

Introduction

This Chapter provides the foundation for the Comprehensive Plan, outlining why it was developed, a snapshot of the City of La Crescent and a summary of existing plans and studies.

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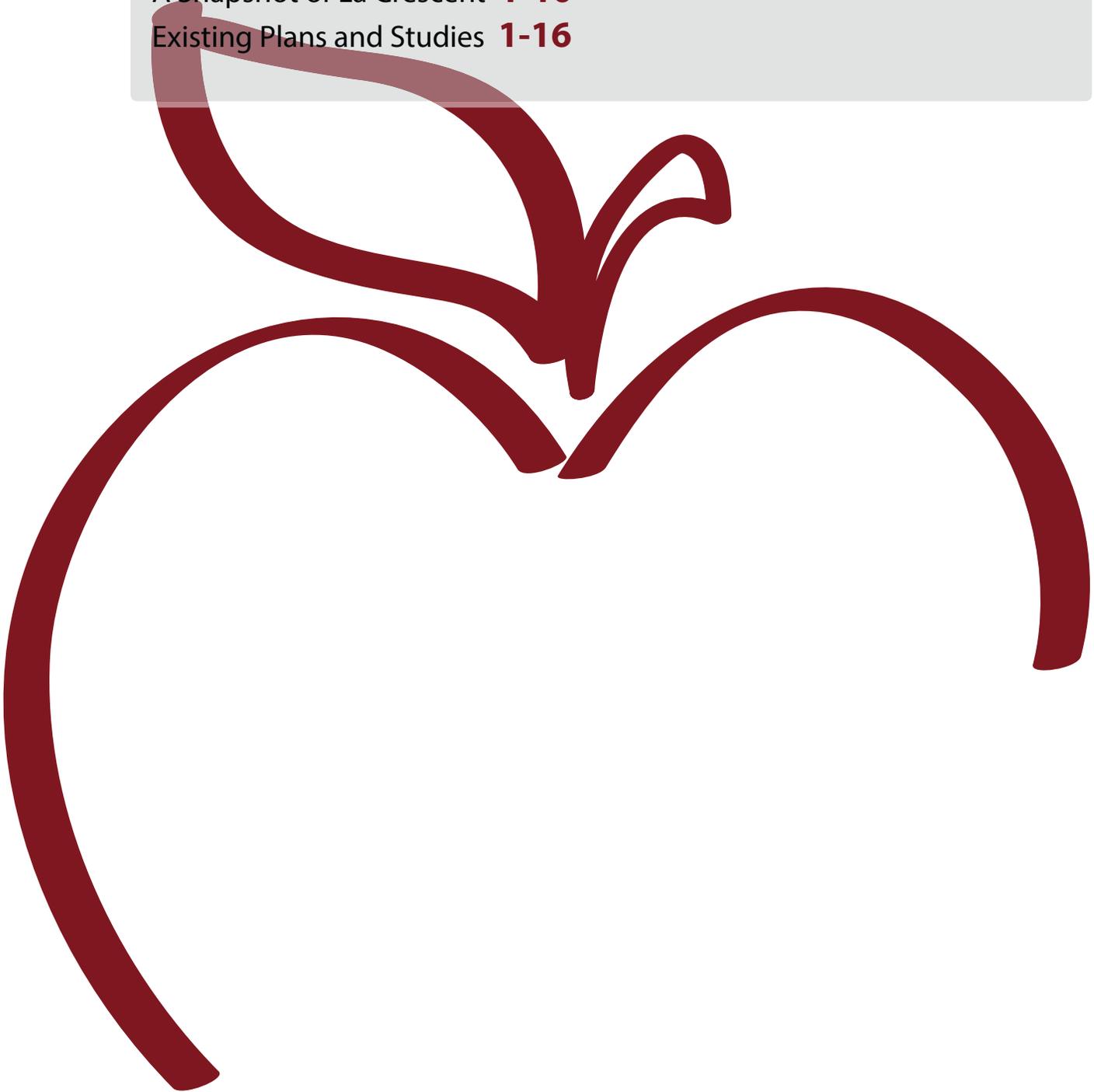
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The Plan as a “Living Guide”

Why a Comprehensive Plan?



It is difficult to know what the future may bring for La Crescent, or for any community. As economic and demographic trends rise and fall, changes will occur. The purpose of this plan is to establish a shared vision for La Crescent to guide future actions and decisions. This guidance improves predictability and consistency over time, which encourages investment. We plan so that we can act and react in a changing world with a confident understanding of our common values and goals.

Plan Maintenance



This planning document is a “living” guide for growth and change in the City of La Crescent. The plan represents the City’s best effort to address current issues and anticipate future needs; however, it can and should be amended from time to time if conditions warrant reconsideration of policies in this plan. If decisions are being made that are not consistent with this plan, then the plan has lost its relevance and should be amended. The process of amending the comprehensive plan should not be onerous, but it should trigger a brief pause to consider again the long term vision for the community. This plan’s value is dependent upon frequent use and occasional updates.



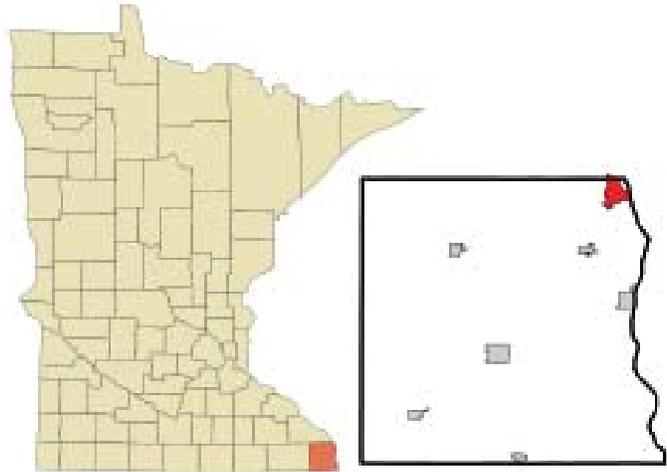
Minnesota Comprehensive Planning

Comprehensive plans and land use plans are tools used by cities, townships and counties to guide local decision-making. The authority to plan is granted to Minnesota cities and townships by State Chapter 462: "The land use plan must provide guidelines for the timing and sequence of the adoption of official controls to ensure planned, orderly, and staged development and redevelopment consistent with the land use plan." (§462.357 Subd. 2(c)). In other words, comprehensive plans do not carry the weight of law in Minnesota, but they are used to inform other local mechanisms that do carry the weight of law, including subdivision and zoning ordinances.

The comprehensive plan is used by municipalities to inform the adoption and application of ordinances. It is also used to inform local budgeting processes and public investment decisions, and to support grant applications.

Common and recommended components of a comprehensive plan include:

- A statement of authority to prepare and adopt the plan (see above)
- Background data and analysis – including area history, a description of existing social, economic and physical (natural and man-made) conditions and trends, and economic and demographic projections (see Appendix B)
- Documentation of stakeholder's interests and involvement – these include interests of residents, public officials, and the business community (see Appendix A)
- Vision statement (or statement of desired goals and objectives) – desired Village outlook, generally 20 years from now (see Chapter 2)
- Future plan map or maps – these maps depict various components, including land use, transportation, community facilities, and housing areas (see Chapter 3)
- Plan Implementation – framework or schedule that describes specific measures to carry out the plan, the time frame for completion, and assignment of responsibility (see Chapter 4)



La Crescent, Houston County, Minnesota
Source: Wikimedia Commons

The Plan as a “Living Guide”

Plan Organization



The plan is divided into four chapters plus several important appendices, as described below:

Chapter 1: Introduction
 Chapter 1 gives a snapshot of the City of La Crescent and discusses the role of this Plan, the planning process, and previous planning efforts.

Chapter 2: Vision, Goals, Objectives & Strategies
 Chapter 2 includes a vision for the future of the City, and goals, objectives and strategies for each element of the plan, including:

<i>Housing</i>	<i>Community Facilities & Services</i>
<i>Economic Development</i>	<i>Transportation & Mobility</i>
<i>Natural Systems, Open Spaces & Recreation</i>	<i>Collaboration & Partnerships</i>
<i>Downtown Enhancement</i>	

Chapter 3: Land Use & Community Design
 Chapter 3 describes the desired future land use for La Crescent and the surrounding planning area and explores design strategies consistent with the Goals, Objectives and Strategies of Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Implementation & Action Plan
 Chapter 4 describes the tools and procedures by which the plan will be implemented and provides a detailed timeline of action steps for successful implementation of the plan.

Appendix A: Community Surveys
 Appendix A includes summaries of the two community surveys that were given.

Appendix B: Community Indicators Report
 Appendix B is a compilation of data that describes the existing conditions, trends, and projections for the City of La Crescent. This data informs the planning process and should be updated from time to time to track progress and change in the City.

Appendix C: Plan Area Maps



The Plan as a “Living Guide”

Planning Process



This plan was developed over approximately 15 months, beginning in March of 2015 and culminating with plan adoption in July 2016.

Community involvement in the planning process is the foundation of an effective plan, and this process incorporated several methods to inform, involve and engage residents and other stakeholders.

Planning Consultant

The City Council selected MSA Professional Services, Inc. (MSA) in January 2015 to help draft and assemble this plan. MSA collaborated with the Logistics committee throughout the process and was responsible for creating community surveys, drafting plan content, assembling maps and documents, and facilitating committee meetings.

Logistics Committee

The planning process was coordinated by a core group of residents and City staff who helped schedule meetings, organize and promote events, ensure policy consistency throughout the plan, and oversee plan implementation methods.

Project Web Page

The City maintained a page on the City website throughout the planning process with information about the plan, including schedule information and draft documents.

Public Meetings

The planning process kicked off with a large public meeting on March 31, 2015 in the Community Room at Prince of Peace Church. About 100 people attended this meeting, which included a presentation by MSA about trends affecting community planning and featured Tom Thibodeau, Distinguished Professor of Servant Leadership at Viterbo University, who spoke about the importance of public conversations, engaging in our communities and getting to know our neighbors. Participants discussed the future of the La Crescent community and completed worksheets to share their concerns and aspirations for the future of the La Crescent community. Several themes emerged from those comments:



Public Meeting #1 on March 31, 2015

1. *La Crescent is a great place to raise a family; it is a safe, friendly, caring community.*
2. *La Crescent has great schools, teachers, facilities and student achievement, but there is a need for further investment in school facilities.*
3. *La Crescent benefits from having a small town feel while enjoying being close to important amenities including health care and retail options.*
4. *La Crescent lacks a robust Central Business District with local dining, entertainment, employment opportunities. There are opportunities to attract residents and benefit from pass-by traffic by offering more retail and service amenities downtown.*
5. *La Crescent has recreational and artistic amenities and has engaging beauty and scenic attributes. We can use these amenities to attract people, and we can do more to encourage walking, biking and other recreation in the area.*
6. *La Crescent has a limited supply of lots for new homes and there are few affordable housing options, especially for families and seniors. More housing options are needed.*
7. *La Crescent needs to articulate a vision around which all citizens can rally.*

A second public meeting was held in June 2016, again at Prince of Peace, to share and celebrate the completed draft plan. Committee chairs presented summaries of each plan topic. (to be completed...)

releases and news articles. Most of the questions on each survey were completed by at least 600 people, providing a high degree of confidence in the results. See Appendix A for a full summary of each survey, including assessments of who took the survey, by age and place of residence. At least 60% of responders to each survey were City residents, and comparisons between City residents and others showed few differences. A simplified summary of survey findings follows:

Survey 1 - Housing and Economic Development

1. Safety/low crime and price/affordability are the most influential factors of where people choose to live.
2. 65% of respondents have lived in La Crescent for >10 years.
3. A majority of respondents (90%) live in a home with 3 or more bedrooms.
4. If respondents were to move in the next 5 years, only 60% would want a home with 3 or more bedrooms.
5. 92% live in single family homes.
6. 92% own their homes.
7. A large majority (86%) believe their home is in good or excellent condition.
8. A large majority (84%) are happy with their current homes.
9. The perceived greatest need for improvement in the housing market is supply/availability (compared to cost or quality).
10. 59% of respondents expect to continue living in La Crescent for more than 10 years.
11. Regarding the need for housing in various categories, the highest number of respondents suggested the City needs more senior condos and apts, assisted living facilities for seniors, and affordable housing.
12. 26% percent think the city has too many high end homes, 19% think there are too many mobile home parks.
13. Most respondents spend weekdays in La Crescent (46%) or La Crosse (30%).
14. 58% believe their employment is secure in the next 3-5 years. Another 18% felt "somewhat secure".
15. 72% feel the availability of employment opportunities within La Crescent is lacking.
16. Respondents primarily patronize La Crescent businesses for groceries, gasoline and convenience retail.
17. Respondents want more sit down restaurants and downtown retail shopping/services.

Public Meeting #2 on June X, 2016

Content Committees

This planning process was unique in that it created a separate committee for each of the seven core planning topics to help craft goals, objectives, policies and actions. Each committee met at least four times, including an initial meet and greet and assignment of reading tasks, a meeting with MSA to work on a vision statement and broad goals, another meeting with MSA to work on the more detailed objectives and strategies (policies and actions), and a meeting with Plan Commission to discuss the draft plan content. The two committees working on Housing, Economic Development and Downtown Enhancement met October-December 2015. The four committees working on Community Facilities and Services; Transportation and Mobility; Natural Systems, Open Space and Recreation; and Land Use and Community Design met January-April 2016. All meetings were hosted at Prince of Peace Church.

Community Surveys

There were two community surveys conducted during the planning process to solicit information and opinions from residents and stakeholders, one in fall 2015 (October 30-November 18), and one in spring 2016 (February 10 to March 2). The surveys were offered online, but hard copies were also available. The surveys were promoted primarily via email, press

The Plan as a “Living Guide”

18. When asked about local public funding to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and related tourism, respondents were most strongly in favor of investing in hiking and canoeing & kayaking amenities.
19. Respondents believe retail/service supply and variety are inadequate in downtown La Crescent.
20. Only 8% are opposed to new, multi-story buildings Downtown.
21. What don't people want to see change in the downtown area? Common themes include small-town feel; the grocery store; and a sense of connection to nature, including downtown greenery and views of the bluffs and river.
22. What other communities do respondents like? The most popular answers were Lanesboro, MN and La Crosse, WI.
8. 21% of respondents rate local streets as “poor”.
9. 49% of respondents said more/better bike lanes or paths would make them more likely to ride a bike in La Crescent. 46% said more/better sidewalks would make them more likely to walk.
10. A majority of respondents would still not use public transit even if the following changes were made: employer subsidy of fare cost, employer shuttle from bus stop, lower total trip time, more convenient bus stop locations and more convenient pickup times.

Survey 2 - Land Use and Community Design; Transportation; Public Infrastructure and Services; and Natural Systems, Open Space and Recreation

1. Respondents' most common “very important” issues when it comes to land use and regulations are protecting public health and the environment (71%) and preserving the beauty of our natural surroundings (65%).
2. The most strongly supported locations for new housing in La Crescent are the Elementary School site (57%) and the downtown area (56%). 44% of respondents oppose or strongly oppose new housing on bluff tops or faces west or south of the City and 33% are unsure.
3. The most strongly supported changes if the land currently used for commercial and industrial along highway 14/61 were to change use over time is to convert it to more open space and passive recreation along waterways (73%) or more retail and service businesses (62%).
4. Respondents feel that City leaders should be more restrictive when it comes to property upkeep/cleanliness (48%) and billboards (38%).
5. 42% strongly agree and 33% agree that La Crescent should become a leader in green practices and ecological stewardship.
6. Common responses when asked if there are specific sites or areas in the City that respondents would like to see changed or improved through redevelopment include more/improved opportunities for outdoor recreation; improved waterfronts; housing or other new development on the school site if it is sold; making the downtown more vibrant and attractive to tourists; and adding more businesses.
7. 84% of respondents drive a personal vehicle 4-7 days per week. 94 % rarely or never use public transit.
11. 58% of respondents chose “maintenance of existing roads” as a high priority for transportation investments over the next 10 years.
12. The most desired bike and pedestrian safety improvement is “crosswalks near the elementary school”.
13. Additional safety improvements that respondents feel are needed to improve safety or convenience for drivers, bikers or pedestrians include promoting awareness of bikers & pedestrians and etiquette on sharing the road; adding sidewalk on Oak Street near schools to improve safety; adding bike and pedestrian facilities on Highway 6, and improving bike lane, crosswalk, bike/ped awareness on Elm Street.
14. 51% of respondents rated the aquatic center as an excellent service offered in La Crescent.
15. 60% of respondents said La Crescent should spend more money on public schools.
16. 55% of respondents said that the City should make no changes and should continue to use the current City Government Building as long as possible. 28% think a new City Government facility should be built for Police, City Hall and the Public Library.
17. 77% of respondents agree or strongly agree that park and outdoor recreational facilities around La Crescent currently meet their needs. Only 14.5% disagree.
18. The most widely used outdoor recreation facilities in the past year (with 10+ visits per respondent) include the Mississippi River, Old Hickory Park and Kistler Memorial Park.
19. The most common recreational activities respondents participate in include recreational walking (70%), swimming (64%), trail hiking (58%) and playground play (56%).
20. The top recreation amenities respondents would like to see expanded or improved in La Crescent include walking trails (45%), bike trails (33%) and kayak/canoe launch.
21. Only 10% or less of respondents oppose or strongly oppose various options to protect and/or expand access to the bluffs around La Crescent.

Plan Commission

The City Plan Commission is the entity that will use this plan most frequently, not only as a source of policy guidance when reviewing development projects, but also to encourage the implementation of City initiatives described in this plan. The Plan Commission was involved throughout the planning process, including recommendation on process design and consultant selection, and then in the review and editing of draft plan content in the later phases of the project. Plan Commission members also served on and participated in the various Content Committees. Plan Commission recommended adoption of this plan by City Council on _____.

City Council

City Council is responsible for setting and enforcing City policies, including final decisions on how taxpayer dollars are used. City Council approved the budget and scope for the development of this plan and adopted the completed plan on _____.

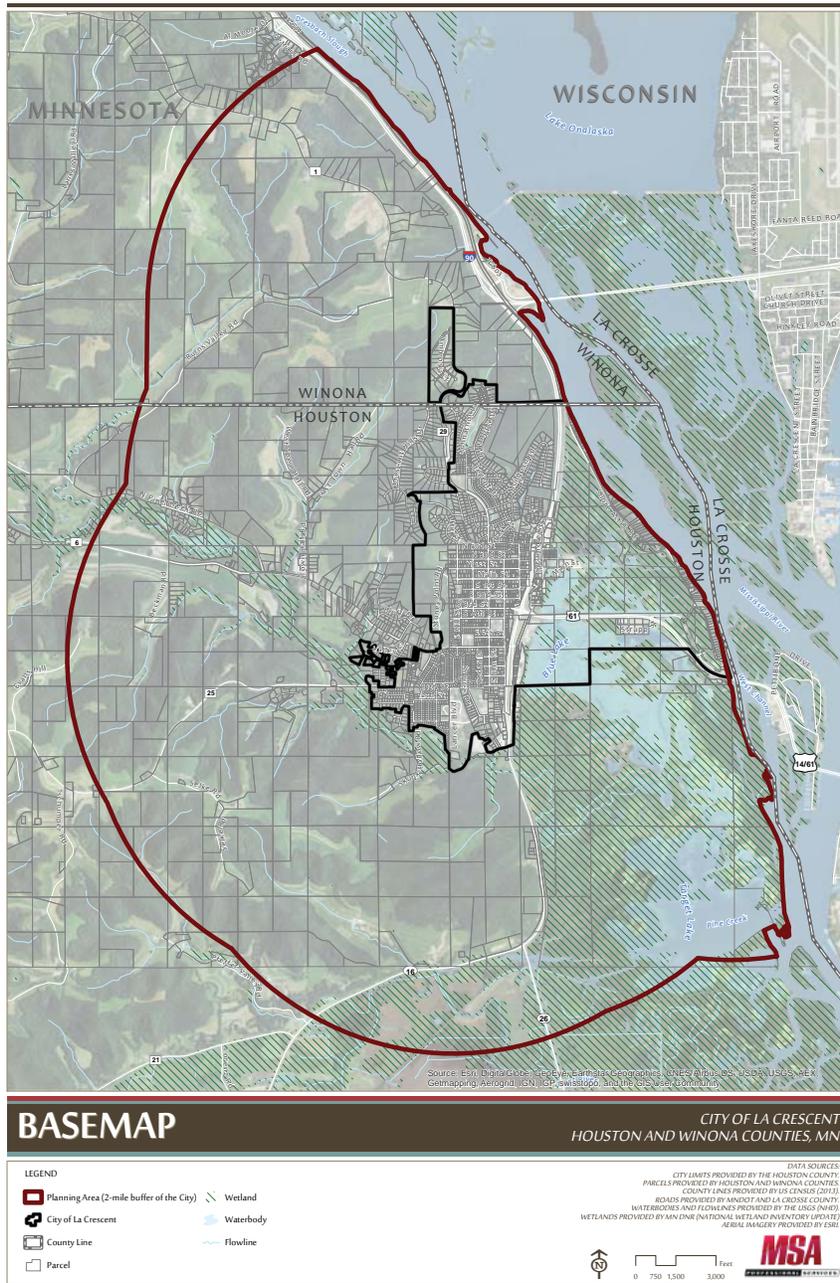
A Snapshot of La Crescent

Planning Area



The study area for this Plan includes all lands in which the City has both a short- and long-term interest in planning and development activity. As shown in *Figure 1.2 (below)*, the Planning Area includes all lands within the current municipal limits and within two miles of the current City limits. The City is approximately 2,221 acres (3.47 square miles). The entire Planning Area, including significant areas of undevelopable wetlands and bluffslands, is approximately 14,847 acres (23.2 square miles).

Figure 1.1: Planning Area Map



Regional Context



La Crescent is located primarily in Houston County, plus a small portion in Winona County. It is the largest city in Houston County, by population, and the fourth largest municipality in the La Crosse-La Crescent two-county metro area, after the Cities of La Crosse and Onalaska and the Village of Holmen. La Crescent has many close ties to the City of La Crosse and the wider metro area, including economic, social and public services interdependence.

The region is known for its bluffs and the Mississippi River, which provide scenic beauty and recreation opportunities for tourists and residents. These features are also important constraints on development and growth, allowing little room for horizontal expansion.

History

La Crescent was founded in 1851 and was originally named Camerons, by founder Peter Cameron. Cameron attempted to divert the Mississippi River to flow closer to La Crescent and bypass La Crosse, but passed away weeks before the project's scheduled completion date in 1857. The project was never completed. The second name of the City was Manton, but this was quickly changed to La Crescent to make the name sound more appealing to settlers. La Crescent was incorporated in 1857.

The City has a long history in the apple industry. This history began in 1856 with John Harris who was able to plant trees that could survive Minnesota's harsh winters. Due to Harris' accomplishments and the thousands of trees and hundreds of varieties he planted, he is known as the "Father of the Orchardists" in Minnesota. La Crescent continues to hold an annual Applefest to honor its long history in the industry.

Today La Crescent is known for its gourmet apple varieties which are unique to the region. The City is known as the "Apple Capitol of Minnesota".

La Crescent is also known for the its beautiful bluffs and the Mississippi River which continue to attract residents and tourists to the area.

Key Community Indicators

The following pages present population and demographic trends for La Crescent. These data provide a foundation for the planning process. The data was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey (ACS), and local sources. See **Appendix B** for a full report on La Crescent's Community Indicators, including background information related to each of the plan's core topics.



PEOPLE



HOUSING



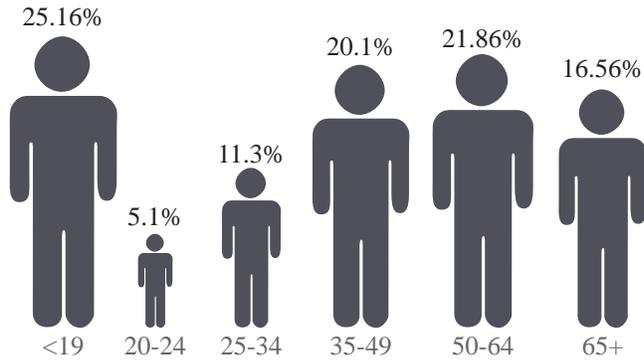
TRANSPORTATION



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

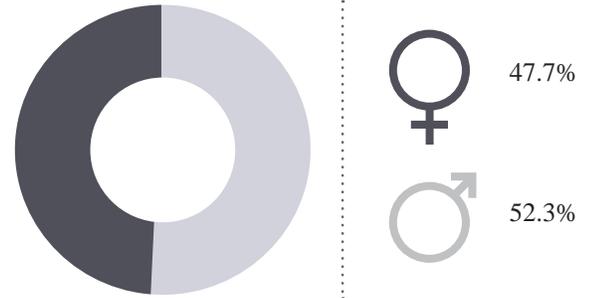
A Snapshot of La Crescent

People



AGE

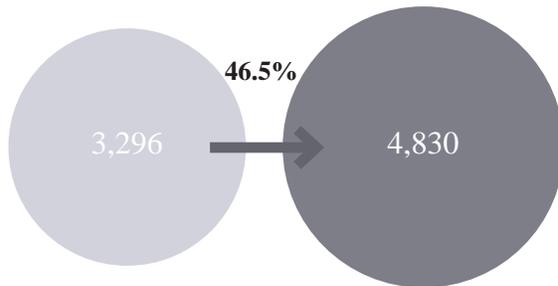
In 2010, the median age in La Crescent was 42.8; approximately five (5) years older than the median ages in both the La Crosse Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) (36.6) and the State (37.4).



GENDER

The breakdown between female and male residents in the City is average with an almost even split, although the females do outnumber the males by approximately 5%.

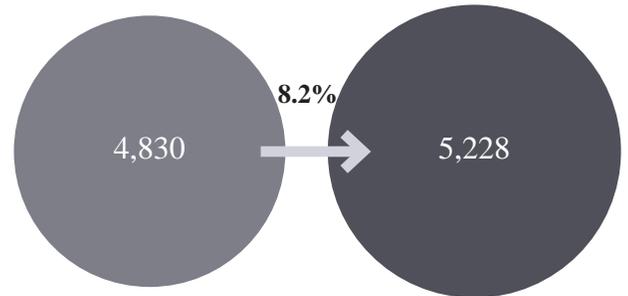
1970 - 2010



30-YEAR POPULATION CHANGE

From 1970 to 2010, La Crescent's population experienced expansive growth with more than a 45% increase- higher than the La Crosse MSA (36.4%) and the State (39.4%).

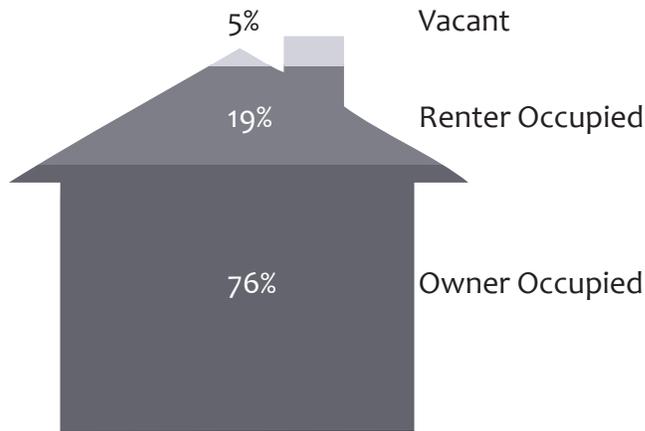
2010 - 2030



30-YEAR POPULATION PROJECTION

The 30-year projection for population is not as robust as the previous three decades, however, the City can expect a modest growth of around 8%. This is lower than the La Crosse MSA's projection (11.3%) and the State's projection (12.8%).

Housing

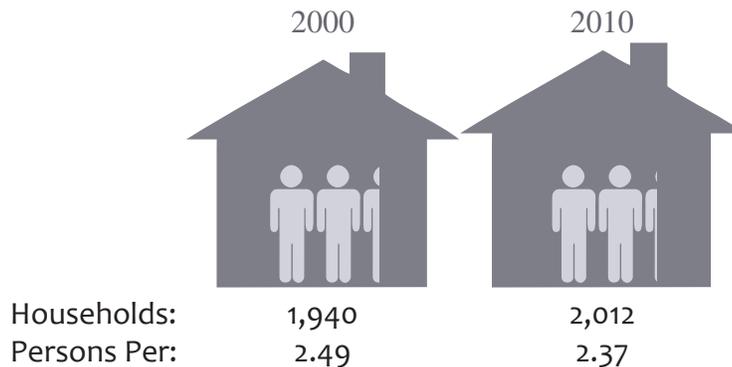


2010 OCCUPANCY

Nearly three-fourths (76%) of City residents live in owner-occupied housing. This percentage held steady over the last decade, despite the 2008 housing market crisis, suggesting a resilient local housing market. The rental vacancy rate (1.5%) is lower than what is considered a healthy rate of around 5%. This rate of vacancy indicates a lower number of choices for renters and that competition for units may have the undesired effect of driving rent prices up.

AVERAGE MEDIAN VALUE

The value of a home is also an indicator to the strength of the housing market and in turn, the vitality of the community. La Crescent's housing market appears to be in good shape as the median value of a home in the City is \$159,000 and is slightly higher the La Crosse MSA's average value of \$155,600 but below the State's of \$187,900.



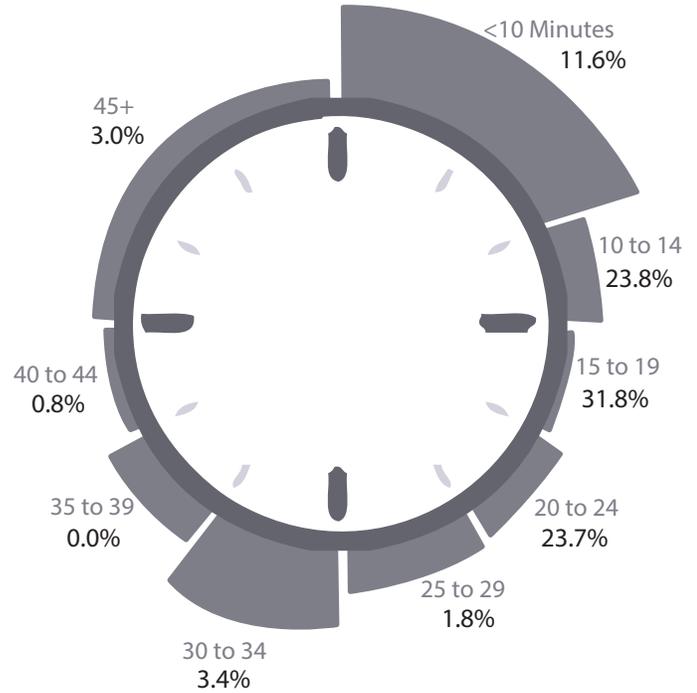
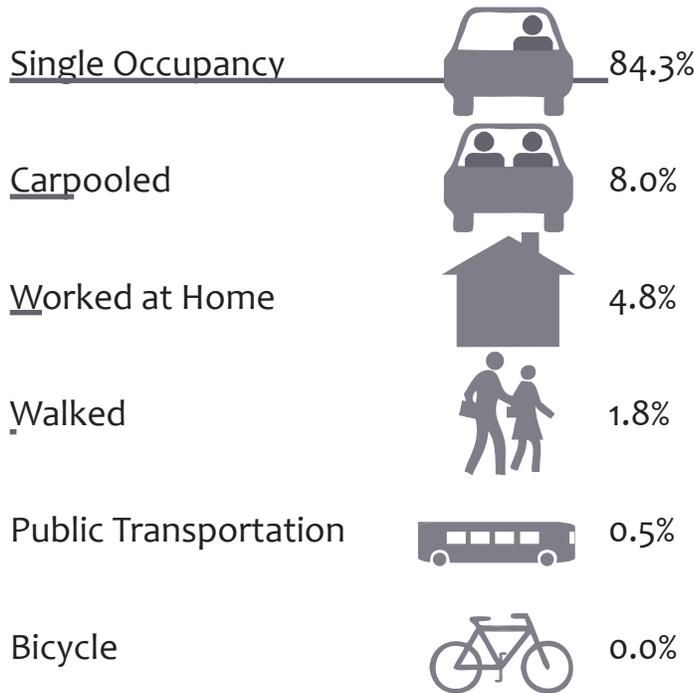
HOUSEHOLD COUNTS

Household trends for the City of La Crescent show a 3.7% increase in households between 2000 and 2010, which was below that of the La Crosse MSA (10.1%) and the State (10.1%) for that same time period.

Nationally, the number of persons per household has been declining in recent decades which has been explained several way, including fewer children per family, an increase in single parent households, and an increase in life expectancy. In 2010, Lac Crescent was just below the National Average of 2.59 persons per household with 2.37 persons per household.

A Snapshot of La Crescent

Transportation



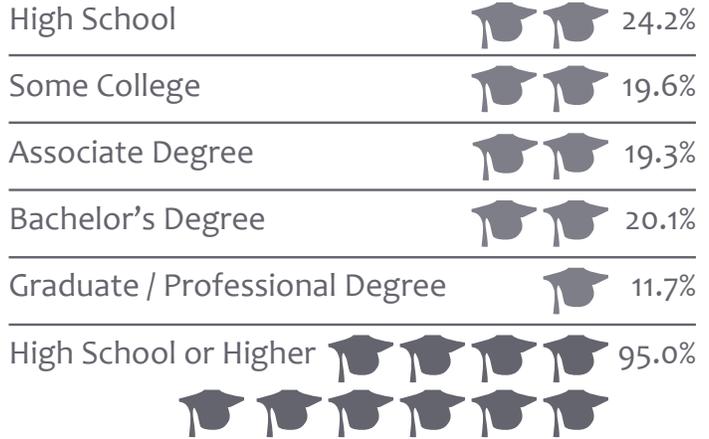
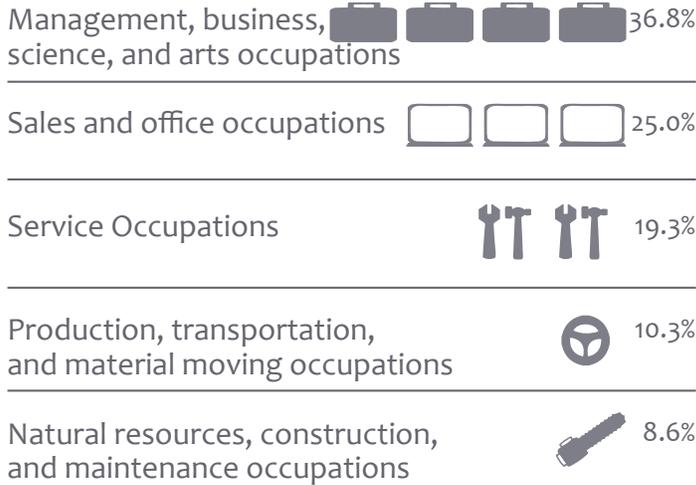
COMMUTING METHOD TO WORK

Commuting in La Crescent is mostly done by car, with 84.3% of commuters traveling in a single occupant vehicle. This number is higher than the La Crosse MSA (79.0%) and Minnesota (78.0%). Only 8.0% of commuters in La Crosse carpoled to work, 1.8% walked, 4.8% worked from home and 0.5% used public transportation. There were no reports of residents bicycling as a method of transport to or from work.

COMMUTING TIME TO WORK

Only 11.6% of La Crescent's working residents (age 16 and over) have less than a 10 minutes commute to work while nearly 80% percent drive between 10 and 24 minutes to work. This commute indicates a large percentage of residents working a short distance outside of La Crescent--mostly La Crosse where many employment options are located.

Economic Prosperity



OCCUPATIONS

Approximately three-quarters (71.4%) of workers in La Crescent earn a *private* wage and salary, similar to workers in the La Crosse MSA (69.3%) and the State of Minnesota (70.6%).

The major occupation group in La Crescent is the "Management, Professional & Related" category. Coming in second is "Sales & Office", while "Service Occupations" comes in third.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment can provide valuable insight into the existing labor force, including availability of skilled and professional workers and demand for training opportunities. The percentage of La Crescent residents 25 years or older who have at least a high school diploma is a staggering 95.0%. The numbers show La Crescent has a highly educated workforce.

Existing Plans

City Plans and Studies

City of La Crescent Comprehensive Plan - 1999

In 1999, the City of La Crescent adopted its Comprehensive Plan with a vision of maintaining the City's unique setting in the Mississippi River Valley by providing residents the ability to share and enjoy many rural and urban amenities without compromising quality of life. At the time the plan was adopted, population was expected to grow by 30% in the next 20 years. For this reason, growth management, preservation of natural features, orchards and open space which all make La Crescent unique are all important elements to consider for the City's future. Guiding principles and recommendations for implementation were developed to help the City to achieve its vision. Topics included: retaining its small-town character, encouraging commercial and industrial developments, preserving natural and scenic qualities, improving access, creating a viable commercial core and an attractive and safe place to live, and developing a connection to the river.

Minnesota Design Team Recommendations- 2008

In 2008 the Minnesota Design Team, a group of volunteer architects and planners, worked with the City of La Crescent to help plan for its future. With the assistance of community members, the Design Team identified "likes, dislikes and opportunities" within La Crescent. Residents most liked the area's scenic beauty, parks, and city-wide amenities like the library and fine arts center. Dislikes included excessive billboards and certain development that residents felt poorly reflected the image of their community. Opportunities within the City included revitalizing La Crescent's downtown, preserving and enhancing natural areas and creating beautiful and innovative entryways to La Crescent. To realize the City's vision for its future, the Design Team made recommendations related to housing, bike trails, downtown, ecology, MNDOT, zoning, beautification, water access and opportunities for seniors. Recommendations were made for the short-, mid- and long-term.



DOWNTOWN: LONG TERM IMPROVEMENTS

LA CRESCENT
MINNESOTA DESIGN TEAM



SEPTEMBER 11-13, 2008

Regional Plans and Studies



La Crescent Park and Recreation Plan - 2012

The City of La Crescent updated its Park and Recreation Plan in 2012 to plan for the future of its park system. The plan identifies trends that will influence La Crescent's park system in the coming years such as the desirability of trails, non-traditional sports, a health-conscious population, dog ownership, safety concerns, demographics, diversity, aging population, changing family structures, environment/climate change, and increased interest in nature. Recommendations were made to improve and expand existing parks to meet the needs of park users based on these trends. Primary implementation goals include improving access to water, enhancing the entryway to the City, improving trails, creating a pedestrian bridge, establishing a dog park, acquiring additional parkland, and generally ensuring the City is developing high quality park and open space facilities that meet users' needs.

La Crescent Bike and Pedestrian Plan - 2013

In 2013, the City of La Crescent completed a bike and pedestrian plan to improve these elements in and around the City. The primary principles of the plan include fixing infrastructure that needs repair, improving intersections for bicyclists and pedestrians, improving integration of bike and pedestrian-friendly policies in everyday activities, and developing a connected system for bicyclists and pedestrians throughout the City. The plan recommends improvements that should be made in order to provide continuous, safe facilities for people travelling by a variety of transportation modes.

Blufflands Design Manual - 1998

The Blufflands Design Manual addresses issues concerning growth and development within the Blufflands of Southeastern Minnesota. The manual illustrates the value of the Blufflands and discusses growth trends and the impact they may have on the area in the future. Growth management is discussed in three sections within the manual; a common vision, implementation tools to achieve the vision and a discussion on property rights and takings. The common vision connects the present actions being taken in the community with what the community envisions for its future. The manual focuses on communities returning to a traditional approach to development; avoiding isolated residential housing developments (urban sprawl) to preserve the community's identity and natural resources. The recommended tools to accomplish this vision vary from recommending comprehensive newspaper coverage of regional land-use issues to zoning ordinance recommendations. The third section, a discussion on property rights and takings, discusses two opposing viewpoints; protecting personal property rights and the importance of land use for the benefit of common the environment and society. It was intended that the tools and goals set forth in this manual be integrated into all future plans in the City to achieve the community's vision.