

**La Crosse Climate Change Adaptation Workshop Report Synopsis**  
**Black River Beach Community Meeting Room**  
**Feb. 28, 2012**

**Intent of document to capture and summarize all comments in SWOT analysis.**

**Presentation: “Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation”**

- Changes in our climate include a gradual increase in temperature of between 4 -10 F in Wisconsin.
- Warmer temperatures have important implications for human health and natural resources.
- Warmer winters with less precipitation falling as snow and more as rainfall, along with gradual increases in the annual average amount of rainfall for northwest (and other areas of) Wisconsin are predicted.
- More frequent and intense storms have been observed and are anticipated to continue in the future. This puts communities in the position of managing larger amounts of stormwater runoff.
- Freezing and thawing cycles will become more frequent due to warmer winters. This presents a unique set of issues for infrastructure and cars on roadways.

**Facilitated Discussion**

**Question 1: What is your experience with extreme weather events? What do you perceive as gradual weather changes in the La Crosse area?**

- Flooding, tornados and effects of them on human health and property.

**Question 2: What are the impacts to the community and its residents from extreme weather events? Specify to whom and to what impacts are occurring and rank comments as H-M-L priority if applicable.**

- The most significant issue raised by participants was flooding.
- Comments were made about the number of floods that have occurred in the La Crosse area and the ability of the current stormwater infrastructure to safely remove the amount of stormwater produced as runoff from storms.
- Bluffs are subject to erosion and slope failure. Homes located on bluffs are at risk. Transport of sediments to the Mississippi River fills in habitat and impacts all river users.
- A new “model for addressing stormwater” is needed since all stormwater can’t be dealt with in the marsh land or on private or public land.
- Community budgets are stressed when damage occurs to public facilities and infrastructure.
- A variety of human health-related concerns emerged from the discussion. Extreme heat and cold events are critical issues for residents in the city. Mold has been a concern for homes that experience repeated flooding. Higher asthma and visits to emergency rooms result.
- Ice storms have caused more damage than snowstorms and impacts to human health.
- Hail has caused significant property damage to homes and cars.

**Question 3: What do you consider an accomplishment for the community and its citizens adapting to extreme weather events or gradual changes to climate?**

- Natural Step process through the joint Sustainable La Crosse Plan
- All Hazard Mitigation plan and cooperate on training local governments.
- La Crosse County Emergency Management
- Several accomplishments were related to stormwater planning and management. .

**Question 4: What are the near term actions and long-term strategies that the community should take to address the impacts identified? Think about actions or strategies that would be cost effective, feasible and immediate (low-hanging fruit) as well as those that need to be incorporated into planning and budget processes.**

- Get city council and county board members involved and educated and thinking in terms of regional planning and plans, (not just municipal).
- The County Emergency Management Plan and the All Hazards Mitigation Plan are updated regularly. The suggestion was made to incorporate climate adaptation strategies into both plans.
- Create an inter-disciplinary county and city government adaptation task force that “keeps the discussion open” and ensures a systems level (regional) perspective to adaptation planning rather than fragmented, isolated efforts with consideration of climate in all plans
- Reprioritize capital budget spending to needs vs. wants.
- Developing a public information plan to educate 115,000 citizens in the county (from all jurisdictions and government levels) about climate change to ensure as many people as possible develop an understanding that will lead to better decision-making.
- Mobilize health care facilities to educate their customer base through newsletters, etc. .
- Update standards for lawns to allow longer grasses and plants (prairie planting). Note the value of native plants in landscaping.
- Work on a regional plan for farmland preservation and countryside preservation.
- Consider requesting technical and financial assistance from the federal government.

**Question 5: What are the barriers to implementing the adaptation strategies you’ve identified including both the near-term actions and long-term strategies? Barriers might be financial, technical, lack of physical space, public will, etc.**

- Because the idea of climate adaptation is “new” to most communities, concerns were expressed about the lack of community-wide understanding of climate change and its impacts, and the knowledge to address impacts.
- In the absence of such understanding, the lack of political will may slow decision-making about what the top priorities are and allocation of funds in community budgets.
- Enhancing the multi-jurisdiction discussion on sustainability to include climate adaptation will help to remove public resistance to change.

**Question 6: What is your vision of a community and its citizens that have adapted to our changing climate? Think outside the box of budget or existing policy constraints. Anything goes! (comments were provided in future tense – as if it is already occurring.)**

- A variety of educational opportunities are offered through different forums put on by citizen and environmental groups, local government, institutions, businesses and public action groups. Views expressed by an educated citizenry are brought into the adaptive management process with respect to the future of the community.
- Climate adaptation will integrate seamlessly with the sustainability goals of the community. Like sustainability, climate adaptation requires a long-term perspective.