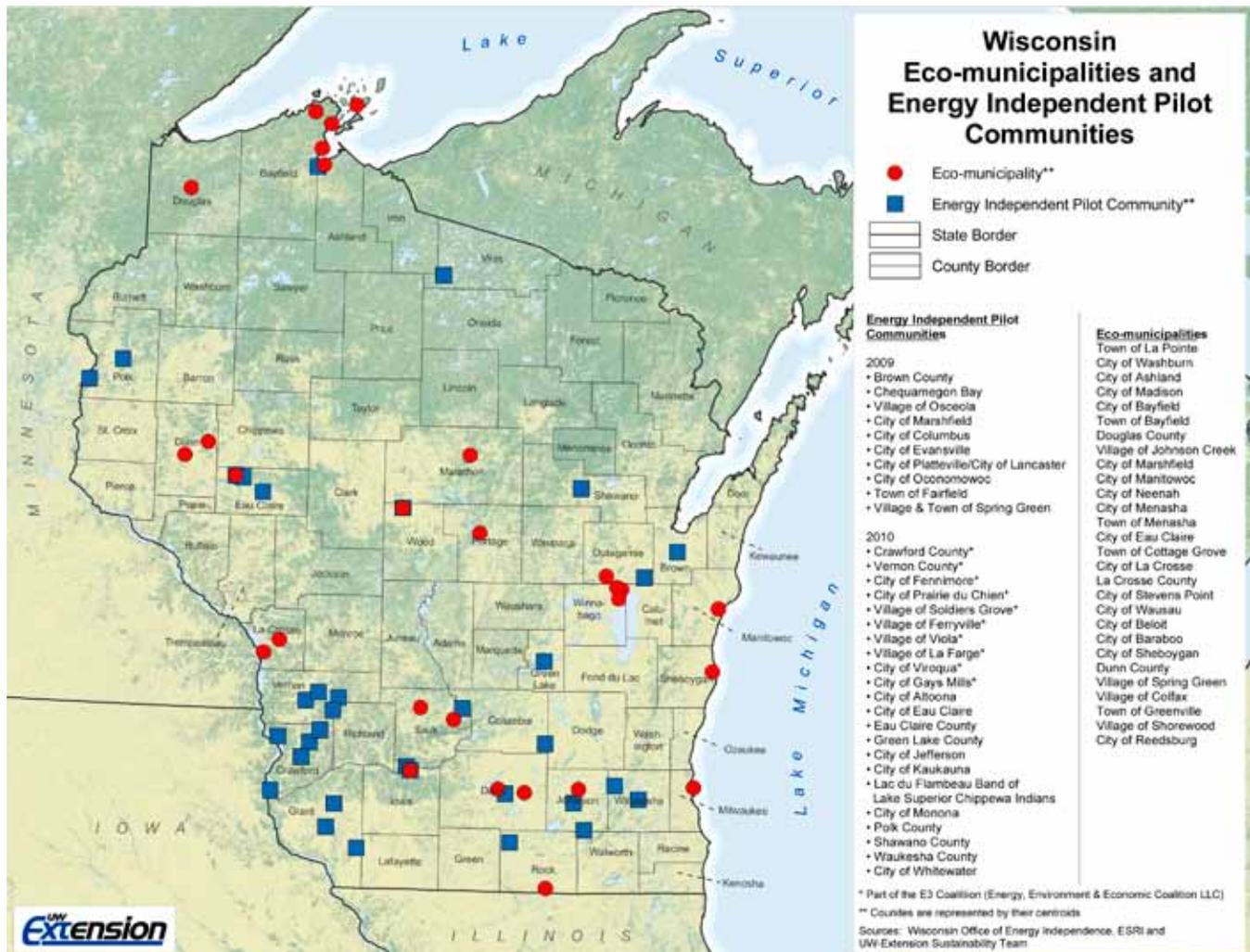


Figure 1: Wisconsin eco-municipalities are noted with red circles and Energy Independent pilot communities with blue squares.

community for the long term, using The Natural Step<sup>8</sup> framework for sustainability as a guide, and a democratic, highly participative development process as the method. An eco-municipality becomes the driving force for involving citizens and sectors of the larger community in the process of becoming a sustainable community.<sup>9</sup>

At least 30 local governments in Wisconsin – towns, villages, cities, and counties – have passed eco-municipality resolutions endorsing the four sustainability principles of The Natural

8. To visit the international web portal for The Natural Step, see <http://www.naturalstep.org/en>.

9. Lahti, Torbjorn, and James, Sarah. "The Eco-municipality Model for Sustainable Community Change: A Systems Approach to Creating Sustainable Communities." N.p.: 2005.

Step and agreeing to apply them, whenever possible, to their planning, policy-making and municipal practices.<sup>10</sup> These principles, using language adopted by the American Planning Association, include:

- Reducing dependence upon fossil fuels and extracted underground metals and minerals.
- Reducing dependence on chemicals and other manufactured substances that can accumulate in nature.
- Reducing dependence on activities that harm life-sustaining ecosystems.

10. Information on Wisconsin's eco-municipalities can be found on the UW-Extension Sustainable Communities Capacity Center website. See <http://www.capacitycenter.org>.

- Meeting the hierarchy of present and future human needs fairly and efficiently.<sup>11</sup>

As Figure 1 indicates, these eco-municipalities are located throughout the state and vary considerably in size and composition. No other state in the country has such a large number of local governments formally committed to this community-based approach to sustainability.

Not surprisingly, these communities vary considerably in terms of planning, decision making and implementation in support of their eco-municipality resolutions. This support ranges from simply passing a resolution to a broad array of sustainability initiatives actively involving many sectors of the community. Interest continues to expand and lead to additional eco-municipality resolutions.

### **Transition Towns and the Transition Movement**

Another community-based approach expanding its reach and application is the Transition Towns model. This model for sustainability focuses on the twin drivers of peak oil and climate change and on the related need to develop a positive vision and related “energy descent” plan at the community level.

To date, the two formally declared transition initiatives in Wisconsin are the Hay River Transition Initiative (HRTI) in the Prairie Farm area of Barron County and Transition Madison Area. In addition, at least three known “mulling” groups or initiatives have formed in Green County, Racine and Milwaukee, and a Transition Wisconsin state-wide networking coalition recently has been organized.<sup>12</sup>

### **ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability**

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a membership organization that states: “locally

11. American Planning Association. “Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability.” American Planning Association, 2000. <http://www.planning.org/policy/guides/pdf/sustainability.pdf>.

12. <http://www.transitionwisconsin.org/>.

designed initiatives can provide an effective and cost-efficient way to achieve local, national and global sustainability objectives.”<sup>13</sup> Nearly 1,200 local government members from 70 countries comprise the organization. Wisconsin member cities include Fitchburg, Howard, Madison, Marshfield, Milwaukee, Racine and Oshkosh. Formerly known as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, ICLEI supports community sustainability efforts through networking, training, consulting services, conferences and a website.

### **Buy local and the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies**

More than a dozen buy local campaigns are being promoted around the state. Buy local initiatives vary from community to community but have as their premise the belief that locally owned and operated businesses are keys to community vitality and long-term sustainability.

The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) comprises 80 community networks representing more than 22,000 independent business members across the U.S. and Canada. BALLE brings together independent business leaders, economic development professionals, government officials, social innovators and community leaders to build local living economies.<sup>14</sup>

The two BALLE local networks in Wisconsin are Dane Buy Local<sup>15</sup> and Our Milwaukee.<sup>16</sup> Distinguishing characteristics of this community-based approach to sustainability are its business orientation and its emphasis on localization, which includes a focus on the benefits of local ownership.

### **Sustainability and comprehensive planning**

Wisconsin’s Smart Growth legislation already provides a useful framework for addressing many issues related to community sustainability.

13. <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=iclei-home>.

14. <http://www.livingeconomies.org/>.

15. <http://www.danebuylocal.com/home/>.

16. <http://www.ourmilwaukee.net/>.

Communities that wish to exercise local land use control through official mapping, subdivision and zoning ordinances are required to develop holistic plans addressing the following elements: land use; housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; economic development; agricultural, natural and cultural resources; intergovernmental cooperation; and implementation.<sup>17</sup>

Since many communities around the state rely on and are familiar with comprehensive planning, the comprehensive plan itself is increasingly employed to address sustainability issues. Eau Claire, for example, recently added a sustainability chapter to its comprehensive plan. Other communities are embedding sustainability principles throughout their comprehensive plans, rather than addressing sustainability as a separate chapter within the plan itself.

### **Energy Independent Communities**

Created in 2006, Wisconsin's Office of Energy Independence (OEI) supports the goal of generating 25% of electric power and transportation fuels from renewable resources by 2025. To earn OEI's Energy Independent Communities voluntary designation, more than 125 Wisconsin communities have agreed to adopt the 25 x '25 goals. In 2009 and 2010, competitively selected pilot communities (see Figure 1) received resources to help achieve the 25 x '25 goal through a process including: community preparation, data collection and analysis; identification of opportunities and strategies; evaluation and selection of strategies; and plan implementation.

### **Other efforts**

In addition to the examples cited above, Wisconsin communities are approaching sustainability in many other ways. Waukesha County developed a sustainability plan that includes a focus on green economic development. The village of

17. <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/category.asp?linkcatid=743&linkid=128&locid=9>.

Turtle Lake commissioned a feasibility study to examine the potential for creating an eco-industrial park using renewable energy. Also, interest in developing more sustainable infrastructure around the state is significant. The American Public Works Association recently developed a framework for sustainable communities.<sup>18</sup> It includes a one-page tool to assess the overall sustainability of public works projects.

### **Concluding note**

Communities need new approaches, new policies and new sets of actions to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable society and more sustainable local communities. We do not know what a truly sustainable future will look like, but we do know the journey will be long and continuing. Communities will start from different places and with varied goals, assets and political leadership. A positive and compelling vision can provide a sense of direction and shape local actions. Communities can control many aspects of their future. To do so sustainably, they should find themselves moving from organizational approaches to broader approaches that involve the entire community.

### **Sustainable community policies**

Wisconsinites are known for their innovation and ability to adapt to change. During the forum process, participants identified hundreds of policy ideas to support sustainability initiatives around the state and shape the transition to sustainability. These ideas were categorized into the following six key policy areas related to sustainability:

1. **Policies promoting more sustainable patterns of land use and urban form**
2. **Policies improving government leadership on sustainability and sustainable decision making**

18. <http://www.apwa.net/sustainability/centerforsustainability.aspx>.

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.



*Peter Senge, founding chair of the Society for Organizational Learning and author of "The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World."*

able development or they do not know how to implement them through effective visions, strategies and concrete actions.

As a result, communities across the state are missing opportunities to promote more sustainable patterns of development and community building. While many corporations, including Wal-Mart, are aggressively pursuing sustainability strategies, local leaders continue to struggle to gain traction. Without more effective and bolder public leadership, communities will continue to face barriers when it comes to promoting sustainability.

### Why it is important

In his most recent book, Peter Senge engages the reader in imagining a sustainable future.<sup>30</sup> He asks, "What would a way of thinking, a way of living, and ultimately an economic system look like that worked based on the principles of the larger natural world? And how do we create such a way of living in our organizations and societies...?"

Being a leader means thinking differently and in new ways about sustainability. We must be creative, insightful and bold enough to think about the entire system and not simply attack problems in a piecemeal fashion as we have done in the past. New skills, new capacities in problem solving, new ideas and new policies and ap-

30. Senge, Peter, et al. *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.

proaches will be critical if municipalities want to move toward a sustainable future.

Active leadership by local and state government leaders is needed to promote sustainability statewide. In order to create a sustainable community, new decision-making methods and criteria need to be developed. People need to know the broader impacts of their choices – the social, economic and environmental impacts – in order to make truly informed decisions.

### What is working

Participants cited numerous examples of communities and leaders demonstrating their commitment to sustainability and thereby leading others to do so as well. In the Brown County area, the De Pere School District installed geothermal and solar water heating to reduce their consumption of energy. New buildings all over the state are being constructed using LEED<sup>31</sup> standards, and many communities are working with Focus on Energy and the Office of Energy Independence to promote energy conservation and renewable energy. Leaders in the cities of Waukesha and Pewaukee instituted water sprinkling bans in order to conserve precious groundwater in their communities.

Participants noted that community leaders are beginning to change their way of thinking about sustainability. Stevens Point, through the Sustainable Point initiative, developed an integrated and systematic plan for their community.

Meadowbrook School in Green Bay participates in Wisconsin's Green and Healthy Schools program.<sup>32</sup> They are taking steps to enhance sustainability by promoting both the health of their children and the school building itself.

31. The U.S. Green Building Council website provides background information on the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system: <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CategoryID=19>.

32. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/greenschools/>.

iStockphoto



***Local codes and subdivision covenants, such as those prohibiting clotheslines, can hinder sustainability efforts.***

Forum participants are encouraged by the fact that some communities are supporting and investing in local sustainability groups and boards to help guide their own efforts. The city of Madison, for example, provided extensive training for their municipal staff to equip them to make strategic and sustainable decisions.

Forum participants noted positive changes related to how we measure, assess and allocate responsibility for waste streams. Wisconsin's new e-cycling law was cited as an example of a new approach that enables recycling and capturing of electronic waste by requiring individuals and businesses to be responsible for the products they sell or purchase.<sup>33</sup> Collecting and properly disposing of pharmaceutical waste was cited as another positive example of how communities are considering the longer-term impact of waste disposal practices.

Local governments are also taking new approaches to budgeting by looking at the entire cost of a project or action over the long term rather than just focusing on the short term. Many are using an "investing" versus an "expensing" mindset in order to justify larger capital outlays for sustainability projects, including energy efficiency investments.

Finally, participants felt that the transition to more sustainable communities is being encouraged by leaders and communities actively seeking input, ideas, energy and commitment from everyone in the community. Community visioning and open public participation in community planning exercises are providing opportunities for new ways of tackling issues. The formation of EcoTeams in Eau Claire was cited as an example of how to engage residents at a personal level and encourage individual responsibility and behavior change.

### **What is hindering**

Participants stated that leading through demonstration is hindered when current policies get in the way. Building codes that limit the height of buildings, zoning codes that encourage less compact development and wide streets, local codes that do not allow grey water systems or storage of rainwater, and subdivision covenants that prohibit clotheslines and compost bins were all cited as specific examples.

Leadership on community sustainability is hampered when the principles and ideas of sustainability are not well understood or embraced by staff within local and state governments. Budgets and election cycles were cited as barriers because they encourage a focus on cheaper and short-term solutions instead of cost-effective and long-term ones.

Forum participants also stated that local leadership on sustainability issues is hampered by tight budgets and the lack of personnel available to focus on sustainability efforts. Grants and government funding sources often come with too many reporting requirements to make them worth seeking. Government purchasing policies often drive decisions to the lowest cost product or contract regardless of environmental impacts. Finally, turnover of key elected officials and municipal staff and the subsequent institutional memory loss were cited as barriers to effective local leadership on community sustainability.

33. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/ecycle/>.

## What Eau Claire is doing

The city of Eau Claire, with a population over 65,000, sits at the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers in west central Wisconsin. In 2008, the Eau Claire City Council amended the city's 2005 comprehensive plan to address sustainability, leading to the creation of an interdepartmental Green Team to assess energy use, recycling, purchasing and employee wellness and chart a course for sustainability within the organization over the next five years.

In November 2008, the City Council resolved to support Wisconsin's vision for energy independence by generating 25% of electricity and transportation fuels from renewable resources by 2025. The city became an eco-municipality in May 2008, adopting The Natural Step principles for a sustainable city. Related benefits include saving \$68,000 in electricity costs annually and a leveling of health insurance costs attributed to employee health assessments.

The city partners with the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin-Extension and community groups that hosted informational meetings in 2009. EcoTeams, a method developed by the Empowerment Institute to engage households, were formed. Members support each others' lifestyle changes to reduce waste, use less water and energy, buy "eco-wise" products and encourage others to get involved. Information is available at: <http://www.sustainableeauclaire.org/index.php?ecoteams>

## Recommendations

**Provide education and incentives for local elected officials, staff and the general public to increase their awareness and knowledge of community sustainability issues and opportunities.**

There was very widespread support for enhancing sustainability education on all fronts. This was seen as a critical step toward improving local leadership on sustainability issues. For example, many people indicated support for the creation of a green leadership forum or institute statewide. Others suggested that an annual conference be held. Sixty-five participants felt that engaging local officials to promote sustainability and drive change should be a priority. Other educational recommendations included the development of fact sheets and public service announcements to help educate the broader community on sustainability practices. Finally, there was strong support for providing education through local sustainability coordinators, which could assist local governments, schools, businesses, churches and homeowners with their own sustainability priorities including becoming more energy efficient.

### **Encourage communities to adopt sustainability principles and decision-making frameworks to guide policy development.**

Many participants recommended that communities adopt principles and decision-making frameworks to help guide their policies, practices and investments. For example, communities might adopt The Natural Step, the precautionary principle or other principles of sustainable decision making. Many participants expressed strong support for using tools such as life-cycle cost assessment in order to understand the entire lifecycle of costs and benefits of a particular purchase before investing taxpayer funds.

For example, local officials should factor in how much energy or greenhouse gases are embedded in alternative types of carpeting when considering the remodeling of a public building or facility.

### **Develop requirements for all community-owned facilities and fleets to become more energy efficient and increase their use of renewable energy.**

Participants expressed strong support for requiring all types of local and state governments to



*The Sustainable Point initiative has led to use of a hybrid car for parking enforcement.*

adopt energy efficiency and renewable energy goals. Many felt that governments should be required to publicly report their progress toward energy conservation by providing regular status reports indicating level of progress made toward goals as well as current energy consumption and cost data.

**Require community infrastructure to be built to sustainable or green standards.**

Participants felt strongly that communities should develop green goals for public works. They expressed strong support for investing in quality infrastructure that minimizes environmental impacts while providing long-term benefits.

**Provide state incentives to support local government sustainability efforts.**

Participants expressed strong support for state incentives to help fund local sustainability efforts, including the transition to more energy efficient infrastructure and fleets. They felt that the state should balance mandates with incentives.

### **3 Economic development policies encouraging more local production and consumption**

**Description**

Many communities across the state are struggling to maintain healthy local economies. There is widespread concern that new approaches are needed going forward. The traditional economic

development approaches that emphasize industrial recruitment no longer seem to be working. For example, communities across the state have invested heavily in industrial parks, many of which are sitting empty. More recently, regional collaboration, with an emphasis on distinct regional assets and the bridging of economic and community development, has been seen as the key to success.

As we look to the future with an underlying goal of sustainability, the new economic drivers are sustainable development and systems thinking. The health of our economy, our environment and us, both individually and collectively, are closely interrelated. Production and consumption decisions are the basis of how we organize our economic lives and they entail environmental and social costs and benefits. A new economy will require a rethinking of such basic questions as: What is produced? How is it produced? Who is it produced for? Is there provision for economic growth?

**Why it is important**

The goal of creating more sustainable communities includes economic development. A healthy community economy ensures that everyone's human needs are being met, functions in harmony with local ecosystems and supports community resilience. A healthy economy is critical for promoting sustainable communities because without the security it provides, individuals and communities are unable to plan for and invest in long-term sustainability policies related to housing, transportation, land use and other aspects of the community.

We are clearly moving toward a new economy. It remains to be seen what this economy will look like, but current approaches and descriptions include green economy, green collar economy, clean economy, post-carbon (or carbon neutral) economy, circular (recycling) economy, steady-state economy, human-scale economy, human-centered economy and local living economy. Similarly, there is ongoing conceptual reform

## What Chequamegon Bay is doing

Formed in 1992, the Alliance for Sustainability in the Chequamegon Bay region includes the cities of Ashland, Washburn and Bayfield, the town of La Pointe, and the Red Cliff and Bad River bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwa), which are home to about 20,000 people. Struggling economically and aware of the environmental price paid for past development efforts, local leaders wanted to create opportunities for people to make a living and, at the same time, care for the resources that make the area unique.

Following The Natural Step process, they developed a regional strategic plan for sustainability, created a Green Team Network of Early Adopters of Sustainability and collectively participated as one of the pilot communities in the Wisconsin Energy Independent Communities (EIC) initiative. Five governments in the Bay area have adopted eco-municipality resolutions and close to a dozen communities have adopted EIC resolutions.

The alliance launched the Sustainable Chequamegon Initiative in 2005 and has engaged hundreds of area residents over the years. Current initiatives include facilitating baseline energy assessments in tribal, town, city and county facilities, as well as the ongoing work of a Wind Energy Consortium and regular educational events.

within the field of economics that is anchored around these ideas: adjusting economic scale, shifting from growth to development, making prices tell the ecological truth, accounting for nature's contribution (valuing ecosystem servic-

es), applying the precautionary principle (to assess technological change), revitalizing the management of the commons (open access resources) and valuing women.<sup>34</sup>

In many cases, not all of the costs and benefits – economic, social and environmental – associated with the production and consumption of goods and services are directly reflected in the prices that we pay for such goods and services. Economists refer to such costs and benefits as externalities. Water and air pollution are typical examples of negative externalities, while the knowledge “spillover” of inventions and information and the behavioral implications of education are examples of positive externalities. A more sustainable economy should do a better job of incorporating the true costs and benefits of goods and services we demand into their prices. This will result in a more sustainable use of our economic, environmental and social resources.

## What is working

Participants emphasized the localization of production and consumption as a contributor to community sustainability. Examples related to food and agriculture dominated across all of the roundtables. Participants noted the growth of farmers' markets across the state as an indicator of success in terms of localizing the economy. They also pointed out how community gardens are becoming central to community efforts aimed at the production and consumption of locally produced food. Such efforts include urban agriculture and neighborhood gardens. They can also represent alternative uses for empty lots, yard space and rooftops, among other possibilities.

Forum participants mentioned the growth in community-supported agriculture (CSAs) as a

34. Gardner, Gary, and Prugh, Thomas, Project Directors. *2008 State of the World: Innovations for a Sustainable Economy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

positive force for community sustainability.<sup>35</sup> The state's Buy Local Buy Wisconsin<sup>36</sup> grant program that supports direct market agriculture was cited as a positive force as well. Other agricultural efforts that seem to be working include community kitchens for food preparation and processing, farm-to-school initiatives, and the restaurants, grocery stores and cooperatives featuring local foods.

Localization was linked to successful downtown and redevelopment efforts. Examples cited included the Main Street program and other historic downtown revitalization efforts, as well as business improvement districts emphasizing local arts and entertainment. Positive examples related to chambers of commerce and other development groups included the growth in the number of buy local efforts around the state.

In terms of financing, several existing incentives and programs were identified by participants. These included Focus on Energy funds for local sustainability projects, the Working Lands<sup>37</sup> initiative, statewide recycling programs, USDA Rural Economic Development funds, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act "stimulus" funds and new technical college programs for renewable energy degrees. Local business mentoring programs and the DNR's Green Tier<sup>38</sup> program for business were also cited as positive contributors toward a more sustainable economy.

### What is hindering

Roundtable participants provided a broad list of hindrances to localized production and consumption. At the broadest level, the culture of consumption was singled out at most of the roundtables. This culture is characterized by conspicuous consumption, planned obsolescence,

a more-is-better philosophy and a make-use-waste approach to production and consumption decisions. This complements a growing body of research showing that additions to income and consumption fail to add significantly to human satisfaction and happiness once a certain threshold has been passed.

The other broad consideration that participants focused on related to how costs are viewed and calculated, with specific emphasis on short-versus long-term approaches to costs. Here, identified barriers included the perception that locally produced goods and services are more expensive and a prevailing culture in which the economic or profit bottom line is the only consideration. There was a clear recognition of and sensitivity to costs beyond those reflected in market prices and the desire to look for ways to "get prices right."

Participants also identified specific practice and policy areas that were seen as working against localized production and consumption. Institutional purchasing policies and related contracts and regulations can often reduce the use of locally produced goods and services. An emphasis on the lowest price or cost may end up being a higher cost option in the long run. Recycling policies are not structured to better support localization efforts. Most recycling programs only accept plastics numbered 1 or 2, there are limited markets for recycled materials, there are limits on local composting, there are few limits on the use of packaging materials, and there are few incentives to use recycled materials.

Food and agriculture policies that were singled out included meat inspection rules, food inspection rules preventing sales of locally produced items to retailers, agricultural policies aimed at the support of large-scale commercial production and an emphasis on commodity crop versus local food and produce production. It was also observed that development approaches and

35. See the Local Harvest website for background information on CSAs: <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>.

36. [http://datcp.wi.gov/Business/Buy\\_Local\\_Buy\\_Wisconsin/BLBW\\_Grants/index.aspx](http://datcp.wi.gov/Business/Buy_Local_Buy_Wisconsin/BLBW_Grants/index.aspx).

37. <http://datcp.state.wi.us/workinglands/index.jsp>.

38. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cea/environmental/>.

Linda E. Nelson



***Farmers' markets around the state help localize the economy.***

policies may not favor localization. Examples included development of infrastructure to support outlying big box retailers, a jobs-only approach to development without considering green jobs and not prioritizing local and small over big and new businesses.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations fell into a number of complementary categories: local food networks and systems, local finance and incentives, local purchasing and business practices, and full-cost valuation and pricing. Participants cited many opportunities to support more localized production and consumption related to each of these areas.

**Support community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets, food shares, community gardens and comprehensive local food systems.**<sup>39</sup>

There was considerable support for policies that provide incentives for the use and purchase of locally produced goods. These include the purchasing practices of schools, as well as those of local and state governments and institutions.

39. An excellent resource for ideas and strategies to support local food and agriculture in general is the findings and recommendations published in "The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin" by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters: [http://www.wisconsinacademy.org/idea/index.php?category\\_id=3568&subcategory\\_id=4844](http://www.wisconsinacademy.org/idea/index.php?category_id=3568&subcategory_id=4844).

Some of these focused specifically on food, such as requiring an emphasis on locally produced foods in city cafeterias and county-prepared meals in institutional settings. Rules requiring schools to source as much food locally as possible were also popular. Related ideas included requiring schools to have their own gardens and to develop food policies and programs based on sustainable values and locally sourced and healthy foods.

On the production side, there was widespread support for promoting community gardens and orchards on city and school property, including park land. Similarly, land use planning could be used to allow for agricultural and food production uses in developed areas and for reserving land within the city limits for food production and future food security. The Food Not Lawns program was cited as an example. The need to find ways to connect producers and consumers was noted, which has implications for the food distribution system. One of these was rules related to food resale, specifically locally grown food. Food cooperatives to pool local farmers' products for public sector and institutional purchases were recommended.

Two complementary recommendations pointed to connections with other aspects of communities. One is the use of food waste for compost and energy creation (in digesters). The other was increasing the number of living wage jobs in agriculture and food production to tie into food security and decentralized food systems.

**Provide financial support and incentives for the production and purchase of locally produced goods and services.**

There was significant support for the provision of incentives for the use and purchase of local goods by local and state government. This included not just local foods but also the entire array of goods and services purchased by public institutions and entities.

A reconsideration of financial mechanisms and

tools to support localization and sustainability efforts was recommended. One of the more intriguing ideas is to develop a sustainable TIF (tax increment financing) district model. It would require (and then monitor) TIF districts to follow established sustainable development guidelines. Related recommendations included the creation of sustainable community investment funds, establishing sustainable community revolving loan funds, municipal bonding to support sustainability projects and initiatives, and leveling the playing field by pooling funds for local projects. As noted, these are primarily existing tools that can be focused on identified sustainability initiatives.

There were a number of recommendations related to different types of financial institutions and tools. The promotion of more CDFI's (community development financial institutions) and support for micro-financing opportunities and the infrastructure to allow for this were two key ideas. These should be complemented by the creation of investment vehicles for local residents to target their savings to local projects. There was support for finding a way to exclude such locally generated and invested funds from capital gains tax on the resulting investment income.

The creation of local currencies is an alternative being put into place in some areas of the country and was a recommendation of the participants. These can be local or regional approaches. In some cases, this might be a variation on the use of something like "Chamber Bucks" to fund local resiliency and sustainability efforts.

#### **Develop and follow standards for "buy local" purchasing for materials, supplies, food items, etc.**

There should be purchasing policies in place for private, public and nonprofit entities that give preference to locally produced goods and services. One idea is to follow a type of preference scale with the top preference given to locally produced goods and services, the next level of preference given to regionally produced goods and services, the next preference for items pro-

duced in the state of Wisconsin and so on. These efforts can complement practices that reflect the unique heritage of a community or area. They can emphasize local ownership of restaurants and retail establishments through the use of sign ordinances such as the one in Bayfield.

#### **Level the financial and decision-making playing field through the use of metrics that reflect social and ecological costs and benefits as well as economic costs and benefits.**

There was strong support for policies and practices that would take advantage of efforts to "get prices right." Life-cycle assessment and true-cost pricing should be used to inform decision making. Labels should be required for all products indicating where they were produced and if they were sourced and made in a sustainable manner, industries should be required to pay the true cost of production, state policies should be adopted that reflect life-cycle assessment, and common metrics should be developed to model all costs related to ecosystem services.

#### **Expand recycling markets.**

Participants felt that one way to enhance the continued circulation and use of materials locally and regionally is through an expansion of recycling markets. One element of this would be to use and provide markets for more categories of post-consumer waste. Another element would be on the industrial and production side of the equation. Materials viewed as waste from one industrial and manufacturing process can be used as inputs or resources for another type of production.

## **4 Policies promoting sustainability education and local engagement**

### **Description**

Wisconsin has a proud tradition of progressive education and community engagement through public and private K-12 schools, the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical



*Sustainable Dunn is opening its "Year of Water 2011" with an educational program discussing Red Cedar Basin issues.*

College System and private colleges and universities. In addition, many community-based sustainability organizations, alliances and advocacy groups are actively involved in education and engagement related to community sustainability.

Despite these tremendous assets and efforts, there are still significant challenges related to sustainability education and local engagement. The formal education system, for example, still struggles to prepare students for the highly complex problems facing society. Many educators and academics remain pigeonholed in their own disciplines and specialty areas and are unable or unwilling to work across disciplines to better understand and respond to the interconnected challenges that exist.

Meanwhile, community-based efforts often struggle to reach their full potential because of understaffing and lack of resources. Their long-term success can also be undermined by volunteer burnout or the lack of long-term leadership and organizational continuity.

### **Why it is important**

Education is the foundation of sustainability, whether you are talking about awareness build-

ing, baseline analysis, community visioning, prioritization, implementation or evaluation. All of these imply high levels of community engagement. The "three Es" – ecology/environment, economy/employment and equity/equality – are typically cited as the three interrelated aspects of sustainability. These three Es and their interaction are made more powerful by a commitment to education. This has been referred to as "the three Es plus one: education."<sup>40</sup>

### **What is working**

Participants clearly appreciated both the current and potential roles of the state's educational institutions in the area of sustainability. Cooperative Extension initiatives, and other university resources and general outreach efforts, were cited as assets contributing to community sustainability. Northland College's Sigurd Olson Institute and the film education partnership between Carroll College and Plowshare were mentioned as well.

Community and technical colleges are starting programs focused on the delivery of sustainability education and services. College campuses are using segregated student fees to make "green" changes. Many higher education institutions are hiring sustainability coordinators and beginning to measure and benchmark energy usage and waste streams.

Several community-based and nonprofit organizations were cited by participants. These included Sustainable Door, Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association, Northwoods Land Trust, Clear Vision Eau Claire, Wausau Area Fresh Start, Sustainable Dunn, the Main Street Program, and Resource Conservation and Development Councils. Collaborating on sustainability issues, both locally and regionally, was cited as a means to effectively provide educational resources.

40. Edwards, Andres. R. *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005.

Community-based events including Earth Day and farmers' markets were cited as well. Other examples included newspaper columns on sustainability, speaker series, social networking and local research.

### **What is hindering**

Participants referenced a lack of knowledge related to sustainability. Common descriptors and phrases included: ignorance, misinformation, lack of awareness, holding on to old beliefs, apathy, complacency and passivity. Similarly, they noted a lack of necessary leadership, political support and strategic thinking. All of these elements were seen as limiting an understanding of the need for and benefits of sustainability. An unawareness of and/or an inability to see the connections and interrelationships between economic, environmental and social issues was cited in particular, as was the lack of a long-term view and long-term thinking. Participants noted that it is hard for people to believe there are limited resources or that limits will be reached in their lifetimes. A prevailing culture rooted in mobility and conspicuous consumption – and not community – was also singled out.

Barriers to communicating about and participating in community sustainability efforts that were identified across the state included polarization, active resistance, public skepticism and political boundaries. Partisan politics and political mindsets were seen as interfering with constructive conversations and unnecessarily politicizing issues. Getting people to talk across boundaries – municipal, school district, county and geographical – is limiting the ability to identify shared values and actions. These and other barriers are contributing to skepticism and resistance to change. While the existence of positive conversations was noted at the level of local affinity groups, the lack of communication among these and other groups is preventing the development of synergies at broader levels.

Participants felt there were inadequate educational resources available to support community

sustainability efforts. Turnover of key municipal staff and elected officials and burnout among sustainability advocates continue to hamper progress. They pointed to the need for more knowledgeable people to work in this area, a more efficient distribution of information, more examples and more funding for public education at the local level.

### **Recommendations**

Roundtable participants cited the need for education on sustainability for all sectors of the community through the use of a broad range of formal, informal and grassroots institutions and initiatives. Participants expressed strong interest in engaging both local elected officials and young people, in particular. They emphasized the importance of education as a community capacity-building strategy to enhance the effectiveness of local sustainability efforts.

#### **Provide sustainability education, leadership development, networking and support for local elected officials and staff.**

Participants identified the engagement of local officials and staff to drive change as the area where sustainability education would be most effective. Getting local officials "on board" and making sustainability a priority for groups such as the Wisconsin Counties Association and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities are seen as critical. There was fairly strong support for the creation of a Green Leadership Forum/Institute that would involve these same state-level organizations. On the staff side, education programs similar to those for code enforcement officials should be used to educate public employees about sustainability design and policy.

#### **Provide a clearinghouse of relevant resources and model practices related to community sustainability as guidance for local decision makers.**

Participants identified the need for a state-level sustainability resource clearinghouse. They recommended the ready availability of examples and model practices in such areas as land use planning, sustainable transportation planning,

community sustainability planning, financial mechanisms and tools to support sustainability, energy and water conservation, eco-municipalities and resource sharing at the neighborhood level.

**Promote and support K-12 school policies, programs, standards, requirements, professional development, funding and education based on sustainability values and principles, and provide meaningful opportunities for youth involvement in community sustainability projects.**

There was clear and strong support for the integration of sustainability across all aspects of the K-12 curriculum as well as into the operations and facilities of educational institutions. Teacher education and professional development was a key theme. The curriculum recommendations included a variety of specific ideas while recommendations related to operations strongly endorsed increased funding for locally sourced and healthy foods. The emphasis on more meaningful and exciting opportunities for youth to be involved in community sustainability projects included the desire to directly involve youth in local visioning processes and decision making.

**Promote and support the provision of community education and educational materials related to community sustainability as a means to developing effective and informed community engagement and involvement.**

Participants felt there were clear links between broader public education and community participation. They identified the need for educational programming and information in areas such as sustainability policies for community events, the benefits of sustainability practices, healthy lifestyle practices and understanding legal, economic and social barriers to sustainability. There was pronounced support for community gardens and orchards on city and school property. Communities should look for ways to broaden citizen engagement, such as by establishing community sustainability boards, encouraging volunteerism through targeted incentives and ensuring that people with inter-

ests in sustainability are tapped to serve on local boards and councils.

**Develop policies supported by related measures and quantifiable metrics as a means to bring about desired behavior change in support of sustainability.**

There was a sense among participants that relevant measures and metrics should be used for both educational and behavior changes purposes. Examples with notable support included the following: require labeling for products indicating where and how they are produced (with an eye toward sustainability metrics), model the costs and benefits of ecosystem services and develop net-zero targets for energy conservation and renewable energy.

**Ensure that existing sustainability resources remain available and are fully utilized.**

Participants promoted greater utilization of university resources to support community sustainability. Another existing state resource with strong participant support was Focus on Energy.<sup>41</sup> Broader use of public service announcements that educate on sustainability practices was advocated. Finally, participants noted the importance of state and federal training and education programs to generate educators, facilitators and motivators who would be capable of going into individual homes and helping people develop their own personalized sustainability action plans.

## **5 Policies leading to more sustainable transportation systems and regional cooperation**

### **Description**

Current transportation policies and practices focus far too many resources on concrete and asphalt pathways for automobiles and larger vehicles and far too few on public and private mass transit and walking and bicycling options. The latter options foster safer, more livable, family-friendly communities, promote physical activity

41. <http://www.focusonenergy.com/>.

and health, and reduce vehicle emissions and fuel use while connecting to other forms of personal transit.

### Why it is important

Sustainable policies that drive decisions regarding transportation system investments are vital to the economic health of communities and to the quality of life available to the citizens of those communities. They can ensure effective and efficient transportation networks that are necessary to meet the diverse transportation needs of community residents, including the unique mobility requirements of the elderly and disabled as well as those residents without access to private automobiles.

Transportation policies have profound, long-lasting and, in some cases, detrimental impacts on the natural resources of communities, including the quality of air, lands and water. Residents of urban, suburban and rural areas depend upon functional, timely and interconnected transit systems. These systems take residents to and from places of employment, medical and dental services, recreational sites, shopping sites, social services and social events. Notably, land use and urban form considerations are directly related to transportation systems.

### What is working

Participants identified several examples and trends they felt are contributing to a more sustainable transportation system. More bike infrastructure is being constructed in Menomonie, Stevens Point and Wausau, for example. The Rails to Trails and the state's Safe Routes to School programs were both cited as positive state-level programs supporting local sustainability efforts. Passenger rail development and plans to increase rail transit across the state were mentioned as well. The Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) that serves the Chequamegon Bay area was noted. Finally, road projects incor-



Donald S. Abrams

*Walking and bicycling options help create family-friendly communities, promote wellness and reduce pollution.*

porating recycled materials were cited as a positive step toward a more sustainable transportation system.

### What is hindering

Participants cited several key barriers to a more sustainable transportation system. They pointed out that policy makers often choose “quick-fix” and short-term solutions that may appear less expensive in the short run but that are actually more expensive and less sustainable over time. They observed that transportation policies are sometimes developed in isolation without recognizing their effects on other issues and sys-

tems. They also noted that poor or nonexistent public transit options are evident throughout the state, especially in rural areas.

Many participants felt that a key barrier to the development of more sustainable transportation options is the many levels of government that exist in Wisconsin. Towns, cities, counties and the state itself often do not coordinate their transportation policies or resources, yet these governmental boundaries are transparent to residents who need to cross them to travel to work, to medical services and to shopping centers and markets. Even when transit systems are established, there often appears to be little public policy in place to encourage cooperation or interconnectivity between systems.

## Recommendations

Participants provided several policy recommendations that they felt would lead to both more sustainable transportation systems and the improved regional cooperation necessary to develop, operate and maintain these systems.

### Prioritize and invest in public transit.

The top transportation-related recommendation – identified by nearly 100 participants – was to prioritize public and mass transit investments over automobile infrastructure investments. Public transportation systems provide mobility for those who do not have access to or cannot drive a car. They stimulate economic activity by providing access to shopping, education and places of employment. They also are good for the environment. They help reduce personal vehicle miles travelled and the associated greenhouse gas emissions. They minimize the need for costly and sprawl-inducing new road construction and infrastructure.

### Provide less structured and more efficient transit options.

Many participants recommended exploring new ways of running public bus systems as a means to make mass transit more efficient. They ex-

pressed support for less costly options, including shared taxis, in order to meet the demand for public transit where fewer riders exist.

### Promote regional transit systems and policies.

There was widespread support for promoting regional transit systems across the state. Participants felt strongly that more regional transit systems are needed, especially in the rural areas of the state. They indicated strong support for regional transportation policies and approaches as well. For example, they cited the need for more regional trail planning. They also expressed support for regional policies related to the use of electric vehicles, vehicle idling and the use of Zipcars.<sup>42</sup>

### Provide safer routes and better connections to encourage neighborhood electric and other low-speed vehicle use.

A priority shared by many participants is to provide safer routes and better connections around communities in order to facilitate greater use of neighborhood electric and other types of low-speed vehicles. Participants felt that with better systems in place to handle these types of vehicles more citizens would adopt the technology.

### Develop better bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and connections.

Similar to the recommendation above, many participants expressed support for developing better bike and pedestrian infrastructure and connections within and between Wisconsin communities. They cited the need for more bike and pedestrian crossings and the need to promote programs like Safe Routes to School. They also cited the need to develop walkability policies at the local level.

## 6 Policies encouraging clean energy, water conservation and waste reduction

### Description

In Wisconsin, we are blessed with reliable and affordable energy. For more information, visit <http://www.zipcar.com/>.



*Wisconsin is blessed with abundant water resources, but water quality is threatened by nonpoint source pollution and the spread of invasive species.*

fordable energy. When one pulls the switch, the lights go on. Wisconsin's consumers and businesses have come to expect a constant and inexpensive source of energy for their homes and businesses. Recycling is now common across the state and many landfills are even generating electricity in addition to safeguarding waste. More recently, the state passed a law requiring electronic waste recycling. Finally, Wisconsin is blessed with abundant water resources including lakes, rivers and groundwater.

Despite our abundant resources in energy, water and waste management, our current approach is undermining community sustainability in a number of ways. For example, Wisconsin is heavily reliant on coal for electricity generation. Water quality is threatened by nonpoint source pollution and the rapid increase in the spread of invasive species through our lakes and streams.

## Why it is important

Local communities and state leaders play a major role in shaping the markets for energy, water and waste. Public policy is therefore critically important to ensure that these systems contribute to the overall sustainability of the community. Energy, water and waste represent basic and necessary infrastructure systems for local communities. They are costly investments that have tremendous impacts on the environment, quality of life and business. Greening local infrastructure has the potential to dramatically decrease energy consumption, reduce nonpoint source pollution and create new environmental products and services in the marketplace.

## What is working

Roundtable participants identified several policies and actions that are contributing to more sustainable infrastructure in Wisconsin. Requiring or encouraging Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for new and existing buildings as a way to reduce energy consumption and promote resource conservation was brought up repeatedly. Another example of what's working with regard to energy and conservation was the development of municipal energy policies and sustainability plans. For example, the city and county of La Crosse developed and adopted a Strategic Plan for Sustainability that includes policies related to energy and resource conservation.<sup>43</sup>

Participants often identified their local schools, colleges or technical colleges as examples of what is working. For example, St. Norbert College decided to construct a new library according to LEED standards. In De Pere, the school district decided to incorporate geothermal energy and solar hot water heating into one of the elementary schools.

In terms of statewide programs, there were

43. <http://www.sustainablelacrosse.com/PDF/jointPlan.pdf>.

## What Osceola is doing

Osceola is a northwest Wisconsin village, with a population of about 2,500, on the St. Croix River bordering Minnesota. In 2008, the Osceola Public Library and the Osceola School District created study circles based on The Natural Step framework. One early outcome was the creation of a car pool blog to connect commuters who work in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area about 50 miles away. A long-term goal is the development of a 100% energy and food self-sufficiency model for the village and school district.

On March 11, 2008, the Osceola Village Board became the first community in the state to pass a 25 x '25 resolution for energy independence, with a goal to generate 25% of electricity and transportation fuels from renewable resources by 2025. The board directed a municipal center advisory committee to explore the costs, benefits and feasibility of "green technologies," and the Osceola Public Works Department and the Osceola Police Department each purchased two flex-fuel vehicles.

With help from a Focus on Energy matching grant, the Osceola School District installed solar flat plate panels to heat water for the swimming pool and hot water. The school district continues to explore solar and bio-fuels applications and to pursue investment in wind farms located in Wisconsin.

many positive comments related to the state's Office of Energy Independence and its 25 x '25 energy independence planning program. Focus on Energy, Travel Green<sup>44</sup> and the DNR's Green Tier program for businesses were cited as additional examples of positive sustainability efforts. In terms of funding, participants cited the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Focus

44. <http://www.travelwisconsin.com/wisconsin/Travel-Green/Overview.aspx>.

on Energy and the EPA brownfields<sup>45</sup> programs as positive contributors to sustainability efforts.

Storm water utilities and effective storm water management were cited as examples of successful efforts to manage water sustainably. Building water conservation into utility rates and offering reverse rate structures that reward resourceful consumers were mentioned as well. Finally, the state's move to further protect groundwater resources was seen as a positive step toward sustainability.

In terms of waste reduction and management, several people indicated that Clean Sweep, pharmaceutical waste programs and the newly mandated electronic recycling program are all steps in the right direction toward community sustainability. Alternative sewage treatment systems including "reed beds" were also cited as positive examples. These types of systems use natural filtration to improve the quality of effluent exiting the wastewater treatment plant.

## What is hindering

Participants cited several policy, funding and technology hurdles that must be addressed in order to create more sustainable infrastructure at the local level. The lack of climate change legislation was cited numerous times. In the absence of such legislation, fossil fuel prices may remain quite low, thereby making it difficult to attract the necessary investment to develop new forms of renewable energy and to fully deploy new and emerging energy efficiency technologies. Participants pointed to the lack of market-based decision making that takes into account the full costs that result from our energy consumption choices.

In terms of renewable energy, participants mentioned that the conversion of methane from farms into gas or electricity is not currently treated as green energy production (like wind and solar) eligible to receive preferential rates from utilities. Furthermore, they cited the lack

45. <http://epa.gov/brownfields/>.

of enforcement of existing clean air and water regulations across the state as an impediment to expanded use of renewable energy. Without effective enforcement, the transition to a more sustainable infrastructure may become less of a priority for communities.

Another hindrance cited was land use regulations that inhibit or discourage renewable energy development across the state. Similarly, participants pointed to existing landscaping and grey water rules as hindering sustainability. Such rules can limit the deployment of rain barrels, clotheslines and composting technologies that promote water conservation and nutrient recycling.

The lack of markets for recycled materials was cited as a barrier by several participants. Participants felt that more incentives and programs are needed to promote renewable energies implementation and to encourage better waste disposal practices. Similarly, they cited the need for better regional recycling facilities to encourage composting and better waste re-use. They also felt that requiring manufacturers to use more recycled content and less packaging was a priority.

Not surprisingly, funding issues were cited as barriers to promoting community sustainability. Not only are there not enough available funds, but participants mentioned the high upfront costs associated with renewable energy deployment and energy conservation. They cited how difficult it is to make the case for these investments given existing budget pressures, and they noted a lack of flexibility in terms of how existing funding sources, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, can be used. The lack of resources available to hire sustainability coordinators at the local level was also mentioned.

Finally, participants cited the lack of clean energy, water conservation and waste reduction examples as a barrier to creating more sustainable communities. They expressed the need for

more collaboration and regional approaches to tackle key barriers. Participants also pointed to a lack of proper planning and cooperation. Finally, participants cited the need for more measurement – energy, water, resource use – in order to monitor our impact on the environment and our successes promoting more sustainable use of our resources.

## **Recommendations**

### **Remove subsidies of fossil fuels to level the playing field for renewable energy.**

Participants felt that renewable energy would be more competitive if it were allowed to compete on an even playing field with fossil fuels.

### **Support small scale and distributed technologies.**

Small scale technology options may offer cost-effective solutions for increasing the efficiency of energy, water and waste systems at the local level. For example, on-site rain gardens can help limit storm water runoff while reducing the need for more expensive and carbon-intensive infrastructure improvements. Likewise, distributed energy technologies such as solar and wind can contribute to energy efficiency by reducing energy losses associated with long-distance transmission. Promoting smaller-scale renewable energy technologies or mandating a certain percentage of energy be generated on site could promote more self-sufficient communities while reducing carbon dioxide emissions and contributing to local economic development.

### **Develop local renewable energy and energy efficiency programs.**

Many federal and state programs exist to support renewable energy development. However, local programs and support services can play a vital role in filling the gap where financing or other support services are absent. For example, local communities can play a lead role in developing property-assessed clean energy programs (PACE) for homeowners and businesses to fund energy improvements. Communities should identify other creative financing models, includ-



***Recommendations to encourage water conservation include education about rain gardens and rain barrels.***

ing bonding and revolving loan funds, to help fund energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades for businesses and homeowners.

**Update local ordinances to encourage energy conservation.**

Local communities should adopt building codes that encourage on-site energy generation and high standards of energy efficiency. Communities can not only lead by example with their own facilities but can also require that local businesses and homeowners make improvements as well.

**Encourage storm water utilities to be more proactive in terms of promoting conservation practices including pervious pavements, rain barrels and rain gardens.**

Storm water utilities have been set up around the state to fund storm water infrastructure through rate payer fees. These utilities could be more proactive by helping consumers and businesses

lower their rates of runoff. For example, they could provide education to individuals on the use and construction of rain barrels and rain gardens.

**Increase the amount of renewable energy generated in the state.**

The state should update its renewable portfolio standard to mandate that a higher percentage of energy generated from renewable sources come from within the state. Wisconsin currently spends more than \$15 billion on imported energy purchases. The state should not switch from being highly dependent on fossil fuel imports to becoming highly dependent on renewable energy imports. Closing the gap on energy imports would encourage more economic development in-state by supporting local businesses and technology providers.

**Encourage more sustainable waste management systems.**

Requiring individuals and organizations to pay for waste management services based on the weight of their waste might encourage less consumption. For example, the state of New Mexico operates a program which does just that. Other methods of internalizing the true costs of our consumption patterns could help send stronger signals to consumers to lower their consumption levels. For example, more aggressive fiscal incentives could be used to lower levels of water consumption.

**Create local markets for local products.**

Communities should create incentives to promote the use of locally generated materials such as wood resources and readily available recycling materials. By helping to create a market for these types of materials, communities would make these emerging industries more cost effective and sustainable. This type of policy could also help reduce transportation related carbon dioxide emissions.

**Create a clearinghouse of sustainability practices, policies and applied research.**

More examples are needed for communities to

consider. Alternative financing mechanisms can be studied to find ways to locally fund investments in sustainability. Waste management studies are needed to better understand the true local costs of waste and the gains to be realized from waste reduction. More research is needed to quantify the benefits of rainwater gardens and other techniques that may reduce the need for DNR-mandated retention ponds.

**Prioritize and invest in programs that reduce non-point source pollution on agricultural lands to reduce phosphorous and other contaminant runoff.**

Communities and the state should develop new regulations and incentives to effectively address nonpoint source pollution, especially as it relates to agricultural lands. Innovative approaches, such as collaborative bio-digesters, may help reduce agricultural runoff while also creating renewable energy.

**Reward communities that implement voluntary sustainability programs.**

There are many voluntary programs available to communities pursuing different sustainability strategies. Communities that enroll in the new Water Star<sup>46</sup> program, for example, should be given bonus points for state and federal grants.

46. <http://www.waterstarwisconsin.org/>.

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*Cover photo by Donald S. Abrams*

## Conclusion

The transition to a more sustainable society will require tremendous effort. To date, much of the discussion has focused on what one can do as an individual or as a business. For example, countless books, websites and other resources are available to help consumers go green or purchase their way to a more sustainable planet. Likewise, there are many resources available for businesses to implement sustainable practices or capture new and growing markets for sustainability related products and services.

But what about communities? How can groups of citizens – acting collectively through community institutions and/or grassroots organizations – pursue sustainability? The Sustainable Communities Public Policy Forum was designed to gather responses to this question. It is evident that Wisconsin's communities are moving toward sustainability through the use of a wide spectrum of policies and practices. Many additional policy ideas and recommendations have been proposed to support community sustainability as we move forward.

A discernible sense of optimism pervades this effort. Participants easily and readily identified existing programs, groups and policies that are already supporting sustainability efforts at the community level. This was complemented by clear-eyed pragmatism in identifying hindrances to community sustainability efforts. But there was not a sense of resignation. Participants shared a vision for a sustainable future. They were able to articulate the types of policies that they felt could lead Wisconsin's communities in that direction. The journey has begun. We can continue to take practical steps on that journey. This report is one such step along the way. Let's use it wisely.