



LA CROSSE COUNTY
Exceptional services. Extraordinary place.

Sustainability Indicators 2021 Report

May 25, 2022

Prepared by



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many La Crosse County staff persons and others who provided information for this report, and to all people and organizations engaged in the important work of preserving and improving the livability of our County.



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Introduction

In 2009 the La Crosse County Board adopted a *Strategic Plan for Sustainability*. The plan identified multiple sustainability indicators to be monitored on an ongoing basis. Some indicators apply to government operations only, while others apply to the County as a whole. For most indicators, 2007 was the earliest year for which reliable data could be gathered. It was therefore designated as the “base year” against which future values would be compared. According to the *Strategic Plan for Sustainability*, a report was to be generated on an annual basis to monitor and highlight improvements or setbacks in the pursuit toward sustainability. This report summarizes the status of the following indicators through the end of 2021:

County Government Operations Indicators

- Electricity Usage
- Natural Gas Usage
- Facility Energy Use Intensity
- Vehicle Fuel Usage
- Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Use
- Water Usage
- Paper Usage

County-Wide Indicators

- Electricity Usage
- Natural Gas Usage
- Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Usage
- Solid Waste Generation & Diversion
- Municipal Recycling Collection
- Bicycle Accommodations
- Alternative Commuting Rates
- Land Use
- Education Attainment
- Median Household Income
- Poverty Rate
- Unemployment Rate

La Crosse County Government Operations

Facility Energy Usage

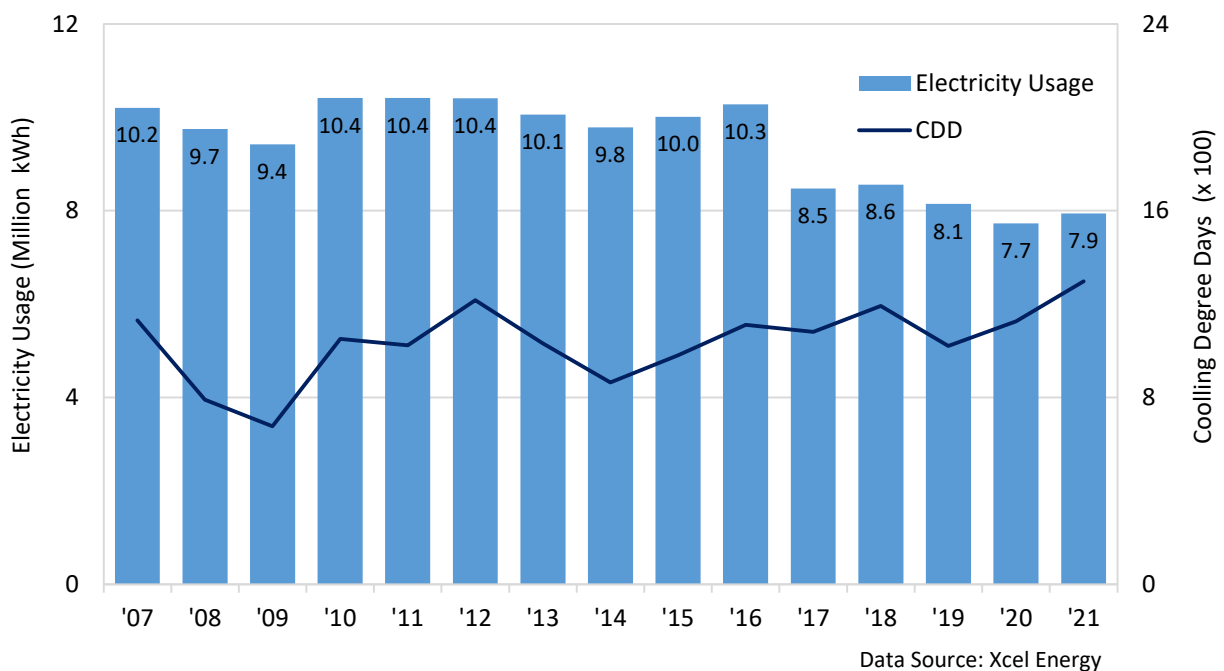
The La Crosse County government utilizes electricity and natural gas energy sources to operate facilities; each is examined separately below. The County government implemented several facilities changes in 2016 and 2017 that significantly impacted subsequent energy usage levels:

- A new Lakeview Health facility opened late in 2016, replacing the old facility.
- The Administration Center was relocated to another existing facility – smaller in area – in La Crosse. After renovations were completed, the new facility opened early in 2017.
- A boiler replacement and major expansion at the Health & Human Services facility were completed in late 2016

Electricity

La Crosse County government operations consumed 7.94 million kWh of electricity during 2021 – down from 10.20 million kWh in 2007 (-22.2%), but up from 7.73 million kWh in 2020 (+2.7%; see Figure 1). Increased electricity usage in 2021 compared with 2020 may have resulted from increased air conditioning needs (due to hotter summer temperatures; see CDD discussion below), and/or increased facility occupancy/usage as the COVID pandemic progressed. The County government spent an estimated \$243,000 less for electricity in 2021 than if usage had remained at 2007 levels, and \$1.22 million less from 2008 - 2021 in total. Savings estimates are based on annual statewide average commercial electricity prices, published by the US Energy Information Administration.

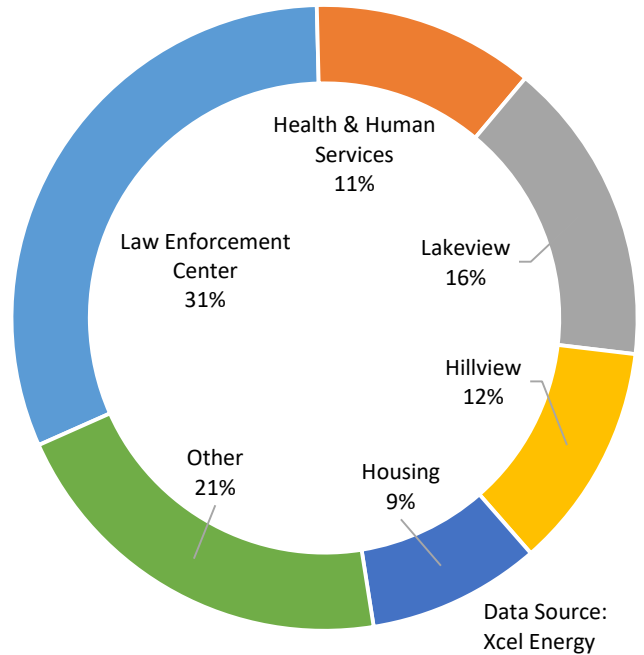
Figure 1: La Crosse County Government Annual Electricity Usage with Cooling Degree Days



Cooling degree days (CDD) measure the difference between outdoor temperature and the base indoor temperature of air-conditioned facilities. The annual CDD values shown in Figure 1 represent an index of overall summer heat levels. Higher electricity consumption for air conditioning is expected in years with higher annual CDD values. In La Crosse, cooling degree days were 15.3% higher in 2021 than in 2020.

Among County facilities, the Law Enforcement Center used the largest amount of electricity in 2021 (31% of the County government total; see Figure 2). Lakeview Health Center, Hillview Health Care Center, and Health and Human Services facilities also used relatively large quantities.

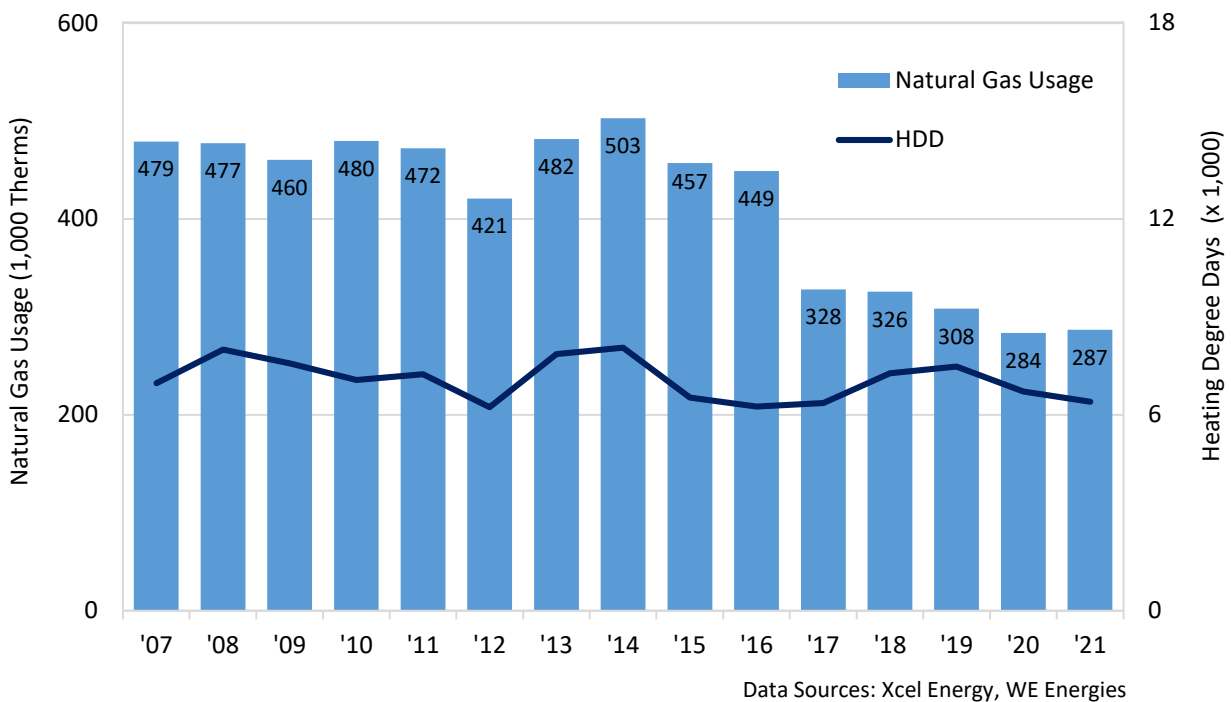
Figure 2: La Crosse County Government 2021 Electricity Usage by Facility



Natural Gas

La Crosse County government operations consumed 286,751 therms of natural gas during 2021 – down from 478,918 therms in 2007 (-40.1%), but up from 283,678 therms in 2020 (+1.1%; see Figure 3).¹ Increased natural gas usage in 2021 compared with 2020 may have resulted from increased facility occupancy/usage as the COVID pandemic progressed. The County government spent an estimated \$107,000 less for natural gas in 2021 than if usage had remained at the 2007 level, and \$583,000 less from 2008-2021 in total. Savings estimates are based on annual statewide average commercial natural gas prices, published by the US Energy Information Administration.

Figure 3: La Crosse County Government Annual Natural Gas Usage with Heating Degree Days

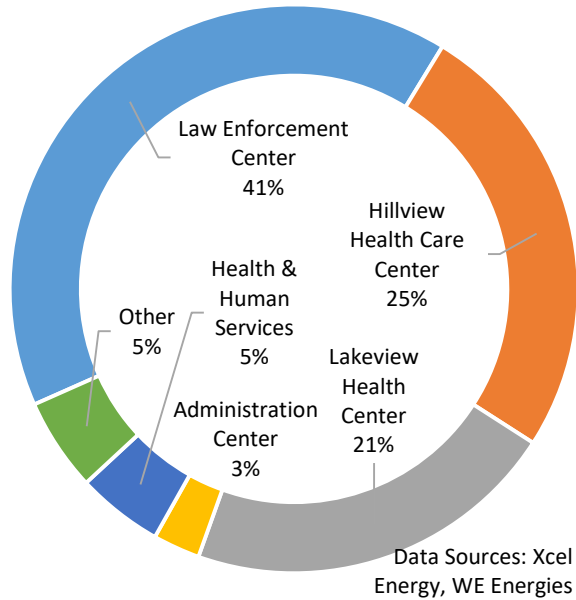


Heating degree days (HDD) measure the difference between outdoor and indoor temperatures. The annual HDD values shown in Figure 3 represent an index of overall winter coldness. Higher natural gas use is expected in years with higher HDD values. In La Crosse, heating degree days were 4.7% lower in 2021 than in 2020.

¹ 2020 natural gas usage value revised slightly upward from previous report (omission discovered and corrected)

Among County facilities, the Law Enforcement Center used the largest amount of natural gas in 2021 (41% of the County government total; see Figure 4). Hillview Health Care Center and Lakeview Health Center facilities also used relatively large quantities.

Figure 4: La Crosse County Government 2021 Natural Gas Usage by Major Facility



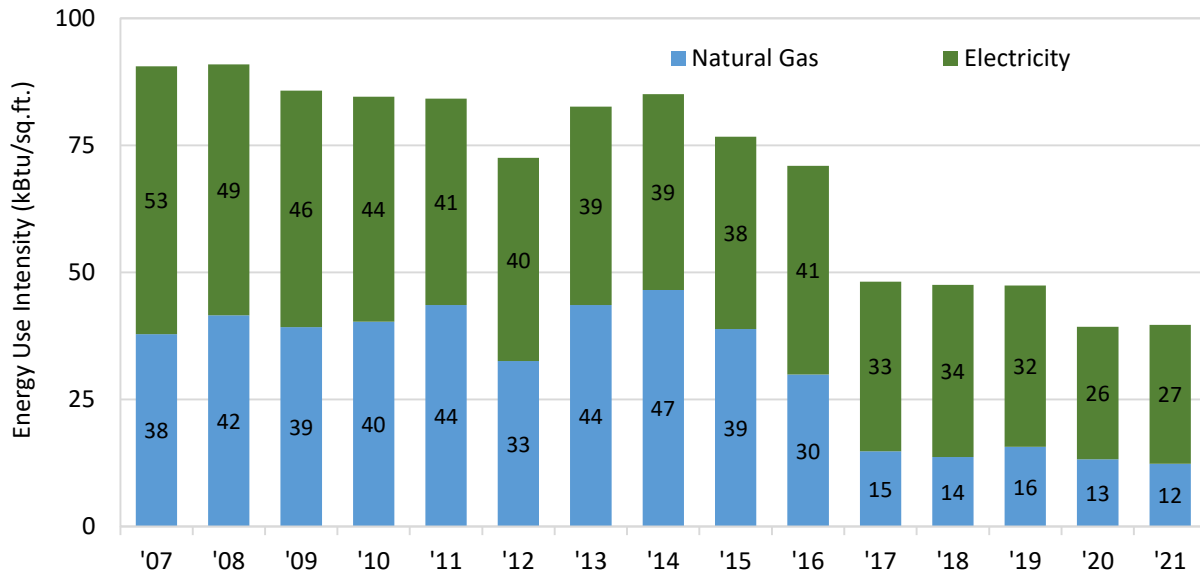
Energy Use Intensity

A facility’s annual energy usage per square foot, or *energy use intensity (EUI)*, is a measure of its total annual energy usage (in units of kBtu), standardized by its size (in units of ft²). EUI is useful for comparing energy use among facilities of different sizes. This analysis examines EUI of two La Crosse County government facilities -- Health and Human Services and the Law Enforcement Center.

Health and Human Services Facility

The Health and Human Services facility’s EUI in 2021 was 39.6 kBtu/ft² – down from 90.6 kBtu/ft² in 2007 (-56.2%), but up slightly from 39.3 kBtu/ft² in 2019 (+0.9%; see Figure 5). For comparison, U.S. EPA’s Energy Star Portfolio Manager publishes median EUI values by facility type. As of March 2016, the median site-level EUI value for offices was 67.3 kBtu/ft². Note that La Crosse County replaced the boiler and completed an expansion in its Health and Human Services facility in 2016, increasing the total area of conditioned space from 90,000 ft² to 114,000 ft² and leading to the significant drop in EUI between 2016 and 2017. The drop in energy use intensity in between 2019 and 2020 likely resulted from changes in facility usage patterns during the COVID pandemic.

Figure 5: Health & Human Services Facility Annual Energy Use Intensity

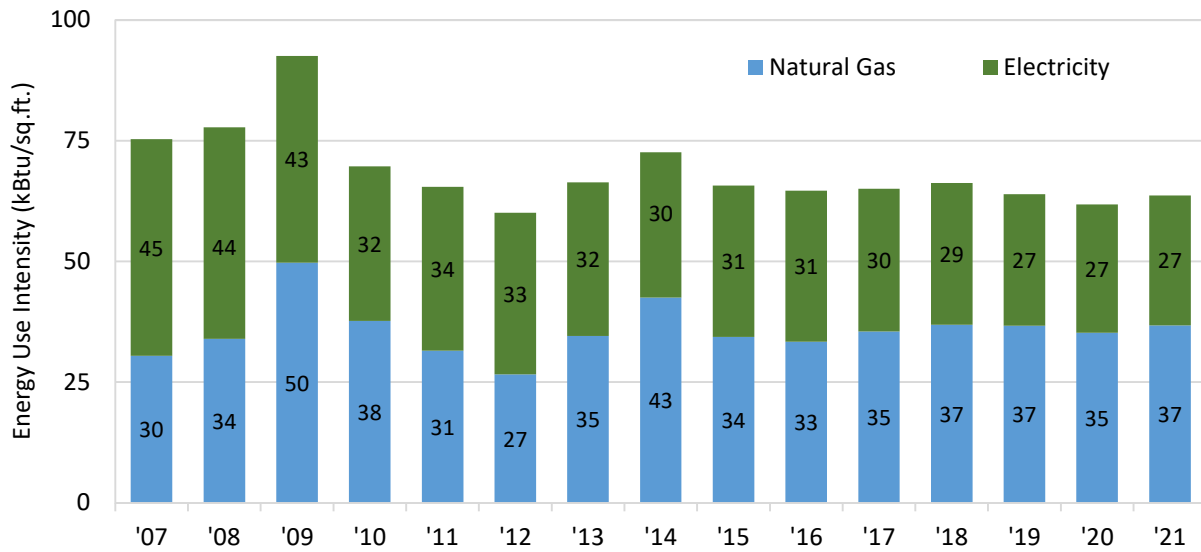


Change in EUI can have significant financial implications. The energy cost to operate the Health and Human Services facility in 2020 was ~\$108,000 less than if the EUI had remained at 2007 levels, based on statewide average commercial energy prices.

Law Enforcement Center

The Law Enforcement Center’s EUI in 2021 was 63.7 kBtu/ft²— down from 75.3 kBtu/ft² in 2007 (-15.4%), but up slightly from 61.8 kBtu/ft² in 2020 (+3.1%; see Figure 6). For comparison, the Portfolio Manager’s median EUI value for incarceration facilities in March 2016 was 93.2 kBtu/ft². Note that the La Crosse County Law Enforcement Center underwent a major expansion in 2010, increasing its total area from 169,000 ft² to 315,000 ft².

Figure 6: Law Enforcement Center Annual Energy Use Intensity

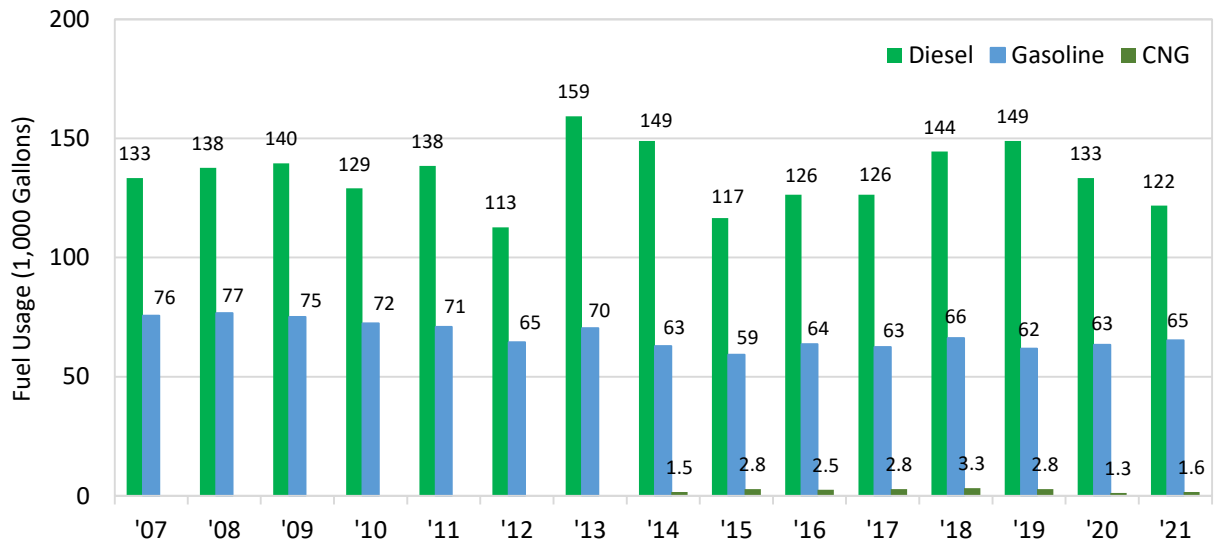


Change in EUI can have significant financial implications. The energy cost to operate the Law Enforcement Center in 2021 was ~\$169,000 less than if the EUI had remained at 2007 levels, based on statewide average energy prices.

Vehicle Fuels

The County government’s vehicle fleet uses three fuel types: diesel fuel, gasoline and compressed natural gas (CNG). Usage of each type is examined separately below. Overall, the County government’s total vehicle fuel usage in 2021 was 9.7% lower (by energy content) than in 2007.

Figure 7: La Crosse County Government Annual Vehicle Fuel Usage



Data Sources: LaX County Hwy., Facilities, Sheriff Dep'ts.

Diesel

Diesel fuel is utilized by heavy-duty vehicles such as snowplows and construction vehicles. Therefore, diesel fuel usage is influenced by winter snowfall amounts and summer construction activity. County government operations used 121,822 gallons of diesel fuel in 2021 – down from 133,348 gallons in 2007 (-8.6%) and down from 133,420 gallons in 2020 (-8.7%; see Figure 7). The Highway Department accounted for 99% of diesel usage in 2021.

Gasoline

Gasoline is utilized by lighter-duty vehicles such as passenger cars and sheriff squad vehicles. County government operations used 65,204 gallons of gasoline in 2021 – down from 75,550 gallons in 2007 (-13.7%), but up from 63,416 gallons in 2020 (+2.8%; see Figure 7). The Sheriff’s Department accounted for 72% of gasoline usage in 2021, and the Highway Department for most of the remainder.

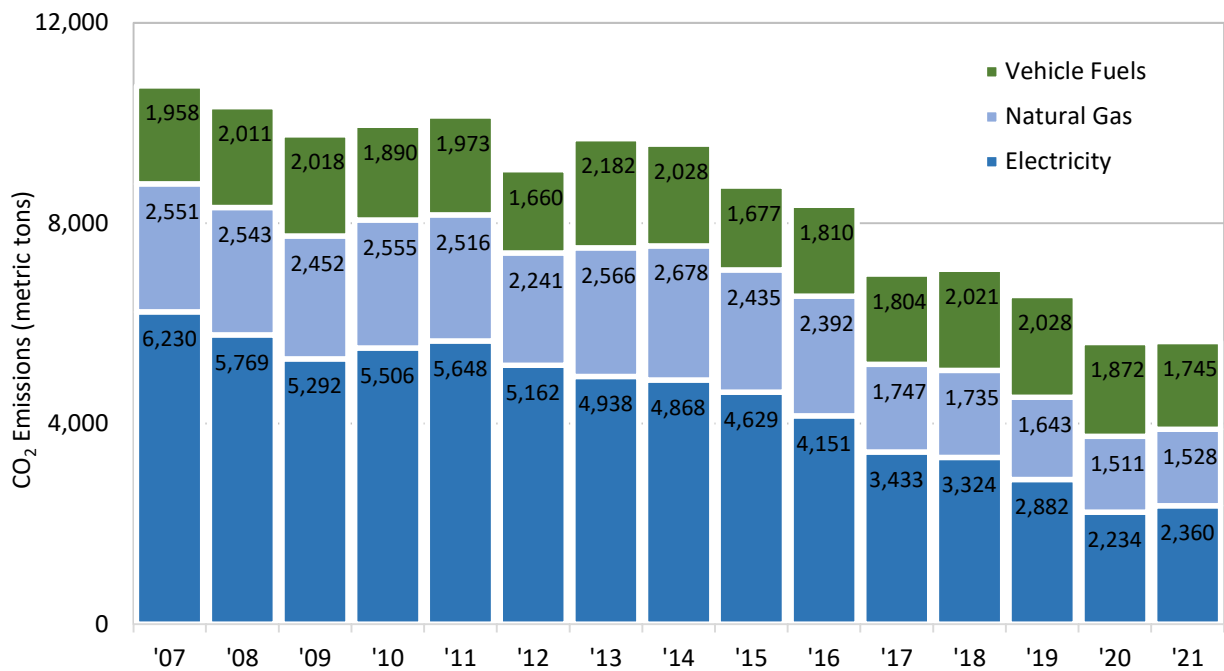
Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)

In 2014, the Highway Department began operating two full-size pickup trucks that were converted to use compressed natural gas (CNG) rather than gasoline. CNG quantities are typically measured in gallons of gasoline equivalent (GGE), which represents a quantity of CNG with energy content equal to a gallon of gasoline. Total CNG usage in 2021 was 1,563 GGE, which was up from 1,259 GGE in 2020 (+24.1%; see Figure 7).

Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Usage

Combustion of fossil fuels to produce energy emits carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The County government’s 2021 energy usage resulted in an estimated 5,632 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions – down from 10,739 metric tons in 2007 (-47.6%), but up slightly from 5,616 metric tons in 2020 (+0.3%; see Figure 8).² The electricity component was the largest driver of reduced emissions from 2007 to 2021, having decreased by 62.1%.

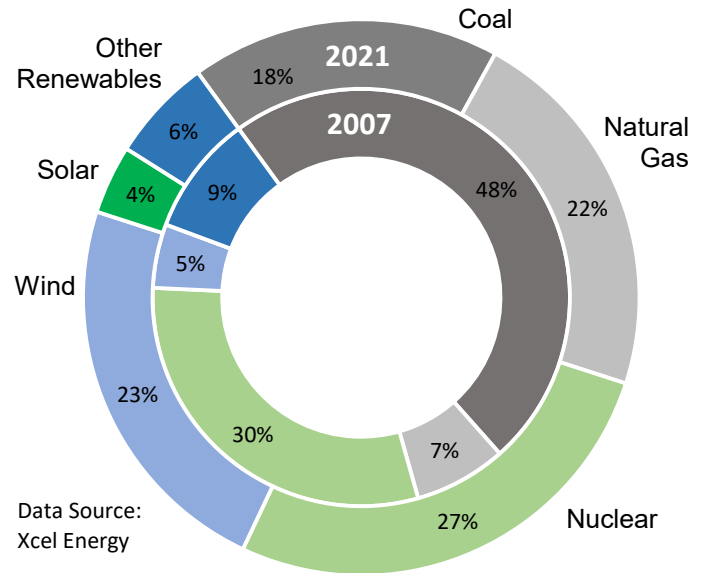
Figure 8: La Crosse County Government Annual Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Usage



² 2007 value revised slightly from previous reports based on vehicle fuel data correction

The County government’s carbon dioxide emissions from electricity are influenced by two factors: the County government’s electricity usage quantities and Xcel Energy’s electricity emission rates – i.e., the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per unit of electricity produced. Both factors declined from 2007-2021, usage by 25.1% and emission rates by 49.4%. The decline in emission rates resulted from Xcel Energy producing less electricity with coal and more with natural gas, wind, and solar energy sources (see Figure 9). Natural gas is a fossil fuel source like coal, but electricity generated from natural gas produces approximately only half as much carbon dioxide as electricity generated using coal.

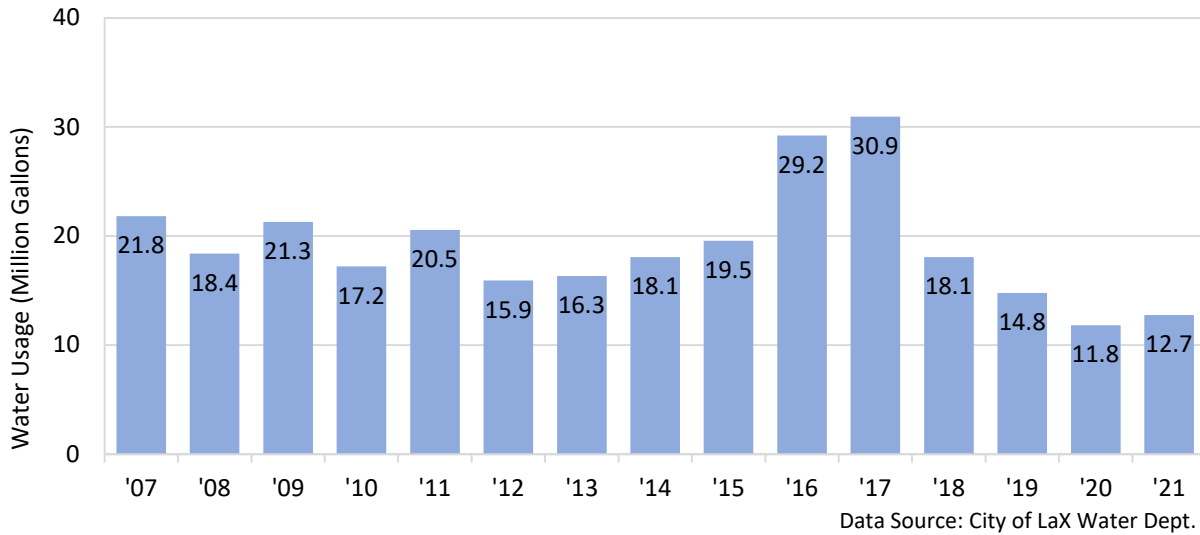
Figure 9: Xcel Energy Upper Midwest Region Electricity Resource Mix



Water Usage

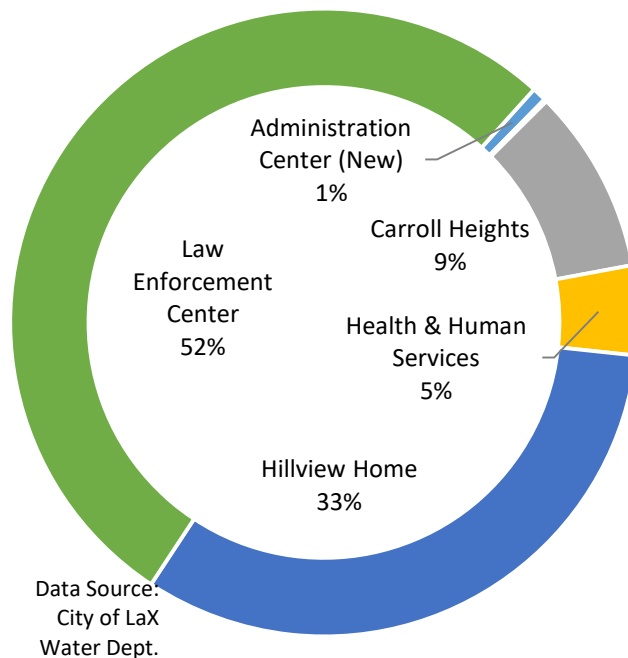
This indicator tracks water usage at County government facilities that are located within the City of La Crosse and served by the City Water Utility: Administration Center, Health & Human Services, Law Enforcement Center, Hillview Health Care Center, Carroll Heights, and the Highway Department facility on Park Lane Dr. Several facilities located in other municipalities are excluded, e.g., Lakeview Health Center, Highway Department Headquarters. Also excluded is water sourced from on-site wells at the Administrative Center, Health and Human Services, and Law Enforcement Center facilities.

Figure 10: La Crosse County Government Annual Water Usage



The County government’s water usage in 2021 was 12.7 million gallons – down from 21.8 million gallons in 2007 (-41.6%), but up from 11.8 million gallons in 2020 (+7.9%; see Figure 10). Among included County facilities, the Hillview and Law Enforcement Center facilities used the largest quantities (see Figure 11). High water usage quantities in 2016 and 2017 resulted from temporary stoppages of on-site wells at the Law Enforcement Center (2016) and the Health and Human Services facility (2017). The facilities used City-sourced water while on-site wells were not operating.

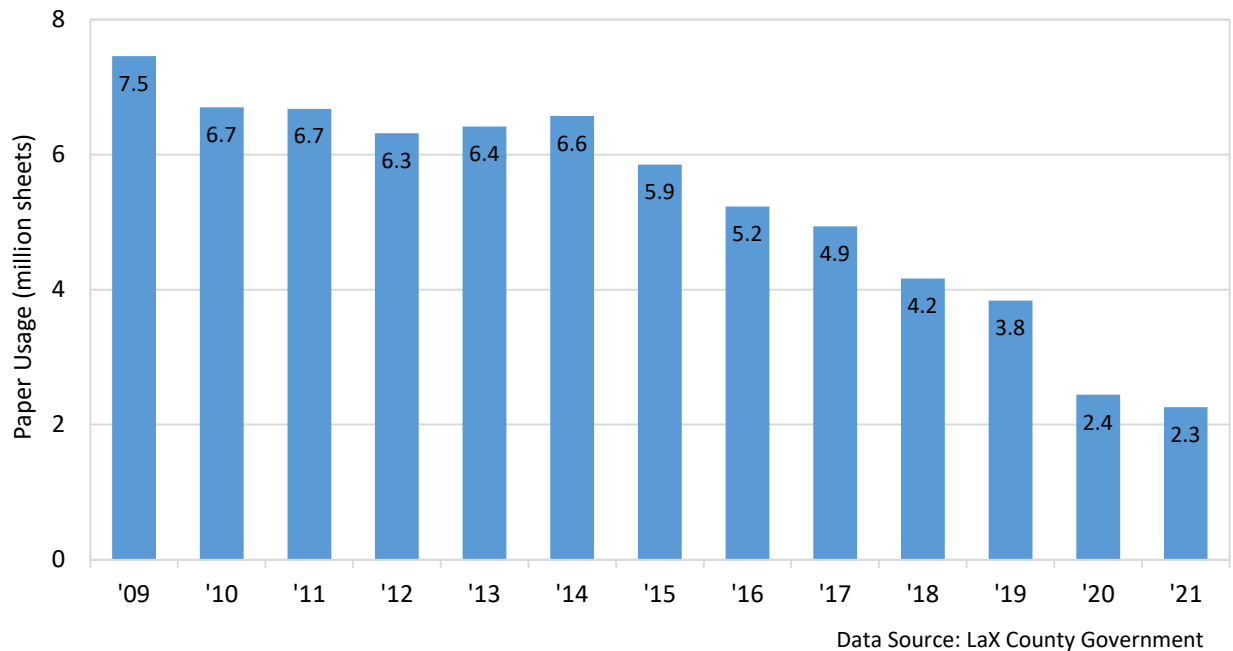
Figure 11: La Crosse County Government 2021 Water Usage by Facility



Paper Usage

County government operations consumed 2.3 million sheets of paper in 2021 – down from 7.5 million sheets in 2009 (-69.7%), and down from 2.4 million sheets in 2020 (-7.4%; see Figure 12). Paper usage information is not available for 2007 or 2008. Exceptionally low paper consumption in 2020 and 2021 likely resulted from changes to County employee work patterns caused by the COVID pandemic. At \$0.05 per printed sheet of paper, the County government spent an estimated \$260,000 less on paper/printing in 2021 than if usage had remained at the 2009 level, and \$1.4 million less from 2010-2021 in total.

Figure 12: La Crosse County Government Annual Paper Usage

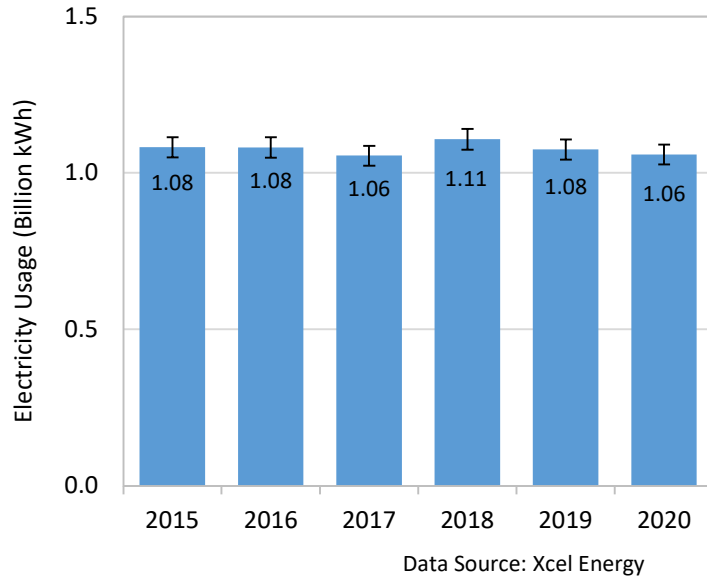


Community-Wide Indicators

Electricity Usage

Community-wide, La Crosse County used 1.059 billion kWh of electricity during 2020 – down from 1.075 billion kWh in 2019 (-1.5%), and down from 1.082 billion kWh in 2015 (-2.1%; see Figure 13). 2021 information was not available in time for this report, and 2015 is the first year for which information is available. Note that year-to-year differences may fall within the margin of error (+/-3%) specified by Xcel Energy. Of the County’s total 2020 electricity usage, 69% was used by businesses and 31% by residences.

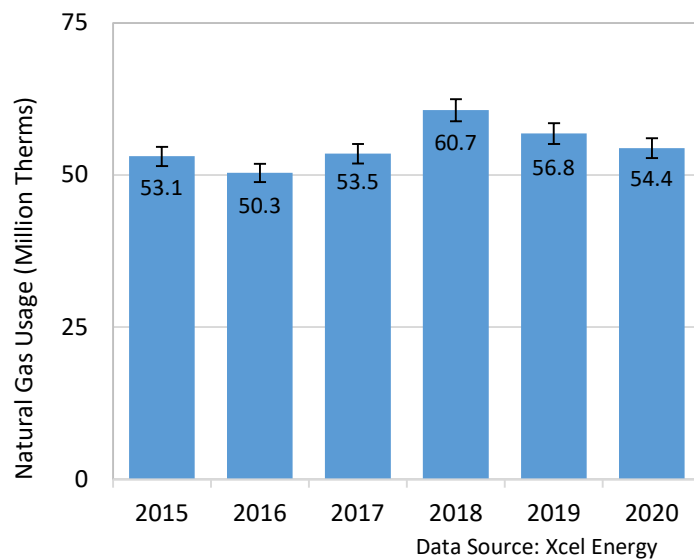
Figure 13: La Crosse County Community-Wide Annual Electricity Usage



Natural Gas Usage

Community-wide, La Crosse County used 54.4 million therms of natural gas during 2020 – down from 56.8 million therms in 2019 (-4.2%), but up from 53.1 million therms in 2015 (+2.5%; see Figure 14). 2021 information was not available in time for this report, and 2015 is the first year for which information is available. Note that year-to-year differences may fall within the margin of error (+/- 3%) specified by Xcel Energy. Of the County’s total natural gas usage in 2020, 65% was used by businesses and 35% by residences.

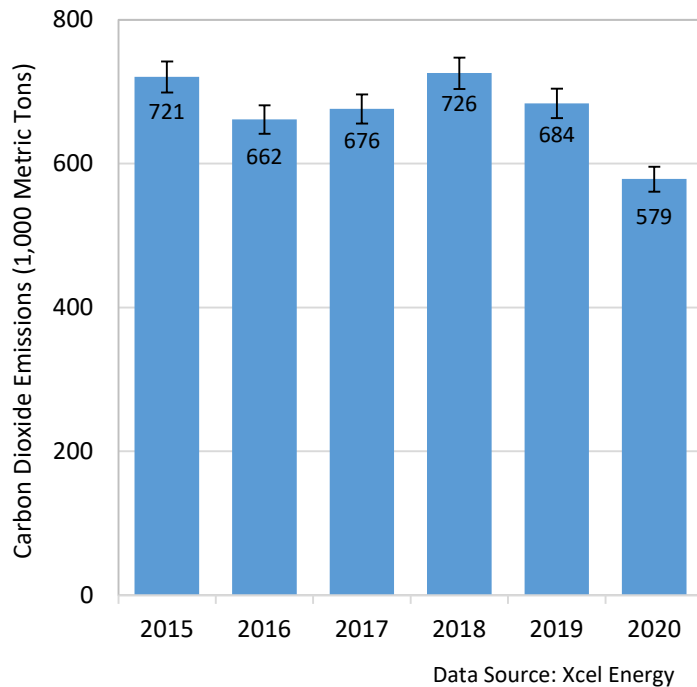
Figure 14: La Crosse County Community-Wide Annual Natural Gas Usage



Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Usage

Community-wide, electricity and natural gas usage in La Crosse County during 2020 was responsible for 578,608 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions – down from 683,899 metric tons in 2019 (-15.4%), and down from 720,676 metric tons in 2015 (-19.7%; see Figure 15). 2020 information was not available in time for this report, and 2015 is the first year for which information is available. Note that year-to-year differences may fall within the margin of error (+/- 3%) specified by Xcel Energy. Of the County’s total carbon dioxide emissions from electricity and natural gas usage in 2020, businesses were responsible for 67% and residences for 33%.

Figure 15: La Crosse County Community-Wide Annual Carbon Dioxide Emissions from Energy Usage

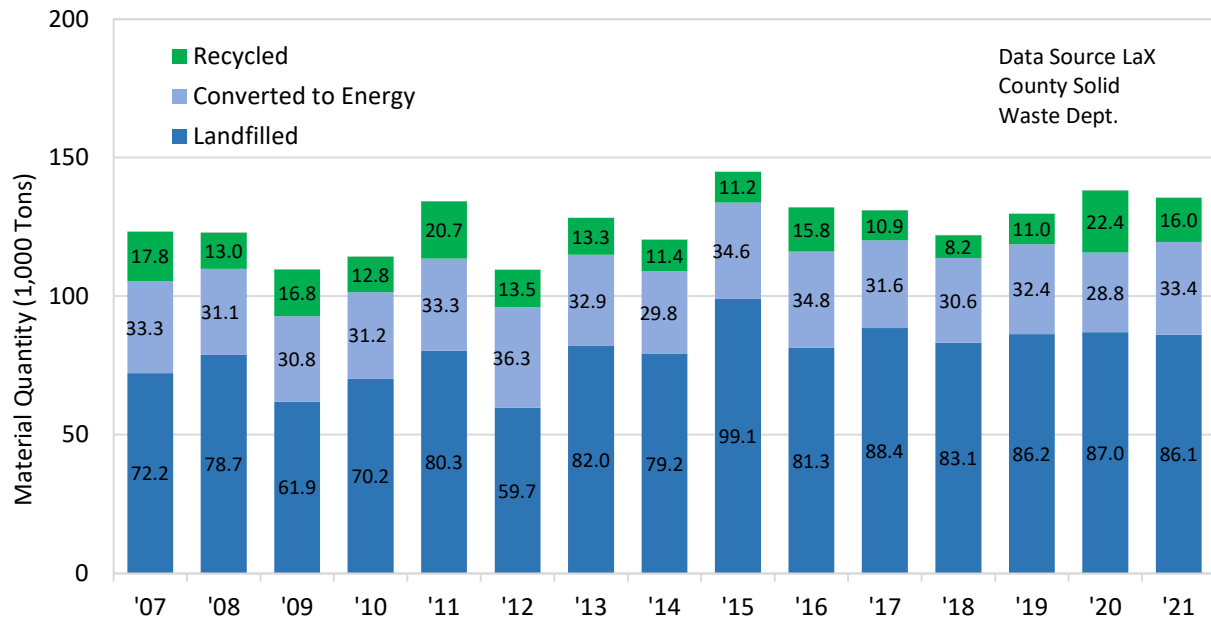


Solid Waste Generation & Diversion

Solid waste managed by La Crosse County enters one of three waste streams: deposition in the La Crosse County Landfill, incineration at Xcel Energy’s Waste-to-Energy facility on French Island, or recycling. Recycled quantities include materials diverted for recycling at the landfill -- shingles, concrete, tires, scrap metal, yard waste and wood waste.

In total, La Crosse County handled 135,518 tons of solid waste in 2021 – up from 123,274 tons in 2007 (+9.9%), but down from 138,133 tons in 2020 (-1.9%; see Figure 16). Economic recession may explain the relatively low quantity of solid waste generated in 2009 and the subsequent increasing trend.

Figure 16: La Crosse County Annual Solid Waste Quantities



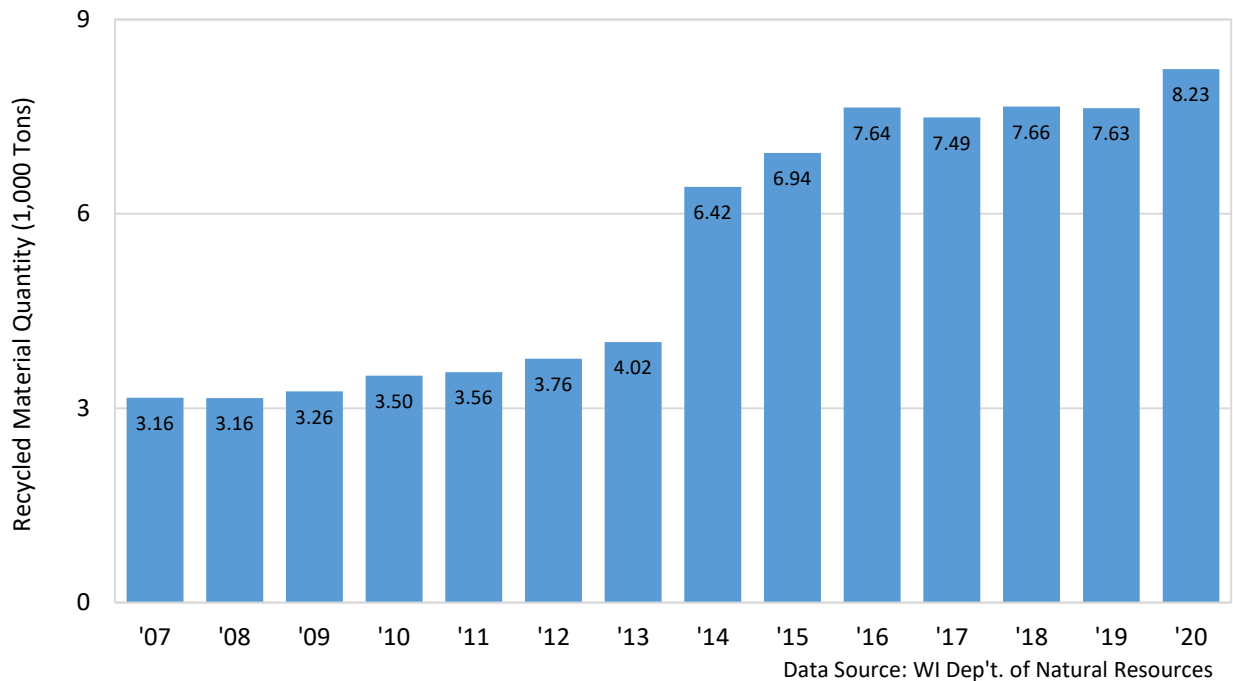
Of the total solid waste handled in 2021, 63.5% was deposited into the landfill, 24.7% was incinerated to produce electricity, and 11.8% was recycled. Roof damage caused by storms resulted in large quantities of shingles being received by the County solid waste system in 2020, which explains the increased quantity of recycled material during that year. The 2021 total diversion rate (i.e., the sum of the percent incinerated and the percent recycled) was 36.5%, down from 41.4% in 2007, and down slightly from 37.0% in 2020. Waste from La Crosse County incinerated at French Island was used to produce an estimated 21.6 million kWh of electricity in 2021, enough to supply approximately 2,376 households.

Municipal Recycling Collection

This indicator tracks quantities of recyclable materials collected through curbside and drop off collection methods by all municipalities within La Crosse County. Materials include paper products (newspaper, corrugated, magazines), containers (aluminum, steel, bi-metal, plastic, glass) and polystyrene foam packaging.

Recycling collection quantities have increased significantly since 2007. Together, the County’s municipalities collected 8,233 tons of materials for recycling in 2020 – up from 3,160 tons in 2007 (+160.5%), and up from 7,632 tons in 2019 (+7.9%; see Figure 17). Information for 2021 was not available in time for this report. The increase in recycled quantities between 2013 and 2014 coincide with the initiation of “single stream” collection processes and distribution of larger storage containers to residents in the Cities of La Crosse and Onalaska.

Figure 17: La Crosse County Annual Municipal Recycling Quantities



Transportation

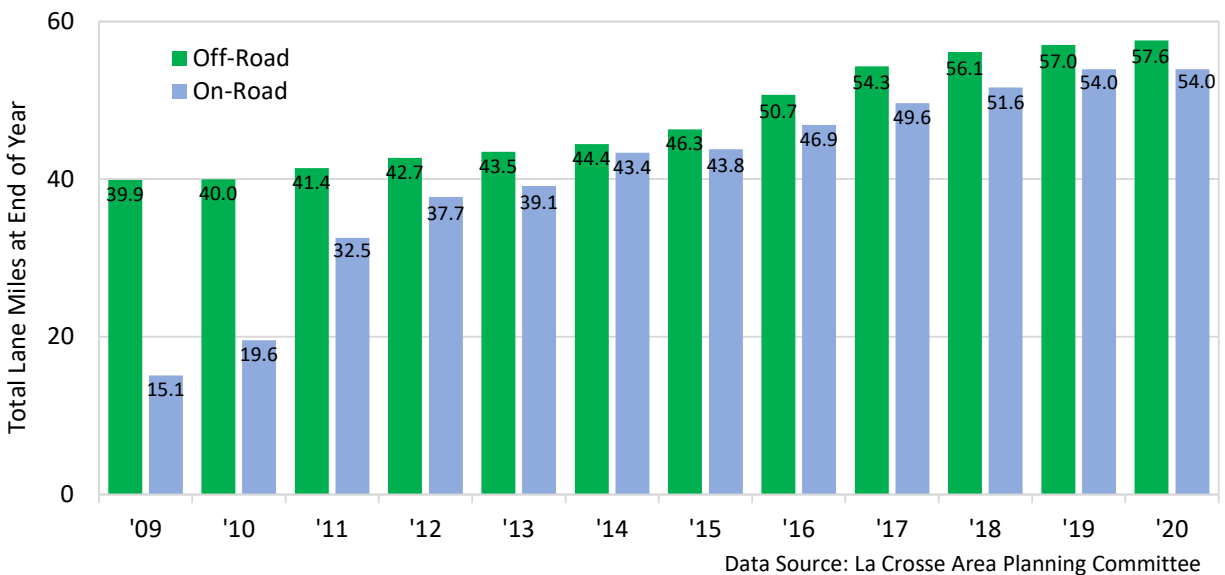
This report tracks two indicators related to alternative forms of transportation: the total length of area bicycle accommodations (i.e., routes and trails), and residents’ usage of alternative methods for commuting to work.

Bicycle Accommodations

This indicator quantifies on-road and off-road accommodations for bicycle transportation within the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) Planning Area -- which includes the city of La Crescent, MN as well as most of La Crosse County except for the towns of Farmington, Washington, Rockland, Burns, and Bangor.³ On-road accommodations include designated bicycle lanes, designated shoulders and streets marked with “sharrow” symbols. Off-road accommodations include paved trails that are at least eight feet wide, and state trails – which generally have crushed stone surfaces. Trails with grass or earth surfaces are not included. This indicator is quantified mainly from aerial photography, which was updated most recently in spring 2020. Information for 2007 and 2008 are unavailable for this indicator.

The LAPC Planning Area contained 57.6 lane-miles of off-road bicycle accommodations at the end of 2020 – up from 39.9 lane-miles at the end of 2009 (+44.4%), and up slightly from 57.0 lane-miles at the end of 2019 (+1.0%; see Figure 19). The Area contained 54.0 lane-miles of on-road bicycle accommodations at the end of 2020 – up from 15.1 lane-miles at the end of 2009 (+257.5%), and unchanged from the end of 2019 (see Figure 18).⁴ Visibility of markings for bicycle lanes and sharrows deteriorates over time, however. According to the LAPC, 31% of total bicycle accommodation lane-miles had “poor”, “very poor”, or “no longer visible” markings as of 2020.

Figure 18: LAPC Planning Area Bicycle Accommodations



³ See LAPC Planning Area map at www.lapc.org/content/about/map.htm

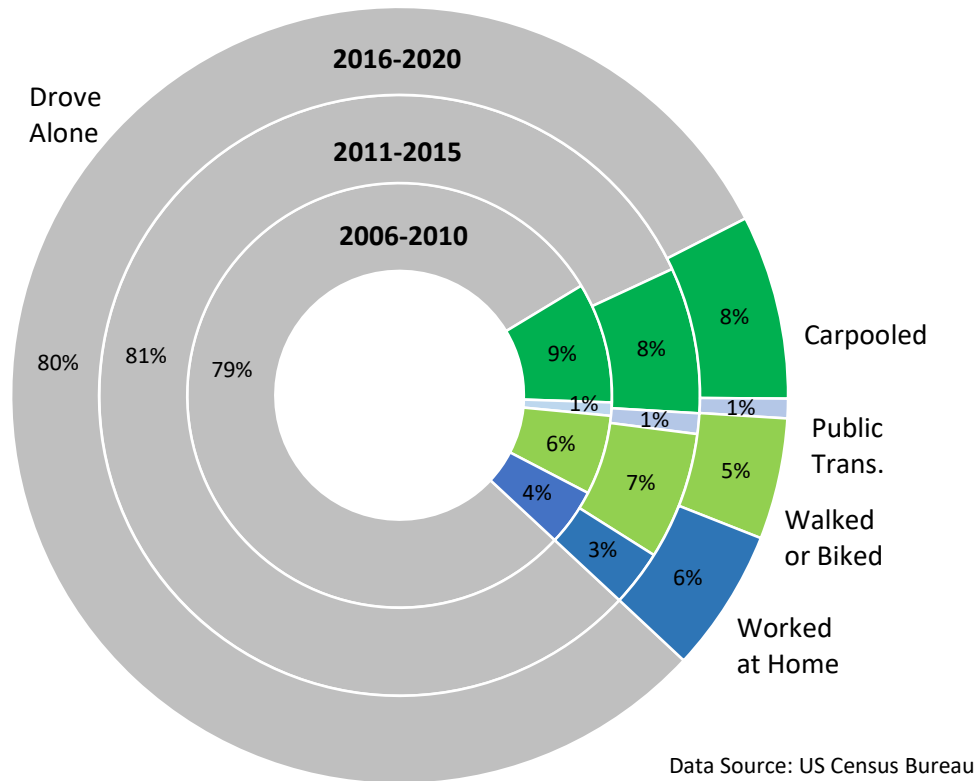
⁴ On-road and off-road values revised from previous reports to reflect corrections made to LAPC’s GIS.

Alternative Commuting Rates

This indicator examines percentages of workers who travel to work in ways other than driving alone in an automobile: bicycling or walking, public transportation, or carpooling. Data are collected as part of the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). ACS results are published as 5-year averages; this analysis examines alternative commute rates in three periods: 2006-2010, 2011-2015 and 2016-2020. Information for 2021 was not available in time for this report.

Approximately 80% of County residents drove alone to work during all three periods, while the remainder utilized alternative methods including carpooling (8-9%), walking/bicycling (5-7%), or public transportation (1%; see Figure 19). The City of La Crosse’s relatively compact spatial arrangement with short travel distances between residential areas and workplaces make walking/bicycling practical, so this percentage is higher for the City of La Crosse than the state average. Although many students also walk or bike to school in the City, students are not included in the analysis. The higher percentage of persons working from home during the 2016-2020 period was likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

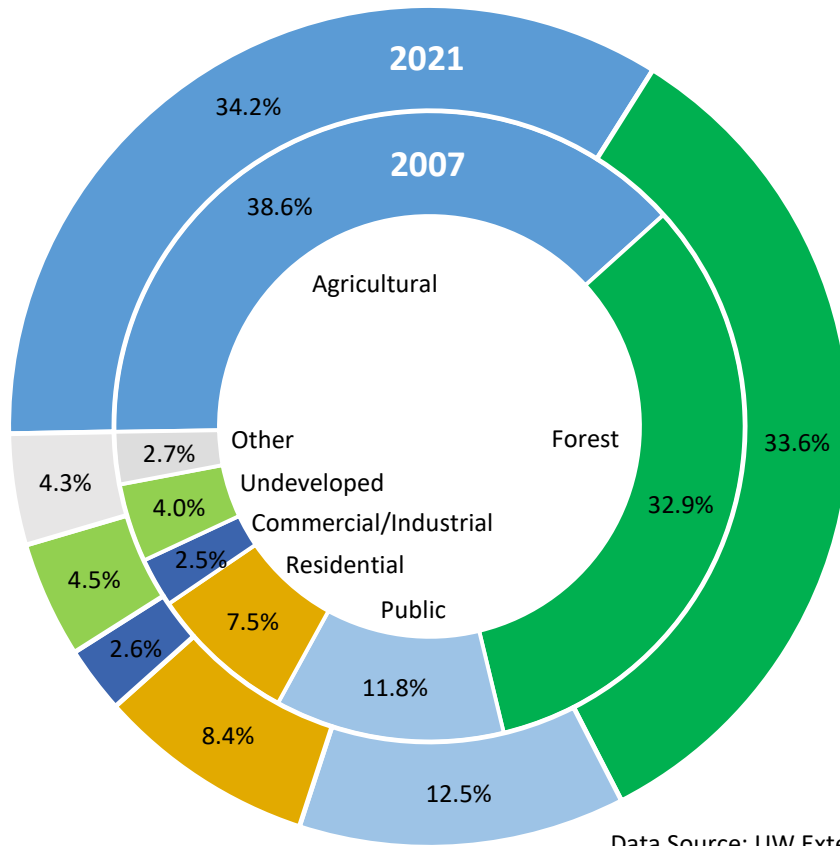
Figure 19: La Crosse County Resident Commuting Methods



Land Use

This indicator tracks land use change across La Crosse County. Land classification categories include residential, agricultural, forest, commercial/manufacturing, public (i.e., local/state/federally owned), undeveloped, and other. Most of the County’s land area is classified as agriculture or forest (see Figure 20). Public and residential uses make up most of the remainder.

Figure 20: La Crosse County Land Use Classifications



Forest, public, residential, commercial, undeveloped, and ‘other’ land use types gained area between 2007 and 2021, while agricultural land was lost. Transition of agricultural land into “undeveloped” land may occur with Conservation Reserve Program enrollment, or loss of access for a season because of high water. Of perhaps greater concern is conversion of agricultural into residential areas. The increase in public land may result from WI DNR stewardship grants in within the County, or from any road building or expansion projects that increase right of way.

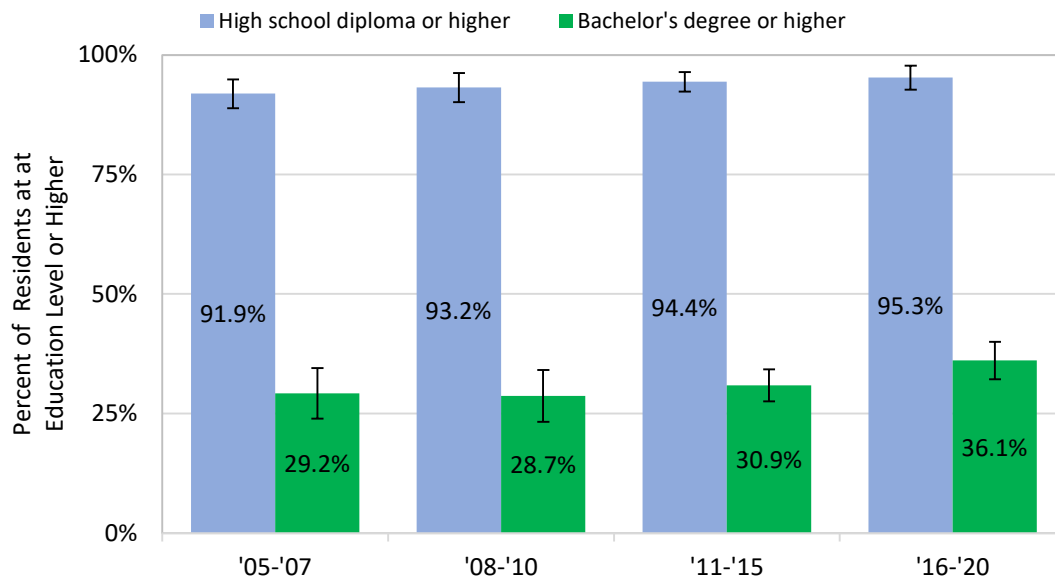
Socio-Economic Indicators

Socio-economic indicators specified by the *Strategic Plan for Sustainability* include educational attainment, household income, poverty rate and unemployment rate. For all socioeconomic indicators but the unemployment rate, the source of these data is the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS).

Education Attainment

This indicator tracks percentages of residents who held (1) high school diplomas and (2) bachelor’s degrees during four periods: 2005-2007, 2008-2010, 2011-2015, and 2016-2020. Information for 2021 was not available in time for this report. An estimated 95.3% of County residents held high school diplomas in the 2016-2020 period, up from 94.4% in 2011-2015 and up from 91.9% in 2005-2007 (see Figure 21). An estimated 36.1% of County residents held bachelor’s degrees in the 2016-2020 period, up from 30.9% in 2011-2015 and 29.2% in 2005-2007. Both high school diploma and bachelor’s degree indicators suggest trends toward higher education levels among County residents over the time periods examined, but please note that period-to-period differences are not statistically significant when margins of error are considered.

Figure 21: Percent of La Crosse County Residents with High School Diploma / Bachelor’s Degree

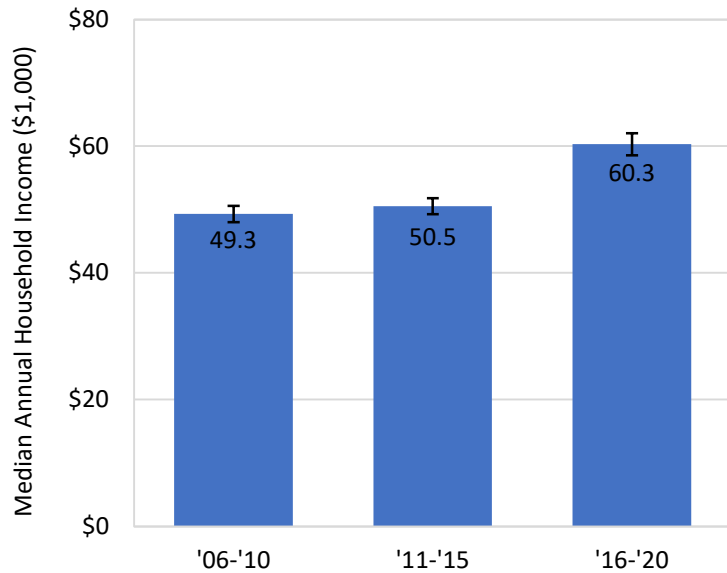


Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Household Income

This indicator examines median annual household income (MAHI) during three periods: 2006-2010, 2011-2015 and 2016-2020. Information for 2021 was not available in time for this report. La Crosse County’s estimated MAHI during the 2016-2020 period was \$60,307, up from \$50,539 during the 2011-2015 period (+19.3%) and up from \$49,328 during the 2006-2010 period (+22.3%; see Figure 22). This increasing trend is consistent with economic recovery from the “great recession.”

Figure 22: La Crosse County Median Annual Household Income

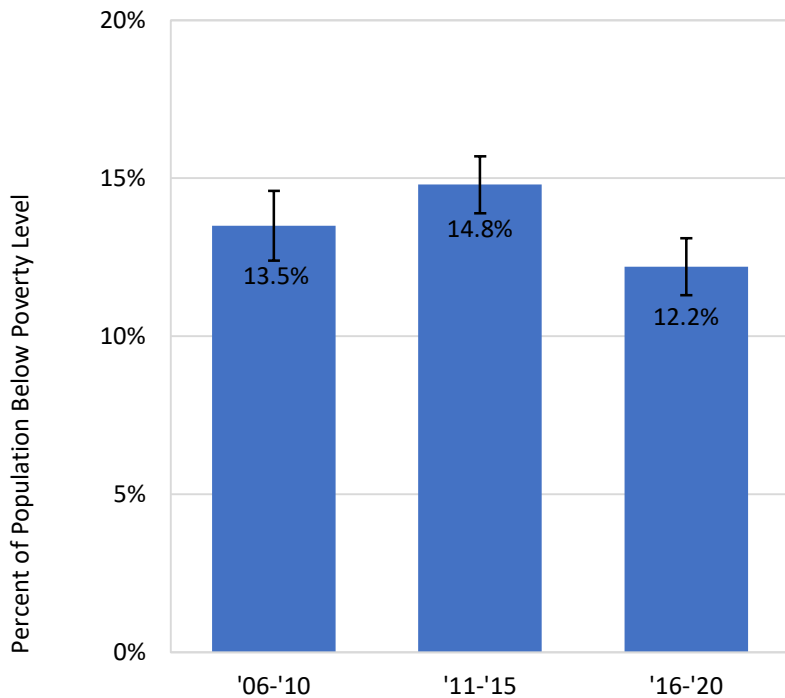


Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Poverty Rate

This indicator examines the percentage of residents whose income in the past twelve months was below poverty level during three periods: 2006-2010, 2011-2015 and 2016-2020. Information for 2021 was not available in time for this report. La Crosse County’s estimated poverty rate for the 2016-2020 period was 12.2%, down from 14.8% during the 2011-2015 period and down from 13.5% during the 2005-2009 period (see Figure 23). Please note that when margins of error are considered, the poverty rate in the 2016-2020 period differs statistically from the 2011-2015 period, but not the 2006-2010 period.

Figure 23: La Crosse County Resident Poverty Rates

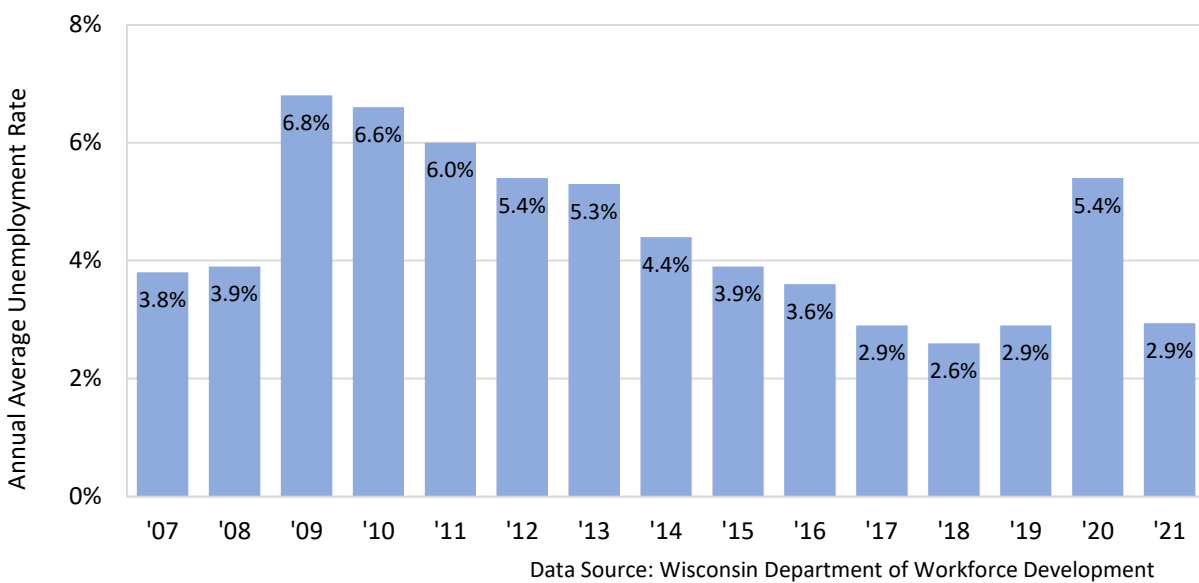


Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Unemployment Rate

This indicator tracks trends in La Crosse County’s annual average unemployment rate, as measured by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. After unemployment rates below 4% in 2007 and 2008, the rate increased sharply to 6.8% in 2009 because of the “great recession” (see Figure 24).⁵ Rates then slowly declined as the economy gradually recovered, and by 2015 rates had returned to 2007-08 levels. Unemployment rates were under 3% from 2017-2019, increased sharply again in 2020 because of the economic disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, and then fell back to 2019 levels in 2021.

Figure 24: La Crosse County Annual Average Unemployment Rates



⁵ Values for 2021 are considered preliminary as of publication of this report; final values may vary slightly