

Madison Sustainability Plan Comments - May 10, 2011

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These comments were prepared by the author with some assistance and review by members of the Sustainable Atwood neighborhood group. Lance Green briefly presented most of these comments at the Public Hearing Monday, April 11, 2011.

GENERAL

We strongly support this Plan. It covers quite a lot of ground, setting excellent directions and goals for many aspects of sustainable activities. The Overview provides an outstanding introduction to the Plan and to our City's sustainable approach. Presenting Vision statements in each section help the reader "back-cast" and better understand the particular goals and actions in each section.

In many cases, the same action is listed several times through the document (e.g., increase mass transit). Perhaps extracting a briefer listing of specific actions under headings such as transportation, energy, natural areas, food, water management, etc. could be done to help readers review the ideas more effectively.

SPECIFIC

Some of the comments below support and strengthen existing ideas; others present more detailed actions and time goals. An attempt is made to present specific comments in the same topical order as the Plan. However, many of the comments apply to several sections of the document and will only be listed once.

Improve Air Quality – Good set of goals, especially to go beyond meeting just the EPA Attainment Status (especially for particulates) and targeting vehicle pollution with incentives and other programs to increase mass transit options and use.

- Consider proposing a county-wide anti-idling ordinance for large vehicles and outreach/education to reduce other idling, with a goal to significantly reduce excessive idling by 2015. These efforts could include better electronic monitoring and controls to enhance traffic flow through intersections and along major arteries.
- As for coal reductions, shouldn't the "25 by 25" renewable energy program be referenced here?

Improve Water Quality/ Increase Conservation – The specific goals for reducing phosphorus and solids run-off and algal blooms, as well as reducing use are very laudable.

- Strengthen requirements for pervious surfaces for new and rebuilt parking lots, driveways, sidewalks, aprons.
- Increase water tax rates for owners of large impermeable surfaces.
- Provide more definite incentives for installing permeable surfaces, rain-barrels/gardens by making the process for accounting for these improvements on sewer/water bills (impermeable area calculations).
- Require all major water users to develop and implement water conservation plans.
- Reduce both residential and business/institutional water use 20% by 2020 (p.11).
- Consider modifying the present water fee rate structure to motivate water use reductions – e.g., by inclining rates for larger users.
- Provide automatic on-off faucets at all public buildings.
- Continue the toilet rebate program and possibly expand to promote purchasing rain barrels and on-demand water-heaters.

- Consider modifying the building/zoning codes to enhance using grey-water and cistern systems for some non-drinking use.
- Increase the promotion and use of terrace rain gardens in road and development projects.

Prevent Solid Waste to Landfills – Again a great set of goals, especially addressing organics, construction/demolition wastes and recycling compliance, but some need a specific timeframe.

- Require 70% recycling of all demolition/construction/remodeling wastes by 2015. This goal is already met at many sites, with assistance from WasteCap.
- Enforce the recycling ordinances more powerfully and consistently for businesses and large housing facilities (apartments, condo, etc), with the goal of “complete compliance” by 2015.
- Alternate weeks for garbage/recycling collection to reduce costs and give recycling an “equal weight” to producing garbage. Do this as soon as possible.
- Set goal to develop a system to collect and compost or digest organic wastes from the largest generators (grocery stores, kitchens in large restaurants and institutions, food producers, plant/flower businesses) by 2013. This may include requiring the large-volume generators to send their organic wastes to these alternatives, as well as instituting reduction programs.
- Set goal to compost/digest all organic wastes county-wide by 2015, in cooperation with Dane Co.

Restore/Maintain Natural Habitat – The goals present an ambitious plan to grow and maintain green spaces, parks and natural areas. We especially applaud linking parks, expanding urban forests, providing 10-minute walking access to natural areas, preserving open space, designing green space into streetscapes and promoting edible landscapes.

- Place power and cable lines underground during any street revisions whenever possible.

Transportation Planning/Design – All of the myriad of ideas here should be implemented to understand and modify our current transportation choices, especially aiming to reduce single car use, develop usable area-wide transit systems, and particularly improve bus, bicycle and pedestrian choices.

- Develop rapid transit bus routes connecting major population centers around Madison by 2014.
- Utilize the Regional Transit Authority (RTA, if it can still exist) to rapidly improve Metro bus route coverage/hours and to improve bike routes.
- Implement the Platinum Bike Plan and “2020 Madison Bike Map.” Add clear, consistent street/side/overhead signage to identify bike paths, both to riders and drivers, especially at bike/road intersections and parallel lanes. Improve directional signage and lighting on bike paths. Move more bike paths off sidewalks and allow 2-way biking on short one-way streets.
- Work to provide bus passes to more large employers, especially for the state workers.
- Replace Metro 2-bike racks with 3-bike racks.
- Install more public bike racks strategically around the City and provide incentives for more private business to install them.
- Increase resources to expand the Ride-Share program.
- The minimum parking requirements in our zoning code should be reduced or eliminated, and maximum parking thresholds established.
- Work to assure the high-speed rail service from Madison to Milwaukee and Twin Cities, including a station at a location that maximizes multi-modal transfers.
- Provide assistance to those planning events expecting over 200 people and granted either a park or street permit to plan and implement Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs.

Buildings/Energy Conservation

- Require LEED-equivalent certification for all TIF-funded projects.
- Require energy performance audit and energy use disclosure as part of any building's sale information.
- Provide property-tax-based, low-interest loans for installing energy efficiency and renewable energy on existing buildings.
- Revise codes to allow home and commercial wind generators, with appropriate sound restrictions.
- Strengthen economic assistance programs to promote increased solar and green rooftops on home and commercial facilities.

Promote/Foster Local Food Systems – We strongly support efforts to provide more urban gardens and agriculture, including fruit/nut trees in public spaces, promoting CSAs and Farmers Markets, and allowing residents to keep chickens and other small species. The goal of 4% land area for urban ag by 2020 is appropriate and commendable.

- To establish more community gardens in many neighborhoods, consider qualifying vacant, City-owned and private lots that are not appropriate for development and could be available for years of gardening.
- Increase neighborhood-based resources to assist home gardeners.
- Continue and grow the movement for healthy school lunches.

Sustainable Education/Outreach – Public awareness of sustainable options is essential to maximize effectiveness of all of these programs.

- Create and distribute a “Madison Sustainability Handbook” to provide residents with basic public and private services and options for more sustainable choices. This would be an expansion of the present recycling/reuse guide.
- Create a web-based and printable City-wide Green Map showing locations of public and private sustainable products and services.
- Improve the City web resources to allow easy search for answers to sustainability questions of all kinds.