

City of La Crosse Exterior Lighting Ordinance Draft 04/30/2026

Section ... – Exterior Lighting and Lighting Zones

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Section is to enhance the attractiveness and livability of the City of La Crosse for its residents and visitors, both during the day and at night, without compromising safety, security, and wellbeing for persons engaged in outdoor nighttime activities. It is the intent of this Section to mitigate light pollution and misuses of artificial light at night by requiring practical and effective measures that minimize glare, sky glow, light trespass, and adverse impacts on human health, nocturnal ecosystems, and the night sky while promoting energy-efficient lighting practices.

2. Applicability

- (a) The requirements of this Section apply to all exterior lighting installed, constructed, reconstructed, enlarged, or altered within the City of La Crosse, including within all zoning districts listed in Chapter 115 – Zoning (Article IV – Basic Zoning District Regulations), except lighting located entirely within public street rights-of-way under the jurisdiction of the City or Wisconsin Department of Transportation.
- (b) This Section does not apply to interior lighting except where such lighting causes direct light trespass or glare onto other properties or into the public right-of-way.
- (c) Nothing in this Section shall be interpreted to prevent the use of lighting that is required by state or federal law for safety or navigation.

3. Establishment of Lighting Zones

Lighting Zones are established for the purpose of determining compliance with Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) lighting standards. Each zoning district established in Chapter 115, Article IV – Basic Zoning District Regulations is assigned to a Lighting Zone as provided below.

4.1 Lighting Zone LZ0 – Protected Areas

LZ0 applies to lands where preservation of natural darkness is a primary objective and where outdoor lighting should be kept to an absolute minimum. This zone includes the Conservancy District under Sec. 115-158 and other environmentally sensitive lands where the City determines that LZ0 protection is necessary.

4.2 Lighting Zone LZ1 – Low-Light Residential and Agricultural

LZ1 applies to areas where the primary land use is residential or agricultural, and where low levels of outdoor lighting are appropriate for safety and wayfinding while maintaining neighborhood character and nighttime darkness. This zone includes Agricultural, Exclusive Agricultural, R-1, R-2, R-3, Low Density Multiple Dwelling, Multiple Dwelling, R-6, and Washburn Neighborhood Residential districts under Sections 115-140 through 115-148.

4.3 Lighting Zone LZ2 – Moderate Mixed-Use, Commercial, and Civic

LZ2 applies to areas intended for mixed residential and commercial activity, general commercial uses, and civic or institutional uses where moderate lighting levels are appropriate for pedestrian-oriented activity, commerce, and public facilities. This zone includes Local Business, Community Business, Commercial, Public Utility, Parking Lot, Planned Development, and Public and Semi-Public districts under Sections 115-149 through 115-157, subject to case-specific treatment of Planned Development districts where warranted by the approving ordinance.

4.4 Lighting Zone LZ3 – High-Intensity Commercial and Industrial

LZ3 applies to areas with predominantly industrial or similarly intensive activity where somewhat higher lighting levels may be justified for safety, operations, and security, but where careful control is still required to minimize glare, sky glow, and light trespass. This zone includes the Light Industrial District under Sec. 115-152 and the Heavy Industrial District under Sec. 115-153.

4.5 Lighting Zone Assignments

La Crosse Zoning District	Lighting Zone	Typical character
Conservancy District, Sec. 115-158	LZ0 – Protected Areas	Conserved or environmentally sensitive land
Agricultural, Exclusive Agricultural, and residential districts in Secs. 115-140 to 115-148	LZ1 – Low Light	Agricultural and residential neighborhoods
Local Business, Community Business, Commercial, Public Utility, Parking Lot, Planned Development, and Public and Semi-Public districts in Secs. 115-149 to 115-157	LZ2 – Moderate	Mixed-use, business, civic, and institutional areas
Light Industrial and Heavy Industrial districts, Secs. 115-152 and 115-153	LZ3 – High	Industrial and operational areas

4. Lighting Zone Performance Standards

- (a) All exterior lighting shall comply with the maximum correlated color temperature and maximum horizontal illuminance at the property line for the applicable Lighting Zone.

Lighting Zone	Maximum CCT	Maximum horizontal illuminance at property line
LZ0 – Protected Areas	1800 K	0.1 footcandles
LZ1 – Low Light	2700 K	0.1 footcandles
LZ2 – Moderate	2700 K	0.1 footcandles
LZ3 – High	2700 K	0.3 footcandles

- (b) The average intensity of illumination on any portion of a lot shall not exceed 25 percent above the recommended average horizontal value as defined by the most current IES standards for the applicable use and Lighting Zone.
- (c) Where a site abuts a lower-intensity Lighting Zone, the more restrictive maximum property-line illuminance and CCT standards shall apply along the shared lot line.

5. Fixture Requirements

- (a) All exterior lighting fixtures, whether wall- or pole-mounted, shall have zero-uplight meaning an IES uplight rating of U0 and installed such that the bottom

luminous surface is level and parallel to the ground. Exception: Fixtures that emit less than 500 lumens of light.

- (b) Tilting fixtures above horizontal is prohibited except to compensate for out-of-plumb poles.
- (c) All permanently installed exterior lighting shall comply with the maximum CCT for the applicable Lighting Zone and where CCT-adjustable shall not be adjustable above 3000 K.
- (d) Flashing, flickering, moving, or otherwise distracting lighting is prohibited except as required for traffic control, emergency signaling, or other lawful public safety functions.
- (e) Security lighting intended to illuminate fence or property lines shall include motion sensors and be designed to remain off unless triggered. Luminaires activated by motion detection shall automatically turn off or return to their dimmed state no more than 5 minutes after activity is no longer detected.

6. Controls and Hours of Operation

- (a) Any nonresidential or mixed-use land use shall extinguish exterior facade and landscape lighting within one hour after closing and shall not energize such lighting earlier than one hour before opening.
- (b) All other exterior lighting on nonresidential and mixed-use properties shall be reduced in power to a minimum of 50 percent or extinguished during nighttime hours using one or more of the following schedules: from not later than midnight to not earlier than 6:00 a.m.; from not later than one hour after business closing to not earlier than one hour before business opening; or during any time when no activity has been detected for 15 minutes or more.
- (c) Exemptions from these control requirements may be granted for covered vehicle entrances or exits, parking structures, emergency lighting as determined by police, fire, EMS, or public works, and communication tower lighting required by law.

7. Administration and Compliance

- (a) All development and redevelopment subject to site plan review shall demonstrate compliance with this Section by submitting a lighting plan showing fixture locations, mounting heights, shielding, CCT, lumen output, control methods, and photometric calculations documenting compliance with applicable Lighting Zone limits.
- (b) Existing nonconforming lighting shall be brought into compliance when replacement, substantial alteration, or a building permit involving exterior site work is issued, consistent with the City's nonconforming fixture provisions.

8. Definitions

The following definitions apply to terms used in this ordinance:

- (a) **ANSI:** American National Standards Institute.
- (b) **CCT (correlated color temperature):** The measured color appearance of light emitted by a light source described using a nominal value stated in kelvins (K). The lowest CCTs (1800 K and 2000 K) have an amber appearance. CCTs in the middle range (2200 K to 2700 K) appear "warm white," similar to standard incandescent bulbs. Higher CCTs (3000 K, 4000 K and higher) appear progressively more "cool white" or "blue" as the number increases. Increasing blue spectrum light increases atmospheric skyglow light pollution.
- (c) **Fully Shielded:** A complete lighting unit designed or shielded in such a manner that no light is emitted, either directly or indirectly, at or above a horizontal plane running through the lowest light-emitting part of the lighting unit.

- (d) **IES (Illuminating Engineering Society):** An ANSI-recognized Standards Development Organization. ANSI/IES Recommended Practices are universally recognized as authoritative references for lighting applications.
- (e) **Illuminance:** Measured in Lux or footcandles, the total luminous flux incident at a point on a surface.
- (f) **Light Pollution:** Artificial light at night (ALAN) traveling into areas where it is not needed or wanted. This can be in the form of Light Trespass, glare, or atmospheric sky glow.
- (g) **Light Trespass:** Artificial light at night (ALAN) illuminating past property lines without permission. Unless specified otherwise, light trespass limits are measured at any location along a property line both horizontally at the ground plane facing upward and vertically at 1.5 meters (5ft) above grade with the meter aimed toward the light source in question.
- (h) **Lighting Zones:** An ANSI/IES system describing the luminous environment and related lighting conditions based on land uses and expected tasks. These range from natural and intrinsically dark zones to very bright zones.
- (i) **Lumen (lm):** A unit of measure of the luminous flux of a light source.
- (j) **Residential Use:** Municipal zoning districts dedicated exclusively to places of low-rise (i.e., 3 stories or less) human residence and dwelling. Examples include single family, duplex, dual family, multi-family, apartment, townhouse, and mobile home. This does not include mixed-use or commercial districts with combined dwellings.
- (k) **Security Lighting:** Illumination used specifically to protect people, property, and infrastructure from criminal threat.
- (l) **Shielding:** A light fixture design, optical intervention, or physical accessory (such as a louver) preventing light emission from traveling into a particular area, angle, or region.