



2.4 Economic Development

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The La Crescent economy is a complex and evolving mix of production, sales and service-oriented enterprises. Local businesses are a source of income for residents and they respond to the purchasing needs of residents. This section of the plan should be used by City officials, business owners and developers to inform decisions and programs that affect business success in the City.

Vision Statement



The City of La Crescent is growing a diverse and resilient local economy. Employment opportunities are increasing due to the growth of local businesses and the willingness of residents to start new enterprises. Retail, restaurant and service businesses are thriving due to population growth and an increase in recreation tourism and residents can satisfy many of their weekly shopping and services needs within the City. It is apparent that the community values and celebrates the arts in La Crescent. These successes are the result of ongoing collaborations and communication between the City and private sector organizations.

Issues & Opportunities



The planning process revealed the following issues and opportunities related to economic development that inform this plan for the future of La Crescent. (These statements are drawn from public comments and survey results and do not represent policy decisions.)

- The City enjoys convenient access to an interstate freeway and downtown La Crosse
- The City has many long-term family-owned businesses that anchor the local economy (though there is concern about succession planning)
- The cost of land is relatively high and the availability of land for growth is low.
- The bluffs and waterways are an underutilized economic asset – an opportunity for recreation tourism
- Tax and employment policy differences between Minnesota and Wisconsin are a challenge for commercial development here (commercial property taxes are higher, minimum wage is higher, workers' compensation costs are higher, sales tax is higher).
- We don't have many young professionals; we want our own kids to come back here to work and start businesses
- There is strong support for the enhancement of outdoor recreation opportunities in the La Crescent area, especially hiking and canoeing/kayaking trails and trailheads. A majority (53%) of survey respondents supported local public funding support for expanded hiking amenities.
- Based on survey results, most area residents (72%) believe employment opportunities are "lacking" in the La Crescent area. A plurality of respondents (40%) believe the City should commit additional tax dollars to attract and retain jobs in La Crescent. Only 19% did not support this, while another 41% answered "No opinion" or "It depends".

Goals & Objectives

Economic Development Goal 1

Employment will grow in La Crescent

Objectives:

1. Retain and grow existing businesses
2. Attract businesses to relocate to La Crescent
3. Increase local startups and entrepreneurship

Economic Development Goal 2

The City will continue to host a diverse and competitive workforce

Objectives:

1. The school district will have an excellent reputation based on good facilities and strong academic performance.
2. Residents will have more local shopping and dining options.
3. People of all ages will be attracted by the prevalence of recreation opportunities.
4. The City will continue to demonstrate support for sustainable energy and environmental stewardship.

Economic Development Goal 3

Recreation tourism will grow in La Crescent

Objectives:

1. There will be more businesses catering to outdoor recreation enthusiasts, including residents and visitors.
2. There will be more access to the region's highlands and lowlands/waterways, especially via trails and trailhead improvements.

Strategies

1. Respond promptly and collaboratively with existing businesses seeking to remodel, expand, or move to La Crescent.
2. Collaborate with and support the Chamber of Commerce in efforts to maintain regular contact and communication with local businesses, especially manufacturers and other primary sector employers.
3. Identify and protect land for business growth, including redevelopment areas.

4. Continue to use Tax Increment Finance Districts to facilitate development, especially to assist redevelopment costs.
5. Continue to utilize Tax Abatement as a strategy to encourage business expansion.
6. Support entrepreneurship by allowing and encouraging low-impact home-based businesses.
7. Work with the La Crescent-Hokah school district to increase connections with local businesses. For example, leverage local construction industry strengths with a program that enables students to build homes or garages.
8. Encourage local businesses to establish internship and apprenticeship collaborations with UW-La Crosse, Western Technical College, and Viterbo.
9. Take an active role in Downtown redevelopment by acquiring property and soliciting redevelopment proposals.
10. Actively pursue the development of a river trailhead on Blue Lake, including property acquisition and/or conversion from other uses if necessary.
11. Actively pursue the improvement of bluffland and lowland hiking trails and connections to those trails from downtown, including a bridge over 14/61.
12. Use the City and/or Chamber websites to promote local recreation opportunities.
13. Encourage the establishment of a recreation tourism booster group in the City to help promote local resources.
14. Collaborate with the La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote La Crescent attractions.
15. Incorporate more recreation-oriented activities into Applefest or host new, standalone events focused on recreation in the bluffs and/or river/lake.
16. Continue to provide a Community and Economic Development Coordinator to support local business success, including guidance for new local businesses (start-up or relocations).
17. Maintain an active Economic Development Committee (EDC) to help guide the efforts of the Community and Economic development Coordinator.
18. Create a high-profile trail from the Mississippi River to Hokah via Downtown La Crescent, and build a coalition of municipal and state and federal agency stakeholders to support development of that trail.



2.5 Downtown Enhancement

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Downtown La Crescent is the heart of the community - its economic and civic center, but there are mixed feelings about its quality and attractiveness. This section of the plan should be used by City officials, business owners and developers to inform development decisions and infrastructure design.

Vision Statement

The Downtown area is thriving, with activity from morning to evening. A series of new buildings and uses have brought energy to the community and enhanced the character of the place while retaining a small town feel. Streetscape improvements, including more trees, planting beds, corner bumpouts and crosswalks have defined the downtown area and made it a very pleasant place to visit and walk around. Downtown is recognized as a central trailhead for river and bluff adventures, with convenient parking and safe walking and biking connections to popular trails.

Issues & Opportunities

The current planning process revealed the following issues and opportunities related to downtown enhancement that inform this plan for the future of La Crescent. (These statements are drawn from public comments and survey results and do not represent policy decisions.)

- Residents desire more retail and service businesses in La Crescent, especially sit-down restaurants and breakfast/café options.
- Residents value the existing downtown businesses, especially the grocery store and hardware store, but would like longer and more uniform hours of operation.
- Existing downtown development has weak urban form, including a prevalence of front yard parking, and single-story buildings with small windows facing the street. These characteristics don't attract visitors.
- Many residents wish to retain a small-town feel in the downtown area, as compared to and distinct from downtown La Crosse.
- Most area residents are comfortable with multistory buildings downtown (only 8% of survey respondents "opposed" or "strongly opposed").
- There is sufficient convenient parking downtown for current uses - 88% of survey respondents rated parking convenience "adequate" or "excellent".
- People like and want to maintain/restore trees and landscaping in the downtown area.



Goals & Objectives



Downtown Enhancement Goal 1

New development on Main Street and Walnut Street in the Downtown Core will have urban character appropriate to La Crescent.

Strategies:

1. Most new buildings in these locations will be built to the sidewalk and all within 10' of the sidewalk
2. New buildings in these locations will generally be at least 24' tall on all sides, and will include at least two functional stories
3. All new buildings and significant renovations of existing buildings will have a large percentage of clear glass windows along the ground floor street façade to increase visual connections to and from the street
4. There will be no off-street surface parking within 50' of an intersection and no parking that is closer to the street than an adjacent building.



Downtown Enhancement Goal 2

Downtown streetscaping will be improved to define and enhance the downtown character

Strategies:

1. Improve key downtown intersections with corner bumpouts to slow traffic, increase landscaping, reducing the pedestrian crossing distance, and identify the core downtown area.
2. Keep downtown green with street trees, planting beds or grass, and/or planters.
3. Add dedicated bike parking racks throughout the downtown area.





Downtown Enhancement Goal 3

The downtown district will be apparent and accessible to visitors from all directions

Strategies:

1. Improve signage identifying access to downtown, especially from the north.
2. Design, fund and build a pedestrian bridge over 14/61 to connect downtown to the waterfront and provide a visual indicator of downtown's location.
3. New downtown buildings will be visible from the highway due to their height



Downtown Enhancement Goal 4

Downtown activity and retail/service market demand will be increased through the development of more residential units in the downtown area.

Strategies:

1. There will be upper story apartment units in some new buildings in the Downtown Core (Main and Walnut)
2. There will be new multi-unit buildings in a variety of formats (flats, townhomes) and serving a variety of market needs (senior housing, efficiencies, three-bedrooms) constructed in the Downtown Fringe and Downtown Mixed Residential areas.



Downtown Enhancement Goal 5

Parking will remain convenient and free in the downtown area

Objective

1. Customers will be able to find parking within one block of their final destination at most times

Strategies:

1. The City will maintain as much on-street parking capacity as possible to reduce the need for off-street lots, including existing angle parking.
2. The City will improve existing public parking lots downtown, including pavement quality and signage. As opportunities arise, the City will acquire and reserve parcels for additional off-street public parking, typically at the edge of the urban core.
3. There will be routine reminders for downtown business employees to reserve prime parking for customers by parking their own vehicles in secondary lots and streets.



Downtown Enhancement Goal 6

Downtown will be recognized locally and regionally as the civic heart of the La Crescent community

Strategies:

1. Key civic buildings will continue to be located in the downtown core, including City Hall and the library.
2. Downtown streets will be closed for community events in every season, including parades, recreation events, car shows, arts festivals, etc.

