

## **ELEMENT 9: ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Vision**

*Polk County utilizes its diverse resources as a leader in sustainability endeavors and creates an environment and conditions necessary for a sustainable future.*

### **9.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **9.2 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES**

#### **9.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Sustainability is a burgeoning concern worldwide. Here in Polk County issues related to sustainability surface every day. Virtually all local level plans contain language supporting environmental protection and local self-reliance - two hallmarks of sustainable development.

The State of Wisconsin requires that a comprehensive plan contain at least the nine planning elements previously addressed. Polk County has elected to add this additional element out of concern for emerging global issues that will combine to make “business as usual” untenable for future generations. Of particular importance are the related issues of peak oil and global climate change, both of which will have local impacts that must be identified and addressed to the best of our ability.

Polk County has already taken some steps toward meeting these challenges, first by establishing an Ad Hoc Renewable Energy Committee, and then by becoming the first county in the state to adopt Governor Doyle’s “25 X 25” initiative, which sets the goal of a 25% reduction in the use of nonrenewable energy by the year 2025 – either through conservation or through conversion to renewable sources. The City of Amery has declared itself an eco-municipality, and the Village of Osceola and City of St. Croix Falls are both pursuing aggressive sustainability initiatives of their own.

The most widely agreed upon definition of sustainability is “meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” There is a grassroots movement in Polk County on sustainability formed around “study circles” meeting and discussing the framework set forth in the book *The Natural Step for Communities* by Sarah James and Torbjorn Lahti. These groups, which have already involved hundreds of county citizens, are providing the largest groundswell of support for these initiatives. The four system conditions of the Natural Step framework are:

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

- 1) concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust
- 2) concentrations of substances produced by society
- 3) degradation by physical means  
and in that society,
- 4) human needs are met worldwide

One of the reasons for the popularity of the Natural Step movement is that it does not dictate exactly what steps a community should take to become sustainable; rather, it uses the above framework to evaluate alternative courses of action so that every decision made is the most sustainable possible at the time.

Many of Polk County's policies and procedures already support sustainability. Examples include the Highway Department's no idling policy and the Parks, Buildings and Solid Waste Department's performance contracting with Johnson Controls to maximize operational efficiencies in county buildings. Polk County's recycling center is recognized as one of the best in the state, providing safe and economical disposal of everything from batteries to paint to unused pharmaceuticals.

There are a number of goals listed in this section that reinforce language elsewhere in this plan. That is as it should be; many issues are interrelated and don't fit neatly into one category. The desire to maintain a healthy farm economy, for example, includes goals related to culture, economy, and the environment. There are a number of actions being taken within the county to emphasize sustainable food production, such as: the numerous farmers' markets, various Community Supported Agriculture farms, buy local initiatives, etc. As another example, the protection of the County's water resources finds mentions in almost every element of this plan. While many of the goals listed below could have been integrated into other elements, there is a desire to emphasize sustainability issues by listing them separately as follows.

## **9.2 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES**

### **Goal 1: Promote energy efficiency and conservation for the County.**

#### **Objectives:**

##### *1) Lead by example*

#### **Policies:**

- 1) Establish a plan to monitor the County's consumption of electricity, natural gas, liquid propane, and vehicle fuels
- 2) Set goals that put the County on track to meet its stated "25 X 25" goal
- 3) Continue performance contracts for efficient operation of county buildings

##### *2) Assist and encourage homeowners and businesses*

#### **Policies:**

- 1) Work with Focus on Energy and other public and private agencies to educate homeowners and businesses on ways to improve energy efficiency.
- 2) Develop a means of recognizing businesses that are leaders in adopting efficiency measures.
- 3) Adopt building codes and ordinances that encourage and reward energy conservation measures in new construction.

### **Goal 2: Adopt renewable energy policies and practices as part of a strategy to meet future energy needs.**

#### **Objectives:**

##### *1) Take full advantage of opportunities as they arise*

#### **Policies:**

- 1) Utilize experienced grant writers to pursue funding available from government agencies and private foundations
- 2) Monitor and emulate best practices as exemplified by other counties in the state and nation
- 3) Investigate financing options to assist businesses and homeowners in affording renewable energy technologies

*2) Plan for long-term conversion to green energy sources*

Policies:

- 1) Ensure the viability of the Renewable Energy Committee
- 2) Identify “low hanging fruit”, i.e., what County operations are most likely to benefit from renewable applications
- 3) Promote and assist to the extent possible the location of renewable energy production facilities in the County
- 4) Identify and take steps to remove barriers to the development of renewable energy in the County

**Goal 3: Encourage food and energy independence in the County.**

Objectives:

- 1) *Promote Polk County as a place that values local food and energy production*

Policies:

- 1) Partner with Buy Fresh, Buy Local; Focus on Energy, and other organizations and institutions working toward similar goals
- 2) Work with municipalities within the County to assist with zoning changes, grant applications, and other efforts designed to increase self-sufficiency
- 3) At every opportunity, advertise Polk County as a place that values sustainability

- 2) *Give preference to local purchasing*

Policies:

- 1) Investigate possibilities to purchase local food and energy for County consumption
- 2) Review purchasing policies to remove barriers to purchasing locally

**Goal 4: Promote land uses that do not negatively impact water resources in the County.**

Objectives:

- 1) *Maintain and enhance water quality in the County*

Policies:

- 1) Fully enforce the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, including the establishment of buffer zones
- 2) Support the efforts of the Polk County Association of Lakes and Rivers

- 3) Adequately fund the Land & Water Resources Department
- 4) Closely examine and monitor potential long-term threats to groundwater from mining, large confinement farming operations, and industrial activities
- 5) Promote and assist with the periodic testing of private wells throughout the county

***Goal 5: Utilize sustainability and local food/energy independence as tools to improve economic stability and quality of life throughout the county.***

Objectives:

- 1) Promote the County as a place that welcomes, promotes, and encourages green businesses and green jobs.*

Policies:

- 1) Investigate and take advantage of tax incentives and other means of attracting new green businesses
  - 2) Develop programs to attract new agricultural enterprises to the County, especially small-scale, direct-market farms
- 2) Investigate the possibilities of barter and local currency to encourage local transactions in food and energy.*