

GreenStep Cities Update

GreenStep Cities is a voluntary challenge, assistance and recognition program to help cities achieve their sustainability goals. This is a free continuous improvement program, managed by a public-private partnership including Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Clean Energy Resource Teams, League of MN Cities, Great Plains Institute and more. It is based on 28 best practices focusing on cost savings, land use, waste reduction, energy efficiency and civic innovation. Each best practice can be implemented by completing one or more actions, from a list of four to eight actions. These actions are tailored to all Minnesota cities, focus on cost savings and energy use reduction, and encourage civic innovation. Cities that implement a minimum number of best practices will be recognized as a GreenStep City, with additional practices garnering additional recognition based on a three step scale.

Cities are categorized into A, B or C cities depending on population, city buildings/employees, transit services available, location related to metropolitan area and other factors. These categories determine what is required to receive credit for each best practice. Coon Rapids is a Category A City. GreenStep Cities is a three part program. Step 1 requires cities to become familiar with the program, conduct inventory of completed/planned best practices and discuss with city council. Then approval of a city council resolution to work toward GreenStep Cities recognition is required to complete Step 1. Step 2 will require Coon Rapids to complete 8 of the 28 best practices and Step 3 requires completing 16 of the 28 best practices. In March 2014, Coon Rapids joined the GreenStep program as a Step 1 City. Since then, data has been collected and Coon Rapids has already completed 13 Best Practices and become a Step 2 City. Coon Rapids will officially be recognized as a Step 2 City at the League of Minnesota Cities Annual Conference in June.

Completed Best Practice Steps are listed below along with a brief description of what has been done in Coon Rapids to meet the criteria.

Building & Lighting

Step 2. Efficient Existing Private Buildings: Outreach program to reduce residential energy/water use via newsletters, website and workshops, and water efficiency actions via sprinkling ban

Step 4. Efficient Building & Street Lighting and Signals: Rapid replacement of inefficient street lights, coordinated traffic signals, solar powered lighting (Wedgewood Trail), relamp exterior building lighting (LED now used), motion sensor lighting (City Hall)

Step 5. Building Reuse: Residential remodeling assistance program through Homes for Generations

Land Use

Step 6. Comprehensive Planning & Implementation: Adopted Comprehensive Plan with complying regulatory ordinances and intergovernmental coordination for land use/watershed impacts

Step 7. Higher Density/Efficient City Growth: Encourage higher density housing, limit low-density development and access to transit corridors

Step 8. Mixed Uses: Community planning for mixed use areas, city building adjacent to existing employment center, access to walking/biking trails and transit service including Foley Boulevard Station area planning

Transportation

Step 12. Mobility Options: Walk/Bicycle Friendly City as part of Mississippi River Trail and expanded transit service via Northstar

Step 13. Efficient City Fleets: Increase efficiency of existing fleet by reorganizing mowing routes for gas/energy saving, right-size/down-size city fleet, rerouted buses to ensure optimal seating resulting in 20 fewer buses needed

Environmental Management

Step 16. Urban Forests: Certified Tree City USA, Tree Trusts' Best Practices, protect existing trees/plant resilient species, provide free service calls to residents

Step 17. Efficient Stormwater Management: Ordinances regarding stormwater runoff volumes, stormwater utility fees to enhance management, nine rain gardens present in residential neighborhood

Step 18. Parks & Trails: 2013 park bond referendum of \$17.4 million for improvements, 15.7 acres of native grasses, park recycling present

Step 22. Solid Waste Reduction: Fix-It Clinic, organics pilot programs, city zones for trash/recycling pickups, residential drop off facility

Economic, Community Development

Step 24. Benchmarks & Community Engagement: Sustainability Commission to lead and report on GreenStep, regional indicators program, community engagement, annual Green Expo

This program provides clear goals for city-wide sustainability in various areas. There are specific Best Practices required to be awarded a Step 3 recognition. The major project staff will be working on that is required to become a Step 3 City is Minnesota Buildings, Benchmarks and Beyond (B3 Benchmarking) which tracks energy consumption, costs and carbon emissions for all city owned properties. The program aims to track energy use, provide tools to reduce consumption and compare city buildings to similar municipalities. This project is very time intensive but will be beneficial in the long run for city energy use. Other requirements for Step 3 include complete green streets policy, environmentally preferred purchasing policy, green business development and more. These best practices will provide framework for future projects and initiatives for Coon Rapids to continue to improve in various areas related to sustainability.