



# Iowa City 2013 Sustainability Assessment Executive Summary

The City began its efforts towards sustainability many years before the term became as commonly used as it is today. Iowa City was a pioneer in energy conservation in the 1980s, implementing numerous energy conservation programs and using a portion of the energy savings to fund additional projects. More recently, from 1999–2005, LED lighting was installed in City traffic signals, cutting electrical usage for signals in half. In 2001, Sycamore Greenspace was constructed. This green infrastructure contains 55 acres of wetland which serves to manage stormwater and which also provides the City with a multi-use greenspace containing native plants, trails, public art and wildlife habitat. The City-owned landfill began capturing and flaring landfill gas in 2001, which has decreased greenhouse emissions from the landfill by 69%. Iowa City's mayor signed the Mayors Climate Protection agreement in 2007 and in 2009 was the first City in Iowa to complete a community-wide greenhouse gas inventory and emissions baseline data. In the last several years, many City departments have begun partnering in sustainability projects with the University of Iowa, enhancing the ability to broaden the work on sustainability within the community.

This assessment identifies specific indicators that coordinate with the vision and broad set of goals set forth in IC2030, Iowa City's most recent Comprehensive Plan and the City's Strategic Plan. The indicators will act as a source of information for the next step of this process: the development of sustainability goals and targets. In the process of sustainability goal setting, the City should also consider sustainability goals set forth in the University of Iowa's 2020 Plan so that aligned efforts of local government, business, non-profits, residents and the University will combine to foster greater community progress.

Data for nearly 60 sustainability indicators in nine focus areas were compiled and analyzed for this assessment. These indicators focus on the economic, environmental and resource management, and social/cultural categories of sustainability.

The nine focus areas included in the report are:

- Economic
- Community Design and Transportation
- Energy
- Water
- Waste Reduction
- Natural Ecosystem
- Housing
- Community Wellness
- Arts and Culture



The assessment conveys meaningful and measurable information about the current status of the Iowa City community with respect to sustainability. Data from 2007 serves as the baseline from which indicators in the following four years are assessed. Comparisons between Iowa City, the state of Iowa, and national totals are provided for each indicator wherever data is available and applicable. A simplified rating system measures the status of each indicator in the community and allows us to assess whether Iowa City is within or exceeding the acceptable level, below the desired level or unclassifiable due to complexity or other factors such as limited data.



**The indicator rating system shows that 34 indicators are within or exceeding acceptable limits, 13 indicators are not at desired level and 12 indicators are unclassified due to insufficient comparison data.**



Economic, environmental, and social/cultural conditions are healthy and balanced in a vibrant and livable community. This report evaluates these three categories of the Iowa City community in order to establish baseline conditions for the creation of an effective and coordinated community-driven sustainability roadmap.

The evaluation highlights improvement and provides a starting point for leveraging our strengths and improving upon our deficiencies. The indicator rating system shows that 34 indicators are within or exceeding acceptable limits, 13 indicators are not at desired level and 12 indicators are unclassified due to insufficient comparison data. The indicators show that the City's sustainability can be quantified, and that our level of sustainability is high.

Of the nine focus areas, these areas had the strongest positive indicators:

- Economic
- Community Design and Transportation,
- Water (municipal treatment and protection)
- Natural Ecosystem (acreage of natural areas)
- Community Wellness
- Arts and Culture

Although Iowa City is doing very well in many sustainability indicators the challenge we face is how to maintain these desirable characteristics while overcoming deficiencies as the city grows in the coming years.

In these focus areas, work is underway and continued improvement is needed:

- Energy
- Water (river water quality and stream bank erosion)
- Waste reduction
- Natural Ecosystem (invasive species)
- Housing (rental housing issues)

Recognizing that there is room for improvement in these areas will allow the community to see the need for more focus on energy reduction, greenhouse gas targets, river and stream water quality improvements, waste reduction opportunities, plant species awareness and housing issues.

This report is the first step in commitment towards strategies that will foster a more livable, viable and equitable community and solidify our future success. Sustainable advancement in Iowa City requires setting quantifiable targets, assessing progress and reevaluating goals to establish a basis for an overarching sustainability strategy. Sustainability for a city means shifting to more whole systems approach of functioning as a community, looking at all parts of the environment, economic and social interconnectedness. In providing sustainability goals and targets, Iowa City can use this overarching theme to ensure that the city can continue to thrive and improve in the future.

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**You can find the full assessment at:**

[www.icgov.org/sustainability](http://www.icgov.org/sustainability)