



State Policy & Local Climate Efforts

Photo: Kenton Fowler





- ▲ State policy is critical to addressing climate change, in part because it has a major impact on whether local government is empowered to, or prevented from, building resiliency, adapting, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

State policy, is of course, critical to moving forward in the transition to a clean energy economy and deep de-carbonization. Dane County will continue to collaborate with state officials at every opportunity to make the clean energy transition as quickly and smoothly as possible.

State policy is important locally primarily because state policy can, and often does, directly impact the ability for counties, and local municipalities, including cities, villages, and towns, to set their own policies. This is often referred to as local control. Over the past decade the state legislature has taken local control away from municipalities in key areas that directly affect this, and any, climate action plan (CAP).

For two decades (the 1990s and the first 10 years of the 2000s) Wisconsin was a regional, and even national, leader in the area of commercial building codes, particularly as it pertains to energy efficiency in the commercial building codes. Through those years, Wisconsin developed its own, independent, and tailored commercial building code (many states use a one-size-fits all national

or international code), that often set stronger efficiency goals than the national code.

With the end of the Department of Commerce in 2011, this building code independence and innovation came to halt. However, local municipalities had always been able to adopt their own commercial building codes to fit their own needs and meet their own objectives. So, when Wisconsin began to fall behind other states in their commercial building code development, at least municipalities could individually continue to keep up.

That stopped in 2013, when the state legislature passed a bill that was signed into law stripping local governments of the authority to set their own safety and efficiency standards in building codes. That was particularly unfortunate since the state, at that point, had stopped updating building codes. Recently the state building codes were updated in regard to energy efficiency.

This is one particularly important example of state policy taking away local control. Another example of state policy that directly impacts local government's ability to mitigate and prepare for climate change is a bill in 2016 that took away the requirement for rental properties to bring their buildings up to code when they are sold. Another is legislation that took away the ability of school districts to exceed spending limits specifically for energy efficiency upgrades in their schools. There are many other examples.

While Dane County works to make major investments in clean energy, clean transportation fuels, climate mitigation programs, climate resilience programs, and more at the County level, we will also greatly appreciate and embrace every opportunity to work with the state's administration, the state legislature, and state agencies to make Wisconsin a Midwest and national leader in the transition to a clean energy economy and climate solutions leader.

