



Stoughton Sustainability Planning

Engaging community to develop a shared vision for the future

Situation: Dane County Extension Educators, Sharon Lezberg, Community Development, and Michelle Probst, Natural Resources, were asked by the Stoughton Sustainability Committee to provide information about community engagement. An introductory presentation then led to a request from the committee to assist with community engagement on the development of a sustainability plan for the City of Stoughton.

Response: The Extension educators worked with the Stoughton Sustainability Committee to develop an engagement plan that included focus groups, a survey, and a community wide sustainability dialogue. Each of these activities provided opportunities for the community to share ideas on how to make Stoughton a more sustainable community. The survey provided a baseline on community values, ideas, and concerns that pertain to sustainability. 594 residents completed the survey and 237 provided text responses for how to make the city more sustainable. Focus groups with educators, businesses, environmental groups, and anchor institutions provided more nuanced perspectives. The dialogue engaged nearly 50 residents in small group discussions in a variety of issues areas. The conversations provided input on educational opportunities, advancing solutions, reducing barriers, fostering community leadership, and collaboration and partnerships.



Stoughton Sustainability Committee

The Extension team worked with Committee members to design each of these engagement processes. Extension facilitated focus groups and community dialogue sessions, wrote up the results, and provided a report and analysis of the results. The committee discussed the reports and drew conclusions to inform the sustainability report.

Extension educators help communities hold conversations about important issues, identify a shared vision for their future and engage residents. We work with community partners to ensure every voice is heard.

Results: After nearly a year and a half of committee meetings and engagement activities, the Stoughton Sustainability Committee reviewed all the records from the engagement process and generated a list of actions for potential inclusion in the plan. Over 200 actions were identified! The committee hired a consultant to help prioritize and narrow the list down to 50 high impact, achievable actions. The committee then developed prioritization criteria and a scorecard for each recommended action to determine priorities based on potential impact, effort, and equity considerations.

The Sustainability Committee released a draft of the Sustainability Report in February 2024. The report will guide the policies and efforts of city departments, committees, and commissions. The report identifies local and regional partners for collaboration and implementation. The plan identifies goals and outlines priority actions and is grounded with an equity lens.

Participants at the Sustainability Dialogue evaluated the event highly, indicating it was beneficial and timely. Comments from the survey indicated the majority of respondents were very supportive of the City initiating a sustainability plan. And residents indicated they are concerned about climate change and want the City to be leading.

While Extension’s role in the process has not yet been formally evaluated, there are several outcomes that are noteworthy:

- New partnerships have been formed with County departments, non-profit organizations, and businesses that will support implementation of the sustainability recommendations.
- Committee members learned how local government works and built skills in facilitation and public engagement.
- The committee was nominated for the 2023 Sustain Dane ‘Live Forward’ awards that acknowledges change-makers who are locally promoting thriving sustainability, community healing, and resiliency.
- The Sustainability Committee Chair received a scholarship to travel and present at the Midwest Climate Resiliency Conference in 2023.

UW-Madison Extension brought valuable expertise to help us gather and understand the perspectives of our community. The process was professional, research-based, inclusive, and engaging. This was an essential piece to inform the writing of our sustainability plan.”
~ Sustainability Committee Chair



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