Village of Elm Grove

A Sustainability Plan

for the Village of Elm Grove

MAY 2025

Prepared by: Erik Heisel, Hannah Keckeisen, Rose Melton, Eli Norlander, Adam Schumacher

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MILWAUKEE
School of Architecture & Urban Planning

"We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."
- Chief Seattle

Acknowledgments

Thank You

We would like to thank our clients, Deb, Natalie, and Tom for providing their expertise and excitement for this plan. Thank you to the Elm Grove Sustainability Committee for welcoming us to your meeting and providing guidance during our planning process.

As we completed our case studies, we also had the opportunity to communicate with other planning professionals who have furthered sustainability efforts in their communities. Thank you to the representatives at the City of Ashland, the City of Sun Prairie, the City of Eau Claire, the City of Oconomowoc, and the Village of Shorewood for providing detailed information on funding, programming, and initiatives that are improving communities every day.

Additionally, we would like to thank residents who participated in the sustainability interest survey, as well as municipal representatives and community advocates who provided high-quality feedback in our focus group. Public participation is the cornerstone of plan development and helps guide recommendations, polices, and programming.

Cover Page Image Source: Lisa Heisel

Report Prepared For:

The Elm Grove Sustainability Committee

Deb Baesemann

Tom Castile

Natalie Schneider

Planning Team:

Erik Heisel

Hannah Keckeisen

Rose Melton

Eli Norlander

Adam Schumacher

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Instructor:

Carolyn Esswein, FAICP, CNU-A

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
MILWAUKEE

School of Architecture
& Urban Planning

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The Framework

High Level Overview of Our Process

The Sustainability Team completed a detailed planning process throughout the spring 2025 semester for the Applied Planning Workshop course. Working with the clients, the Sustainability Subcommittee (the Sustainability Committee) for the Village of Elm Grove, the team crafted a problem statement, scope of work, and goals for the Sustainability Plan. The team also reviewed current conditions of the Village ranging from municipal code to the existing sustainability programs.

Following this review, the team selected five municipalities that currently implement sustainability programs and initiatives to analyze for case studies. These communities provided examples of lessons learned and a potential road map for success.

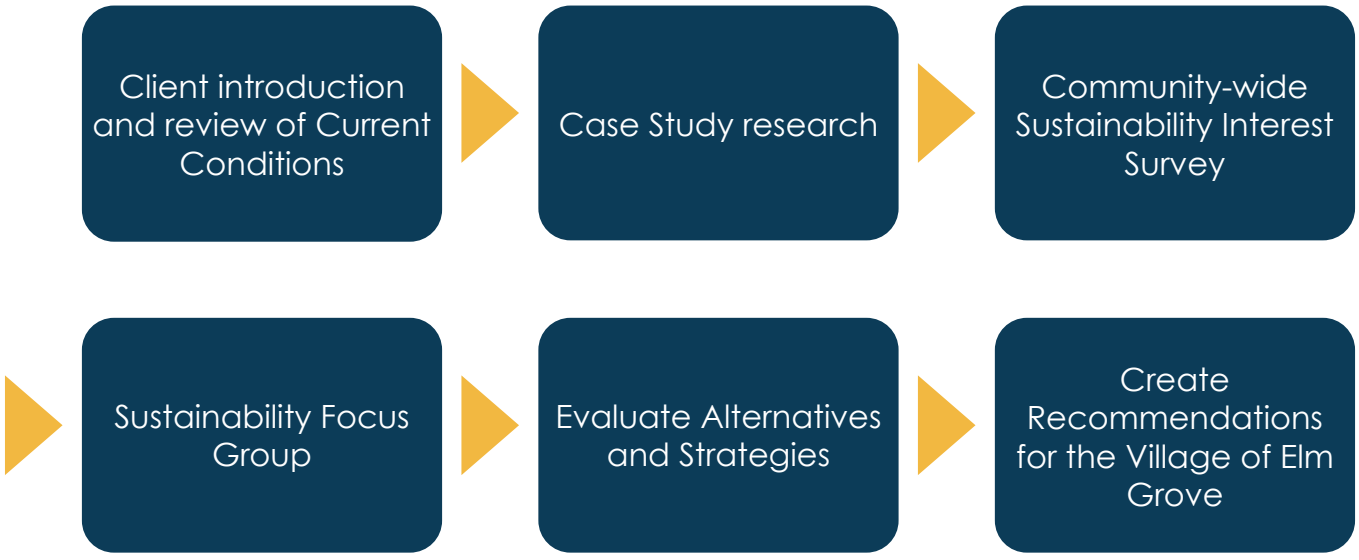
The Sustainability Team completed a comprehensive public participation plan including a sustainability interest survey, a focus group, and a final review of recommendations by the clients. Current conditions, case studies, and public participation guided the alternatives and final recommendations for the Village. To assist with implementation, recommendations were organized into the following timelines: Seeds (0-2 years), Trees (3-6 years), and Groves (6+ years). This document acts as a guide for the Sustainability Committee to create positive, sustainable change in the Village.

Seed

Tree

Grove

Our Strategy



Problem Statement

The Village of Elm Grove lacks a defined strategy to channel the community's passion and expertise for sustainability into feasible and long-lasting initiatives. Sustainability planning from other communities inspires the Village, but they need community-tailored research and recommendations to begin their own. Creating structured Sustainability Strategies for the Village of Elm Grove will build on existing momentum, set clear priorities, and implement meaningful sustainability policies at a municipal level.

Goal 1 - Municipal Actions

Enhance the Village's ability to benefit residents, conserve resources, and improve environmental quality through sustainable municipal policies and strategies.

Objective 1.1 - Recommend updates to municipal codes to incorporate sustainable practices.

Criteria

- Recommendations will align with emerging best practices and local examples for incorporating sustainability into codes and ordinances.
- Recommendations will provide clear pathways for implementation and adherence within the existing regulatory framework.
- Recommendations must have evidence of political support by aligning with existing policy priorities or public participation input.

Objective 1.2 - Recommend updates to municipal operations to incorporate sustainable practices.

Criteria

- Recommendations will demonstrate cost-effectiveness through case studies, financial projections, or past successful implementations.
- Proposed changes will reduce environmental impact while maintaining or improving service efficiency.
- Proposed changes will be feasible given current municipal staffing, expertise, and resources.

Objective 1.3 - Recommend updates to municipal plans to incorporate sustainable practices.

Criteria

- Recommended strategies will modernize Village plans and enable implementation
- of current sustainability best management practices.
- Recommended updates will integrate sustainability in Village plan development, resulting in cohesive priorities across planning documents.

Goal 2 - Community Programs

Create initiatives that engage residents, enhance community collaboration, and empower local behavior changes for a Sustainable Elm Grove.

Objective 2.1 - Maximize opportunities for placemaking in the Village of Elm Grove and celebrate local sustainability successes.

Criteria

- Recommendations will help the Village of Elm Grove achieve local and state recognition for sustainable initiatives through awards and certifications.
- Initiatives will leverage features that residents already value in the Village, including the Underwood Creek, Village Park, trees, walkability, and open space.
- Public spaces will be designed and activated in a way that is more sustainable, welcoming, and valued by the community.

Objective 2.2 - Motivate leaders, organizations, and stakeholders throughout the Village to create and strengthen partnerships and lead sustainability efforts.

Criteria

- Recommendations will identify (local and regional) partners and stakeholders that can carry out programs and initiatives successfully.
- Identified leaders will actively engage residents across age groups and support opportunities for collaboration through inclusive programs, events, or initiatives.
- Recommendations will integrate Elm Grove programs with other regional and local sustainability organization goals.
- Proposed activities will establish relationships between residents of surrounding communities and Elm Grove residents.

Objective 2.3 - Empower residents, contractors, property owners, and businesses to take sustainable action through education, engagement, and community-driven initiatives.

Criteria

- Educational efforts will generate consensus in the community for future policy and code changes that increase sustainability in the Village.
- Recommended initiatives will reflect local priorities and existing community strengths by centering public input.
- Recommendations will lead to increased sustainable behavior, local engagement, and habit changes in Elm Grove.

Objective 2.4 - Identify funding sources to expand Village programs and initiatives.

Criteria

- Funding sources will align with current and/or future initiatives that the community desires.
- Funding sources will be renewable and able to sustain a program beyond creation.
- The process of applying for and administering funding will be manageable for Village staff.

Source: Wisign Photo - Image of the Elm Grove Village Center Sign

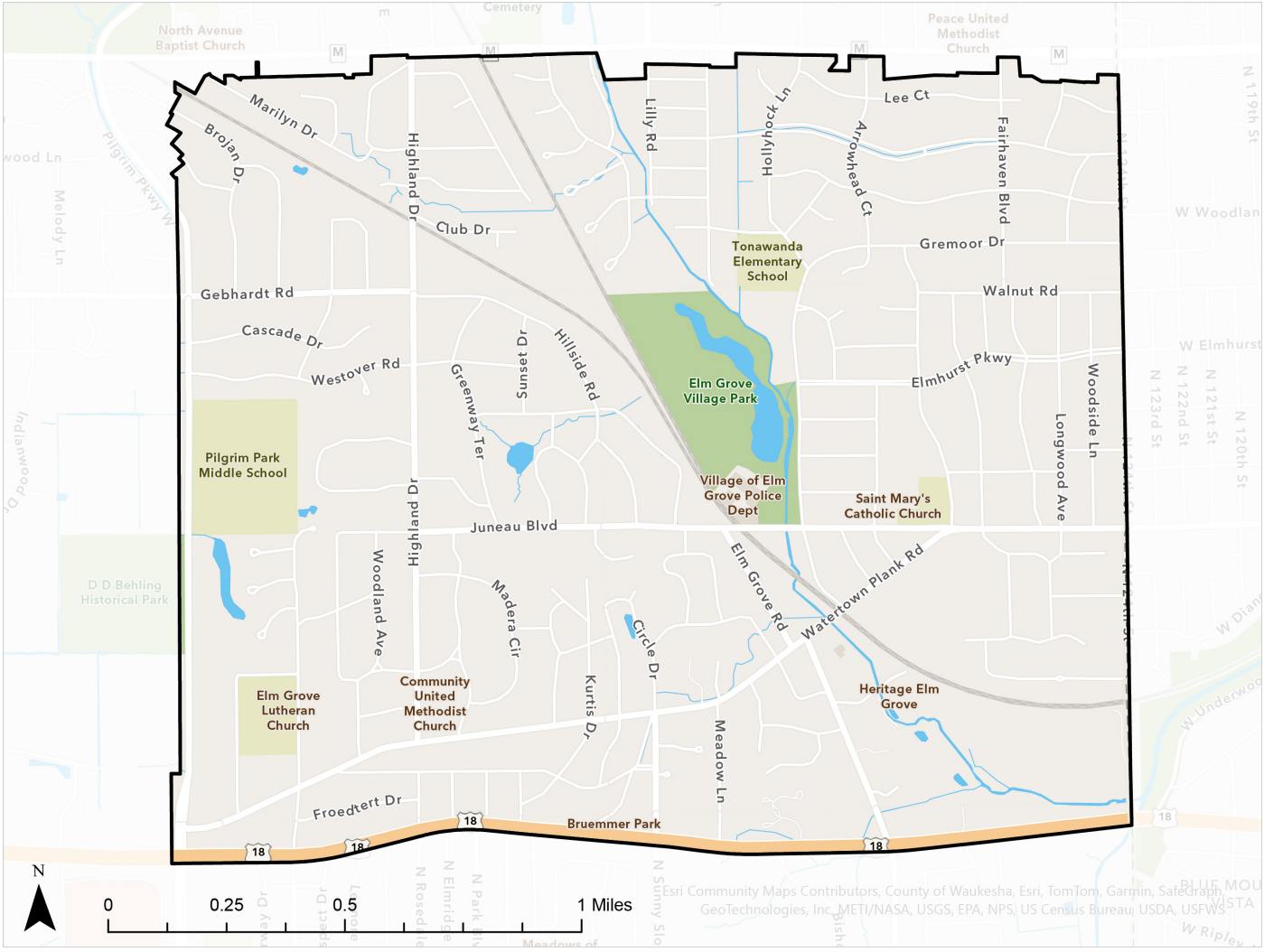
Chapter 1:
An Introduction to Elm Grove

Introduction

Located less than 10 miles from the shores of Lake Michigan, the Village of Elm Grove is home to around 6,500 residents.[1] The community has preserved the natural landscape and seeks to increase sustainability within the Village. Elm Grove has the opportunity to create ambitious goals towards a more sustainable future. This plan serves as a guide for creating comprehensive strategies for a healthy, resilient, and environmentally responsible community.

The Village of Elm Grove lacks a defined strategy to channel the community's passion and expertise for sustainability into feasible and long-lasting initiatives. Sustainability planning from other communities inspires the Village, but they need community-tailored research and recommendations to begin their own. Creating structured sustainability strategies for the Village of Elm Grove will build on existing momentum, set clear priorities, and implement meaningful sustainability policies at a municipal level.

Map 1: The Village of Elm Grove



What Does Sustainability Mean to You?

The Sustainability Team surveyed residents to create a local, Village-specific definition of sustainability. According to the Elm Grove residents, sustainability means:

Village-Specific Definition
Recycling and waste reduction
Native plants and green infrastructure
Improving air quality and water quality

Additional local priorities included protecting natural resources and biodiversity, resource conservation, and stormwater management. When asked their top three sustainability-related outcomes, survey respondents focused on those relating to the natural environment and conserving resources.

Outcomes relating to economic and cost benefits were the secondary priority of respondents, and the fewest respondents prioritized social outcomes These findings align with residents' interest in preserving habitat, ecosystems, and natural beauty in the Village. Appendix A provides additional details on survey results.

Source: Wisign Photo - Elm Grove nature photo

The Triple-Bottom Line

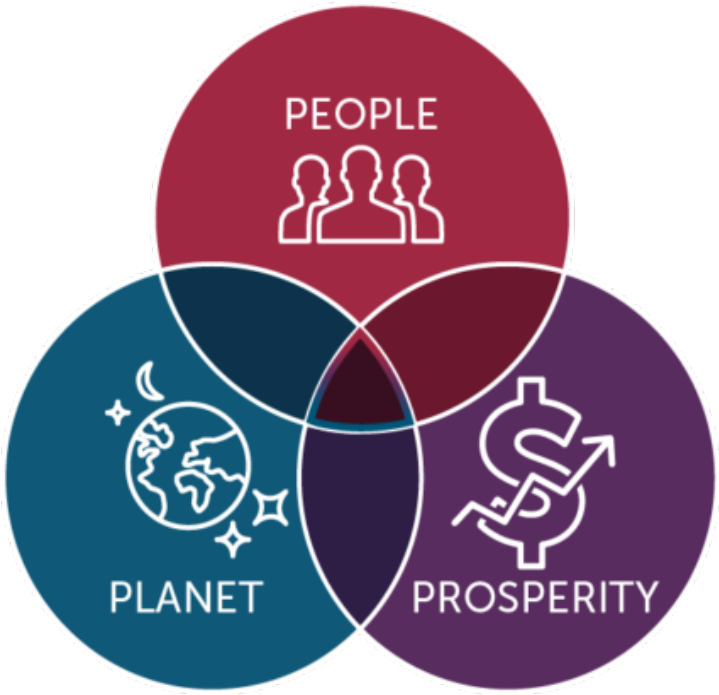
Understanding these priorities is important to ensure that this plan's recommendations advance community interests. However, residents do not have to settle for strategies that only improve one of these areas. The Village of Elm Grove can advance strategies that serve environmental, economic, and social interests. In fact, the "Triple Bottom Line" offers that comprehensive sustainability polices will work together to provide benefits across all three areas.

Triple Bottom Line[2] is a sustainability framework that examines social, environmental, and economic impacts. Success cannot be defined by monetary profit alone, but true success also considers the impact on the planet and the people within a community.

Sustainable practices and implementation can increase the quality of life for current and future residents in the Village of Elm Grove. Strategies and recommendations within this plan include evaluation based on the triple bottom line.

The Village of Elm Grove has an enthusiastic and engaged community with dedicated members of the Sustainability Committee who are looking to make positive impacts. This plan creates a detailed framework for the Village to implement low-cost, easy-win strategies as well as goals that can push boundaries and set the standard for sustainability with the Village and southeast Wisconsin.

The Triple Bottom Line

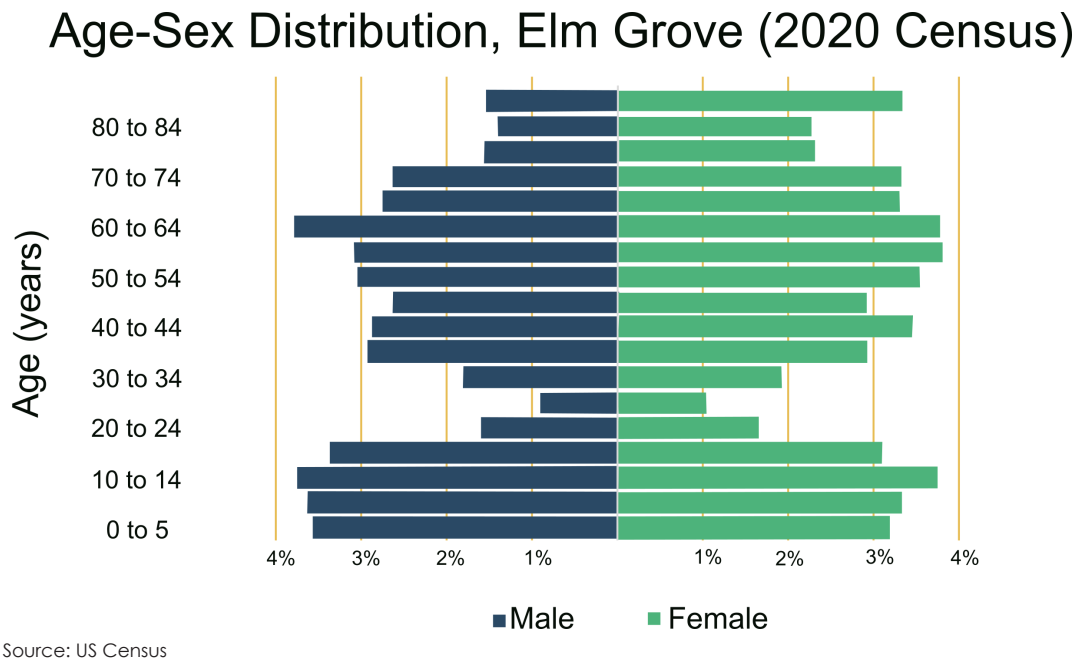


Source: UW-Extension - Triple Bottom Line

Village Demographics

As a community, the Village of Elm Grove has high levels of both household income and education. In 2023, local median household income exceeded $133,000 annually.[3] Median home value in the Village is around $468,000.[4] For residents 25 years of age and older, more than 99% have a high school diploma and around two-thirds have a bachelor's degree or more. High levels of household income and education indicate potential financial and technical resources that can advance sustainability in the Village.[5] To obtain an investment of financial resources from residents, encouraging philanthropic opportunities or offering programs that excite residents will be essential for the success of future recommendations.

The Village's population shows a higher distribution of older residents (50 and older) and younger residents (15 and younger). Fewer young adults and working age people live in Elm Grove. This population distribution creates opportunities to center intergenerational connections. The Wisconsin Department of Administration projects that the population in the Village will decline slowly over the next two decades, and is expected to drop below 6,000 residents by 2050. To stabilize or grow the local population, Elm Grove may seek strategies that attract and retain younger residents to the Village.[6,7]



Source: US Census

Committee Structure and Funding

Elm Grove's Sustainability Committee was the main contact for this planning project. The Committee was first formed in 2023 as a sub-committee of the Public Works and Utilities Committee. As a subset of Public Works, Sustainability Committee members provide guidance on projects that are approved by Public Works. Any recommendations it proposes must have the support of Public Works before advancing to the full Board of Trustees. The municipal code allows up to eight members on the Sustainability Committee plus one Village trustee sitting on the Public Works Committee. Members are self-nominated and then are appointed by majority vote of the Board of Trustees. This group does not receive any funding allocation from the Village, but through its textile collection program has built a small budget of around $1,200.

Elm Grove Vision

The Village of Elm Grove Seeks to become a pioneer community for sustainable programs, initiatives, and municipal action.

Source: Canva - Graphic

The Sustainability Team and Committee

Source: Eli Norlander

Sources

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(7) Population Projections. WI Department of Administration. (2024). https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx
Source: ChatGPT for descriptive sentences.

Images:
Triple Bottom Line: https://uwex.wisconsin.edu/stories-news/triple-bottom-line/

Source: Wisign Photo - Legion Park

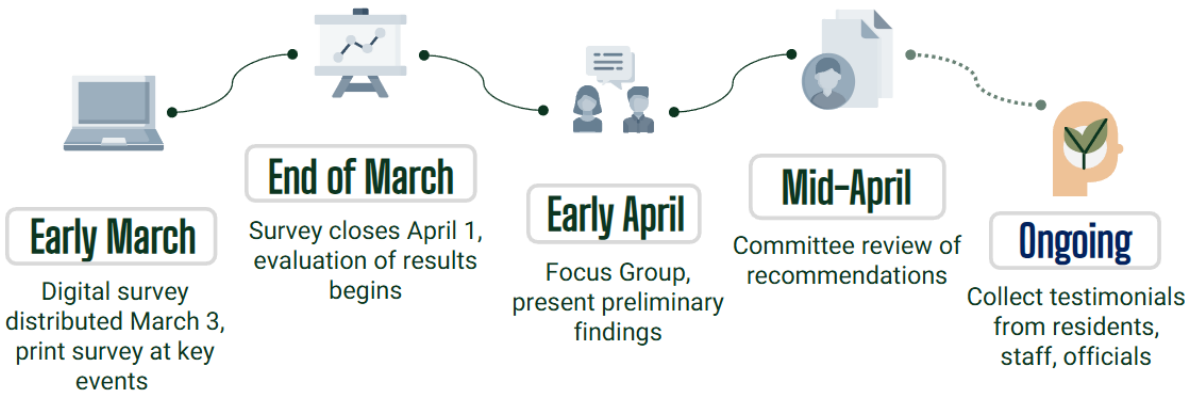
Chapter 2:
Public Participation

Public Participation Overview

Engaging the public was a primary focus during the planning process, as the Sustainability Team sought to offer community-tailored strategies and recommendations for the Village. To accomplish this, the planning process needed to determine local views and priorities related to sustainability. This decision led to a public participation-heavy planning process with two main components: a community-wide survey and a focus group. The survey aimed to measure current attitudes, uncover resident priorities, and establish a local definition of sustainability. After a local definition was identified, alternatives were crafted to align with Elm Grove's vision of sustainability.

To better understand how these alternatives might be implemented, the Team invited local stakeholders to participate in a focus group. Village staff, business owners, and key community members were asked to discuss their priorities, concerns, and whether the alternatives might be feasible in Elm Grove. Findings from the survey and focus group (Appendix A), were incorporated into many of the plan's recommendations. Lastly, the Sustainability Team provided preliminary recommendations to the Sustainability Committee members for final review and feedback and incorporated suggestions into final recommendations.

Public Communication Timeline



Community Interest Sustainability Survey

The Village of Elm Grove Sustainability Interest Survey was created on the platform Qualtrics (See Appendix A). This survey included twelve multiple choice questions and two optional write-in response opportunities. A flyer and graphic including a QR code to access the survey was distributed in the following locations and outlets.

- The Elm Grove Green Team Facebook Page
- QR code and physical surveys at the March 12th Women's Book Club event
- QR code and physical surveys at the March 19th Beautification Committee Lecture
- Poster displayed at Village Hall during the April 1st election
- Poster displayed at Village Hall between March 12th and April 1st
- Elm Grove Sustainability Committee Monthly Email newsletter

Almost all survey respondents were Village residents, and many have lived in Elm Grove for a decade or more. The ages of respondents closely aligns with general population trends in the Village (most were 40 to 79 years old). When asked to describe their willingness to contribute to sustainability, most respondents were willing to change their personal habits, share information, and volunteer their time.

Total Survey Responses

366
Participants!

Survey Flyer

Top Programs with the Highest Reported Participation:
1. Annual Recycling Day
2. Native Tree, Plant, and Shrub sale
3. No Mow May

Key Survey Takeaways

One of the key questions survey participants were asked used ranked choice to determine their top three most important sustainability outcomes. These results allowed a prioritization of the strategies and programs. The Sustainability Team used this valuable feedback to guide the recommendations for the plan. The top ranked outcome, "well-managed stormwater runoff and high-quality surface water" led to a number of recommendations targeting green infrastructure.

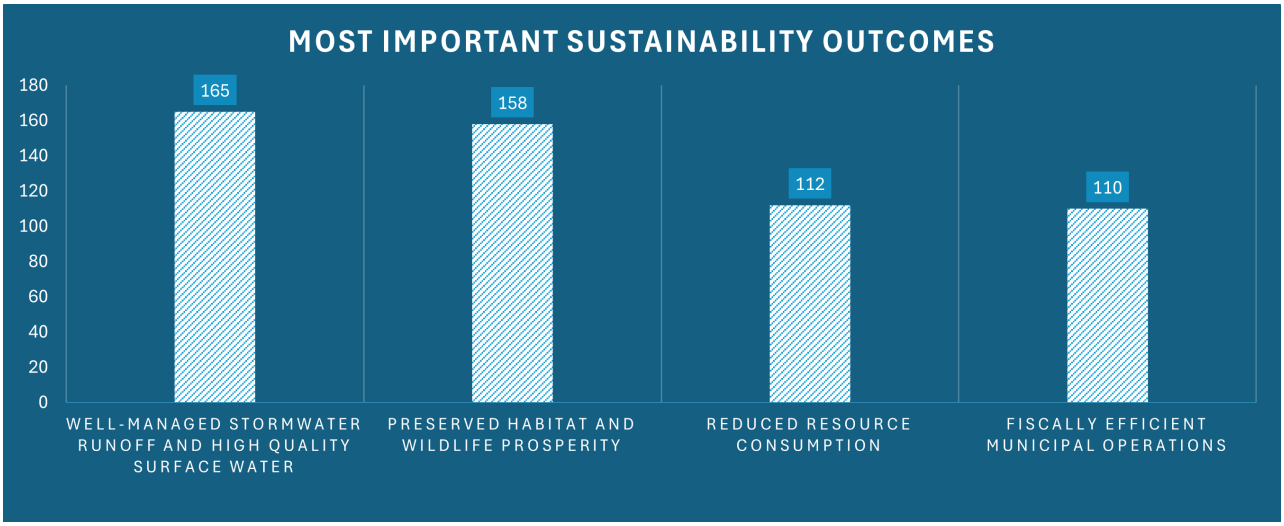
These options also corresponded with aspects of the triple bottom line. The top four most often ranked choices included at least one quality of life choice (well-managed stormwater runoff), one environmental benefit (preserved habitat and wildlife prosperity), and one from economic prosperity (fiscally efficient municipal operations). This mixture of triple bottom line benefits shows that sustainability can be approached from all angles and strategies should be encompassing all three. The chart below shows the distribution of responses.

Top Opportunities to Grow Programs (Lowest reported participation)

1. Winter Lecture Series
2. Lights out Elm Grove
3. Plastic Bag Reduction

Participants were asked about how they heard about the Village's programs. Newspapers, newsletters, and social media proved to be effective forms of communication. Nearly 60% of participants primarily received information over newspaper or newsletters; social media reached half. Around one-third of respondents had heard about the Sustainability Committee's initiatives from a friend or family member or attending an event at Elm Grove parks.

The last question on the survey asked which strategies the Sustainability Committee should prioritize over the next five years. Each priority that participants identified has been addressed by at least one recommendation. Very few stated that the Village's current efforts were sufficient, which supplies reaffirms the Village's decision to develop a Sustainability Plan.



Write-in Response Themes

Write-in responses provide an opportunity for participants to suggest new ideas and initiatives. In these testimonies, a number of common themes were frequently mentioned across multiple individuals. These themes can be categorized into three groups.

Environmental

- Love to see the Village reduce their pesticide use on grass areas in park and parkways and in pond.
- More trails and paths for biking
- Plant milkweed & flowers for monarchs

Energy

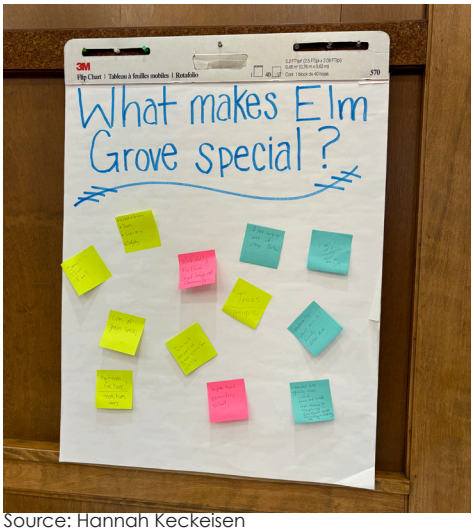
- Energy efficiency within government: permeable Village surfaces rather than asphalt, green or solar roofs
- Promote solar panels and batteries in Village government, local businesses, apartments, and homes.
- Would love to see a dependable power grid and opportunity for City water.

Municipal Operations

- Positive signs about sustainability along popular paths in Village.
- More recycling and hazardous drop off opportunities. Including batteries, appliances, paints, household chemicals.
- Village composting pick-up (in addition to trash and recycling)
- Support the educational efforts but scrutinize changes to ordinances and Village operations if there is a cost increase in operations.
- The highest priority should be fiscal management of any sustainability project and proven results.

Source: Canva - Graphic

Elm Grove Sustainability Focus Group



Source: Hannah Keckeisen

Source: Eli Norlander

Event Summary

In an effort to engage community and municipal stakeholders in shaping sustainability priorities, the Sustainability Team hosted a focus group event with 14 participants. To kick off the event, participants were asked, "What makes Elm Grove special?" A few clear themes emerged from this exercise. Residents value Elm Grove's unique character, especially its abundant trees, wildlife, walkability, and strong sense of community.

Once everyone was settled, the Sustainability Team presented findings from case study reviews, preliminary results from the community wide survey, and an overview of potential alternatives. After the presentation, participants were divided into two focus groups to provide feedback on these alternatives. One group was made up of community members with a passion for sustainability in the Village, while the other included Village staff with expertise in municipal operations.

Municipal Actions

Conversations with Village staff showed clear enthusiasm for expanding Elm Grove's sustainability efforts and becoming a leader in this area. While staff acknowledged the challenges of limited budgets and staffing, they emphasized that even small steps can lead to meaningful long-term change. They also expressed a strong preference for the Village to lead by example by adopting practical strategies and sharing information, while remaining open to introducing new regulations as needed. Their goal was to support residents in making sustainable choices through education and clear resources.

Source: Eli Norlander

Energy efficiency efforts focused on expanding ongoing upgrades to LED lighting in Village buildings and gradually updating outdoor lighting on public properties.

Water quality was a major concern, particularly in Underwood Creek and the Village stormwater pond. Underwood Creek recently received a failing grade from Milwaukee Riverkeeper, a regional advocacy group, and the connected Village pond experiences recurring algae blooms.

Municipal Actions Priorities Discussed:

- Educational Materials to Support Sustainable Practices
- Upgrading Village Facilities to Increase Energy Efficiency
- Surface Water Quality - Underwood Creek & Village Pond
- Composting as Cost Efficiency
- Sustainable Downtown Development

Composting emerged as a practical way to reduce trash removal costs. The Village pays per ton of waste, including grass clippings, and a recent audit revealed high levels of food waste in household trash. A composting program could reduce landfill use, lower methane emissions, and save money.

Staff also discussed ways to encourage sustainable growth, such as offering incentives for green development and integrating green infrastructure for stormwater management. There was additional interest in including wayfinding and low maintenance educational tools throughout the Village to promote awareness and engagement.

Community Advocates

Community advocates and residents of Elm Grove held an engaged discussion that touched on several key themes. They emphasized the value of expanding opportunities for community involvement in sustainability, especially programs that engage children and young families. The group also discussed ways to encourage philanthropic giving from residents to support sustainability efforts in the Village. Finally, they explored how to balance respect for property rights with the need for clear expectations for residents, property owners, and businesses

Source: Eli Norlander

Residents identified downtown redevelopment planning as a priority for the Village. The Caroline Heights development was used as an example of the need to better understand the scope and responsibilities involved in new projects. Sustainable development topics discussed included stormwater management, efficient energy use, and addressing lighting at night. While participants recognized that regulations can help set clear expectations for property and business owners, the group emphasized that educational programs, especially those aimed at young people, would be the most effective way to build long-term community support for sustainable development.

Community Advocates Priorities Discussed:

- Community Education Initiatives
- Sustainable Downtown Development
- Outdoor Classrooms and Natural Learning Environments
- Energy Resilience During Extreme Weather

When discussing outdoor educational opportunities, the group preferred natural learning environments that support hands-on experiences over traditional outdoor classrooms. They explored ways outdoor learning could be included in the curriculum, such as sharing personal experiences, creating photo journals, and participating in projects like removing invasive species. Budget limitations and safety concerns were noted as possible challenges. However, participants suggested that support from parent teacher associations could help fund and sustain these efforts.

Energy resilience was another important topic. Residents expressed concern about power outages caused by severe weather and downed power lines. The group discussed the potential benefits of placing power lines underground, both to prevent outages and to reduce the need for trimming trees near overhead lines. Participants also shared personal experiences with the challenges of obtaining permits for solar panels and home generators. Streamlining the permitting process could help support the use of renewable and backup energy sources.

Shared Takeaways and Opportunities

Education
Both focus groups agreed that community-wide education is essential for building long-term sustainability in the Village of Elm Grove. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating educational elements into events that already draw strong community participation, such as the beer garden, as well as creating new events like movie nights to reach a broader audience. Smaller and more frequent opportunities to engage residents, along with passive tools like signage, were also identified as effective ways to raise awareness. Youth involvement is important for fostering lasting community engagement with sustainability efforts.

Clear Expectations
In addition to education through community events, businesses and property owners could benefit from clear guides and informational materials to support sustainable practices. While regulations may play a role, guidance from the Village, particularly through the building board, could help residents make informed choices while respecting property rights. It was also clear that the current permitting process creates barriers to implementing sustainable upgrades. Making the process more straightforward could help residents and businesses take meaningful action more easily.

Green Infrastructure
Green infrastructure is widely recognized as a best practice for managing stormwater runoff and could help improve local water conditions. In addition to environmental benefits, these features can enhance the visual appeal of public spaces and offer opportunities for community education. The Village could work with MMSD to develop strategies and access funding to install green infrastructure on public property. For private development, the Village seems to prefer offering incentives to encourage the use of green infrastructure in stormwater management over relying on regulations.

Composting
Composting was recognized as a high priority for the Village. It is a practice that supports community education while addressing environmental concerns related to organic waste in landfills. Composting also presents a clear opportunity for cost savings. A larger Village initiative would need to include education and guidance for residents. For example, the Village could establish expectations for home composting to address concerns about pests and odors.

Community Vision
Together, these discussions reflect a strong commitment among both community members and municipal staff to make sustainability a shared priority in Elm Grove. While each group brought different perspectives, there was clear alignment around the importance of education, practical support, and inclusive engagement. The feedback collected during this event help shape strategies that are responsive to local values and grounded in community collaboration. As Elm Grove moves forward, continued dialogue and partnership will be essential in transforming these ideas into lasting, meaningful action.

Source: Wisign Photo - Village Park

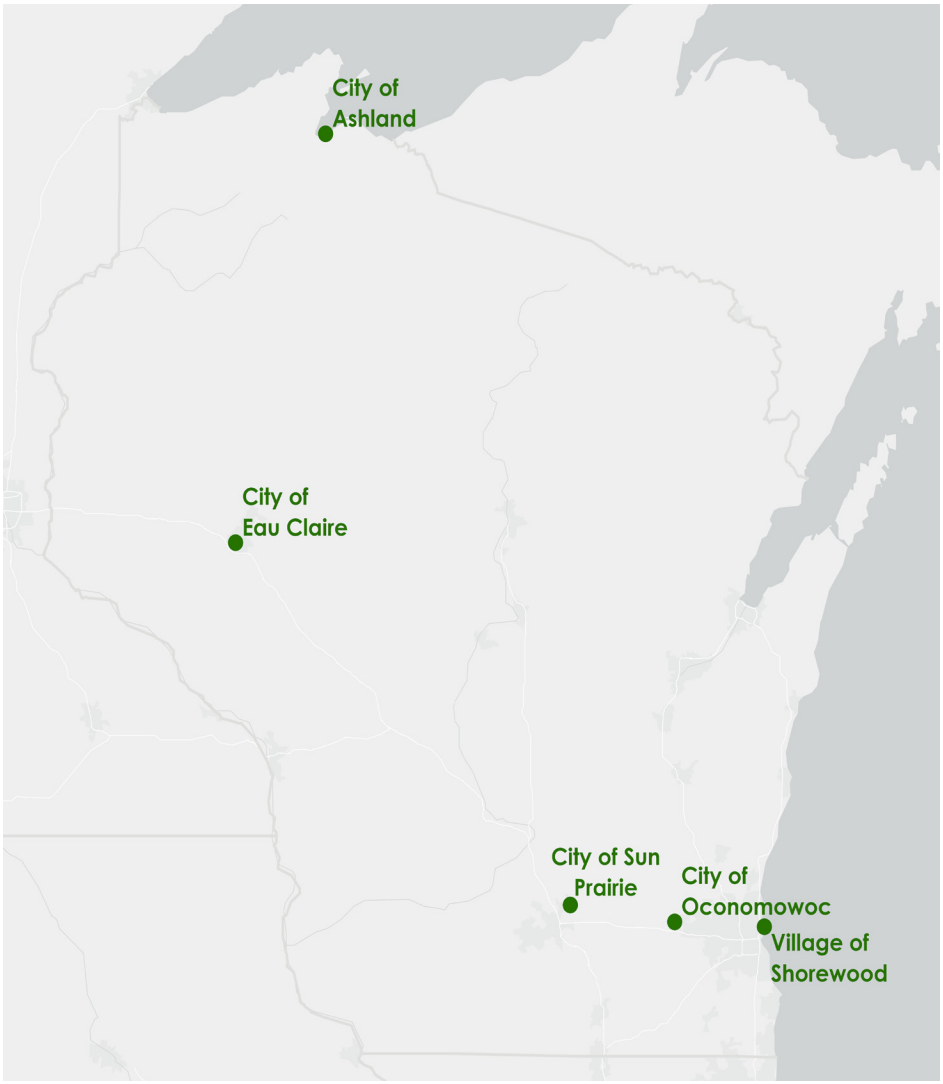
Chapter 3:
Case Studies

Case Study Overview

To understand additional sustainable practices that may be possible in the Village, the Sustainability Team looked to other Wisconsin communities. The next section explores organizational, planning, and programming insights from five municipalities:

- The Village of Shorewood (Milwaukee County)
- The City of Oconomowoc (Waukesha County)
- The City of Sun Prairie (Dane County)
- The City of Eau Claire (Eau Claire County)
- The City of Ashland (Ashland County)

Map 2: Case Study Municipalities



Source: Village of Shorewood - Logo

Source: City of Oconomowoc - Logo

Source: City of Eau Claire - Logo

Source: City of Sun Prairie - Logo

Source: City of Ashland - Logo

By learning from communities near and far, the Village can gain a spectrum of potential strategies to increase sustainability. Communities closer in size and population to the Village offer potential short- and medium-term recommendations. Larger, cutting-edge communities provide strategies for advancing long-term, transformative sustainability practices in the Village. Insights from these case studies help to shape this plan's analysis and recommendations. Appendices B through F provide additional details about each community.

Wisconsin State Law 66.0401 *provides regulation relating to solar and wind energy systems[1]. No political subdivision may place any restriction on the installation or use of solar energy systems, unless the restriction satisfies one of the following conditions:*

- *Serves to preserve or protect the public health or safety.*
- *Does not significantly increase the cost of the system or significantly decrease its efficiency.*
- *Allows for an alternative system of comparable cost and efficiency.*

Descriptions of Common Sustainability Programs

SolSmart This national program provides resources for communities to help increase solar adoption. Communities pass a resolution to become part of the program. Passing solar-friendly policies helps communities reach increasing levels of designation, up to Platinum level.[2]	**Green Tier Legacy Community** This statewide program offered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides a framework for communities wanting to increase sustainability across multiple areas. The program assists with data collection techniques, access to experts, and funding opportunities.[3]
Wisconsin Energy Independent Communities Statewide, Energy Independent Communities have passed resolutions committed to reaching 25% renewable energy for government operations. Some communities have revisited this goal and now aim to reach 50% or 100% renewable energy in coming decades.[4]	**Xcel Energy Partners in Energy Program** Through this public-private partnership, Xcel Energy supports local energy planning efforts. The program also offers plan implementation support and progress tracking.[5]

Village of Shorewood Case Study

Population[6] 13,000 residents	**Economic Characteristics** [7] Median Household Income: $108,159 Median Home Value: $334,700
Size & County 1.6 square miles Milwaukee County	**Sustainability Governing** Comprehensive Plan 2040 Sustainability Action Plan 2012

Background

The Village of Shorewood is located on the western edge of Lake Michigan, north of the City of Milwaukee. Approximately 1.6 square miles, the Village is home to approximately 13,000 residents[7]. Just over 10% of the Village area is made up of park and open space. The Village provides appealing greenspaces, trails and parks, as well as bikeable streets available to its residents year-round. This supports key sustainability strategies in place that focus on creating beautiful and ecologically sound spaces for Village residents. The Village of Shorewood's 2012 Sustainability Plan, Sustainable Shorewood, provides a variety of strategies to promote environmentally sustainable best management practices. A prominent goal of the plan is to reach 25% renewable energy use by 2025.[8]

Planning

Multiple local plans provide strategies to maintain the Village's extensive trails, parks, and natural areas, including the Transportation and Parking Analysis Plan 2020, 2019 Community Survey Results, Vision 2025 (2015), Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan (2015), and Comprehensive Park Plan (2015). Recommendations encourage Complete Street Policies and improving connections to the Oak Leaf Trail – a multi-jurisdictional path that runs throughout the Milwaukee region. Residential survey responses in these plans promote conservation and green initiatives as key priorities. See Appendix B for more details on the Village of Shorewood's plans and codes.

Source: Village of Shorewood - Downtown Photo

Conservation Committee

Shorewood's 2040 Comprehensive Plan, written in 2021, articulates the role of the Conservation Committee is to inform and educate the public about matters related to conserving energy and recycling materials. Goals include attaining a healthier and safer environment in which to live, protecting and conserving valuable natural resources.[7] Re-established in 2007, the 13-member committee discusses topics such as litter pickup, ordinance changes for grass heights, energy efficiency, events like Pollinator Palooza or Film Fest, as well as a variety of others. Residents are able to volunteer to join the committee and are appointed by the Village Board of Trustees as vacancies appear.

Landscaping & Trees

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan provides sustainability recommendations across different City departments. One land use recommendation suggests implementing strategies to buffer existing neighborhoods from new development, such as landscaped or green roofs. An environmental stewardship recommendation suggests preserving the Village's urban tree canopy through regular and judicious replacement. These suggestions from the Village's long-term plan indicate that natural elements are a priority.

Ordinances

The Village promotes green infrastructure in systems by requiring site-specific stormwater management system plans that should consider an analysis of at least two green infrastructure best management practices appropriate for the site.[9] Shorewood complies with this ordinance by analyzing pervious pavement and underground storage options for a local Metro Market, The Oaks of Shorewood Development, and Harbor Chase Development.[10]

Village Code on Recyclable Materials

Under the larger ordinance on solid waste, recycling regulations have it's own article, and articulates the separation of recyclable materials and their preparation, differences in recycling requirements by dwelling size and property type.

Identified recyclable materials per S455-17 include:
Aluminum containers, bimetal containers, corrugated cardboard and other paper board, glass containers, magazines, newspapers, office papers, rigid plastic containers (PETE, No. 1-7 plastics), steel containers, waste tires (brought to drop off center).

Community Programs

In addition to Village code and infrastructure development, Shorewood provides a variety of programs aimed at increasing sustainable initiatives for residents to participate in. One of these includes Shorewood Grows Solar, an initiative partnering the Village with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association in offering residents and business owners an opportunity to participate in a group-buy discount for new solar installations. In 2016, the initiative finished with 52 installations of panels on homes and businesses in the Milwaukee area.[11]

City of Oconomowoc Case Study

Background

The City of Oconomowoc, just 30 minutes west of the Village of Elm Grove, also engages in sustainability strategies. While both communities are part of Waukesha County, the City of Oconomowoc is about four times larger. As nearby neighbors, the two communities have access to similar local partners and resources.

Population[12] 18,682 residents
Size & County 12.43 square miles Waukesha County
Economic Characteristics[12] Median Household Income: $105,833 Median Home Value: $367,700
Sustainability Governing 2013 Lead by Example 25x25 Plan UWM Sustainability Plan

In 2007 and 2008, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation reconstructed WIS 16 through Oconomowoc's downtown. This project caused significant disruption, but the City was able to take advantage of the project and leveraged a number of positive outcomes. These included improved pedestrian improvements, wider sidewalks, and additional landscaping.[13] As the Village of Elm Grove considers downtown redevelopment, the City of Oconomowoc provides examples of thriving business alongside new sustainability features.

Source: Google Maps (2021) - WIS 16 Downtown Oconomowoc

The 25x25 Plan

The Oconomowoc Utilities' Lead by Example Team formed in 2008 thanks to an Energy Independent Communities grant from the State Office of Energy Independence. In 2013, the team produced a 25x25 plan in partnership with several City departments. The 25x25 plan provides baseline data about the City's energy use and provides a road map for energy reductions. By partnering with the Village of Summit, the two communities were able to build an energy efficient, shared fire station starting in 2009. The building serves as an emergency government operations center that also conserves electriCity and natural gas.[14] To help support this project, the City leveraged funding generated from Pabst Farms.

Fire Station Costs

In total, the project cost totaled $2.58 million.[15] The 25x25 plan states the following financial benefits from this project:

- Taxpayer dollars shared between municipalities for shared services
- Reduced capital expenses by combining a Public Safety substation with utility monitoring with a fire station
- Energy efficiency features provide 15% energy savings over the baseline fire station

Energy Efficiency

The City also constructed a new community center building that offers higher energy efficiency. Oconomowoc offers tours of the conservation features at the Fire Station and Community Center, which educates the public about energy efficiency measures.

Source: Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP - Oconomowoc Fire Station No. 2 at Pabst Farms

Many sustainability initiatives led by the City of Oconomowoc originate with the 25x25 plan or the Oconomowoc Utility's work. However, in 2013, the City also partnered with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee to produce a Sustainability Plan. This plan offers the City opportunities related to food, resource conservation, open space, economic development, transportation, energy, and water. Oconomowoc also promotes sustainability through municipal codes, including solar equipment permitting, electric vehicle charging stations, residential density, building design, and more.

Due in part to space limitations in the City's downtown, Oconomowoc increased maximum building height restrictions to up to 70 feet. The City also regulates residential development based on unit density rather than minimum lot or home size. See Appendix C for additional sustainability code details in the City of Oconomowoc.

Community Initiatives

The City's website helps connect residents to a variety of initiatives, including the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program. Collaborative efforts with program partners help protect surface and groundwater quality in the local watershed. The City has a local electric and wastewater treatment utility, which encourages the City to implement energy and water saving initiatives. Residents can access incentive programs through the local public utility, including electric vehicle charger rebates, air conditioning tune-ups, and shade tree planting incentives. Oconomowoc Utilities also participated in a pilot for Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council Green Masters Program. This program offers resources to incorporate environmental, social, and governance actions into their businesses. In the past, the City has engaged community partnerships to put on local sustainability events. For example, the Oconomowoc Chamber of Commerce offered a breakfast to educate attendees about "Green Power."

City of Eau Claire Case Study

Population[19] 69,421 residents	**Economic Characteristics**[19] Median Household Income: $59,350 Median Home Value: $164,800
Size & County 34.14 square miles Eau Claire County	**Sustainability Governing** Comprehensive Plan 2015[20] Renewable Energy Action Plan 2020

Background

In the Chippewa Valley of west-central Wisconsin, about 90 miles east of Minneapolis, lies the City of Eau Claire. Although Eau Claire is significantly larger than Elm Grove, its well-established sustainability initiatives offer transferable strategies and policy insights that can inform sustainability planning in smaller communities.

Source: City of Eau Claire Economic Development - Eau Claire Park and Pedestrian Bridge

Sustainability Leadership

Established in 2014, the Sustainability Advisory Committee guides Eau Claire's sustainability initiatives. The Sustainability Advisory Committee is comprised of ten citizen members and one City council member appointed by the City council. Members serve three-year terms and are selected based on demonstrated interest in sustainable practices. Collectively, the Committee provides policy advice to the City council on environmental matters, aligning with the City's strategic and comprehensive plans. The committee meets monthly and welcomes public participation and plays a vital role in advancing Eau Claire's sustainability goals.[21]

Supporting the committee's work, the City employs a dedicated Recycling and Sustainability Coordinator who leads community programs focused on waste reduction, recycling, and environmental stewardship. This position ensures continuity and professional oversight in implementing sustainable practices Citywide, reinforcing the committee's advisory role with on-the-ground action.

Development Policies

Eau Claire's City code integrates several sustainability-focused requirements to promote sustainable development. For example, project site designs must support pedestrian and bicycle access and circulation. Developers must also incorporate existing landscape and natural features into their site designs.[22]

To support renewable energy adoption, the City conditionally permits wind energy conversion systems in residential, commercial, and industrial districts. Similarly, Eau Claire has implemented a solar ordinance to remove barriers and enable property owners to install solar energy systems. Additionally, accessory dwelling units are permitted as conditional uses. This policy helps provide flexible housing options within the community.

Eau Claire also addresses parking requirements to balance development needs with sustainability goals. Non-residential parking facilities are capped at 25% over the minimum requirement, effectively setting a maximum parking limit. The code also offers parking reductions for planned mixed-use projects that incorporate bicycle parking, are located within 500 feet of a bus route, are situated downtown, or provide a comprehensive parking study. Collectively, these measures aim to reduce reliance on automobiles and promote sustainable urban development.

Plans and Programs

Eau Claire's Renewable Energy Action Plan outlines the City's strategy to achieve carbon neutrality and 100% renewable energy usage by 2050.[23] This plan emphasizes strong partnerships with local utilities and the implementation of solar-ready guidelines to facilitate the adoption of solar energy. The City's efforts have earned it the SolSmart Gold designation, recognizing its commitment to streamlining solar permitting processes and promoting solar-friendly policies.

To support the goals outlined in the plan, Eau Claire has a robust catalog of programs and initiatives to promote sustainability in the community. The City has created and published online resources to help residents adopt a wide range of sustainable practices. These resources cover topics such as clean and efficient energy use, recycling and waste reduction, green building strategies, local food support, and water quality improvement.

With a strong commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the City has set goals for community-wide electric vehicle (EV) adoption. By 2030, the City aims for 10% of all registered vehicles, approximately 8,000, to be electric. To support this transition, the City plans to install around 160 public charging stations, or one station per 50 EVs. (See Appendix D)

Source: Think Eau Claire - City of Eau Claire Downtown River during Sunset

City of Sun Prairie Case Study

Population[24] 37,890 residents	**Economic Characteristics**[24] Median Household Income: $90,521 Median Home Value: $339,800
Size & County 12.93 square miles Dane County	**Sustainability Governing** Comprehensive Plan 2019-2039

Background

Sun Prairie is a suburban community just to the northeast of Madison in Dane County. It is one of Wisconsin's fastest growing communities. The City's medium size and pursuit of innovative practices means Sun Prairie can inspire Wisconsin communities of all sizes to commit to sustainability.

Source: City of Sun Prairie - Impact Areas of Sustainability

Sustainability Committee

The Sustainability Committee was established in 2021 and can consist of 9 to 11 members.[25] One member is appointed by the common council through a majority vote. The remaining members are mayoral appointments. A portion of the mayoral appointments must meet pre-determined requirements. Requirements include one high school student, one school district representative, and two businesspeople. The remaining places are filled by residents at large.

The residents at large must have expertise in relevant areas such as energy, transportation, land use, or environmental protection. Recommended committee members include those involved in the City's Public Works Committee or the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Commission.

The committee meets monthly to advance sustainability initiatives in the City.

Independent from the committee, a dedicated full-time sustainability staff member helps direct municipal-led sustainability initiatives. See Appendix E for more details on the City of Sun Prairie.

Municipal Operations

Beyond its projects for solar, two EV charging stations were installed at Sun Prairie City hall. This infrastructure was added to support the growing inventory of electric and hybrid City vehicles, but it also is free for the public.

In another initiative, effective tracking of the City's salt usage and snow clearing operations allowed Sun Prairie's Department of Public Works to greatly reduce the City's salt usage during winter. Over several years, Sun Prairie's fleet supervisor reduced volumes of salt application and monitored the results. He found that using a brine pre-treatment on roadways could reduce the average salt usage by 200 pounds per mile while maintaining safe travel conditions. The department continues to pursue new equipment and solutions to further reduce salt usage.

Sun Prairie has also been focusing on composting in its City hall. The City partners with a local organization, Green Box Compost to divert paper towels from bathroom garbage to be composted.

Grant Funding

Throughout 2022, Sun Prairie underwent a number of energy-efficiency upgrades using $131,000 in grant funding from the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. The project replaced 728 light bulbs at City Hall with light emitting diodes (LEDs), leading to an estimated $11,000 in annual savings. All ceiling tiles were replaced with insulating tiles made of 81% recycled materials. Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning controls were also upgraded to allow for management of the building's electrical uses. The remaining grant funding purchased the City's EV chargers and vehicles.[28]

Sun-Friendly Zoning

Sun Prairie has a long history of advancing home solar panels; residential solar panels first came to Sun Prairie nearly 20 years ago in 2007. Two new initiatives greatly reduce barriers in the City for widespread implementation of residential solar.

1. In 2024, roof and ground-mounted solar arrays were added as permitted accessory uses across all zoning districts. This builds on an earlier initiative from two years prior.

2. In 2022, the City began using an application website to streamline the permitting process for residents interested in solar. Through the new process, residents complete online trainings to help them verify their home is structurally equipped for solar and to understand their home's electrical equipment and energy storage. Using the information learned, residents input details to the application and can instantly receive approval. This cuts out the previous 9-day waiting period. Solar permit applications have remained high since the permitting process was streamlined. Adopting this new application process earned the City a $15,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

These strategies also helped Sun Prairie become one of two communities in Wisconsin to receive Solsmart Platinum designation.[26,27]

City of Ashland Case Study

Population[30] 7,908 residents	**Economic Characteristics**[30] Median Household Income: $49,258 Median Home Value: $162,200
Size & County 13.4 square miles Ashland County	**Sustainability Governing** Authentic Ashland 2017 Energy Action Plan for Ashland 2021

Background

The City of Ashland is The City of Ashland is located along the shores of Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin. The City offers a wide range of activities ranging from kayaking on Lake Superior, hiking through the forests, bike tours, snowmobile trails, the Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival, or enjoying the historic downtown.

The City of Ashland has prioritized many sustainable initiatives and certifications. While the local context differs from Elm Grove, Ashland's efforts show what sustainability initiatives may be possible in small Wisconsin communities.

Sustainability Committee

The City of Ashland Sustainability Committee was established in 2018 and is a group of concerned residents who would like to see sustainability pursued within City projects and initiatives.[31] This committee provides guidance to the Planning and Development Department and the City Council for priority sustainability projects and initiatives. Currently, there are five members on the committee, and residents can volunteer to join through a simple application process.

Committee initiatives include recycling education, working with the City to upgrade facilities, and the Partners in Energy program, which works with Xcel Energy on energy efficiency and tracking energy use over time.

Municipal Sustainability

The 2022 Budget and Strategic Plan from the City Administrator outlines sustainable and environmental goals as key benchmarks for success. One example is that, by 2025, Ashland will adopt a Climate Change Resiliency and Adaption Plan.[32] This plan will help the City anticipate, prepare for, and respond to adverse climate change impacts. As of April 2025, the City is working on this plan and is in the early stages of the planning process. The budget also outlines that Conservation & Development make up about 2.3% of the General Fund Operations, or about $237,000. Some of the sustainability initiatives are included within this budget item, other projects may be included within the Public Works Departments or General Government.[33]

Source: City of Ashland - Downtown Ashland

Grants received for the City of Ashland Sustainability Initiatives:[33]

- Public Service Commission Rural Energy Startup Program: $75,000 to fund a solar and micro-grid assessment
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Grant: $249,000

The City of Ashland's Comprehensive Plan Authentic Ashland was adopted in 2017.[34] The plan's vision and key goals support a vibrant, environmentally sustainable City. A call to action is made to protect and prioritize the countryside surrounding Ashland so that it will remain visually beautiful and ecologically sustainable. Key principles of the plan include financial self-sufficiency and environmental sustainability, which incorporates the Triple Bottom Line into Ashland's plan.

Sustainable Policies

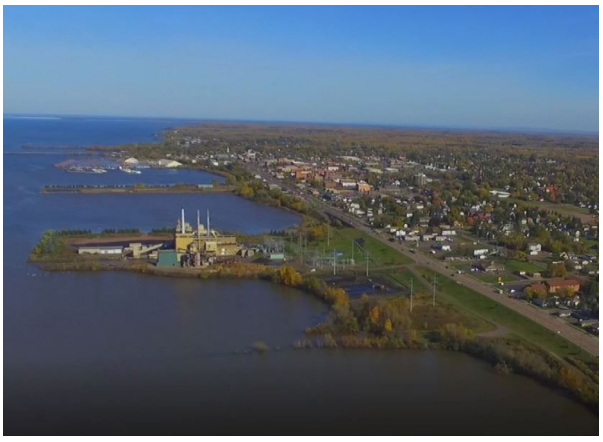
The most unique piece of the City's zoning code are callout boxes within the document that outline sustainability tips. One of the key sustainability tips outlined in the code states, "Accessory dwellings can provide economic and social benefits for the residents of the principal dwelling and the residents of the accessory dwelling." The City of Ashland permits Accessory Dwelling Units as a conditional use in three residential districts. Other conditional or accessory uses that include sustainable practices are duplex units, wind energy facilities, composting, landscaping, and solar equipment. The City's ordinances offer clear permitting and provisions for many sustainable practices. This strategy offers residents clarity and indicates local policy priorities. Detailed ordinances for composting, solar equipment, wind facilities, and bicycles, are outlined in Appendix F.

Community Priorities

In 2017 the City of Ashland completed a Sustainability Survey to identify residents' needs and received 179 responses.[33] Residents prioritized food waste reduction, such as by putting compost in a separate container.

The City of Ashland is also designated as a Green Tier Legacy Community and has been since 2013).[35] Through this Department of Natural Resources (DNR) program, the City can access funding for sustainability projects and implementation strategies.

Ashland's website offers residents a variety of educational materials to help reduce the water utility costs and make the City more sustainable. Some educational pages include compositing, rain barrels, native landscaping design and maintenance, tree plantings, yard care, what not to flush, energy savings, and stormwater management.



Source: City of Ashland - Aerial Photo

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Chapter 4:
Municipal Actions

Municipal Actions Overview

Before developing recommendations for sustainability for municipal actions, the Sustainability Team identified current conditions for municipal sustainability. This review included codes and ordinances related to development practices, Village planning documents, as well as key municipal operations. These current conditions were used as a baseline for creating alternatives and recommendations. After identifying the current conditions and incorporating data collected through the case studies, the Sustainability Team created initial alternatives. Presenting these alternatives at the Focus Group in April provided valuable feedback from municipal representatives and community advocates. Following the Focus Group, new alternatives were drafted and evaluated against a set of detailed criteria (Page 6). Alternatives that passed these criteria became recommendations, which are presented at the end of this chapter.

Goal
Enhance the Village's ability to benefit residents, conserve resources, and improve environmental quality through sustainable municipal policies and strategies.

Objectives
Recommend updates to municipal codes to incorporate sustainable practices.

Recommend updates to municipal operations to incorporate sustainable practices.

Recommend updates to municipal plans to incorporate sustainable practices.

Source: Village of Elm Grove - Municipal Court Room

Village of Elm Grove Zoning Code

What is it?
Elm Grove's Zoning Ordinance promotes the comfort, health, safety, morals, prosperity, aesthetics and general welfare of the Village. The ordinance was originally adopted in 1991 and recodified in 2001. Though the zoning code provides guidance and requirements for the entirety of the Village, the scope of this review focuses on the residential, business, and manufacturing zoning in Elm Grove.[1]

What does it do?
The zoning code regulates use and general restrictions of properties within the Village of Elm Grove. The general intent of the chapter is to regulate and restrict the use of all structures, lands and waters. Regulations include lot coverage and the size and location of all structures to prevent overcrowding and provide adequate drainage.

The zoning code currently defines four single-family zoning districts and two multi-family residential districts. Single-family lot size minimums range from 15,000 square feet to 25,000 square feet and multi-family zoning allows for lots as small as 20,000 square feet.

The Village has three districts designated for business and one for limited manufacturing. Within the limited manufacturing district, the only permitted use is an indoor storage and warehouse facility, and all other uses are conditional.

Elm Grove's current zoning code also describes environmental zoning districts, including the Wetland Overlay District, the Floodway Overlay District, and the Floodplain Fringe Overlay District. These districts provide regulatory requirements that preserve natural resources areas. The districts encourage appropriate uses for the to minimize flood damage during periodic flood events.

Any sustainability currently in the zoning code?
- Building plan review applications require a tree root system preservation plan.
- If increasing density within a development, the selected materials must be utilized in a manner that is harmonious with the natural environment.
- The code allows for parking lots, driveways, or other hardscape constructed using permeable surface to exceed the maximum impervious surface area.

Gaps
The existing residential, business and manufacturing, and environmental districts leave gaps related to sustainability initiatives or practices. Composting, wind energy, solar energy, and dark sky regulations (or guidance) are all examples of items to potentially include in a code. Within the environmental districts, strengthening language in the code could encourage more sustainable practices.

Land Division Ordinance

What is it?
Landowners seeking to divide a parcel of land into multiple lots must submit a plat document to the Village.[1] The plat map diagrams the number and size of lots to be created, and any street extensions needed to serve the new properties. This process allows the Village to anticipate utility and density impacts and direct the orderly use of land. The land division ordinance also establishes the Zoning Administrator and Plan Commission as the authority over approving platting proposals. Setting standards for land division helps limit traffic congestion and ensures access during emergencies. Requests to divide land near natural resources or within the floodplain face extra scrutiny through the land division process.

What does it do?
In a nearly fully developed community such as Elm Grove, it is uncommon for parcels to be divided. When land division is proposed, this article sets the required elements to include in the plat plan which is submitted to the Plan Commission.

Any sustainability currently in the code?
The Village requires applicants seeking a parcel subdivision in a floodplain to submit their application to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. This ensures expert review to consider mitigation needs and allows a proactive approach to flood resiliency.

The chapter's design standards recommend collector streets to be oriented to the broader transit system. This supports circulation optimized for public transportation.

The land division ordinance also recommends the preservation of trees, lakes, and ponds. Additionally, it also states the Plan Commission should maintain ideal sites for schools, parks, and playgrounds.

Source: Canva - Graphic

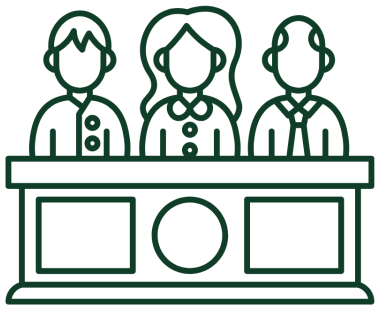
Gaps
- The Zoning Administrator's review of preliminary plats could determine if any potential future residents in each lot will have adequate access to parks and open space.
- In Article VI relating to preservation of trees, lakes, and ponds, text could recommend or require new tree installation when streets or other changes necessitate tree removal.
- A street tree requirement during the platting process ensures newly constructed roadways as a part of a subdivision have tree coverage. This also places tree installation responsibilities and costs on the landowner requesting the parcel subdivision.

Sustainability Committee Ordinance

What is it?
The Village of Elm Grove requires an ordinance for the establishment of a standing advisory committee.[1] These standing committees advise the Village Board on subjects for which they are established. For example, the Sustainability Subcommittee (Sustainability Committee) is part of the Public Works/Utilities Standing Advisory Committee and advises the Village Board on "economic, social and ecological needs of [Village] residents and businesses." The support of Public Works is required by law for any Sustainability Committee recommendations to reach the Village Board. Additionally, this ordinance details the size and makeup of the committee. A maximum of nine individuals may serve on this committee. Each of these are self-nominated, but one member must serve on the Public Works Committee. The final detail specifies that this committee cannot form a separate social media account from the Village-wide page.

What does it do?
The ordinance specifies the members and terms for the Sustainability Committee, but it does not specify the daily proceedings. Key reasons for this ordinance are to ensure a regular meeting opportunity at Village Hall and that recommendations from this committee will be heard by the whole Board.

Any sustainability currently in the code?
Communities of Elm Grove's size do not always prioritize sustainability and most in Wisconsin do not have committees dedicated to it. Having the Sustainability Committee established in legislation is already a key sustainable action that the Village has taken.



Source: Canva - Graphic

Gaps
Requiring approval from the Public Works Committee for recommendations to reach the Village Board could overly limit the Sustainability Committee's impact. Maintaining the provision of a Public Works Committee member but removing the required approval of the broader committee maintains the input of Public Works and removes a factor that could keep ideas from reaching the Board.

Municipal Operations

Despite its small size, the Village manages significant public land, including Village Park which is nearly 80 acres.[2] Elm Grove currently contracts with a private landscaping company to manage its municipal yards. True Green Commercial performs a number of services including applying herbicides and fertilizers. These treatments help to prevent the growth of weeds and keep playing fields green and healthy. Other than this maintenance, the Village DPW team mows roadside grass every 3-4 weeks. Elm Grove also provides the opportunity to rent out pavilions at Village parks. The average annual rentals typically range from 50 to 70. Since 2020, the pavilion rental fee has generated nearly $50,000 in total for the Village.[3]

Green infrastructure for stormwater management exists throughout Village land. After significant flooding in the early 2000s, a stormwater pond was constructed at Village Park.[4] An Eagle scout built a rain garden bordering the Village Hall parking lot. Additionally, near the South Facility the Village owns a small bioswale.

Between 2022 and 2025, the Village of Elm Grove purchased varying amounts of road salt for winter maintenance. In both 2022 and 2023, the Village purchased 600 tons each year. In 2024, the amount decreased to 500 tons. By 2025, the Village only needed 300 tons but was required to purchase the 500-ton minimum. Should the Village desire to reduce salt use to improve environmental quality and reduce overall maintenance costs – both from de-icing and subsequent road repairs from salt-related-damages – municipal services should look to lowering the minimum salt purchasing volume.

The Village also owns 41 vehicles across three different departments. These include 10 police vehicles, 2 Emergency Medical Service (EMS) vehicles or ambulances, 6 fire trucks, and 23 Department of Public Works (DPW) vehicles. In Elm Grove, municipal DPW crews perform their own snow and ice removal.

In Elm Grove, only a portion of homes are connected to a municipal water utility.[5] These homes are serviced by the City of Brookfield water utility which has limited service, primarily along Bluemound Road, Elm Grove Road, and Wall Street. This means that new connections to this utility require payment from the landowner or developer to construct the infrastructure. The recently constructed Caroline Heights development paid for a large connection to the Wauwatosa water utility,[6] meaning some residents of downtown have new access to municipal water. Other residents generally rely on well water.

Stormwater Management Plan

The Stormwater and Floodland Management Plan for the Dousman Ditch and Underwood Creek Subwatersheds (Stormwater Management Plan) was completed in February of 2000 and set the following two decades of floodland, water quality, and stormwater system management priorities. The document evaluates these three management areas while considering possible economic, technical, and environmental implications. This plan also recommends cost-effective stormwater and floodland management practices for implementation.[7]

A stormwater management plan is set in place to effectively manage floodlands, water quality, and stormwater systems in an area. The plan provides a set of objectives and standards to guide the development an effective stormwater and floodland management system for the area.

The document includes implementation criteria and procedures, including key projects to complete. Within these recommendations, the plan also identifies responsible government entities or agencies. To ensure best management practices and cost-effectiveness, the plan recommends updates every 10 years.

The Village of Elm Grove prepared a "Stormwater Service Charge Study" in 2004 that formed the basis for the Village's stormwater management ordinance. The code provides regulation for the collection and disposal of storm and surface water discharge for all real property within the Village.

Sustainability-related language is not utilized in Elm Grove code for stormwater ordinances. It also does not articulate strategies to improve infrastructure capacity, such as rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavement, or other similar strategies.

Source: Flows to Bay - Sustainable Stormwater Management

Downtown Master Plan

Leveraging the Underwood Creek Daylighting for redevelopment will be critical for the downtown's future, according to the Downtown Master Plan.[8] A network of small plazas featuring art and seating can help with placemaking downtown. Additional priorities of the plan include supporting aging in place, small business and retail retention, bicycle and pedestrian access, and a cohesive downtown image. These goals create ample opportunities to incorporate sustainability into downtown redevelopment.

The plan notes a local preference for a quaint downtown consisting of buildings with one or two floors. However, a low-density downtown may not support the goal of increasing bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

Incorporating a visual preference survey into future downtown redevelopment planning efforts may help clarify what residents want to see downtown, in terms of building height, bulk, and distribution. Low building density and footprints are suggested to allow enough area for surface parking. Impervious surface from traditional buildings and parking areas both require stormwater management. Compared to parking, local businesses offer more direct benefits to the Village by providing goods, services, and tax base. The Village should consider these additional benefits when balancing density, parking availability, and stormwater management downtown. The Downtown Master Plan can also incorporate specific strategies to improve stormwater management and water quality as a key part of redevelopment.

Source: Wisign Photo - Image of Downtown Elm Grove

Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan identifies future risks associated with housing affordability, well and surface water quality, economic activity, and downtown redevelopment.[9] Priorities of the plan include maintaining cultural touchstones and the Village's "small town" feel. There are opportunities to include sustainable housing strategies in the housing section of the plan. For example, current development trends result in single family homes being demolished to build new homes (at least 31 homes). This development strategy creates significant demolition waste, new materials, and may reduce the historic charm of the Village.

Housing affordability is an emerging regional and local issue not currently addressed as part of the land use plan. Additionally, the plan states an intention to preserve current residential dwelling unit densities, which may prevent accessory dwelling unit (ADU) and duplex zoning. The plan identifies wanting a walkable, mixed-use area near downtown, but does not offer many supporting strategies. Current policies only support aesthetic components of pedestrian character (lighting, landscaping, and sidewalk treatment). Additional support for pedestrians and bicyclists includes increasing benches, destinations, and bicycle parking. Improving pedestrian crossings would also enhance walkability downtown. Current strategies primarily focus on the amount of available car parking. Plan updates can recommend improvements to parking quality and sustainability features, such as parking location, landscaping, materials, and runoff management.

The cultural and natural resources section overall aligns with current Village sustainability initiatives and priorities, but there are opportunities to update and clarify priorities. Updated stormwater management studies could be completed in advance of major downtown redevelopment to ensure sustainable development strategies and best management practices. Recommendations to increase stormwater infiltration using bioswales and rain gardens could be expanded to more areas in the Village. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) could be a partner to ensure effective implementation of green infrastructure and pollinator habitat. A Comprehensive Plan update could provide clearer priorities about habitat and natural system connectivity in the Village.

The plan emphasizes maintaining a cost-effective, modern, and operable public safety communications system. Improved extreme weather and energy resilience would advance this goal for the Village, particularly if implemented in Village facilities. Existing partnerships identified in the plan can help support sustainability efforts. Collaboration with neighboring municipalities and government agencies, like MMSD, may help the Village access resources, including funding. Current priorities include partnership on watershed issues, stormwater management, natural resources, parkland maintenance, utilities support, and pathways planning.

Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Residents of Elm Grove take great civic pride in their community parks and recreational facilities.[10] A vast majority of residents surveyed for the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) indicated that Elm Grove has an adequate amount of parks and open space. Most respondents emphasized that the Village should prioritize upgrading and maintaining existing facilities over acquiring additional park space. The CORP reflects this by focusing on improvements that extend the usability and longevity of existing assets, while supporting the Village quality of life and community identity.

CORP Recommendations that advance sustainability:

- Preserving and protecting natural resources and environmental conditions
- Enhancing accessibility to park amenities through an integrated path network and ADA compliance
- Promoting inclusive use across all ages and abilities
- Expanding community gathering spaces
- Increasing awareness through wayfinding and educational signage
- Improving athletic field conditions and maintenance with an emphasis on addressing drainage and irrigation challenges.

Source: Village of Elm Grove - CORP

These recommendations can be further enhanced through sustainable practices in both design and implementation. Facility upgrades offer an opportunity to incorporate green building standards, use sustainable and durable materials, and support energy and water efficiency. For example, upgrades could include the installation of low-impact lighting, smart irrigation systems, and permeable pavement. Trail expansions and park connectivity efforts should emphasize safe, accessible routes between neighborhoods, schools, and key Village destinations, supporting walkability and everyday active transportation.

Finally, the CORP emphasizes the importance of inclusive community engagement, the pursuit of grant funding, and the development of partnerships to support long term needs. As implementation continues, incorporating sustainability indicators such as equitable access, ecological restoration, and climate resilience can help maintain alignment with the Village's broader sustainability goals while strengthening Elm Grove's park system for future generations.

Recommendations

Seeds (O-2 Years)

Add Solar Provisions to the Municipal Code

Expand the Municipal Bicycle Ordinance

Install Solar LED Lighting

Incorporate Sustainability in all Planning Documents

Tree (3-6 Years)

Establish a Dark Sky Ordinance

Add Composting to the Municipal Code

Add Green Features to the Municipal Code

Achieve SolSmart Bronze Designation

Develop Downtown District Sustainability Guidelines

Stormwater and Floodland Management Updates

Grove (6+ Years)

Incorporate Solar Panels on Village Facilities

Bury Key Powerlines to Increase Energy Resilience

Other Alternatives Considered

Green Infrastructure in New Developments

Road Salt Reduction

Village Hall Microgrid System

Village Hall Energy Efficiency

Electric Vehicle Charging Code

Accessory Dwelling Units

A detailed review of alternatives can be found in Appendix H.

Add Solar Provisions to the Municipal Code

By clarifying code language, the Village can make adding rooftop solar a straightforward process. As the Elm Grove zoning code is currently written, solar is never mentioned explicitly. In practice, residents in the Village are still able to apply for a permit and install rooftop solar. However, the lack of solar text in local ordinances could limit the widespread adoption of solar arrays. Residents and businesses seeking to add solar to their property need to be confident these systems are allowed in the Village. Specific provisions could allow the Village to regulate how solar is deployed and solidify solar as an allowable use for all neighborhoods.

To add this text to the zoning code, a resolution must be proposed and passed by the Village Board of Trustees. The Village could copy the simple action taken by the City of Sun Prairie, where ground and roof mounted solar arrays are added to the allowed accessory uses table in all districts. More detailed language could be included if the Village Board prefers certain requirements to be in place. However, any additional regulations must comply with state law prohibiting excessive restrictions on solar installations.

Advancing this code edit requires public buy-in. Several participants specifically requested adding solar panels in the Village through the survey, showing this buy-in is present. Focus group attendees also discussed challenges with the existing solar panel permitting process.

To reassure residents, a "Solar in Elm Grove" page on the Village website would make it easier for residents to learn that the zoning code allows solar outright. This education could also be spread through the sustainability newsletter and Village social media pages. To track and report on the success of the code update, the Village should track annual solar permits following the change. Sun Prairie has seen a rise in permits for solar arrays since streamlining its process. Prior to 2019, "Sun" Prairie saw just ten annual solar array permits and now regularly sees 50 or more each year. Changing zoning text for solar advances sustainability goals at the cost of Village staff time and protects property rights for residents.

City of Ashland Solar Provisions in the Municipal Code:

Solar equipment shall be consistent with the setback and height requirements of the principal and accessory building, whichever is applicable. Solar equipment that is not consistent with the setback and height requirements may be considered pursuant to conditional use procedures.

Expand the Municipal Bicycle Ordinance

The Village of Elm Grove currently has a bicycle ordinance as Chapter 101 in the Village code. This ordinance was adopted in 1955 with various amendments through 2005. Since the last update, the evolution of electric scooters and electric bicycles has increased the variety of transportation options. The Village of Elm Grove should update the ordinance to incorporate speed limits and other regulations for electric bicycles and scooters. Within this update, the Village could also incorporate policy language for connectivity to bicycle and pedestrian networks through new development. Together, these updates would support residents' desire to support and improve bicycling in the Village.

The City of Fort Atkinson requires that e-scooters and e-bikes maximum speed of less than 20 miles per hour. The Village could restrict speed limits of e-scooters and e-bikes within parks to 10 miles per hour.

The City of Eau Claire incorporates circulation standards for pedestrians, sidewalks, and bicycles to allow for different modes of transportation within new developments. Incorporating this language allows for adequate traffic capacity, provides connected pedestrian and bicycle routes, and promotes safe and efficient mobility through traditional neighborhood development. Improved connectivity for new development in Elm Grove would help enable residents to enjoy the Village by bicycle,

There is no cost to the implementation of this recommendation, outside of staff time. As residents register their bicycles, e-bikes, or e-scooters for $8, the Village would generate revenue for the licenses. To monitor whether e-bicycle and e-scooter use increases, the Village should track registration levels over time.

The City of Fort Atkinson code language regarding e-bikes or e-scooters:

Sec. 94-214. - Riding on paved recreational paths.[11]

(a) Riders exercising due care may drive and operate their bicycles, e-bikes or e-scooters upon the paved recreational paths within the City when such riding does not jeopardize the safety of the pedestrians or other riders traveling on the path.

(b) It shall be unlawful for any person driving a bicycle, e-bikes or e-scooter on the bike paths to attempt to pass another person going in the same direction on the path without giving a warning and until it becomes evident that the person so warned is aware of the approach of such person driving the bicycle, e-bike or e-scooter. Pedestrians shall at all times have the right-of-way upon paved multi-use recreational paths; and if necessary, the person driving such bicycle, e-bike or e-scooter shall dismount and vacate the recreational path to prevent a collision; and any such person driving a bicycle, e-bike or e-scooter upon the recreational path must have the bicycle, e-bike or e-scooter under control at all times.

Install Solar LED Lighting

Elm Grove should work toward replacing all Village-owned lighting with solar light emitting diode (LED) fixtures. Starting replacement in the Village Hall parking lot could act as a pilot, leading to Village-wide conversion.

Energy efficient lighting could result in reduced Village long-term energy bills. Solar LED fixtures are often more expensive than traditional fixtures, but do not require other significant costs including installing an electrical conduit. This replacement also offers opportunities to select fixtures that are dark sky friendly, helping to reduce glare and light pollution. Thoughtful selection of fixtures will ensure the same or better lighting quality while still reducing environmental impact. The targeted scope of this project will require staff time, but the Village is already planning for parking lot lighting replacement in 2026. Pursuing additional funding may require increased staff capacity to manage grants or other complicated funding sources.

The 2025-2029 Village Capital Budget[12] currently allocates $55,000 for parking lot lighting. The Village Manager estimates solar LED lighting would cost the Village around $5,000 per fixture. Given this estimate, the Village would have the resources to pilot around 10 solar LED lights in the Village Hall parking lot. Over time, these fixtures reduce electricity purchases by generating their own energy. The Village could dedicate resulting electricity savings to convert additional street and parking lot lights. In spring 2025, the City of Cudahy initiated a solar[13] streetlight pilot.

As the City's pilot continues, Elm Grove could benefit from lessons learned in Cudahy. For example, the City may be able to offer recommendations for particular models, contractors, or locations to install the fixtures. Some solar LED suppliers offer[14] detailed online guides to choosing solar LED lighting, which could supplement advice from contractors or other advisors.

The Village could pursue funding opportunities to assist with conversion. Focus on Energy offers incentives for lighting efficiency.[15] The Village can work with a Focus on Energy Advisor to confirm the potential efficiency benefits and to apply for any available incentives. Applications for incentives must be submitted within 60 days of project completion. The Village can remain engaged with the Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition to take advantage of future grant opportunities. Working with WLGCC could reduce the administrative cost of grant application and administration. Lastly, the Village can apply for an Energy Innovation Grant,[16] available through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin.

To monitor effectiveness, the Village could track energy usage data to establish an estimated baseline energy use of current lighting. As old lights are replaced, the Village should monitor electricity usage trends. The Village should determine expected savings from the solar LED lighting upgrade alone to monitor progress, especially if the Village implements several energy efficiency projects at the same time.

Incorporate Sustainability in all Planning Documents

Transformative, community-wide sustainability requires integrating sustainability across a variety of issues. The Sustainability Committee should be a key contributor to future planning efforts, ensuring that plans include sustainability goals and considerations. Village plans should include necessary implementation steps for current sustainability recommendations and can expand to include future goals.

Sustainability outcomes, according to the Triple Bottom Line, can provide social, environmental, and economic benefits. In order to advance outcomes in each of these areas, all community sectors can incorporate sustainability. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)[17] offers communities suggested strategies related to energy and emissions, transportation systems, land use, water quality & conservation, solid waste, health and equity. Comprehensive, outdoor recreation, and redevelopment plans provide ample opportunities to address sustainability in these same issue areas.

According to Village ordinances, "[a]ny recommendation advanced by the Sustainability Subcommittee needs to be supported by the Public Works/Utilities Committee before advancing to the Board of Trustees for consideration." This ordinance may restrict the ability of the Sustainability Committee to directly participate in Village-wide planning efforts. The Village should consider opportunities to address this limitation, such as through ordinance language revision or asking a Sustainability Committee member to also serve on ad hoc Planning Committees.

Relying on local sustainability expertise, rather than additional paid consulting, may save the Village money during future planning efforts. Financial sustainability also remains a key priority of the Sustainability Committee.

As the Village gains additional momentum, the Committee should look to other communities' plan language for inspiration. Appendix I contains some sample language from sustainability, comprehensive, and climate action plans across the state.

Establish a Dark Sky Ordinance

The Village of Elm Grove should adopt a dark sky ordinance, which allows municipalities to regulate light fixtures. These regulations could be related to minimizing energy costs or regulating the type of lighting that is allowable. DarkSky International is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that works to raise awareness about the negative impacts of light pollution and preserve the nighttime environment. DarkSky International provides clear regulatory guidelines that are available to access as well as provide sample policy template for any municipality to use.[18]

Municipal representatives have discussed dark sky ordinances and regulating outdoor lighting to preserve the natural night sky. Elm Grove can incorporate principles of the dark sky ordinance into practice. The Village can take actions to preserve the natural night sky through dark sky friendly outdoor lighting, public policy, and community education and outreach. According to the Sustainability Survey, over 60 residents currently participate in some form of dark sky practice.

Implementing the recommendation does not directly have a cost to adopt the ordinance. If the municipality wishes to submit the ordinance to DarkSky International for review, there may be a fee associated with a review. If approved by this organization, Elm Grove may receive "DarkSky Recognition." If the Village upgrades their lighting to follow this ordinance, solar LED lighting will cost approximately $5,000 per fixture, according to the Village Manager of Elm Grove.

The success of this recommendation can be evaluated by reviewing the number of new permits that are related to the dark sky ordinance, measuring the changes municipal lighting, or hosting star gazing events with residents at Village Park.

The Village of Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin Outdoor Light Ordinance Sample

22.03 Conformance with Applicable Codes. All outdoor lighting fixtures (luminaries) shall be installed in conformance with the provisions of this Ordinance, the Building Code, the Electrical Code. And the Sign Code of the Village as applicable and under appropriate permit and inspection.

22.07 Prohibited Light and Lighting: (1) All outdoor lighting sources, except street lights, shall be shielded or installed so that there is not direct line of sight between the light source or its reflection at a point 3' or higher above the ground at the property line of the source. Light that does not meet this requirement constitutes light trespass. Streetlights shall be fully shielded.

The Village of Shorewood Hills Chapter 22 Dark Sky (Regulate Illumination) Ordinance is included in Appendix G.

Add Composting to the Municipal Code

The Village of Elm Grove should adopt composting regulations into municipal code to help participating residents engage in this sustainability strategy. Following a similar strategy as Shorewood, the Village of Elm Grove can update codes and create an organics program that residents are able to use and be held accountable to. The Village website currently promotes some composting resources, serving as a baseline for future initiatives, yet none currently exist within municipal code. Moreover, community feedback during the focus group articulated interest in composting and referenced school partnerships as supporting institutions for the existing efforts.

Precedence for code language comes from the Village of Shorewood, where code 455-5 includes a list of approved composting procedures. Additionally, injunction procedures are included. Residents who choose to compost must follow certain standards, including using only acceptable ingredients such as yard waste, peelings of raw vegetables and fruits, etc.[19] From this example, the Village of Elm Grove could form and approve a similar code with guidance and political support from the Sustainability Committee.

If residents have the desire to utilize a composting service facilitated by their municipality, Shorewood's current model working with Compost Crusader is simple to replicate.

Source: Garden Organic - Composting Bin

The reduction in refuse volume from composting allows the Shorewood to provide a monthly subsidy of $1.20 to residents, further promoting the service.[20] The Village of Elm Grove has capacity to reduce refuse costs by implementing a similar service, as their recent trash audit indicates that approximately 20% of their refuse comes from compostable items: food waste, 240 lbs. (17.9%), and yard waste 32.1 lbs. (2.4%).[21]

Elm Grove's Sustainability Committee can work with Shorewood's Conservation Committee and Compost Crusader to develop composting ordinance language based on existing precedents and best practices. If successful, the ordinance should result in an increase in resident-reported composting. Additionally, the Village should monitor complaints about composting and adjust the ordinance as necessary to prevent nuisance, a theme touched on multiple times in the Village focus group session.

Add Green Features to the Municipal Code

Municipal code changes should remove provisions that prohibit eco-friendly yard management practices and building features. A permit is currently required in the Village to transition to a natural lawn. Rain gardens could fall into the general category of trees and vegetation because they are not specifically mentioned in the code, likely disallowing larger rain gardens without permit approval. These alternatives save money, support pollinators, and accommodate the needs of native plants. Allowing natural lawns and rain gardens outright and removing the current 7-inch maximum on grass lawns provides flexibility to landowners. With the restrictions removed, homeowners can choose their own balance of natural features and manicured lawn.

In addition to removing yard landscaping restrictions, provisions specifying approved green infrastructure for stormwater management can empower businesses and homeowners to deploy them. In Elm Grove, any development or redevelopment project must use *The MMSD Rules and Stormwater Quality Guidance*[22] as part of the stormwater management process. According to this guidance document, the Village allows green roofs, bioswales, permeable surfaces, and other green infrastructure along with traditional engineered and built stormwater facilities. The City of Oconomowoc provides an example of how green infrastructure can be more clearly promoted. The City's code requires the use of "best management practices" (BMP) for stormwater, and green infrastructure options are specifically listed as valid BMPs:

"Examples include, but are not limited to: wet or dry detention basin, infiltration trench or basin, bio-retention basin, stilling basin, green roof, filter strip, artificial wetland, or any combination of these."[23]

To incentivize rain gardens, bioswales, and other green infrastructure, the Village could reduce or waive stormwater management facility permitting fees when green infrastructure elements are included. If such an incentive is implemented, this would be taking from the current $225 stormwater permit administration fee.

Edits to the trees and vegetation chapter require a resolution to be proposed and passed by the Village Board of Trustees. Survey responses supporting green infrastructure initiatives suggests such a resolution would be supported by the public. Changing the municipal code advances sustainability goals at no additional cost to the Village and protects property rights for residents.

To monitor implementation of the green landscaping features, the Sustainability Committee can choose volunteers to conduct a screen of yards each year and track new features and natural lawns. To address complaints or frustration from neighboring residents opposed to natural lawns, the Village should provide Village staff and police with talking points about why the code change was completed.

Achieve SolSmart Bronze Designation

The Village should pursue the first designation level in the nationwide SolSmart program[24] to help support local solar adoption. As a SolSmart designee, the Village of Elm Grove would join more than 25 other Wisconsin communities committed to supporting solar power.

To reach Bronze designation, the Village would need to complete the actions listed below. In addition to completing these prerequisites, the Village would pursue points in the Permitting & Inspection, Planning & Zoning, and Special Focus program categories. To gain points for Permitting & Inspection, the Village could train staff to quickly review solar permits and simplify permit application documents. The Village could pursue municipal solar installation, offer solar education materials, or coordinate solar group-buys to gain points in the Special Focus program categories. These efforts advance other recommendations for community education and energy resilience in the Village.

Activities that update Village permitting, inspection, planning, and zoning for solar align with the goal to provide clear pathways and support for sustainability strategies. Additionally, residents and businesses would have increased opportunities to reduce their electricity costs by generating solar energy. Streamlining Village processes would require staff effort to evaluate and address current policies. However, the program has no direct costs and SolSmart offers expert technical assistance to support local governments. SolSmart argues that eliminating barriers to solar reduces the overall administrative costs of solar installation.

Some communities committing to SolSmart designation choose to pass a resolution to fulfill the first required action step. To implement program recommendations, the Sustainability Committee would work closely with the Elm Grove Building Board and Plan Commission. As the Village improves local support for solar power, Elm Grove can reach higher levels of SolSmart designation. Future planning efforts can set goals to reach Silver, Gold, and Platinum designation.

Required Action Steps for SolSmart Bronze Designation:[25]

1. Provide a document that demonstrates your local government's commitment to pursue SolSmart designation
2. Post an online checklist detailing the required permit(s), submittals, and steps of your community's permitting process for small rooftop solar PV. (Required for Bronze
3. Review zoning requirements and identify restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development. Compile findings in a memo (Required for Bronze). Examples include height restrictions, set-back requirements, screening requirements, visibility restrictions, etc.

Develop Downtown District Sustainability Guidelines

The Village should create Downtown District Sustainability Guidelines, which will offer developers a selection of sustainability strategies to incorporate. The guidelines can require a minimum number of sustainability strategies while allowing developers to choose those most relevant to their goals and vision.

Clear guidelines can set expectations for developers to implement modern best management practices for sustainability. For example, strategies could include green infrastructure that helps meet the site's stormwater management requirements. The Downtown Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and CORP identify downtown redevelopment as an upcoming opportunity, and sustainability efforts can advance other goals in these plans. Increasing natural daylighting of commercial spaces, for example, might make storefronts more attractive and may encourage people to walk or bike by.

The Plan Commission can work with the Sustainability Committee, the Building Board, the Beautification Committee, and other relevant departments to develop the guidelines. By working with these groups, prospective developers, and community stakeholders, the Village can determine the appropriate level of requirements for downtown. This process will require additional community engagement and can be included as part of future Downtown Master Planning efforts. Developing and enforcing the guidelines will require staff time, particularly during future development planning and permitting processes.

Other Wisconsin communities provide a range of examples related to sustainable development requirements. The City of Oconomowoc, for example, has set sustainable design expectations for specific development projects in part of their zoning code. See Appendix C for specific school loft conversion requirements.

At the other end of the spectrum, the City of Madison requires LEED[26] certification for most City-government building redevelopment. The Village may take inspiration from the LEED program's[27] strategies to make locally relevant Downtown District Sustainability Guidelines. The Village can evaluate the guideline's success by determining local support of new development and tracking the number of sustainability measures implemented by developers.

Source: Homes - Downtown Elm Grove Sign

Stormwater and Floodland Management Updates

The Village can update current stormwater best management practices, increase support for green infrastructure, and promote the benefits of the Underwood Creek Daylighting project. The implementation of these strategies would support Elm Grove's infrastructure resiliency during intense storm events and strengthen the general social and economic capacity of the Village.

Two decades ago, the Stormwater and Floodland Management Plan for the Dousman Ditch and Underwood Creek Subwatersheds[7] identified a comprehensive analysis of current conditions and implementation criteria to effectively manage stormwater in Waukesha County. It was recommended that updates to the plan be carried out every 10 years, so plan revision is overdue. To continue reducing flood risks and strain on existing infrastructure, it is recommended to promptly update this plan.

Current projects the Village has undertaken include the daylighting of Underwood Creek south of Watertown Plank Road through the downtown area. Benefits of the project include protecting public safety, creating a public space, connecting pedestrian pathways, and enhancing the economic viability of the downtown.[28] Additionally, a wide variety of positive environmental impacts have been identified that will support wider ecosystem resilience and reduce high-flow flooding risks.

Floodland Management Plan updates should include and further leverage the Underwood Creek daylighting for stormwater management.

Promoting the development of additional green infrastructure will increase the capacity of the Village to handle extreme weather events such as large thunderstorms. Simple and effective strategies to accomplish this include rain gardens, bioswales, soil enhancements (aerating), and permeable pavement in new developments. MMSD has identified a variety of additional benefits communities gain through the implementation of green infrastructure such as the reduction of crime rates, infrastructure costs, and a significant potential to increase job opportunities.[29]

The Village can work with Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to initiate the updated study. These institutions were key to the development of the 2000 plan and can work with MMSD without straining existing staff resources. The updated Floodland Management strategies will include monitoring and evaluation metrics that will be updated every 10 years to adhere to modern best management practices.

Incorporate Solar Panels on Village Facilities

Elm Grove should install solar panels on Village facilities, beginning with Village Hall. These panels can help the Village demonstrate sustainable technology for businesses and residents, and gain SolSmart designation. Solar panels would provide energy when the sun shines and Village facilities would remain connected to the grid to ensure a steady supply of electricity.

Installing solar panels can reduce Village electricity costs and may generate surplus electricity to sell. The Village's upfront investment could benefit from additional fundraising or grants, which may require dedicating additional staff time for fund administration. Local funds can be provided through private donations (supported by 97 survey respondents) and tax budget allocation (supported by 128 survey respondents). Existing community and foundation support of the Elm Grove Library could also be leveraged to add on-site renewable energy. Upfront investment in reducing energy costs could help with long-term environmental and financial sustainability of the Elm Grove Library and Village overall. The Village can look to information provided by the Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition (WLGCC) about the Federal Elective Pay Tax Credit[30] for Clean Energy. Additional resources for solar financing are available through the University of Wisconsin Extension.[31]

To begin, the Village should identify the best location and system size. As an baseline, Elm Grove budgeted $11,000 for electricity costs in 2024 for Village Recreation alone.

By investing around $123,000 (before incentives) in solar panels, the Village could switch to renewable power and the system would pay for itself after around 12 years of operation. While not an exact quote of solar panel cost, this reasonable estimate indicates the potential savings for the Village (see Appendix I for calculation details). Focus on Energy Advisors[32] or local solar installers[33] can provide support during project development. Shorewood and Sun Prairie both incorporate solar panels on municipal buildings, and the Village can benefit from lessons learned by these communities.

Shorewood Solar[34]
Solar panels on Shorewood Fire Station 83 generated an average savings of $322.42 per month in 2020. The system is expected to pay for itself by 2032 and generate over $95,000 of value for the Department over the next 25 to 30 years.

The upcoming Village Hall roof replacement (budgeted for 2026) should include any necessary alternations to enable solar on a portion of the facility. To evaluate the impacts of the solar panels, the Village should also invest in a monitoring system to collect energy production data. In combination with Village electricity bills, this data will allow Elm Grove to evaluate whether the system is on-track to provide its estimated benefits.

Bury Key Powerlines to Increase Energy Resilience

Elm Grove could strengthen grid resilience and reduce risks of power outages from fallen trees by burying power lines while identifying cost saving measures for homeowners. To do this, vulnerable zones should be located and managed first, utilizing mapping tools such as Geographic Information System (GIS) for effective modeling and analysis. Moreover, key infrastructure locations should also take priority to maximize the effort's impact and investment.

Breckenridge, Minnesota serves as a model that Elm Grove can follow, as the municipality utilized a capital improvement program to update their distribution system, including the conversion of overhead distribution services to underground[35] To pay for the project, the public utility service increased electricity rates per kwh and load management kwh.

The Village currently maintains forestry services to reduce risk of fallen trees and limbs – this strategy aims to further reduce the chances of powerline damage. Benefits to Elm Grove will come in the form of increased energy reliability and aesthetic improvements with overhead powerline burial. "A primary reason two-thirds of Florida Power & Light Company customers had power back after just one day of restoration is attributed to its underground neighborhood power lines performing five times better than overhead neighborhood power lines in southwest Florida."[36] Additionally, cost savings will occur through a reduction of infrastructure repairs after storm events or damages from power outages due to fallen electrical lines.

Source: Business Insider - Village of Elm Grove Beautification Award Sign

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Canva - Graphics

Chapter 5:
Community Programs

Community Programs Overview

Before developing recommendations for sustainability for community programs, the Sustainability Team identified current conditions for community sustainability. This included a review of current certifications, program funding, task forces, and recycling programs. These current conditions were used as a baseline for creating alternatives and recommendations.

After identifying the current conditions and incorporating information collected through case studies, the Sustainability Team created initial alternatives.

Presenting these alternatives at the Focus Group in April provided valuable feedback from municipal staff, elected officials, and community advocates. Following the Focus Group, new alternatives were drafted and evaluated against a set of detailed criteria (Page 7). Alternatives that passed these criteria became recommendations, which are presented at the end of this chapter.

Goals
Create initiatives that engage residents, enhance community collaboration, and empower local behavior changes for a Sustainable Elm Grove.

Objectives
Maximize opportunities for placemaking in the Village of Elm Grove and celebrate local sustainability successes.

Motivate leaders, organizations, and stakeholders throughout the Village to create and strengthen partnerships and lead sustainability efforts.

Empower residents, contractors, property owners, and businesses to take sustainable action through education, engagement, and community-driven initiatives.

Identify funding sources to expand Village programs and initiatives.

Current Conditions

The Village of Elm Grove maintains a variety of community programs that engage residents with sustainability issues. Programs promoted by the Village webpage include Bee City, Bird City, and Tree City designations, registration as a certified Community Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation, information on the Invasive Species Task Force, and an annual Winter Lecture Series.

Bee City

Consideration for a Bee City designation[1] requires municipalities to make commitments[2] to conserve native pollinators. Example actions include reducing the use of pesticides, incorporating pollinator-conscious practices into City policies and plans, creating pollinator habitats on public and private lands, hosting pollinator awareness events, and many others. In March of 2020, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to become the 105th Bee City in the USA, following through on their commitment with the establishment of a Bee Hotel north of the Village Park. Elm Grove actively connects residents to additional habitat development opportunities by including educational resources on their website.

The Village highlights local native plant suppliers and a 2021 resolution[3] committing to integrated pest management. These strategies highlight the community's capacity to support local pollinators at multiple levels, both individually and collectively. Local efforts strengthen the resilience of species like the Rusty Patch Bumblebee – an endangered pollinator whose habitat spans[4] throughout southern Wisconsin and into Minnesota.

Moreover, Bee City designation highlights the Village's commitment to environmental protection and ecological restoration, establishing Elm Grove as a model municipality for similar initiatives.

Source: League City Nature - Bee City Certification

Why are certifications important?

- Marketing tools to Village residents, businesses, and visitors
- Access to experts to help implement desired strategies
- Clear action steps provided by the programs

Bird City

The Bird City Wisconsin Steering Committee recently (July 2024) recognized Elm Grove as a High Flier designation. Bird City Wisconsin[5] is an organization spearheaded by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership (WBCP)[6] consisting of over 175 organizations around the state. The designation recognizes communities that have focused and consistent efforts towards habitat creation and improvement, threat reduction, education and engagement, and sustainability. In addition, participating communities must recognize and celebrate World Migratory Bird Day each year. Elm Grove's work has made them one of 23 municipalities around the state to achieve the High Flyer award. Residents interested in participating can attend Village Hall meetings every third Monday of the month. Discussion led by the Birders of the Grove committee focuses on participating in and promoting individual behaviors to support bird populations in the Village. These actions include keeping house cats indoors, reducing window strike risks, and advocating for light pollution mitigation. The Village website provides a variety of educational resources, connections to larger organizations like the WBCP, and recent initiatives by the Village Forester and Elm Grove Beautification Committee.

Tree City

Since 1989, Elm Grove has been known nationally as a Tree City USA. Requirements[7] for the designation include[8] maintaining a tree department, a tree care ordinance, maintaining an annual community forestry budget of at least $2 per capita, and an Arbor Day observance. The Village encourages residents to maintain their trees appropriately using municipal code[9], which outlines the risks of Dutch elm disease and emerald ash borer and prohibits the injury of public trees. In addition to municipal tree care efforts, the Village website provides residents with educational materials on problem diseases and insects, tree planting and care, invasive plants, and the latest forestry concerns[10] in their community. As a Tree City, the Village promotes healthy forestry practices and current best management practices for residents to follow.

TREE CITY USA®
Arbor Day Foundation

Source: Wisconsin DNR - Tree City Certification

Invasive Species Task Force

The Village's Invasive Species Task Force[11], coordinated by the Beautification Committee, focuses on removing vegetation such as garlic mustard and buckthorn throughout the spring and fall. The program offers opportunities for residents to volunteer, build relationships, and learn more about invasive species. The task force supports Southeastern Wisconsin's Pull-a-thon[12] event. Participants compete competition to remove the largest volume of garlic mustard, aiming to avoid the damage that the invasive causes to native ecosystems.

Community Habitat Certification

Elm Grove was certified as a Community Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation in April of 2023[13], and maintains their achievement by continuously creating and maintaining wildlife habitat in the community. The certification process required the community to earn points related to the number of certified habitats. These certified habitats must provide essential elements for wildlife: food, water, cover, and places to raise young. Beyond habitat creation, Elm Grove engages residents through educational events like native plant sales, stream cleanups, and partnerships with environmental organizations. This achievement complements Elm Grove's previous environmental recognitions, including Tree City USA, Bird City Wisconsin High Flyer, and Bee City USA designations.

Winter Lecture Series

The Village Beautification Committee hosts a Winter Lecture Series[14] as an educational program for residents to participate in each month. Additionally, the Beautification Committee keeps recordings of each lecture on the Village's website for those that missed the discussion, with the earliest dating to October of 2022. To keep residents informed, Village newsletters promote the Lecture Series along with many other sustainability and environmental topics.

Source: Village of Elm Grove - National Wildlife Federation

Residential Composting

Elm Grove utilizes three residential composting services in place of a municipal food waste diversion program. Waste Not, LLC offers affordable weekly pickup and has engaged with the community at local events. Compost Crusaders and Brew City Compost provide curbside collection, with the three programs following different cost models for residents to choose from. These services present feasible options to compost, and the Village website helps residents connect with these services.

Monarch Program

The monarch program that the Village of Elm Grove promotes focuses on native milkweed plants that residents can plant in their yards to support monarch butterfly populations[15]. Additionally, a newsletter from the Village in December of 2023 articulated the achievement of Monarch Pledge Leader. Elm Grove received this recognition for implementing 15 successful action items. A designation of Monarch Pledge Champion is within reach if the Village commits to and achieves 24 action items.[16] The Village provides a map of current monarch habitats throughout Elm Grove, with residents able to email the Beautification Committee to add their address to the map.

Textile Recycling

Since February 2025, the Village of Elm Grove has received $1,202.40 through their textile recycling program. After collection at Village Hall and Recycling center, the clothes are sent to be worn as second-hand clothing, recycled into wiping cloths, or reprocessed into fibers. The textile recycling program is the main source of income for the Village's Sustainability Committee.

Source: Village of Elm Grove - Textile Donation Graphic

Recommendations

Seeds (O-2 Years)

Create the Underwood Creek Sustainable Pocket Park

Expand Existing Sustainability Programs

Establish an Earth Month Action Series

Provide Educational Materials for Energy Efficiency

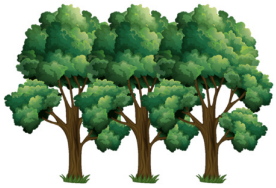
Expand the Textile Recycling Program

Tree (3-6 Years)

Create Sustainability Educational Signage

Expand Collaboration with Regional Watershed Initiatives

Grove (6+ Years)



"Green" Theme in Public Spaces

Create a Sustainability Scholar Position

Other Alternatives Considered

Green Business Association

Sustainability Movie Night

Create an Outdoor Classroom

Logo Design Competition

Underwood Creek Endowment

Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition

A detailed review of alternatives can be found in Appendix H.

Create the Underwood Creek Sustainable Pocket Park

The upcoming Underwood Creek Daylighting project has the potential to be a catalytic project in the Village's efforts to engage with sustainable practices. As part of the project, a new pocket park will be created, providing a highly visible public space in the heart of downtown. The Village should consider developing the new pocket park to meet Sustainable SITES Certification[17] standards. SITES is a certification system similar to LEED, but it focuses on the design, development, and management of sustainable landscapes.

To achieve SITES certification, the project would need to include sustainable design elements such as native plantings, green infrastructure, eco-friendly lighting, and efforts to promote sustainability awareness and education. The Sustainability Committee will work with the Department of Public Works to select elements that meet SITES certification requirements that match Village capacity and priorities.

Obtaining SITES certification would demonstrate the community's commitment to sustainable development, increase awareness of sustainable features, and foster pride in an active, sustainable public space.

The certification process costs between $8,000 and $15,500 in registration and certification fees. However, pursuing SITES certification can increase the project's competitiveness for grants and help attract philanthropic donations by showing a long-term commitment to sustainability.

The Village could choose to design and construct the park according to SITES standards using the SITES scorecard as guidance, without paying the certification fee. This approach would still ensure the inclusion of sustainable features in the park, without official certification.

To evaluate the success of implementing SITES principles at Foundation Park, the Village can monitor the establishment and maintenance needs of native plantings, track community engagement through events and long-term sustainability programming, and document funding opportunities generated by the project. Additional efforts may include conducting public surveys to gather feedback on community perception and satisfaction with the park.

Davidson Park - Opened June 2024[18]

- Wisconsin's 1st SITES Certified Park
- Stormwater managed with bioswales and permeable pavers
- 120+ native plant species supporting local ecology
- Potawatomi Serenity Garden honoring Indigenous culture
- Community-focused design

Elm Grove could have the 2nd SITES Certified Park!

Expand Existing Sustainability Programs

Elm Grove has already established impactful programs promoting sustainable practices in the Village through both the Sustainability Committee and the Beautification Committee. According to the Sustainability Survey, almost all existing programs were known by the majority (50% or more) of respondents. However, reported engagement was much lower, and 13% of respondents did not participate in any of these programs. Expanding existing sustainability programs should aim to increase community participation and awareness.

Efforts to reduce landfill waste through school composting could be expanded to increase community impact. School composting efforts could grow to include Pilgrim Park Middle School and local private schools. Expanding composting efforts could include integrating composting into school curriculum or offering workshops to further promote community-wide awareness.

Elm Grove demonstrates a strong commitment to protecting its natural environment through initiatives such as the Invasive Species Task Force, Monarch Habitat Promotion, and Native Plant Sales. Reframing invasive species mitigation as "habitat restoration," and incorporating native planting events could encourage broader community engagement. To further support these efforts, the Village could consider hosting a garlic mustard cooking workshop to build excitement around annual garlic mustard pulls. Collaborating with local youth organizations and clubs would also help foster sustained participation and greater awareness of ecological restoration.

To further promote monarch and pollinator habitat development, the Village could establish an annual Monarch Festival timed with the monarch migration in mid-September. Additionally, organizing milkweed seed harvesting events in late fall, particularly with participation from local schools, would provide hands-on opportunities for students to contribute to habitat restoration efforts.

Implementing these expanded sustainability and habitat initiatives would involve modest costs for materials, outreach, and event coordination. School composting would require educational materials and staff or volunteer support. Habitat restoration, including native planting events, would need plant and supply purchases, while the garlic mustard pesto workshop would have minor food costs. Larger events like a Monarch Festival would require planning expenses such as permits, tents, signage, and volunteer materials. The Sustainability Committee can collaborate with the Waukesha County Green Team and Beautification Committee on shared-priority projects. Sustained community engagement and participation will be key to long-term success. Tracking event participation can help measure impact.

Establish an Earth Month Action Series

Elm Grove has seen strong engagement with its Winter Lecture Series, which brings in local experts to speak on environmental and nature-related topics. To build on that momentum and further encourage sustainable practices in the community, the Village could establish an Earth Month Action Series each April. This new program would complement the winter series by shifting the focus from passive learning to active participation.

While the winter lectures provide valuable insight, the Earth Month series would offer hands-on workshops, interactive demonstrations, family-friendly events, and opportunities for residents to get involved directly in sustainability. For example, families could participate in a nature-themed Earth Day scavenger hunt in one of Elm Grove's parks, encouraging outdoor exploration and environmental awareness. Residents interested in composting could attend a workshop where they learn about worm composting and build their own bins to take home. A spring migration bird walk could offer a guided experience with a local naturalist, while families might also enjoy building birdhouses together using reclaimed materials. For younger participants, a creative up-cycled craft activity could introduce ideas about reuse and waste reduction in a fun, accessible way.

The main implementation costs would involve staff time to coordinate events, recruit local partners and presenters, and handle logistics. The Village could draw on relationships with local organizations and educators.

Material costs will vary depending on the activities but can be minimized through community partnerships and donations. The Elm Grove Library, Third Space Brewing (Elm Grove beer garden), and the Village Parks Department could be key supporters of Earth Month events.

To monitor the initiative's success, the Village should track participation in events from year to year. The Committee could also collect feedback from attendees, including suggestions for future events. With the right planning, an Earth Month series could become a signature part of Elm Grove's sustainability programming, encouraging residents not only to learn but to take meaningful action.

Provide Educational Materials for Energy Efficiency

Promoting energy efficiency supports Elm Grove's sustainability goals while helping residents reduce utility costs and improve home comfort. By providing clear, accessible information, the Village can empower property owners to make informed decisions that also reduce local carbon emissions.

The Village can share information about energy rebate programs, efficiency best practices, and renewable energy incentives. These materials can guide property owners toward cost-saving improvements and connect them with state and federal funding already available for residential and business upgrades. Example resources could include Property Assessed Clean Energy, Focus on Energy incentives, and Renewable Energy Tax Credits.

This initiative can be implemented by creating a dedicated resource page on the Village website, similar to what the City of Eau Claire provides.[19] For example, the City of Eau Claire provides a document that outlines, "It all adds up: 10 Things You Can Do to Promote Sustainability" document for residents.

The Village could also provide printed brochures and promote energy savings techniques through newsletters and social media. The Sustainability Committee could also work with the Village Building Board to provide this information to property owners. Workshops or expert presentations could complement these outreach efforts. Costs would primarily include staff time and minimal expenses for printing and event coordination.

Much of the content can be sourced from existing programs, reducing the need for new material development.

The Village could measure success through website traffic, material distribution, and event attendance. Surveys may help gauge resident action and interest. Over time, tracking participation in external programs can provide insight into community-wide energy efficiency progress.

Source: Canva - Graphic

Expand the Textile Recycling Program

The Sustainability Committee should expand and diversify marketing to reach Village residents that are not yet recycling textile waste. About 50% of Sustainability Survey respondents reported having heard of and participated in textile recycling, showing a good base of participants, but also room for growth. The Village's recent trash audit also indicates that more textiles can be redirected from landfill, with around 44lbs of textiles found in the examined sample.

Textile Recycling

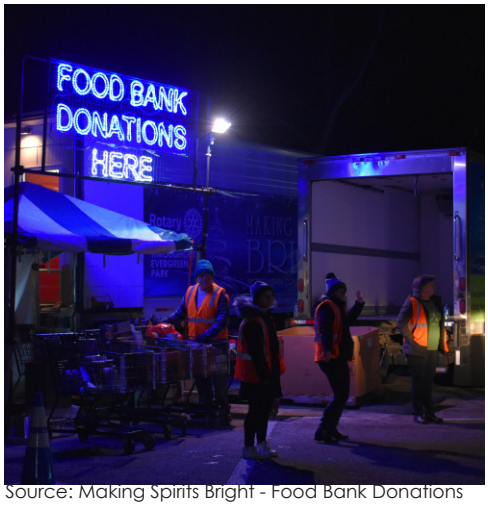
Using the trash audit data, the 44lbs of clothing found would scale to over 115,000 pounds of textile waste in the Village annually. At the current textile purchasing rate of around $0.10, the Village could capture over $10,000 in annual revenue if they could get all of that textile.

At select events[20] in the Village and beyond, Elm Grove's Sustainability Committee could partner with event organizers to collect textiles and spread awareness of the program. Event organizers could advertise bringing in pieces of unwanted clothing for free or discounted entry to ticketed events. Example events could include the Waukesha County Fair or the Snow Globe Holiday Festival at the Ballpark Commons. A similar option is available in Sheboygan for entry into the Making Spirits Bright holiday light show. Visitors must donate a non-perishable food to experience the show which are given to the Sheboygan County Food Bank.

Another opportunity is discounting Village Park Pavilion reservation fees for groups that provide textiles.

Funding generated from increased textile recycling can go toward providing educational materials about textile waste reduction. For example, promoting thrifting and reducing purchases of fast fashion which would help reduce the creation of textile waste.

The Sustainability Committee should track the amounts of textile recycling donated and textile waste found by future trash audits. Successful advertising and education should reduce both textile waste and may also reduce the textiles being collected if purchasing habits change.



Source: Making Spirits Bright - Food Bank Donations

Create Sustainability Educational Signage

Elm Grove should use educational signage to explain new and existing sustainable features in the Village. Educational signage and interactive maps are two green infrastructure outreach strategies[21] that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends. Elm Grove can look locally to find examples of this outreach strategy. For example, the Village of Shorewood provides tools to explain how its green infrastructure improves stormwater quality. On a StoryMap[22] powered by GIS, viewers can explore twelve green infrastructure installations throughout Shorewood. These are all part of the Village's "Water Walk" which the website describes are components that protect Lake Michigan and the Milwaukee River. The Water Walk website provides a downloadable and printable version of the interactive map. At these locations, small signs explain the dual purpose of the green infrastructure. One additional initiative from Shorewood that may resonate with Elm Grove is its Distinguished Trees walking tour.[23] This printable page provides the location of ten different trees that are the largest of their species in Shorewood. The page also describes unique features and descriptions of each tree to help with finding them.

The Underwood Creek Daylighting Project will provide an opportunity to educate Elm Grove residents through the highly visible water management project. Designs for the new public space created by the daylighting project could include a sign describing why the naturalized riverbed is better for plants and animals.

With the removal of asphalt through the project, signage could also discuss the importance of pervious surfaces for allowing water infiltration. A recent referendum confirmed this project will receive Village funding, so the community could have the control to ensure this signage is installed and provides effective education. The signage could also reaffirm residents' decisions to approve the referendum by describing the benefits the daylighting project is providing.

To install these signs, the Village could use its DPW staff[23] and typical road sign materials. A QR code included on these signs could provide viewers with access to a walking tour or other educational resources. This link also would help to keep track of site visits for evaluation of the sign's effectiveness. The Quiet Trails[24] Fund from the Natural Resources of Wisconsin Foundation could be explored to fund this program. These grants specifically prioritize giving support to signage along trails. Other than this grant, for green infrastructure projects funded by the Village, a small fundraising campaign could fund the signs (~$30 each).[25] A message could be included to describe any corporate or individual sponsor of the signs. For projects funded by the community, special assessment, or grant funds, a portion of the project costs can be earmarked for the purchase of a sign.

Expand Collaboration with Regional Watershed Initiatives

Elm Grove maintains strong partnerships with regional organizations including MMSD, Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust (SWWT/Sweet Water),[26] the Milwaukee Riverkeepers, and more. Building on these relationships, Elm Grove can collaborate with partners to develop targeted educational materials, increase resident engagement, and provide technical resources for private property owners in the Village.

The Village could also recruit a small team of local volunteers to participate in stream monitoring through the Water Action Volunteers (WAV)[27] organization. Each spring, WAV offers a training session to solicit volunteers to monitor water quality throughout Wisconsin. Encouraging a local team to monitor water quality of Underwood Creek could help bring awareness about water quality issues in Elm Grove. The team's work would also provide valuable monitoring to track the success of water quality initiatives.

These efforts would support a broader, community-wide initiative to improve local water quality, encourage sustainable property management practices, and complement ongoing stream bank restoration and stormwater management projects within the Village.

Key regional programs like Fresh Coast Guardians and Respect Our Waters offer valuable resources for homeowners seeking to implement stormwater management strategies, including the installation of rain barrels, native landscaping, and responsible lawn care. These programs can support Elm Grove's educational efforts by providing technical guidance and tools to make informed decisions about water quality protection.

Implementation could include distributing brochures or online guides, organizing workshops or webinars led by regional experts or partner organizations. The Village could also incentivize participation by recognizing homeowners who adopt sustainable watershed practices on their properties.

Costs involved with implementing this initiative would primarily include staff time related to providing educational materials, event planning and execution, and water quality monitoring. To save resources and strengthen partnerships, the Village website should include links to educational materials and events already offered by watershed organizations.

To measure the success of this initiative, Elm Grove could track the number of households engaged in stormwater management practices and monitor the water quality of Underwood Creek and the Village Pond for improvements over time. The Village could also track volunteer participation to gauge sustained interest in water quality management efforts.

"Green" Theme in Public Spaces

With the municipal code newly clarifying that green infrastructure is allowed and encouraged, the Village can implement its own green infrastructure projects. Adding new green infrastructure in areas where residents gather increases the visibility of these resources. Possible sites include along the north side of the Pilgrim Park entrance drive, along Underwood River Parkway near Tonawanda Elementary, on the available green space by Elm Grove Evangelical Lutheran Church, at select Village facilities, and sites in Downtown.

One issue that could be leveraged to justify implementing green infrastructure is basement backups. This theme was mentioned during the focus group at Village Hall. Preventing sump pump backups can drive the Village's implementation of green infrastructure. This local issue can provide the reason for investing municipal funding and effort into sustainable, evidence-backed prevention methods.

Village of Shorewood Stormwater[28]
The Village of Shorewood worked with UW-Milwaukee to install green infrastructure after years of basement backups during heavy rain. Since learning of the importance of ecosystem services, Shorewood has since passed a resolution calling for the protection of Downer Woods because it provides stormwater storage.

Using this case study as an example, green infrastructure should become a required element of regular DPW construction projects.

Any public infrastructure or facility project should seek to add bioswales and rain gardens rather than mowed grass. Emphasis should be placed on high lying locations throughout the Village to maximize the benefit of preventing basement backups.

Numerous avenues are available for the Village to fund these improvements. MMSD maintains regular funding programs for green infrastructure. Partnering with MMSD would require an expansion to the area that the Green Infrastructure Partnership Program[29] currently serves. Working through this grant programming could help earn the Village a Green Luminary[30] award from MMSD, becoming the first municipality in Waukesha County to earn one. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also offers grant and loan programs to fund stormwater projects. Other non-governmental grant opportunities such as the Go Outside Fund,[31] The C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant[32] and the Environmental in Wisconsin database would apply to specific locations in the Village. The Go Outside fund could apply to green infrastructure at schools or near playgrounds. Private landowners could be charged voluntarily or through special assessment[33] when these projects are installed. Regular tax allocation in capital improvement funds remains a potential funding source for green infrastructure.

In the years following installations, the Village can engage with property owners to learn if basement backups have occurred less frequently.

Create a Sustainability Scholar Program

To increase capacity to implement sustainability recommendations, the Village can create a part-time Sustainability Scholar position through fundraising. The position could function as a scholarship for undergraduate or graduate students and offer a $6,400 stipend (equivalent to 32 weeks, 10 hours per week at $20 per hour). Funding for this position would come from local donors interested in both advancing sustainability and supporting young professionals. To attract and retain significant donors, the scholarship could be named after the primary contributor(s).

Providing this internship-style program would help younger residents in Elm Grove to engage with sustainability. For example, a college-aged student would be savvy in social media and may be more approachable to middle school and high school students trying to get involved. Outreach and increasing public awareness could be the primary topics of focus for this position. The Sustainability Scholar program would ensure a dedicated person answers residents' questions on programs and Village operations and attends events and Village meetings. They would maintain ongoing tasks producing fliers, educational materials, and developing progress reports to highlight the Village's efforts. These activities are one piece of the work that a full-time sustainability coordinator does in communities with a permanent, funded staff position. Interns would gain direct experience in this field and would gain buy-in to programs in Elm Grove, providing a potential talent pipeline for future Village hires.

Along with the duties of advancing sustainability, the internship can teach skills in grant writing. Interns can spend time finding and applying for grant opportunities to expand the internship and implement new programs in the Village. With review from Village staff, interns can submit applications to grant programs like the Energy Innovation Grant Program from the Wisconsin Service Commission. This state grant has been used by communities like Sun Prairie and Eau Claire to fund municipal building improvements, climate action plans, and an EV charging station.

To provide exposure and opportunity for building connections, the intern would also be scheduled one hour meetings throughout the semester with department heads. At the end of their contract, interns should write a reflection explaining their contributions to sustainability in Elm Grove and what they have learned. This reflection wold help the Village evaluate the position's success and create promotional materials to help raise funds for future interns.

This position[34] would be under the office of the Village Manager, requiring time for bi-weekly check-ins from this office. Guidance for the program can be provided by the Sustainability Committee, but administrative tasks, interviewing, and hiring applicants will be performed by the Manager's office.

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Village Sustainability Successes

2023 WI Recycling Excellence Award

99%

of residents already **incorporate sustainable habits**, according to a community-wide survey

"I think Elm Grove's sustainability efforts far exceed other communities. This is part of the reason I love living here!"

12,000+
pounds of textiles recycled

305
Monarch-friendly yards

100+
households do compost pick-up

Be part of what's next: email **debsustain@gmail.com** to get involved

Source: Sustainability Team - Elm Grove Sustainability Successes

Chapter 6:
Closing Statement

Closing Statement

While this document offers Elm Grove a roadmap for the next several years, Village leaders should continuously look for opportunities to make sustainable choices. This planning effort focused primarily on strategies to protect and conserve natural resources, including electricity and water. The Sustainability Committee's current efforts and known community priorities shaped this focus. However, sustainability touches all parts of a community. Future updates of the plan should incorporate more social dimensions of sustainability, including health, economic prosperity, equity, social inclusion, food access, and housing. In particular, land use and housing policy reform may offer the Village significant opportunities to advance environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

This plan provides recommendations across a range of timelines. The "seeds" will grab residents' attention and provide immediate impact through cost savings for residents and the Village. By showing quick results, these early strategies will help increase the number of residents actively participating in sustainability, growing the number of volunteers to help run events and manage programming. Early planning for upcoming medium- and long-term strategies will allow the Village to develop a schedule, budget, and steps to accomplish them within the anticipated timeline. These aspirational goals keep the Village motivated and will provide the greatest benefits to quality of life, environmental preservation, and economic prosperity. Although these longer-term strategies may be more complex, years of working on shorter strategies will build experience and momentum, allowing staff and residents to overcome future challenges.

Given the timeline for these recommendations, the Village should start the process of updating its Sustainability Plan by 2030. This process should include public participation, not only to center local priorities, but to measure changes in public perspectives and engagement. Key recommendations in this plan focus on increasing public education and participation in sustainability initiatives, and the Village should monitor success toward these goals. At the time of this plan's publication, sustainability and clean energy initiatives remain a key state priority despite environmental policy and funding uncertainty at the federal level. Great planning initiatives offer communities goals to rally behind. While municipal officials and staff can help lead the way, residents are the driving force behind community transformation. The community in Elm Grove has abundant expertise, passion, and resources with which to advance sustainability.

In closing, the Village of Elm Grove's sustainability efforts build on a strong foundation. Few communities of the same size have made as much progress or show as much ambition as the Village. Many planners try to live by the phrase, "Do not design plans that will sit on a shelf." This sentiment means that planners should create recommendations sincerely intend for the community to implement. Fortunately for the Village of Elm Grove, an enthusiastic, thoughtful, and knowledgeable Sustainability Committee will be seeing this plan through.

Seeds (O-2 Years)

- Add Solar Provisions to the Municipal Code
- Expand the Municipal Bicycle Ordinance
- Install Solar LED Lighting
- Incorporate Sustainability in all Planning Documents
- Create the Underwood Creek Sustainable Pocket Park
- Expand Existing Sustainability Programs
- Establish an Earth Month Action Series
- Provide Educational Materials for Energy Efficiency
- Expand the Textile Recycling Program

Tree (3-6 Years)

- Establish a Dark Sky Ordinance
- Add Composting to the Municipal Code
- Add Green Features to the Municipal Code
- Achieve SolSmart Bronze Designation
- Develop Downtown District Sustainability Guidelines
- Stormwater and Floodland Management Updates
- Create Sustainability Educational Signage
- Expand Collaboration with Regional Watershed Initiatives

Grove (6+ Years)

- Incorporate Solar Panels on Village Facilities
- Bury Key Powerlines to Increase Energy Resilience
- "Green" Theme in Public Spaces
- Create a Sustainability Scholar Position

Source: Wisign Photo - Image of the Elm Grove Village Center Sign

Appendices

Appendix A
Public Participation

Appendix B
Shorewood Case Study

Appendix C
Oconomowoc Case Study

Appendix D
Eau Claire Case Study

Appendix E
Sun Prairie Case Study

Appendix F
Ashland Case Study

Appendix G
Shorewood Hills Dark Sky Ordinance

Appendix H
Alternatives

Appendix I Recommendation Details

Village of Elm Grove
Sustainability Plan

May 2025