

Milwaukee Water Commons

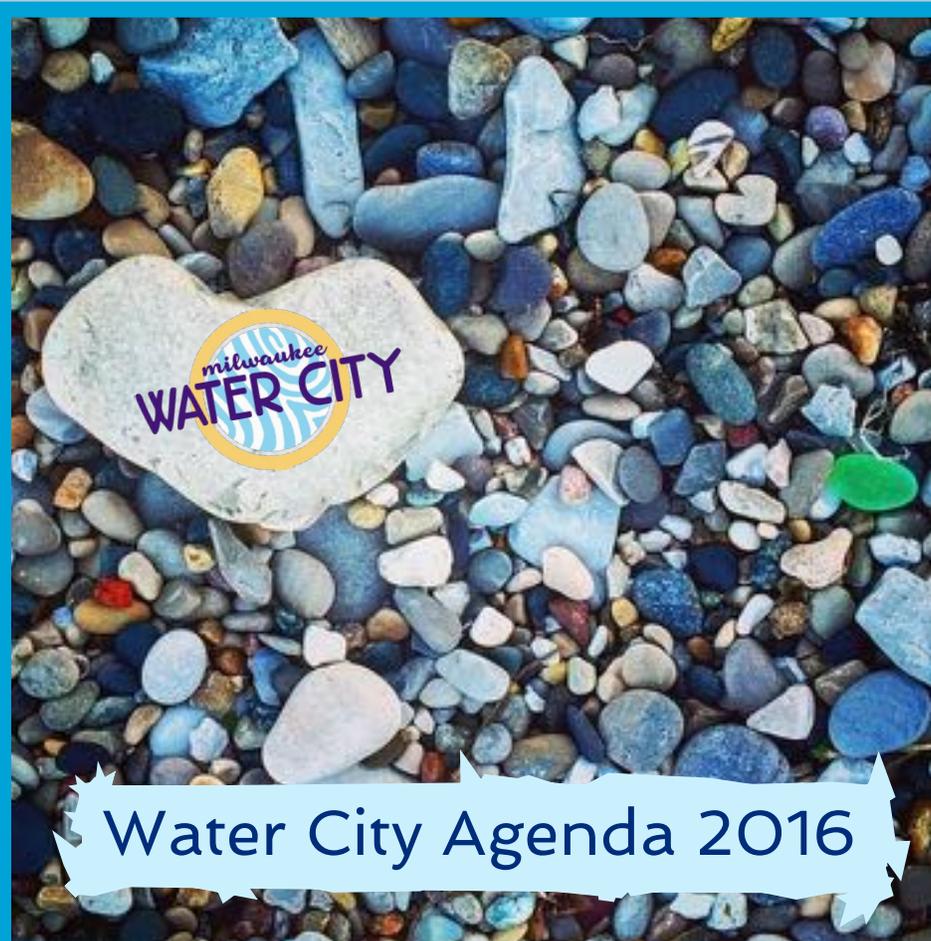




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"What would a water future look like for Milwaukee rooted in the values of connection rather than disconnection?"

Milwaukee Water Commons Vision & Call to Action

Situated on the shores of Lake Michigan and at the confluence of three rivers, Milwaukee has always been a gathering place by the water. For centuries, inhabitants have relied on our waters for fishing, commerce, transportation, recreation, brewing, manufacturing, and world-class drinking water. We have oriented ourselves by them, particularly the great blue horizon to our east, and we have drawn solace from their beauty. We have witnessed our waterways become polluted with industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries, and then recover significantly over the past forty years with greater environmental awareness. However, many water-related challenges remain, and with those challenges come many opportunities for positive action. We face important choices as citizens of Milwaukee about our relationship with water, and these choices will determine our city's future and the legacy we leave the generations to come.

We embarked on Water City 3.0 to meet this moment and ensure that the community was at the center of envisioning and decision-making about our city's water future. We began from a commons perspective - a belief that the care and benefits of the water must be shared by all.

Although Milwaukee's water is very much on the civic agenda, the vast majority of the city's citizens are not included in the conversation and the health of the water is not always front and center. Milwaukee Water Commons believes that only by inviting leadership and innovation from throughout the community can we truly grasp what it means to become a model water city in all its dimensions and activate the level of community commitment necessary for achieving that vision.

After two years of work, we are thrilled to present a set of initiatives and vision to guide Milwaukee's trajectory towards becoming a model water city. Our challenge to you is to bring these initiatives to life in your workplaces, your organizations, your faith communities, your neighborhoods, and your personal lives. **Organize! Collaborate! Innovate!**



“It is up to us to revitalize and protect our water commons.”



Water City 3.0 - Process

Milwaukee Water Commons wanted to create a community-defined vision for Milwaukee as a model water city. Because we believe that **empowering all citizens for solution making** is central to making such a vision a reality, we used a highly participatory process to tap the expertise, creativity and aspirations of all sorts of Milwaukeeans. As a result, in the last two years we have engaged over 1300 people - in large gatherings and small groups, on the street with our mobile “water cycle” and in workshops, in person and online.

Through this process together we have not only imagined what it would mean to be a model water city, but also created an agenda of initiatives and **built growing public involvement** across disciplines, organizations and neighborhoods.

We began with these assumptions

- Water isn't an “issue” - it runs through every aspect of our lives.
- The solutions lie in re-imagining our relationship to both the water and one another.
- Milwaukeeans care about the local waters and are ready to meet the challenges of protecting and sharing them in new and needed ways.
- The talent, creativity and commitment already exist for us to become a water city.
- We need everyone, everywhere - from arts to engineering, health to education, food to recreation - to make Milwaukee a water city.



Future generations are counting on us. The water is counting on us.



Our Water City Agenda Includes:

10 key practices of city life to guide us in becoming a water city.

6 recommended initiative areas that reflect those practices in different areas of city life.

A long-term vision and short-term steps in each of those initiative areas to move Milwaukee forward.



Here are our Six Initiative Areas:

Blue Green Jobs: Milwaukee is a national leader in blue green jobs.

Water Quality: Fishable swimmable rivers and Lake Michigan.

Drinking water: Safe, clean, affordable tap water for all.

Arts and Culture: We celebrate our waters in arts and culture.

Education and Recreation: Meaningful water experiences for every Milwaukeean.

Green Infrastructure: Advancement of green infrastructure practices across the City.

*"Our history is all tied to the water,
even our name."*



Practices for Becoming a Model Water City



Milwaukee is in a position to become a model water city. As we take steps to make this vision a reality, we will foster these ten practices in our city's life, decisions and actions around water:

Empower all citizens for solution making.

Citizens need to not only be aware of the need for solutions but also understand that their ideas and actions matter. In order for solutions to be widely accepted and implemented, citizens should be involved in sustainability planning and engaged in the decision making process.



Increase knowledge of water and watersheds

We tend to be disconnected from water in an urban environment and most of us don't know much about the functioning of our watersheds. While many understand that water is instrumental to public health and survival, citizens need to understand how watersheds function within the urban environment, both on the surface and underground. Learning about water and watersheds enables us to make changes in how we use, value and care for water.



Make connections: water/health, water/food, water/faith, water/climate

The importance of water not only lies in its use for drinking, bathing, or swimming in Lake Michigan but is also interconnected to almost every part of society and the environment. We need to understand those interconnections to make good decisions.



Promote racial justice and water equity

The benefits of water, including access to clean, beautiful water for leisure and recreation and the provision of healthy drinking water and sanitation, are not equitably shared in the city, with this most sharply felt in communities of color. Water equity is about proactively ensuring shared benefits of water in a range of ways.



Cultivate water responsibility and care

Because the Great Lakes are so vast and seemingly everlasting, many citizens find their destruction to be unlikely or unimaginable. Even when we hear of sewer overflows or other human-caused problems with Lake waters, we can remain unmotivated to take responsibility because the problem feels too big for one person and we assume that the government will remedy the situation. But in truth, our health, behavior and choices, both individual and collective, are interdependent with the health of the water. We have to awaken to the reality that the responsibility and care for watersheds lies with all of us.

"The environment comes down to place. People connect to what they see every day, what they see as their home."

Increase the conservation, health, and vitality of water

Conservation, the act of preserving, protecting, and wisely using a water source, is key to maintaining and increasing the health and vitality of water. Due to climate change and overconsumption, water continues to be a source of vulnerability and risk in society and needs many safeguards. In order to maintain the clean and abundant water we have in Milwaukee, citizens need to dedicate themselves to protecting it from harm and misuse.



Improve public health

Quality drinking water and effective sanitation systems are vital for public health, as are urban spaces for recreation and food growing. Gray infrastructure, which includes pipes, sewers, and treatment plants, provides access to clean water and treatment of wastewater. Green infrastructure, including green roofs, streetscaping, rain barrels, permeable pavement, and much more, can help take stress off of gray infrastructure and help us manage water more efficiently. In addition to consumption of healthy drinking water, access to waterways can provide opportunities for recreation that encourage citizens to stay active and maintain a happy, healthy lifestyle.



Foster our civic identity and sense of belonging

Because waterways are so much a part of our urban environment, Milwaukeeans view water as part of their own identity and history, as well as their City's. As members of this community, everyone should share in a sense of belonging to this place and its watersheds and feel connected with one another in preserving and protecting them.



Celebrate water

Despite the concerning and complicated discourse surrounding sustainability, water quality and use, water is, fundamentally, a source of life, happiness, spiritual connection and culture. While it is critical to address water problems, we should be equally focused on creating positive awareness and celebration of water through arts and culture.



Foster community climate resilience

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, climate change refers to any change in the measures of climate, temperature, precipitation, and wind patterns, that last over a long period of time (EPA, 2015). The science is clear that climate change is happening, is caused by human action, and will affect everyone. Choices about our water will be among the most vital as we strategize how to become more resilient and stronger in the face of these uncertainties.



There is more to water than management - Water is Life



In Ojibwemowin

Ne-be Gee Zah-gay-e-goo
 Gee me-gwetch-wayn ne-megoo
 Gee Zah wayn ne-me-goo

The Water Song

by Dorene Day
 Waubanewquay, Marten Clan

English Translation

Water, we love you.
 We thank you.
 We respect you.

Blue/Green Jobs

According to the United Nations, almost half of the world's workers, 1.5 billion people, work in water related sectors. Milwaukee's emergence as a model water city can and should create and sustain water related jobs for our residents. We believe that Milwaukee residents can not only find employment related to water, but also become water stewards through their work responsibilities. We have adopted the term "blue-green jobs" to describe jobs that support responsible stewardship of our water resources. We believe that "blue-green jobs" for Milwaukee residents can support livelihoods and quality of life, while conserving and protecting our water.



10 YEAR GOAL

- Every Milwaukee student learns about training and opportunities for blue-green jobs.
- Milwaukee is a national leader in the creation of blue-green jobs.

INITIATIVES

- Create an advisory council for employers, job programs and educators dedicated to identifying opportunities and to growing the number of local blue-green jobs in Milwaukee.
- Support existing programs and develop new programs that create blue-green jobs and career pathways to these jobs, with guidance from the blue-green jobs advisory council. These programs could include field trips, school curriculum, experiential learning projects, job shadows, internships, service learning, or other activities.
 - Assist formerly incarcerated people in preparing for careers in the blue-green economy.
 - Establish a Youth Water Ambassadors program, providing blue-green summer jobs for Milwaukee youth.
- Design and develop a digital badge system, which awards digital badges to students and job-seekers for participation in activities that contribute to their career development in the blue-green economy.

"The human body is 70% water, therefore I am 70% Lake Michigan -
We are all Lake Michigan."

Water Quality

Our personal connections with water are formed through our experiences with water such as swimming, boating, fishing, shoreline walking and sitting by the edge of the water, soaking our feet. When people are connected to water in these ways, they come to care for them, and often become better stewards of the water. Improving the water quality in Milwaukee's rivers and in Lake Michigan, therefore is connected to naturalizing our city's waterways and better enabling community members to appreciate and value them. Natural rivers and lakeshores are also the most efficient way to ensure the best water quality and they provide better buffers and protection from future environmental and weather risks better than man-made alterations.



10 YEAR GOALS

- All three rivers and Lake Michigan are clean, fishable, swimmable.
- All three rivers and their greenways are naturalized.

INITIATIVES

- Increase the number of swimmable days in the rivers and in Lake Michigan by 80%.
 - This will be achieved by reducing bacterial pollution from agricultural runoff and urban runoff into our rivers and lake.
- Develop incentive program with interested businesses that raises funds and public awareness toward naturalizing Milwaukee's rivers and greenways.
 - Create a "beer fund", whereby a percentage of proceeds of beer purchases would be dedicated towards improving water quality in the region. This could be a voluntary program for brewers and bar drinkers.
- Plant more trees throughout Milwaukee, especially near waterways to improve riparian buffers.
 - Focus on replacing the many ash trees along our waterways, which are threatened by the emerald ash borer, as well as adding more trees throughout the city.
 - This project could be named "Branch Out Milwaukee"

Drinking Water Quality

During the twentieth century, the United States became a world leader in drinking water quality as its cities engineered state-of-the-art water treatment, supply and distribution systems. However, like many U.S. cities, the service lines in Milwaukee were constructed from lead pipe, which we now know can be a dangerous neurological toxin. The recent lead poisoning events in Flint, Michigan, have raised national concerns about lead contamination in water, and cities such as Milwaukee are in a position to respond with decisive action to these concerns.



10 YEAR GOALS

- Milwaukee supplies safe, clean, lead-free tap water to all residents.
- Provide adequate education, testing, and filtration technology to all homes, schools, businesses, or other facilities at risk of exposure to lead in their drinking water.

INITIATIVE

- Develop and implement a transparent process to identify financial and regulatory tools that allow the City of Milwaukee and property owners to remove all water service lines containing lead.

“What we do to our water, we do to ourselves; what we do to ourselves, we do to our water.”



Arts & Culture

Milwaukee's identity and culture are deeply tied to water. The Great Lakes nurtured our ancestors and continue to shape us as a people and as a community. Artistic expression can enhance our sense of connection to the lakes, help us confront the threats and stimulate new patterns of engagement where other methods fall short. A strong water culture, stimulated by the arts, will support the implementation of all the other Water City initiatives, will build identity, and bring people together from all walks of life and experience. Water-inspired art will appeal to the hearts of all Milwaukeeans through expressions of beauty, creativity, and spirituality. In this vein, we are proposing the establishment of an annual major water festival and the development of a visual "water" brand for the city.



10 YEAR GOALS

- "We Are Water" becomes a signature Milwaukee festival, focused on the celebration of water.
- Milwaukee has a recognizable visual brand as a water city.

INITIATIVES

- Improve We Are Water celebration by increasing funding and sponsorship, developing new partners, cross-promoting with other water-focused events, and eventually seeking a new site (as necessary) with access to rest rooms, ADA access, public transit.
- Begin visual Branding as Water City
 - Create a large narrative mural telling the story of Milwaukee's waters (Native American settlement, immigration, industry, fishing, degradation, reclamation).
 - Create several neighborhood, smaller scale murals.
 - Develop a water logo for Milwaukee - simple, recognizable, inspirational, scalable.
 - Engage marketing expertise.
 - Visual branding ties to language of water city, slogan.
 - Employ signage throughout city featuring logo to mark watersheds, public water access points and water infrastructure.
 - Create "water literacy playgrounds", using logo and educational information.

Education & Recreation



Milwaukee sits on the shore of the world's largest freshwater body yet many of our children have never seen Lake Michigan. As a model water city, we have a moral imperative to ensure every child can experience our lake and our rivers. Many cities across the U.S. are already facilitating free swimming lessons for every child. Milwaukee is in a unique position to go above and beyond that benchmark. With an active sailing, kayaking, fishing, rowing, and gardening community, Milwaukee could help children explore the many ways to appreciate and steward water. Likewise it is equally as important for our adults to participate in easily accessible water-based recreation. If Milwaukee is to become a model water city, we must all be water conscious citizens.

10 YEAR GOALS

- Every child in Milwaukee has meaningful water experiences.
- Every adult in Milwaukee has meaningful water experiences.

INITIATIVES

- Encourage children and adults to participate in 5-10 experiences with water every year, such as:
 - swimming
 - boating
 - walking along river or lake
 - winter activities on ice
 - fishing
 - gardening
 - collecting and testing water samples
 - participating in stormwater management with rain barrels or other green infrastructure
 - volunteering during river and beach cleanups

- Develop curriculum and project-based water activities for every grade level, covering the following:

- Where does your water come from?
- Where does your water go?
- What is your connection to water?
- Why do we need to conserve water? Why do we need to manage stormwater?
- What is a watershed? What/where is your watershed?
- What is the quality of your water?

- Launch comprehensive effort to teach every child in Milwaukee to swim:

- Collaborate with schools, YMCA's, county parks, universities, and after school programs that have swimming facilities.
- Create a fund to pay for children to learn how to swim.

Green Infrastructure



Green infrastructure is a term used to describe ways to capture and treat rainwater where it falls and keep it from being wasted or polluted as storm water. Examples of green infrastructure include green roofs, rain barrels, soil amendments, rain gardens, and porous pavement. Green infrastructure done well, has many benefits:

- ecological:** it improves water quality, supports growing food, plants and habitat and increases re-use and conservation;
- economic:** it is cost effective - reducing water use, flooding damage and overflows; it also creates jobs in design, engineering, installation and maintenance.
- educational:** by making water processes visible it educates and increases appreciation of water.
- quality of life:** it greens our city, increases its attractiveness and the value of property, and it connects us to the living landscape.

Milwaukee has made progress on creating green infrastructure. But our efforts must be accelerated and broadened to make a real difference in redirecting rainwater so it doesn't become wastewater and goes instead to the places we need and want it.

10 YEAR GOAL

- On all scales, from neighborhoods to skyscrapers, Milwaukee aggressively advances and enables the installation and maintenance of green infrastructure.

INITIATIVES

- Create a Green Infrastructure Service Center with both a permanent location and mobile station. The GI Service Center will:
 - Market and provide green infrastructure information and support to professional and institutional parties.
 - Provide community outreach and engagement around green infrastructure.

- Launch a "Green First" campaign, institutionalizing a city strategy that incentivizes and promotes green infrastructure as the new norm. The campaign will:
 - Engage local government departments in green infrastructure planning and implementation.
 - Identify and change codes and regulations that are barriers to green infrastructure.
 - Create clear pathways for planning and approval for green infrastructure initiatives of different kinds and different scales.
- Establish a Green Infrastructure Incentive Fund, a dedicated and flexible revolving loan fund that streamlines funding for green infrastructure projects. The fund could be financed by stormwater fees or by allowing an institution to use its fee to create green infrastructure improvements.

Testimonials

“MWC creates a different dynamic where the students aren’t just affected by decisions and outcomes, they are involved in their creation. This puts power into the hands of youth of color. They see what it means to be the architects of their own future. We cannot underestimate this.”

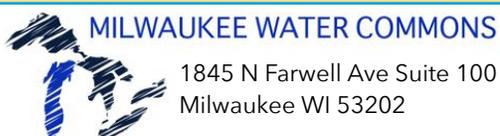
Sharlen Moore
Urban Underground

“Water is our ancestor. The earth is our family. We must cherish our ancestors and protect our family. Milwaukee Water Commons does that by building a pyramid of leaders - they invite 20 people to lead on behalf of our waters, and then they ask those leaders to invite 20 more. Because of this work, more and more people understand their connection to our water, and the important role they play in its protection.”

Ben Yahola
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative

“In every action we take, Milwaukee Water Commons fills a distinct need - to re-personalize our conversations about Milwaukee’s water and invite the soul back in. You can see it in the Water School, where people who never felt a strong positive connection to our waters are taking meaningful, change-making action on behalf of them. It’s there in the cross-city collaborations Milwaukee Water Commons facilitates, which have done more to build bridges across race and class divides than anything I’ve worked on in my history in this city. In a conversation where we swear we’ve already got the answers, Milwaukee Water Commons reminds us to listen to the water and each other.”

Pastor David Dragseth
Lake Park Lutheran Church



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".. there is an ancient relationship of indigenous people to the Lake - a place of gathering, transportation, trade, wild rice, effigy and burial mounds. People settled here because of a love of this place and the abundance of water and game. This place by the water is sacred - the great blue horizon."

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