

Proposed La Crosse City Administrator Position Information Overview

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This information sheet intends to provide information for La Crosse residents and others regarding the benefits and challenges of:

- a. The Mayor-Council form of administration, where the Mayor is both the Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Operating Officer, and
- b. The Mayor, Council, and Administrator form of administration, where the Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer and the Administrator is the Chief Operating Officer. The Mayor and Council legislate policy that the Administrator implements.

Mayor – Council Benefits	Potential Limitations with Mayor as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Executive Officer
<p>The current La Crosse Mayor-Council system has been in place since 1856.</p> <p>Direct accountability to residents through the election process.</p> <p>Committee, commission, and department head appointments by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council.</p> <p>City staff work within the current system.</p>	<p>A Mayor can be elected without any local government knowledge or experience to run a large complex municipality.</p> <p>The time it takes to “learn” what they need to know.</p> <p>Potential for silos and individual departments to influence their committees and Mayor.</p> <p>Concentrated Executive and Operations power in one person.</p>

City Administrator Benefits	City Administrator Challenges
<p>Mayor as CEO and Council policy focus</p> <p>Council and Mayor retain authority over the administrator</p> <p>The Mayor and Council have one direct report, the City Administrator, versus all department heads</p> <p>Specific training and expertise in municipal operations</p>	<p>A City Administrator requires adjustments to the budget for salary, benefits etc.</p> <p>The Council must find the right candidate to succeed in the role.</p> <p>Change in leadership structure can be difficult to adjust to.</p> <p>City Administrators intentionally operate behind the scenes. Thus, the public may not have as much direct communication regarding initiatives.</p>

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- Non-administrator cities have overall higher spending per capita, lower property taxes, lower law enforcement spending, and lower debt (perhaps due to less capital investment), and less Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) debt service.
- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities have higher functioning councils (less destructive conflict types)
- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities report higher levels of reform adoption.
- Administrator/Manager-led municipalities report lower staff turnover rates.

If the Ordinance passes, what would be the Policy versus Operational Role?

This information was developed through research, citizen input, and other comments.

Mayor/Council – Policy role	Administrator – Operations role
Policy creation	Implementing the Council’s policies
Budget approval	Developing and implementing budgets
Organization-level goal setting	Oversight of day-to-day operations
Serving as a bridge between residents and local government	Deploying resources across the organization
Deciding the scope of services to be provided	Personnel decisions
Program creation	Report on goals
Approving legislation	Focus on citizen satisfaction
Evaluating the City Administrator	Collaborating with the community and others

Potential Timetable

Item	Projected Timetable (subject to change)
Public engagement and input	July – October 2025
Create council report.	October – November 2025
Submit report to the City Council.	November 2025
City Council votes on changing the ordinance (February 2026).	February 2026
Create and finalize the city administrator position description.	March – June 2026
Advertise and recruit for the position.	July – October 2026
Complete the selection process (applications, interviews, offer).	Complete by January 2027
Negotiate and finalize hiring details.	February 2027
City Administrator begins position.	June 2027

City Administrator Costs (City of La Crosse Finance Department): The recommended salary range is \$186,645.89 - \$194,422.80 based on current staff salaries but may increase if the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is approved and/or step increases are provided prior to filling this position. With benefits, the estimated total annual cost is \$248,000. Other potential costs include support staff and office space, both of which are not yet determined.

WI Cities/Villages with an Administrator or Manager - Source: UW Oshkosh Whitburn Center				
Wisconsin Cities	Totals	City Manager	Administrator	Professional Administration % of Total
City Manager or Administrator	190	10	91	53%
Wisconsin Villages	Totals	Village Manager	Administrator	
Village Manager (all in SE-WI) or Administrator	415	9	54	15%