

**Community Engagement Plan**  
**City of La Crosse Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan**

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Prepared for:  
City of La Crosse

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## 1.0 Project Background

The intent of this project is to prepare a comprehensive U.S. Highway (Hwy) 53 Corridor Master Plan that will address transportation design of infrastructure, economic development opportunities, urban design, land use and redevelopment opportunities, environmental opportunities and constraints, historic preservation, and linkages to the adjacent neighborhoods for the Northside of La Crosse. Hwy 53 from Interstate 90-Exit 3 is a primary gateway into the City of La Crosse (City) and the development of a master plan has been a high priority for many years. This plan is intended to provide the framework necessary to plan for the land use, redevelopment, and transportation decisions of this corridor for the next 15-20 years.

The City has previously prepared a Hwy 53 Corridor Enhancement Plan in 1999-2000 that established streetscaping guidelines that were implemented during the reconstruction of portions of Hwy 53 by WisDOT. Portions of this plan were implemented but it needs to be updated and incorporated into an overall master plan. The 2004 City of La Crosse Economic Development Strategic Plan calls for the development of an “Area Plan” for the Rose Street Corridor from Interstate 90 to downtown La Crosse. An objective on the 2014 Economic Development Commission’s Action Plan was to coordinate multi-jurisdictional gateway efforts for prime entrance corridors to the City including Interstate 90 & USH 53/STH 35.

The plan must fit with the community’s vision and be responsive to the needs and desires of the Hwy 53 Corridor’s residents, business community, and overall City objectives of improved health and livability. Community engagement is a critical element of understanding existing needs crafting plans that will deliver these outcomes for the affected communities, neighborhoods, and businesses, and creating a highly implementable plan with actionable objectives that achieve community consensus.

### 1.1. Community Engagement Plan Overview

Effective community engagement is essential for good public decision making and will be critical to understanding needs, developing land use plans, and building support for the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. The Community Engagement Plan (CEP) will serve as a guide for the engagement of Hwy 53 Corridor stakeholders, residents, and businesses during the planning process. The purpose of the CEP is to document the tasks related to stakeholder and public engagement that will be undertaken during the preparation of the plan. In general, the intent of the community engagement process will be to be proactive rather than reactive, and to work closely with local communities to build on their successes and to empower people to engage in this as well as other future public initiatives.

Community engagement will consist of a team led by City staff with support from the consultant team and specific stakeholder groups with resources to assist in community engagement. Team members will be engaged in staffing events, on-street activities, and, depending on individual skills and specific engagement strategies, may be asked to assist in the following: provide interpretation services, assist individuals in using filling out surveys, assist with hands-on activities at public events, welcome people to public meetings, hand out information through door knocking or at public events, and assist in other ways to create a welcoming environment and engage people in the planning process.

Outreach activities will be focused around the three major stages of the planning process:

- Discovery: Understanding what exists, what has been done, and what is planned
- Exploring Alternatives
- Draft Document and Implementation Strategies

The specific outreach activities and the outreach tools that will be used will be customized for the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. This CEP will provide direction for outreach activities, and many of the tools described in this report will be used at each of the three stages of the planning process. However, other strategies may be used as well if they have been found to be particularly effective in a given community, neighborhood and/or cultural group.

## 1.2. Community Engagement Goals

The goal of the CEP is to ensure that the concerns and issues of those with a stake in the Hwy 53 Corridor (whether impact or benefit) are identified and addressed. To achieve this goal, the following will need to occur:

- Identify stakeholders, including populations not traditionally involved in neighborhood decision making.
- Engage all stakeholders, including residents and businesses, in meaningful and accessible ways.
- Solicit early and continuous involvement.
- Seek collaborative input on alternatives and evaluation criteria.
- Provide transparency during the planning process.
- Build understanding of redevelopment opportunities and build support for the plan that evolves from the planning process.

## 2.0 Committee Structure and Decision-Making Process

The Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan is led by the City with input and direction from the following committees:

- Project Management Team (PMT)
- Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan Steering Committee (Steering Committee)

The roles, responsibilities and make-up of these committees are summarized here. The PMT will direct the day-to-day work of the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. The Steering Committee will provide guidance on the overall planning process as well as technical and non-technical input. Ultimately, approval authority for the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan rests with the City Plan Commission and City Council.

### 2.1. Project Management Team

The PMT will consist of key staff from the City. Periodically, stakeholders with technical knowledge of the study area will be invited to participate in the PMT by providing information and feedback on draft plans. The PMT is intended to be actively involved in the day-to-day management of the

Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan to guide the study and facilitate team coordination. The PMT is responsible for facilitating coordination among the partner agencies and the consultant team. The PMT is responsible for oversight of all technical work, the project schedule, and City staff recommendations regarding invitations to other stakeholders not represented on the PMT. For the duration of the study, the PMT will meet monthly with the consultant team. Although membership of the PMT does not need to be stagnant throughout the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan process, it is recommended for purposes of continuity due to the high level of involvement of the PMT in day-to-day activities. The following is a list of PMT membership by contact name and City department.

| NAME                 | CITY OF LA CROSSE DEPARTMENT                                |
|----------------------|---|
| Tim Acklin, AICP     | Planning and Economic Development, Senior Planner           |
| Jason Gilman, AICP   | Planning and Economic Development, Director of Planning and |
| Andrea Schnick       | Planning and Economic Development, Economic Development     |
| Matthew Gallager, PE | Engineering, Assistant City Engineer - Transportation       |
| Others               |   |
| Others               |   |
| Others               |   |
| Others               |   |

### 2.1.1 Purpose, Conduct and Values

The role of the PMT is to help direct of the consultants' work, allocating and utilizing resources in an efficient manner to help the oversight of the planning process.

- Participate actively in weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings.
- Work with consultants and other agency staff to complete the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan providing insight on adopted plans, non-adopted plans, zoning, planned capital improvements, other infrastructure needs, and development plans.
- Coordinate discussions with other consultants working on concurrent planning and design efforts impacting Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan design decisions.
- Managing coordination of the stakeholders and advisory groups engaged in the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan efforts.
- Resolving cross-agency issues at project level.
- Assessing project scope and change control and escalating issues where necessary.
- Approving strategies, implementation plan, project scope and milestones.
- Resolving strategic and City/Agency policy issues.
- Driving and managing Community-based change through the duration of the study.
- Prioritizing project goals on behalf of the City and/or agency they represent.
- Making final recommendations based on consensus-based input.
- Briefing your elected officials as necessary on the planning process progress and recommendations.

- Support and promote Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan project to elected officials, the business community, and constituents/community members.
- Providing input/feedback on community engagement framework
- Helping form project advisory committees/stakeholder groups
- Conducting direct outreach on Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan activities
- Facilitating, hosting or sponsoring engagement events

### 2.1.2 Time Commitment

PMT members can expect to spend a minimum of four to five hours per month attending meetings and reading and commenting on documents. Additional time may be required to resolve planning related issues.

## 2.2. Steering Committee

A steering committee of citizen, elected official, business, and non-profit organization representatives has been established for the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. The Steering Committee will work closely with City staff and the consultant team, to develop and evaluate Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan alternatives, and make recommendations on a preferred plan. Members of the Steering Committee will also be asked to provide advice and assistance to the project team for broader community outreach to residents and businesses in the study area, as they are able and willing to do so. The Steering Committee will meet at key milestones during Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan development, and more frequently if needed. Membership of the Steering Committee can only change with City Council approval. Stakeholders will represent residents and neighborhood organizations, neighborhood business owners, governmental agencies and elected officials.

### 2.2.1 Purpose, Conduct and Values

The role of the Steering Committee is to advise and guide project planning efforts, review project deliverables, assist with community outreach and engagement efforts, provide community expertise, insight on issues and priorities throughout the process from a community standpoint. Stakeholders will be representative of a range of views and/or experiences that include Economic, Infrastructure and Urban Design.

The Steering Committee as a whole is responsible for the following:

- Ensuring community engagement in the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan process.
- Assisting in the establishment of project priorities.
- Evaluating project options and alternatives.
- Creating ad hoc working groups to work on specific projects.
- Sharing project information and obtaining feedback from the community.

Individual Steering Committee members have the following responsibilities:

- Serve as stewards of the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan process to the community.
- Engage thoughtfully in the issues brought before the Steering Committee.
- Represent and advocate for the interests of his/her constituency as well as the interests of the Hwy 53 Corridor study area as a whole.

- Share relevant information (historical, background) with the Steering Committee.
- Assist in informing constituencies about the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan project.
- Recommend appropriate avenues for cost effective engagement with the community.
- Work to identify solutions to issues that arise, and openly/objectively discuss and evaluate those options.
- If members discuss the project with the media, they should be clear that they are representing their own views and are not speaking for the Steering Committee or the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan project.
- Attend all meetings and review meeting agenda packet materials prior to the meeting.
- Communicate community concerns and perspectives to City staff and project consultants.
- Help “staff” community engagement events, such as open houses, workshops, etc., attend project events, and host/sponsor engagement opportunities in the community.

### **2.2.1 Time Commitment**

Members should be committed to attending approximately six meetings with project consultant team. The Steering Committee members should anticipate additional meetings and/or working sessions with City staff to review additional information and project background. The Steering Committee should also anticipate additional discussion sessions among members as needed to provide concise project recommendations and meet community goals. Meetings will be held in the afternoon and last no longer than two hours. The only exception to this will be public input meetings; they would be scheduled for the early evening. Steering Committee members should also commit time to reviewing meeting material prior to the meeting and to assisting with any public meetings related to the project.

### **2.2.2 Meeting Guidelines**

Members of the consultant team and City staff will guide each Steering Committee meetings. These meetings will be conducted as follows:

- Begin and end meetings on time.
- Provide agendas in advance of each meeting with an opportunity to adjust the agenda at the beginning of each meeting.
- Provide adequate information to best prepare committee members for productive and collaborative meetings.
- Prepare meeting summaries, including ACTION ITEMS, after each meeting. Meeting summaries will be amended, if necessary, after review at the subsequent meeting.
- Provide follow up on questions or additional research requested by Steering Committee members in a timely manner.
- Although all are welcome, only Steering Committee members will participate in group discussions.
- Reserve ten minutes at the end of each meeting for an open forum to provide comments.

Steering Committee member’s commitment to a productive and collaborative meeting should follow the following rules:

- Prioritize project goals and focus on meeting outcomes.
- Respect other points of view by being open to others' ideas.
- Be active, listen, participate, and advocate for your position at the meeting.
- Do not interrupt other speakers.
- Do not conduct side conversations.
- Keep your commentary brief and allow everyone to participate.
- Be creative – creativity is aided by freedom, openness, and fun.
- Review and understand existing information; limit divergent discussions that require bringing in new information.
- Be prepared before each meeting.
- Turn off electronic devices during meetings.

### **3.0 Other Constituent Groups**

The study area for the Hwy 53 Corridor includes the City of La Crosse and is fully within La Crosse County. One of the initial and ongoing tasks of the study will be to identify key organizations and demographic groups to ensure that these constituents are fully represented in the study process and that a means of regular communication is identified for each one. Additional business, educational, social service, health care and advocacy groups may be added as additional constituent groups are identified. The following constituent groups are examples of those that will be engaged in the process:

- 1) Federal, State, and Regional Agencies
- 2) Study Area Businesses not already participating in the Steering Committee
- 3) Non-Profit Community Organizations, Institutions, and Advocacy Groups
- 4) Public Stakeholders: for example:
  - Residents (owners and renters) along the corridor within the study area
  - Under-represented and under-served populations (including persons with low-incomes, limited English proficiency, or disabilities)
  - Senior housing developments within the study area
  - Public and private landowners within the study area
  - Employees
  - Walkers
  - Bicyclists
  - Motorists
  - Transit riders
  - Commuters

### **4.0 Potential Issues and Opportunities**

The primary purpose of community engagement during the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan is to understand and respond to barriers, challenges, benefits and opportunities associated with

changes in land use, access, transit services and other facilities around key nodes and potential redevelopment sites and throughout the study area, as well as to work with local stakeholders to develop visionary plans for both key sites and the study area as a whole.

Issues, concerns, opportunities and constraints that are submitted through the public involvement efforts will be tracked and documented by the City or the consultant team, depending on who is responsible for particular engagement activities or events. This documentation will provide a means of ensuring that there is public input in the study process and that issues raised by stakeholders are addressed as appropriate throughout the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan process and beyond. Issues identified by stakeholders will be summarized in a Community Engagement report and incorporated into the technical analysis conducted for the study.

It is important to note that a key deliverable of this Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan is the vetting of feasibility of identified remedies, to include potential financing sources, with an implementation plan.

## **5.0 Community Engagement Coordination**

The following public engagement techniques will be used to reach a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public. Some public engagement techniques may be targeted to specific stakeholders or geographic areas in order to create welcoming opportunities for participation in the study process. Because of the wide variety of strategies that could be employed to engage the community, collaboration between the consultant team, City staff, and Steering Committee will be critical in order to determine who is responsible for leading a particular engagement effort or activity.

### **5.1. Project Messages**

The consultant team will work with the City staff and Steering Committee to develop consistent messages regarding the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. This is critical to providing the public with a good understanding of the study and the decision-making process as well as ongoing motivation to participate in the study. Working with the City staff and Steering Committee, several messages will be developed for consistent use in project materials and communications.

### **5.2. Community Engagement Activities**

The following public outreach activities will be used to engage residents and businesses in the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan process. These activities will take project information into the community where people routinely gather to potentially reach those who are not likely to attend a public meeting. The Communication Tools described in section 5.4 will be used to provide notification and promotion of all public meetings.

#### **5.2.1 Public Meetings**

A series of public meetings will be held for the Hwy 53 Corridor at key points in the planning process. These meetings will be organized and led by the consultant team with assistance from the City and other project partners. The first meeting will introduce the project with opportunities to solicit issues and concerns to be addressed in the plan. A series of Pop-Up workshops will be

held to discuss project goals/ objectives and to review design alternatives. These pop-up workshops will allow community stakeholders to provide comments on the plan alternatives. Interactive exercises will be used to help engage people in discussion about the alternatives. The third public meeting will be to present a refined plan for the Hwy 53 Corridor and implementation recommendations and strategies.

1<sup>st</sup> Public Meeting (scope of work task 1.8):                      Late September/ Early October 2016

Pop –Up Workshops (scope of work task 1.10):                      November 2016 – February 2017

(will need to discuss timing to take advantage of more seasonable weather)

3<sup>rd</sup> Public Meeting (scope of work task 3.3):                      April 2017

### **5.2.2 Targeted Outreach**

Working with the City, the consultant team will determine if one or more small group meetings will be held to target specific audiences that may not be easily engaged through a broader public meeting or to gain input from a particular population group. For example, a targeted event (or staffed display) may be held at a study area apartment building to gain input from renters or other hard-to-reach population groups. These meetings will allow project information to be shared where people are already gathering. Tablets may be used at these events to provide access to the project website and MySidewalk (a possible web-based community planning tool). A concerted effort will be made to identify targeted locations to engage historically underserved populations. Our local consultant team member will attend meetings with the City and assist in the development materials.

### **5.2.3 Traveling Displays**

Traveling displays (not staffed) will be provided at libraries, community/recreation centers, social service centers, neighborhood/business organization offices, and/or other key destinations in the study area during key time periods of the Hwy 53 Corridor, such as when alternative concepts have been released for review. These displays would also be timed to help publicize the public meetings as well as to provide people with information about the project and access to a project website if these strategies are considered appropriate. Opportunities will be provided for people to provide their feedback through written comment forms, and links to any possible websites. The location, placement, and printing of the displays will be the responsibility of the City. The consultant team will be available to design and create the displays.

### **5.2.4 Organization Meetings**

Members of the project team, led primarily by City staff and our local consultant team member, will be available to meet with existing neighborhood, business, non-profit, social service, and/or cultural groups, or just impromptu neighborhood groups, to have facilitated discussions or presentations about the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan.

### **5.2.5 Electronic Communications**

The following electronic communications tools will be used to provide notification of project milestones and to maintain a continuous dialogue on the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan among community organizations, stakeholders and the general public.

#### **5.2.5.1 Project Website**

A project web page will be developed as part of the City website. The website will be maintained by City staff but the consultant team will provide content for updating the site periodically. Content will be updated at least monthly and more frequently when public events occur or major milestones are passed. The website should include the following:

- Study area map
- Project news
- Sign-up for project updates
- History/Background/ Analysis
- Info about the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan
- Committee overviews and members
- Notice of public meetings and other events
- Project reports
- List of Frequently Asked Questions
- Project contact information (staff, email phone)
- Ability to submit comments

#### **5.2.5.2 Email Notifications**

The City's email notification system will be used to send out email notifications. Email notifications will be sent to the Stakeholder Distribution List (**we will work with the City staff to create this**), which will be compiled and maintained by City staff for the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan and will be updated periodically. This distribution list will include all Steering Committee members, all identified stakeholder organizations, all individuals who sign up to receive the email updates either at public meetings or via the City's website, and any other organizations, media outlets and individuals that wish to be on the list. This e-mail distribution list will be used to distribute periodic project updates and to announce public meetings, events and milestones.

## **5.3. Print Communications**

### **5.3.1 Fact Sheet**

A factsheet or other printed marketing piece will be created to promote the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan activities and will include a description of the project, key messages about benefits, and links to the website and other social media sites. The piece can be used by all project team members and partner agencies for outreach and education and will be updated as needed as the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan is developed and completed.

### **5.3.2 Display Boards**

Display boards will be prepared by the consultant team for public meetings and other outreach activities as needed to clearly illustrate the concepts and alternatives that will be discussed at

those meetings. The display boards may also be used as a travelling display as opportunities are available.

#### **5.4. Engagement of Under-Represented Populations**

Effective and meaningful engagement of under-represented populations will be instrumental to the success of the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan. A concerted effort will be made to include people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, ethnic minority groups and organizations, immigrant groups and seniors. Strategies that will be used to reach under-served populations include:

- Engage members of the ..... that represent underserved populations in their respective communities.
- Utilize organizations such as ..... to identify specific groups and methods for outreach. If necessary, consider including or more of these organizations to be part of the .....
- Provide public meeting notices in ethnic neighborhood-level media publications for communities represented in the study area.
- Translate meeting notices and project information for any non-English speaking populations concentrated in the study area
- Provide interpretation services and/or staff for any non-English speaking populations concentrated in the study area
- Attend meetings of established organizations that serve specific cultural/ethnic groups or business communities in the study area.
- Provide food and child care at all public engagement events.

#### **5.5. Media Notifications**

Draft news releases for the media will be prepared at project milestones by the consultant team and provided to City staff for review and distribution to the media.

#### **5.6. Presentations to Elected Officials**

The consultant team with support from City staff will provide a briefing of the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan at a to-be-determined milestone during the study to the City Council and other elected officials. The presentation about the recommended Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan will include a summary of the community engagement activities and will emphasize the ways in which community engagement informed each stage of plan development.

### **6.0 Project Contacts**

For all project communication, materials, and media requests, the following City staff will be listed as the project contact:

Tim Acklin, AICP  
Senior Planner  
City of La Crosse  
400 La Crosse St  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608-789-7391

[www.cityoflacrosse.org](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org)

## **7.0 Community Engagement Documentation**

At the end of the Highway 53 Corridor Master Plan, the community engagement efforts will be documented and included as a part of the study. This documentation will describe the processes used for engagement, both formal and informal, and the ways in which public input was integrated into, and influenced the outcomes of the Hwy 53 Corridor Master Plan.