Morris Model- Community Resilience Goals

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9 Morris Community Resilience Goals

Summary

This document summarizes and consolidates important extreme weather and climate resiliency related goals in Morris. These goals were formulated by various experts and leaders through several months of outreach, and represent a comprehensive approach to fostering a resilient community. These goals touch on infrastructure, economic development, public health, education, and emergency planning. While these goals help outline important values and priorities, they also require concerted action on the part of city and county government, schools, and community members. Some goals are more progressed than others, while some represent aspirations yet to be developed.

Goal 1: Healthy Tree Canopy

A resilient tree canopy ensures a healthy community and a sustainable environment. Our city is currently dedicated to transitioning away from a singular species canopy and embracing a more diverse planting strategy. In the past, the city prioritized the planting of ash and elm trees. However, the vulnerability of these trees to disease has helped push the city in the direction of more diverse varieties such as maple and hackberries. Morris is also committed to planting tree species that are more resilient to extreme heat and drought. The city also hopes to use the reforestation budget to expand healthy tree canopy coverage to parks and trails. Expanded coverage will provide greater shading, which reduces the negative effects of extreme heat. It will also increase the different types of nutrients and microbes in the soil, while simultaneously diversifying the fauna.

Goal 2: Alternative Transportation

Safe and healthy forms of transportation are essential for creating a resilient community. It is a priority for both our city government and for public health experts in the area to encourage the use of zero carbon or energy efficient vehicles. Walking, biking, and public transportation are all options currently in place to both promote healthy lifestyles while also easing our carbon footprint. In the future, we would like to expand existing bike paths and lanes (including a new bike lane along 7th street). We will also expand the "Safe Route to School" strategy to encourage more students to walk to school, thus reducing overall carbon emissions.

Goal 3: Expanding Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is fundamental to promoting resilient practices. Solar and wind energy in particular are viable alternatives to traditional fossil fuels that otherwise pollute our environment and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Morris already has developed significant renewable energy capacity, and new plans are under development to expand this potential while bringing in new partners. Several innovative pricing plans are available that would both meet our unique energy needs while also democratizing energy access. Community solar (individual ownership of solar panels located in a traditional multi-panel installation) is one option currently under discussion.

Goal 4: Rain Gardens

Although we live in a rural community, Morris experiences many of the same water problems common in urbanized areas. City streets, parking lots, densely spaced buildings, and other artificial land covering all contribute to excessive runoff, flash flooding, and water contamination. Many of these problems will only intensify as we begin to experience greater than average rainfalls. To better prepare for these changes, one common sense goal is the creation of additional rain gardens by public and private buildings. By using water runoff, these gardens will help sustain a variety of vegetation (including natural prairie grasses, edible plants, and endangered plant species). Additionally, rain gardens located next to schools and government buildings will bring greater visibility to the public about the value of water conservation -- thus promoting greater climate literacy. Currently, UMM and the public elementary school have rain gardens, however, it is a goal of our community to create additional gardens in a variety of public and private spaces.

Goal 5: Community Garden

Community gardens promote healthy eating, community togetherness, and outdoor activities. Not only do they create public spaces for people to interact with one another, they create educational opportunities for community members of all ages. From a public health perspective, these are all goals that can help raise health standards across the board and ensure a higher quality of life for Morris residents. There are a number of options available for locating a new garden, including close to the food shelf. Leasing private farm land is another viable option. Currently, both UMM and the High School have educational gardens which students use to learn about sustainable agriculture while also learning about the nutritional benefit of eating fresh local food.

Goal 6: Climate Education

Climate education is very important because we need people to understand how climate change is affecting our environment, families, and man-made structures. People need to first believe it is a problem before they can start preparing for the changes. Climate education for the community can be in the form of educational events, forums, and meetings. To teach the younger generation about this, we need to incorporate climate education into our public school curriculum. Although climate science is already part of the curriculum in our public schools, more emphasis should be added to sustainable strategies to deal with our changing climate. It is a goal for our community to have greater collaboration between UMM and our public schools on issues of climate literacy and collaborative educational projects. We need the future to start looking bright.

Goal 7: Energy Efficiency Practices

The energy we use to power our homes, our businesses, and our public spaces is vital to the health and resilience of our community. Inefficient use, in turn, threatens our ability to sustain development in the long-term and burdens community members already struggling to make ends meet. To promote energy efficiency practices while also lowering energy bills, it is a goal of our community to implement energy audits of student

and low income rental housing. Moreover, we will work to provide access to energy saving strategies and updates to lower our total carbon footprint. This work will require broad participation among renters, landlords, and our local housing authority. We will also strive to promote energy efficiency standards in public and private buildings by changing our zoning code to facilitate 'green retrofits.'

Goal 8: Resilient Infrastructure

Extreme weather changes represent a direct threat to the resilience of our infrastructure. Like any community, it is necessary to update and expand streets, bridges, plumbing, lighting, and other necessary systems and services. Our changing weather weakens our ability to adapt and in the long-term, will add greater costs to the taxpayers. The fiscal impact of extreme weather change, therefore, necessitates major investments in resilient infrastructure. These updates range from the simple (environmentally friendly salt during wintertime) to the more complex (LED retrofit for street lights). By identifying specific projects, however, we have the opportunity to lower relative infrastructure costs over the long-term while preparing our community for the coming changes in weather patterns.

Goal 9: Extreme Weather Planning

As our weather changes, it will become necessary to modify our emergency preparations for more severe tornadoes, floods, lightning storms, and blizzards. The growing frequency and severity of these events will alter the way we think about financing, planning, and executing emergency plans. Extreme weather events will require greater communication between city, county, and state agencies. It is a goal for our community to update plans when necessary and adjust emergency planning to the realities of climate change. Moreover, a more concerted effort will be made to inform the public of the consequences of our changing weather, and what they can do to become more prepared.