

**2021
-
2022**

Impact Report

ZONING, SURVEYOR AND
LAND CONSERVATION



**Kathleen Stewart, Zoning
Matt Hanewall, Land Conservation
Bryan Meyer, Surveyor**



LA CROSSE COUNTY

Serving the Public

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



The La Crosse County Zoning, Planning and Land Information Department may not always be visible to the public, but the work we accomplish is fundamental to our county.

We ensure that development in the unincorporated parts of the county is sustainable and orderly. This requires a balance between the desire to preserve the rural character of our county with meeting the need for growth. My department oversees what we call “community development.” This encompasses assistance programs for businesses, housing, and the arts, primarily through the county’s Economic Development Fund. Again, the goal is sustainable growth.

Our team oversees updates of permitmaps and processes (fully utilizing GIS capabilities), as well as conducts drone surveys of 14 permitted non-metallic mines to assess the area being mined (expansions or areas of reclamation). The county’s GIS (Geographic Information System) is also administered by this department. GIS is used by property owners, developers, county departments, and others, to provide the clearest and most up-to-date picture of our county possible. We also monitor development in floodplains in our jurisdiction and regulates non-metallic mines.

A big-ticket item we’ve completed over the past year was the adoption of an updated La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan. This document lays out a vision for the future of our county and is a synthesis of public input, staff expertise, and leadership from the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. In 2023, we will remain laser-focused on customer service, and begin work on implementing recommendations from the updated Comprehensive Plan, under the leadership of the county board.

All this important work happens thanks to the team of dedicated professionals who I am proud to work alongside. If you have questions about my department of any kind, please do not hesitate to reach out. We are here to serve the public and enjoy talking about what we do.

Kathleen Stewart, Zoning, Planning and Land Information Administrator
kstewart@lacrossecounty.org

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- Updated of permit maps and processes (fully utilizing GIS capabilities)
- Drone surveys of 14 permitted non-metallic mines to determine the area being mined (expansions or areas of reclamation)

Number of solar panels permits issued from 2019-2020 compared to 2021-2022:

- Attached: 470% increase
- Detached: 377% increase
- Overall: 436% increase

FEMA Community Assistance Visit:

- Staff completed a year long process of assessment of floodplain administration practices. Completing this review ensures that La Crosse County is eligible to continue participation in the flood insurance program.

GIS (Geographic Information System)



Mari Pietz - GIS Coordinator

EXPANDING GIS ACCESS

Two years ago, we moved to a new enterprise licensing model for our Esri GIS software, and that move has paid off. The unlimited licensing has not only decreased annual costs but improved access to tools that many departments can now utilize for their daily work. In 2021 and 2022, the first two years of our 3-year contract under the new licensing model we have increased the number of users from 30 to 50 with no additional costs. In addition to increasing access for other departments, the County now can help staff in town governments also utilize GIS with minimal expense to them.

NEXT GENERATION 911

In September of 2020 La Crosse County along with the other 71 Counties in the state participated in a Next Generation (NG) 911 Readiness Assessment. The results of the data evaluation of our address points, road centerline and emergency service boundaries compared to the adopted NG 911 standards have guided our data and process improvements over the past 14 months. Utilizing WLIP grant funds in 2021 and 2022 we were able to hire a vendor to assist in correcting errors and importing it into a state compliant schema. Since then, we have worked with 911 dispatch staff to continually improve the data.

Planning and Economic Development



Charlie Handy - Community Development Manager

ADOPTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Last update was 2014. This will assist in providing vision and direction for most land use decisions and many other quality of life issues for the residents of La Crosse County. There was significant public input into the drafting of the plan. The document was finalized in May of 2022, and through the process the adoption ordinance was authorized in September of 2022. Staff is now in the process of preparing to assist the County Board in implementing the plan.

ONBOARDING OF NEW STAFF

Dillon Constant, County Planner is an APA Certified Planner and is a graduate of University of Northern Iowa (B.S. GIS) and the University of Iowa (M.S. Urban and Regional Planning). Prior to employment with La Crosse County, he worked as a Community Development Specialist/Planner in Short Elliott Hendrickson (SEH) Inc.'s office in La Crosse.

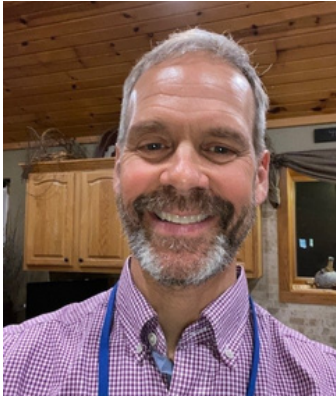
Sam Bachmeier – Community Development Specialist joined the county on Nov. 14, 2022. Sam was born and raised in Eau Claire and moved to La Crosse to attend Viterbo University in 2014 where he earned his bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a Criminal Justice Minor.

STAYING CONNECTED

We are continuing to meet with county towns to introduce staff and discuss zoning and planning issues. The La Crosse County unit of the Wisconsin Towns Association meets quarterly to keep the Towns in communication with each other and provide a nice social gathering. La Crosse County staff and elected officials have an almost constant presence at these meetings, as they are a very nice way to stay in communication with these local officials. Due to a large amount of turnover in the Department, we will be introducing our staff at the next meeting and hoping to generate some conversation and build/ maintain relationships between these organizations.

Protecting Natural Resources

DEPARTMENT OF LAND CONSERVATION



Over the past year the Department of Land Conservation has been busy overseeing the installation of many new conservation practices, strategizing innovative ways to deliver conservation, and refining processes that will forever be changed due to COVID-19. Be it dams, waterways, cover crops, infiltration basins, erosion control matting or silt fencing, continued heavy rainfall events and subsequent erosion has created more demand for our services. To accommodate the increased demand, we have sought out more funding and implemented programmatic efficiencies. Financial sources such as a Department of Natural Resources Targeted Runoff Management grant, American Rescue Plan Act funds and other State and Federal money, have allowed department staff to assist with the installation of a record number of conservation practices. Combined funding sources have brought in over \$2 million of new money for conservation in La Crosse County. We are also collaborating with watershed groups to rethink strategies for improving soil health, water infiltration and the sequestration of carbon. And lastly, we continue to work on ways to refine our permitting process, streamline grant reporting and simplify conservation compliance.

This is an exciting time for conservation! We are witnessing a renewed commitment to our collective conservation ethic. I want to thank the Land Conservation staff for all their hard work and I also want to thank you! Your continued commitment to conservation makes it possible for us to work with local landowners to address erosion and improve water quality.

Matt Hanewall, Land Conservation Director
mhanewall@lacrossecounty.org

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- Conservation staff have assisted with the design and installation of over **4,500 feet** of streambank stabilization and **15 new dams**. Combined funding for all conservation practices in 2022 was approximately \$500,000.
- Soil health, gully erosion and streambank improvements continue to be the focus within the **Bostwick Creek Watershed Targeted Runoff** area. Landowners are participating at an unprecedented rate.
- Flooding, water quality and improvements to public infrastructure are now being addressed with **\$2 million** of American Rescue Plan Act funds. The Stormwater Grant Program received 14 applications totaling almost \$1.5 million in our first application cycle.
- Approximately **1,000 acres of cover crops** were cost-shared in 2022. These cover crops are helping to reduce soil erosion, build soil organic matter and sequester soil carbon.
- The **Coon Creek Watershed** engineering analysis of existing large dams is nearing completion. A Coon Creek Producer-Led Watershed group has also been formed. Innovative cropping and soil management techniques are being tested and shared by neighbors within the watershed.

5 Things to Know



1. The La Crosse Urban Stormwater Group, led by the Department of Land Conservation, advocates for the reduction of runoff pollution and the infiltration of water. Municipal members include: La Crosse County, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, City of La Crescent, Village of West Salem, Village of Holmen, Town of Shelby, Town of Onalaska, Town of Holland and Town of Campbell.

2. The Coon Creek Watershed is our nation's first watershed (1933). To this day, Land Conservation staff continue designing and overseeing the installing of projects within this historic area.

3. 256 Farmland Preservation Participants earn over \$400,000 in annual tax credits by working with staff to meet conservation compliance requirements.

4. 30% and greater slopes are restricted from development through the La Crosse County Erosion Control Land Disturbance Ordinance.

5. 32 watersheds are sampled by Land Conservation staff twice annually for phosphorus and fecal coliform bacteria. Samples have been collected since 1999. Watersheds are assessed and ranked based on the data.

Future Needs and Challenges

- Continued heavy downpours in concentrated areas often cause severe erosion and overwhelm existing infrastructure. Designing conservation practices that accommodate larger volumes of water requires more space and money. In addition, standards do not always require increased design capacity. Selling clients, permittees and municipal partners on the need to provide more space for water can be challenging.
- The demand for conservation practices is increasing. If the County intends to meet future conservation requests more design staff will be needed.
- The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Stormwater Grant Program first round applications exceeded our expectations. It is likely this program will exhaust the \$2 million ARPA allocation before 2026. More ARPA funds could be allocated to address additional community stormwater needs.
- Cost of living increases have caused conservation project installation costs to rise. Existing grant awards and other conservation funding sources have not kept pace. Eventually, additional funding sources will be needed to meet the demand.



Adapting to Change

LA CROSSE COUNTY SURVEYOR



During 2022, the La Crosse County Surveyor's Office experienced many changes and challenges. After five years as Assistant County Surveyor, Corey Hughes accepted the County Surveyor position in St. Croix County mid-way through the year. I truly wish Corey all the best in his new position, and I will miss our daily interactions. As the search began for Corey's replacement, it became evident that land surveying, like many other professions, has a severe shortage of qualified individuals to fill vital roles. I am happy to report that we found a very capable and qualified candidate within the team here at La Crosse County. Dale Hewitt was hired as the new Assistant County Surveyor after serving seven years in the La

Crosse County Zoning Department. Dale had a strong background in surveying before he was originally hired here at La Crosse County, and he has proven to be a perfect fit for our department. His experience and education have already proven to be valuable assets for our department. Dale and I have a similar mindset when serving our customers. We seek to provide quick response times when it comes to map reviews and answering land surveying and land ownership questions. Those questions come from landowners, land surveyors, realtors, and attorneys and other County staff. Our field work also takes us all over La Crosse County as we work to maintain Public Land Survey System corners and provide services for Highway, Facilities, and other County Departments.

In January, I was installed as President of the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors (WSLS). This position has me traveling and speaking to audiences all across the state. WSLS is an organization of over 1000 land surveyors and works diligently to promote the land surveying profession. I am blessed to serve with an amazing Board of Directors and a fantastic Executive Director. Together we achieved much in 2022 and I am looking forward to serving on the Board as past-President in 2023.

I want to thank La Crosse County for all of the encouragement and support I received during my term, especially Administrators Steve O'Malley and Jane Klekamp. Your support means more than you can know.

Bryan H. Meyer, County Surveyor

bmeyer@lacrossecounty.org

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- Preserved the location of dozens of survey marker monuments (property corners) within the right-of-way corridors of CTH M (between West Salem and Barre Mills) and Keppel Road (North of Holmen).
- Performed maintenance work on 75 Public Land Survey System (PLSS) corner monuments.
- Reviewed 61 Certified Survey Maps submitted by local surveyors.
- Took in and filed 221 Survey hard copy maps submitted by private sector surveyors. These maps are indexed and scanned and are now available online.
- Assisted the Highway Department with defining the limits of an excess right-of-way sale on County Road DE and the Facilities Department with locating trails and other items on Goose Island.

5 Things to Know

1. A largely overlooked area of our work has to do with the regular interactions that we have with landowners. A land transaction is not something most folks deal with on a regular basis. Our office serves as a resource regarding next steps and processes when it comes to the transfer of property and/or dividing land. We also do what we can to assist landowners when it comes to property line conflicts.
2. Our local surveyors often reach out to our office with questions regarding ambiguous legal descriptions or uncertain survey information. While we never provide legal advice, we are often able to suggest solutions to those difficult situations and our surveyors appreciate having us as a resource.
3. We work closely with Land Conservation, Land Information, Zoning and Planning with questions on land surveying, land ownership and parcel splits. We also provide assistance and guidance to the Highway and Facilities departments, Register of Deeds and Corporation Counsel.
4. The Public Land Survey System is a network of corners that were established in Wisconsin between 1832 and 1866. That work occurred in what would become La Crosse County between 1844 and 1847. La Crosse County has 1,405 PLSS corner locations. Several years ago, La Crosse County invested heavily to re-establish modern monuments at those corner locations. Our office works to maintain this network of corner monuments which is vital to accomplishing any private sector survey work that is done in La Crosse County. Our goal is to maintain 5% of those markers (71 corner locations). We were successful in reaching that goal in 2022 with 75 corner visits!
5. We serve as the custodian of all La Crosse County survey maps and highway right-of-way maps. We maintain the hard copies of those maps and we also have them available online.

Future Needs and Challenges

Concern: One concerning trend when it comes to land surveying is that landowners in need of survey work are unable to find a land surveyor to come and do needed work in a timely fashion. Many Wisconsin surveyors often have a backlog of work for three months or more. The Profession of Land Surveying, like so many trades, is in need of new surveyors. The average age of a land surveyor in Wisconsin is about 60. As those seasoned veterans retire, we are in need of new land surveyors. In previous years, Corey and I reached out to the next generation by speaking at high school career days and to high school trades classes to ask students to consider land surveying as a career choice. Dale and I will continue that effort in hopes of inspiring students to consider land surveying as a career.

Challenge: The State of Wisconsin has a “lost” western boundary. The line was originally established as the main channel of the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers on May 29, 1848, when Wisconsin became a state. Obviously much has changed over the past 174 years. I am in the process of working with Wisconsin officials and I have reached out to Minnesota officials to see if we can find a resolution to this issue.

Growing Area of Concern/Challenge: Cell phone apps like “onX” are often used to help people determine an approximate location for hiking, hunting, etc. In some instances, people are using the “onX” app to dispute properly surveyed lines. The GPS on a cell phone lacks the accuracy necessary to perform survey grade work. Only a licensed Professional Land Surveyor has the knowledge and highly accurate equipment to accurately locate property lines on the ground. While we haven’t had an issue here in La Crosse County yet, there are reports of cell phones being used by non-professionals attempting to locate property lines in other parts of Wisconsin.



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