

# WATER & LAND USE

## MARQUETTE 2049 LEARNING CIRCLE SUMMARY

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

The Marquette 2049 Learning Circle series is intended to encourage people in our community to engage in proactive planning in anticipation of the likely consequences of climate change. Participants of this circle examined Marquette's water and land use strategies. We discussed how to better adapt to climate impacts such as rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased storm intensity. Additionally, we explored how effective water and land use planning promotes public health, recreational opportunities, and economic stability, ultimately fostering a more resilient community in the face of climate change.

## Pre-Circle Readings & Resources

- [Participant Guide](#)
- [Aanji-bimaadiziimagak o'ow aki](#)
- [Land Use Fundamentals](#)
- [Local Ecosystem Services](#)
- [Local Land Use Example: Founders Landing](#)

## What is Our Ideal Vision For the Future?

During this learning circle, the participants were asked to share their ideal future for land and water use within Marquette County over the next 25 years. These are the main themes that characterize the participants' "ideal vision" for the future:

**Sustainable Land and Water Management:** There are endless opportunities to be responsible, resourceful, and focused when it comes to the management of land and water resources. We need to improve our wastewater treatment, stormwater management, and reducing impervious surfaces. Additionally, there must be emphasis on solutions like building up (rather than out) to preserve green spaces, prevention of sprawl, and protection of water quality.

**Protection of Natural Resources:** Every ecosystem will be protected and monitored in a way that ensures preservation of our open land, the sweeping forest, and our many water sources (everything from wetlands and rivers to Lake Superior). Protections will be put in place where humans have high contact with the natural environment, such as wildlife corridors and protected lakefront access. Furthermore, it will be a priority to protect water from external contamination and pollution through infrastructure such as stormwater management.

**Sustainable Development and Zoning:** Sustainable practices will be incorporated into urban planning. This can include everything from the reuse of existing infrastructure, limiting sprawl, infill development,

and zoning to guide growth. It will be ensured that policies reflect a balance between development, recreational areas, and the protection of natural resources.

**Innovative Water Use Systems:** New technologies will be introduced to improve water use efficiency, such as advanced irrigation systems for food production and sustainable water treatment practices. As we look to the future, the primary focus will be on reducing water use and ensuring water systems support the environment, rather than hinder it.

**Community and Environmental Integration:** Our communities will build stronger connections between urban areas and the natural spaces around us through initiatives like pollinator gardens, green spaces, and managed public access to lakes and recreational areas. Most importantly, community participation will be integral in decision making related to land and water use, ensuring that local input and indigenous perspectives are integrated into every step of the planning process.

## What Key Issues Might Impact Our Shared Vision?

Participants discussed a variety of issues and struggles our community might need to navigate in order to reach the proposed vision for energy and power production in our region.

**Zoning and Land Use Regulation:** A key barrier to effective water and land use is outdated or insufficient zoning laws. The need for zoning reform is emphasized, particularly to accommodate sustainable development practices and to address infrastructure challenges like stormwater management. There is also growing support for more flexible and innovative zoning regulations to help implement the community vision for sustainable water and land use.

**Stormwater Management and Impervious Surfaces:** The risk impervious surfaces present to our land and water ecosystems is enormous. Communities, individuals and businesses alike must have incentivization to reduce impervious surfaces through innovative solutions. This could be done through grant opportunities, or even creative options like a tax system that encourages property owners to take responsibility for stormwater runoff by implementing measures that slow or filter water.

**Financial and Resource Constraints:** The financial limitations faced by local governments in funding infrastructure improvements, including water management systems, are a significant challenge. Resources must be allocated efficiently, possibly through taxation or other means to fund environmental improvements.

**Public Engagement and Resistance to Change:** Overcoming social and systematic barriers, such as public opposition to new land use policies or environmental practices, is a key issue blockading progress. Encouraging community participation and addressing misinformation are key steps in moving forward with changes in land and water management.

**External Environmental Threats:** Issues like over-tourism and the unsustainable use of freshwater resources present challenges to local land and water management. There is a need for balanced policies that protect these resources from excessive exploitation while promoting responsible use and conservation.

# What Can We Do Today?

**Education and Stakeholder Engagement:** There is a strong focus on educating the community, especially youth, about water and land use issues. Engaging elected officials, developers, and local residents through education and outreach is seen as essential for fostering understanding and support for sustainable practices. This includes utilizing creative venues like breweries and organizing speaker sessions to reach broader audiences.

**Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Building collaboration across diverse groups, including businesses, service organizations, and nonprofits, was a key discussion point. There is a call for more inclusive planning processes that involve a range of stakeholders, ensuring that everyone has a voice and that the right people are in the right spaces to discuss and address water and land use issues.

**Local Planning and Policy Reform:** Reforming local zoning ordinances to allow for more affordable housing and updating planning documents to reflect current and future needs is a priority. The importance of adopting clear goals for environmental and land use planning at local and multi-county levels was highlighted, as well as ensuring that rebuilding efforts after disasters take future risks into account.

**Action and Accountability:** Taking action from the grassroots level is emphasized, with a push for bottom-up initiatives that "inspire" communities with the right ideas. Holding local officials accountable and ensuring that community needs and desires are heard by decision-makers is a central theme. There is also a focus on ensuring that stakeholders with authority, such as drain commissioners, are involved in planning and decision-making processes.

**Proactive Infrastructure and Disaster Planning:** The importance of future-proofing infrastructure, especially in relation to environmental risks and disasters, is mentioned. This includes the need to plan for future disasters when rebuilding and ensuring that land use and water management policies are adaptable to changing environmental conditions.