**SWATeam Recommendation**

Name of SWATeam: Resilience Team

SWATeam chair(s): Morgan White and Scott Tess Date submitted to iWG:

Recommendation title: Biodiversity Plan

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*For internal use only*: Date reviewed by iCAP Working Group:

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**Specific actions/policy recommendation**:

Lisa Merrifield at U of I Extension should coordinate the development of an urban biodiversity master plan for the local urbanized area of Urbana, Champaign, and Savoy, with broad stakeholder input and direct faculty/researcher involvement.

**Suggested unit/department to address implementation: UI Extension**

Plan coordination: University of Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development and Champaign County Extension team (Extension Participants: Lisa Merrifield, Ryan Pankau, and Erin Harper. Extension Director, Shelly Nichols-Richardson)

Other campus academic departments and Facilities & Services will be engaged as members of steering and advisory teams. Representatives for the cities of Champaign, Urbana, Savoy, Champaign County, community groups, and other related entities will also be engaged in these committees.

This plan will be coordinated with the campus landscape master plan, other campus plans, and city and county (including park districts and the Forest Preserve) agency comprehensive, stormwater, and related plans.

**Rationale for recommendation:**

The recently published iCAP 2020 recommends the creation of a coordinated urban biodiversity plan for the Champaign, Urbana, and Savoy metro area. The goal of this planning process is development of a robust collaboration between these entities to incorporate biodiversity best management practices from around the world, support applied research to enhance local biodiversity, and establish the metro region as a leader in urban biodiversity innovation. The Resilience Team has identified this planning and implementation process as a priority for the iCAP.

This recommendation serves to establish the framework for the development, implementation, and outreach of this plan, with Lisa Merrifield, University of Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development Specialist, serving as the plan coordinator.

We recommend that Lisa Merrifield, with support as needed from colleagues in the Extension Community and Economic Development (CED) team and the Champaign, Ford, Iroquois, and Vermillion County Unit facilitate the urban biodiversity planning process as described in the iCAP. Lisa should also work with the University Landscape Architect at Facilities & Services, Brent Lewis.

The Resilience Team requests that Extension commits to

* convene and coordinate steering and advisory committees to oversee plan development; host panels of technical experts to include faculty and community partners as identified through the planning process; and conduct key informant interviews with faculty and subject area experts to ensure the plan’s scope is sufficiently robust to achieve the stated goals,
* identify available resources, baseline community biodiversity, and ecosystem services,
* incorporate research benefits in the plan, such as supporting local applied research projects, connecting UIUC researchers to people in the community, and incorporating best practices related to urban biodiversity plans based on University of Illinois research and research from other universities,
* facilitate surveys and focus groups using Appreciative Inquiry methodology to gather input from stakeholders and prioritize goals, objectives and actions,
* ensure participation from all stakeholder groups, including the Resilience Team, university researchers, city and county officials, park district and forest preserve representatives, Master Naturalist volunteers, local NGOs, and others identified,
* engage University faculty to develop and incorporate quantitative targets,
* ensure transparency, communicate with all stakeholders, and provide a tool for evaluation via a website, online portal, social media, and/or email as appropriate,
* participate in national or international communities and discussions of community biodiversity,
* Draft, vet, and finalize the plan, and
* regularly communicate with Resilience Team about progress, outreach, communication, and implementation strategies.

**Connection to iCAP goals**

Objective 8.1 Urban Biodiversity Master Plan: “[Extension w/F&S] Develop a coordinated urban biodiversity master plan by FY24 to make the Champaign, Urbana, Savoy, and campus metro area a model for biodiversity.” See below for full text.

**Perceived challenges:**

Coordinating between the cities and campus on a single plan may prove challenging. To address this challenge, steering and advisory committees representing each of the related governmental entities will be established so that communication will be ongoing, and barriers can be addressed quickly. The process and progress will be shared regularly via website, social media, and/or email.

**Anticipated timeline of implementation:**

We anticipate establishing a steering committee in the spring of 2021 and working through the planning process over the subsequent 3 years. A final plan will be released in 2024.

**Anticipated budget (identify if cost is up-front or continuous):**

At the outset, no funding is required.

To complete the plan we may seek funding from campus or external sources for

* Graduate or undergraduate student support
* Public engagement
* Editing and graphic design
* Seed support for researcher-community teams

**Individual comments are required from each SWATeam member (one or two sentences):**

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| Team Member Name | Team Member’s Comments |
| Warren Lavey | Recommendation looks good. Looking forward to this plan. |
| Meredith Moore | I support this recommendation and am excited about the local biodiversity research and collaboration of this plan. |
| Lisa Merrifield | I am excited to undertake this challenge. |
| Scott Tess | I look forward to supporting our community to become a leader in urban biodiversity. |
| Lacey Rains Lowe | I support this. Let’s do it. |
| Stacy Gloss | I support this recommendation and look forward to biodiversity plan development. |
| Sally McConkey | I fully support this excellent recommendation. |
| Ximing Cai | I support. I hope further discussion will clarify how much Lisa will need to coordinate the effort (which will be important info for UI Extension to approve it). Also how to get city stakeholders/decision makers involved in the process will be important for this effort too. |
| Morgan White | I fully support this recommendation. |
| Dennis Donaldson | I support this recommendation |
| Genevieve Zilmer | I support this recommendation |
| Asli Topuzlu | This excellent recommendation has my full support. |
| Joseph Park | I fully support this recommendation. |

**Further explanation and background (can be supplied in an attachment):**

iCAP Goal 8.1 [Extension w/F&S] Develop a coordinated urban biodiversity master plan by FY24 to make the Champaign, Urbana, Savoy, and campus metro area a model for biodiversity.

Maintaining biological diversity in our plants, animals, and ecosystems is one of the most impactful first steps we can take toward strengthening our communities’ overall resilience. Integrating native plants and greenspaces into local urban areas is central to our biodiversity master plan. These efforts include: » Leveraging tree canopies and other vegetation to manage stormwater, improve air quality, reduce atmospheric CO2, and curb the heat island effect often experienced in built communities. » Planting species that are likely to adapt well to projected climate changes. » Installing native plantings to support pollinator, insect predator, and bird habitats. In addition to supporting native plants, pollinators, and land and water health, our biodiversity plan supports human health and well-being; for example, minimizing illnesses associated with ticks and mosquitos and reducing the adverse environmental impacts of homeowner landscape and lawn maintenance practices. Urban greenspace and landscape beautification are also proven to reduce levels of anxiety and stress. In keeping with our Engagement objectives, we want to encourage community members to become involved with and excited about these biodiversity strategies. Community gardens and food forests (to be included in the master plan) will provide opportunities for residents to engage with the ways biodiversity impacts everything from the ground beneath their feet to the food on their table. As we implement the above practices, we will develop corresponding monitoring programs to assess effectiveness, making the metro area a “test bed” for informative, innovative biodiversity planning. With this information, we will draft model ordinances to use in our metro area and to share with other communities.

**Comments from consultation group (if any; these can be anonymous):**