Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

Downtown Plan

City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

Downtown Plan

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Downtown Plan

Introduction

Downtown Eau Claire is a multiple-use center consisting of retail, office, residential, government, civic, medical and entertainment development. The site of the 1872 incorporation of the City, the Downtown is adjacent to six residential neighborhoods.

Through the late 1960's, the Downtown (then viewed as the North and South Barstow areas) served as the major retail center for a multi-county market region centered in Eau Claire. For **the past forty years**, the Downtown has been undergoing a transition toward a different economic and civic role in the community. The movement of most retail businesses to the perimeter of the city during the 1970's and 1980's resulted in the Downtown's decline as a regional shopping district. The 1992 closing of the Uniroyal Tire Plant further contributed to the Downtown retail decline and also weakened stable home ownership patterns in the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Yet, **Downtown has continued to experience new investment and positive change.** The L.E. Phillips Memorial Library was opened in 1976. New office and apartment buildings were added to the Downtown along Graham Avenue. The vacant Soo Line buildings were replaced with new office buildings. A new office building and senior center were built on Bellinger Street. The vacant Uniroyal site was converted to a successful mixed-use development with over 100 businesses. The Eau Claire County complex was expanded. The Mayo Clinic hospital added a bed tower. The former Phoenix Steel site and adjacent properties were cleared and redeveloped into offices, housing, shops and a riverfront park – a major accomplishment! And, in 2014 a plan was approved to redevelop the former Haymarket site into housing, shops, classrooms, and a performing arts center. See the Assessment chapter for a complete list of accomplishments since just 2005.

At the beginning of the 21st century, while still facing significant economic challenges, the Downtown also has many of the assets needed for economic success. What has also evolved over the past several years is a more clear definition of the Downtown as a unique multiple-use district.

This 2015 Downtown plan is a guide for the major public and private investments that need to be made over the next twenty years to ensure the continued economic and civic revitalization of the Downtown. The recommendations of the plan focus on the transformation of the Downtown into a multi-functional town center active both day and night, seven days a week. The recommendations build on the existing strengths of the Downtown location and identify the market opportunities for additional retail, office, civic and residential uses, as well as the physical and public policy improvements necessary to attract and sustain desired development and investment.

Study Area

The Downtown encompasses the four distinct business areas shown on Figure 12-1:

South Barstow District

The South Barstow District is the traditional business center of the Downtown, generally bounded by Dewey Street on the east, the Eau Claire River on the north, the Chippewa River on the west, and Emery Street on the south. The district is the principal location for arts, entertainment, specialty business, civic and government uses, and includes much of the Downtown's older commercial architecture and the Downtown Business Improvement District.

North Barstow District

The North Barstow District is bounded by the Eau Claire River on south, the Chippewa River on the west, Madison Street on the north, and Banbury Place on the east. The district has a diverse mixture of land uses including light manufacturing, retail, corporate offices and housing, and includes the Banbury Place multiple-use development, the Phoenix Park and Trailhead facility, and the North Barstow Redevelopment Project area.

Courthouse District

The Courthouse District is bordered by Fulton Street on the north, the Chippewa River on the east, Lake Street on the south, and Fifth Avenue on the west. The district includes the County government campus, the West Grand Avenue Business Improvement District, a large number of historical houses and structures, and the surrounding residential neighborhood.

West Madison District

The West Madison District is bounded by the Chippewa River on the east, Fulton Street on the south, Half Moon Lake on the west, and on the north by Cameron Street and the business area south of Maple between Bellinger and the river. The district includes the Mayo Clinic Health Systems campus, the L.E. Phillips Senior Center, the West Madison Redevelopment Project area, and a variety of retail and business uses.

Reinvestment and renewal are occurring in all parts of Downtown.

Major Downtown Issues

These are the major Downtown issues identified through the Assessment of Conditions and Issues. Issues are questions to be discussed, debated and resolved during the planning process in light of the other issues. Please refer to the Assessment for further explanation of each issue.

1. **City Support:** What degree of financial and other support will the City be willing to provide for Downtown redevelopment?

   The City has shown strong support for Downtown through the creation of Phoenix Park, the ongoing North Barstow district redevelopment project, park and trail improvements along the rivers, the rebuilding of Barstow Street and Graham Avenue, financial support for Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., and the public-private Confluence redevelopment project.

2. **West Riverside Redevelopment:** How should the riverfront property north of Madison Street along both sides of Oxford Street be developed, and what should be the role of the public sector?

   The aging industrial and commercial property does not take advantage of the amenity of the river. The West Riverside Neighborhood Plan (2011) provided planning direction for land use, parks and trails, urban design, housing rehabilitation, nuisance abatement, and the role of the City and the Redevelopment Authority. (Refer also to the Neighborhoods Assessment, page 10-20.) The Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority has been gradually assembling properties in the Oxford Street corridor through the West Bank Redevelopment District.

3. **North Barstow Redevelopment?** What should be the next step in the redevelopment of the North Barstow District?

   Approximately two blocks remain to be redeveloped west of Barstow Street, one of which will include a municipal parking structure with first floor shops facing Barstow Street. What's next? Should the City prepare a master plan for the area east of Barstow Street?

4. **South Barstow Redevelopment:** What should be the next step in the revitalization of the south Barstow District?

   How can the momentum of The Confluence be leveraged for additional private investments? Will the renovation of the convention center hotel, The Lismore, bring a significant number of additional visitors to Downtown, creating a cascade of positive effects? Should a "town square" be created on the present site of the US Bank drive-through and parking lot? Should the transit center be relocated and improved, possibly as part of a larger mixed-use project? How should the site of the YMCA be used if or when that facility relocates to Menomonee Street?

5. **Public Access to the Riverfront:** To what extent should there be public access to the riverfront in Downtown? Should such access be provided strictly by public parks or should there be a combination of parks and easements across private property?

   The Waterways Plan (2012) provided direction on this issue. Phoenix Park, First Avenue Park and the public plaza planned as part of The Confluence are splendid examples of public riverfront access. Future private redevelopment projects will provide opportunities and challenges for different forms of public access to the waterfront. Should a waterfront trail be improved and extended south from The Confluence to the Grand Avenue pedestrian bridge (or further?) and east from The Confluence all the way to Boyd Park?

6. **Parking:** What should the City do to create a more favorable parking environment?

   Better use is needed of the existing parking supply. Should a parking utility be created? Should parking enforcement be handled outside of the City's Police Department?

A rendering of the residential and commercial portion of the *Confluence* redevelopment along South Barstow Street

Goal and Objectives

Continue the renaissance of the Downtown as the regional multiple-use center that integrates civic facilities, offices, health care, meetings, entertainment, arts and culture, housing, and specialty retailers. Continue to make Downtown the most desirable location in Eau Claire to live, work or play because it is dense, diverse, walkable and linked to the rivers.

Objective 1 - Downtown Partnership

Continue an effective public and private partnership in order to implement the Downtown plan prepared by Downtown Eau Claire, Incorporated (DECI). See page 12-6.

Objective 2 - Business Development and Marketing

Provide business development and marketing support to encourage diverse economic activity in the Downtown. See page 12-8.

Objective 3 – Redevelopment and Remodeling

Support redevelopment of obsolescent, vacant or underutilized properties. See page 12-10.

Objective 4 - Riverfront Orientation

Encourage the use of the riverfront and adjacent open spaces as a key organizing feature for public facilities and private development. See page 12-15.

Objective 5 - Downtown Design

Encourage the use of consistent Downtown design standards and principles for buildings and public spaces to guide public and private developments. See page 12-16.

Objective 6 – Walking and Bicycling

Enhance the ability to walk and bicycle Downtown by ensuring safe and attractive routes throughout Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. See page 12-21.

Objective 7 – Street System

Maintain a street system that supports land development while honoring the importance of walking and bicycling. See page 12-23.

Objective 8 - Parking

Provide surface and structured parking consistent with Downtown design principles to meet the multiple-use parking needs of Downtown. See page 12-24.

Objective 9 – Housing

Encourage new housing development and housing remodeling in Downtown. Page 12-26.

Objective 10 – County Courthouse District

Maintain the Courthouse District while protecting the integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhood. See page 12-27.

Objective 11 - West Madison District

Encourage the development of the West Madison District as a quadrant of Downtown anchored by the Mayo Clinic Hospital campus, related office uses, small retail businesses, new housing and riverfront parks. See page 12-29

Downtown Policies

Objective 1 – Downtown Partnership

Continue an effective public and private partnership in order to implement the Downtown plan.

Policies

1. Role of Downtown Eau Claire, Inc.

Continue to support Downtown Eau Claire, Incorporated, (DECI) as the lead organization for coordinating economic development and marketing programs for Downtown and for implementing the 2012 *Redevelopment Strategy and Vision Plan* and the 2001 *Downtown Action Agenda*. Many of the major recommendations of that document have been woven into this chapter.

2. Coordinated Effort

Several public or private organizations should work as a team to improve Downtown:

- DECI will assist with Downtown promotions and historic preservation efforts.
- The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Eau Claire will continue to acquire and clear blighted sites and bring those sites to market.
- The City will plan and regulate land use, maintain streets and utilities, operate the Civic Center parking structure and administer the parking utility.
- The Business Improvement Districts for South Barstow, North Barstow and West Grand Avenue will continue to "develop, manage and promote" their areas, financed by an assessment on commercial properties.

3. Role of the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority

The City Council will encourage the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority to take an active role in downtown development in conjunction with the private sector. That is, the Redevelopment Authority will share the responsibility of taking initiatives to stimulate the development process, recruit developers, provide financial and technical assistance for new development and renovation, prepare project feasibility analyses, assemble land for resale if necessary, negotiate agreements, strive to retain existing successful businesses and recruit new ventures.

By state law, the City Council appoints seven City residents to the Redevelopment Authority, one of whom may be a member of the City Council. This body may enter into contracts, acquire real estate by fair market negotiations or eminent domain proceedings, hold or sell real estate, and borrow money and issue bonds not backed by the City.

4. A Public and Private Partnership

The City or its Redevelopment Authority will negotiate a working partnership with business and property owners to carry out the Downtown Plan chapter of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

Under this partnership, the City will provide funds for public improvements, redevelopment incentives and assistance to the Business Improvements Districts and

Downtown Eau Claire, Inc. In return, property owners will invest in the rehabilitation or redevelopment of their buildings in accordance with design standards and will provide financial support to Downtown Eau Claire, Incorporated (DECI).

For the Downtown enhancement effort to be successful, key private and public sector leaders and constituents must plan and implement together, in partnership. A shared direction, a unified voice and action are essential for Downtown success.

5. Funding

The City will devise and agree upon a funding mechanism for revitalization that is fair, efficient and reliable. It will prepare with this mechanism a five-year program of capital improvements to streets, parking, utilities, parks and trails consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan*. In addition to revenues from the existing Business Improvement Districts, the following sources should be considered to fund the enhancement effort:

- Downtown business owners and commercial property owners
- Real estate developers
- Banks
- Utility companies
- Service clubs
- Foundations
- Major employers, corporations and industry
- City, County, State and Federal government.

6. Business Improvement Districts

Three Downtown business improvement districts (BIDs) will continue to be supported by their members and the City:

- West Grand Avenue
- South Barstow
- North Barstow, which includes properties along West Madison Street.

State law gives Wisconsin cities the power to establish business improvement districts and assess (tax) commercial or industrial properties within such areas to promote, manage, maintain or develop each district.

It should be noted that there is a fourth BID that serves the Water Street district, which has its own policy plan.

7. Leadership

Nurture leaders for Downtown revitalization who will support a consensus for this plan. Both private sector leadership and public sector commitment are critical for Downtown success.

8. Forums

Hold regular community forums coordinated by DECI to keep the enhancement process open and inclusive by inviting business owners, property owners, residents, investors, adjacent neighborhood residents and the general public to learn about ongoing developments in the Downtown, discuss upcoming projects and ask questions and offer input.

Objective 2 – Business Development and Marketing

Provide business development and marketing support to encourage diverse economic activity in the Downtown

Policies

1. Downtown Marketing

Continue to implement an overall, comprehensive marketing campaign that includes media relations, special events, social media and a Web site, a brochure and on-street Downtown directories with DECI being responsible for completing necessary mailings.

2. Business Recruitment

Recruitment activities should be focused on filling vacant commercial spaces in the South Barstow District and other districts. A **grocery store** is especially needed.

An outline for business recruitment was presented in the 2012 *Redevelopment Strategy and Vision Plan* and in the 2001 *Action Agenda*, including business prospecting, recruitment materials, working with the real estate community and being aggressive in filling spaces.

3. Business Retention

Continue the business retention programs administered by the City and DECI, which include consultations with business owners, keeping an inventory of Downtown space and administering loan programs.

Additional actions could be taken, such as better snow removal, improved window displays, better window lighting, street tree lights in the winter and improvements to adjacent neighborhoods.

Downtown should not be the sole location of the community's social service providers.

4. Major Downtown Employers

Work to retain and attract major employers, particularly offices, corporate headquarters, health-care services, and government offices.

These key tenants bring workers as well as legal and professional services to the Downtown during the traditional work week.

5. Entertainment, Recreation and Culture

Work to retain and attract entertainment, recreational, and cultural activities and venues.

Market Downtown as a regional center with indoor and outdoor performance spaces for music, dance and drama, places for the display and sale of visual arts, and facilities for conferences, seminars and trade shows.

Key attractions that bring residents and visitors to Downtown include L.E. Phillips Memorial Library, the State Theater, the Children's Museum, the Boys and Girls Club, the prospective community performing arts center at The Confluence, the Civic Center, and riverfront parks and trails.

The new Lismore Hotel and the remodeled Green Tree Inn should help attract visitors of all kinds.

Seek to attract new and better restaurants, cafes and bars in all four quadrants of Downtown. The vicinity of The Confluence and the Lismore Hotel ought to become a prime location upon redevelopment, and the North Barstow District has recently become the place to go.

Continue the summer Thursday evening program of music performances at Phoenix Park.

Seek to have a few of the musical acts from the Eaux Claires music festival (inaugural event in 2015) perform at Phoenix Park, the planned Confluence amphitheatre or the planned community performing arts center. Hopefully, this event can grow to become a city-wide celebration similar to the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas.

The proposed University performing arts center and municipal outdoor public plaza at the rivers' confluence promise to draw many people to Downtown for music and theater.

6. Incentives

Continue to support revitalization of Downtown properties through the Downtown Façade Loan Program, the Code Compliance Program, Loft Matching Grant, and the Revolving Loan Fund.

Ensure the City's financial programs keep pace with the changing economic conditions in the Downtown.

7. Walking

Pedestrian traffic supports retail businesses in a downtown.

Walking will be increased by creating new housing, trails, and retail businesses such as restaurants, brew-pubs, bookstores, art galleries, specialty stores and gift stores.

Objective 3 – Redevelopment and Remodeling

Support redevelopment of obsolescent, vacant or underutilized properties and sites.

Policies

1. North Barstow District – Master Plan for East and North

Continue to prepare plans to guide the redevelopment of portions of Downtown as was done for the North Barstow District and the Oxford Street corridor.

Prepare and adopt a master plan by 2020 period for the revitalization of the perimeter of the North Barstow District. This would include the area from North Barstow Street to the Dewey Street frontage plus the blocks between Madison and William Streets.

2. The Confluence

Continue to participate financially in the public-private effort to create The Confluence, a multiple-use redevelopment at the corner of Eau Claire Street and Graham Avenue consisting of University student housing, class rooms, retail shops and restaurants, live performance theatres, a public plaza or amphitheatre and riverfront trail extensions.

It is hoped and expected that The Confluence, in combination with the rejuvenated Lismore Hotel, will be the catalyst for many other private investments in the South Barstow District.

3. Redevelopment Tools

The City Council will continue to provide adequate funding and support for the Redevelopment Authority to plan and execute its Downtown actions.

The Redevelopment Authority will address the cost difference between redeveloping obsolete, blighted or contaminated sites versus preparing greenfield sites. Consider using a variety of tools, including private investment (of course), tax increment financing, City loan funds, municipal general obligation bonds, and state or federal grants. Examples of the latter include help with soil remediation at the Phoenix Steel site and a state challenge grant for the University performing arts center.

4. Redevelopment and Major Remodeling Prospects

These locations are considered prime for new development and should be given attention by the private sector and, if necessary, the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority.

South Barstow District

Riverfront - Gibson Street to Grand Avenue – the 200 Block

The value of this riverfront site will rise tremendously when The Confluence has been completed and the community performing arts center has been opened north of Gibson Street.

Consider removing the tired three-story commercial and residential building that faces Gibson Street but keeping and restoring the façade of the building that fronts Grand Avenue. The middle of the block is being used as

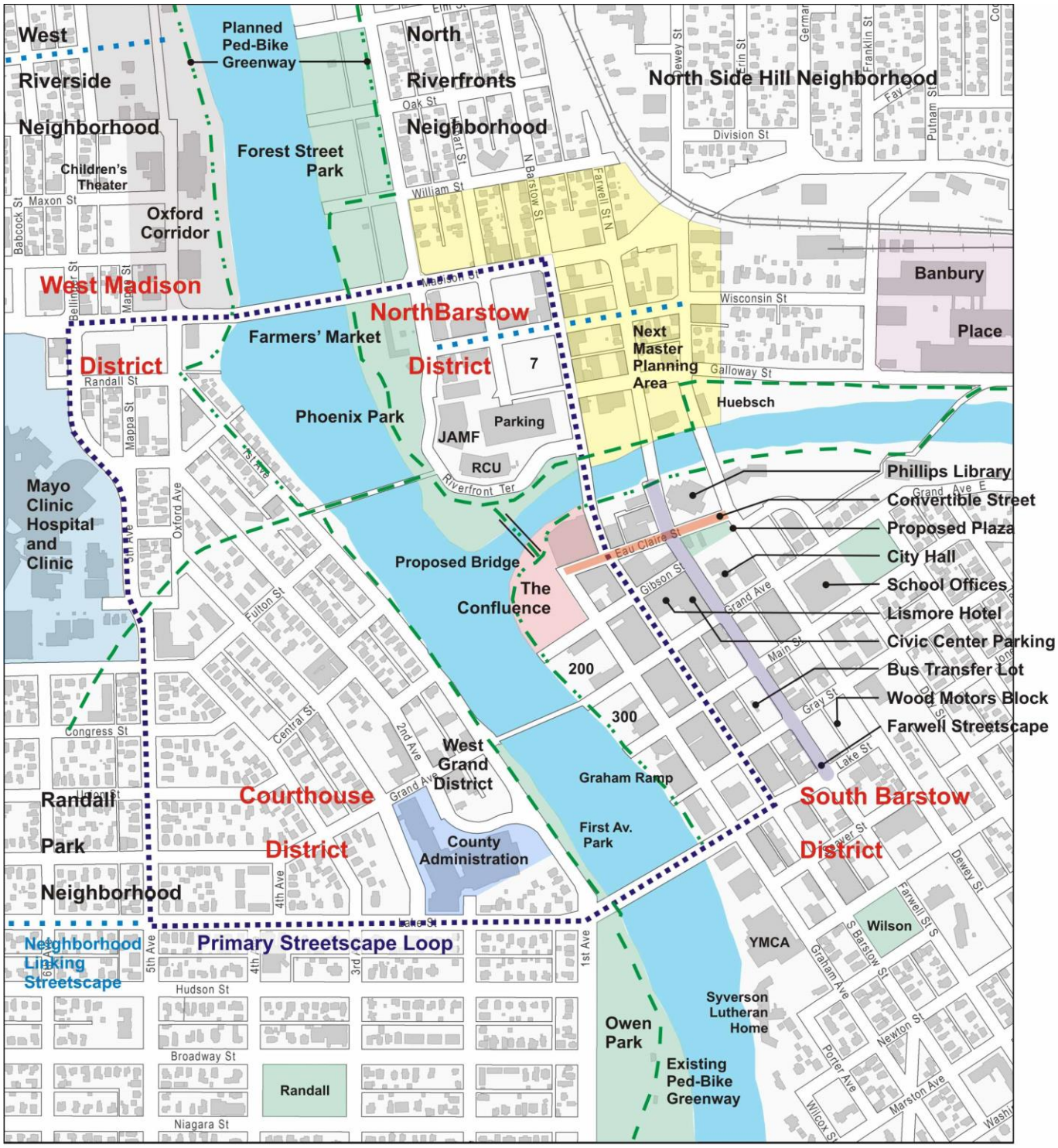


Figure 12-1

Downtown Districts and Places

parking for 112 cars, which is not appropriate for a riverfront site. The City apparently has a riverfront easement for the existing path; this should be verified.

New development here should respect the performing arts center, have doors and windows on Graham Avenue, and provide an architectural and green transition to the riverfront trail. Housing or office, hopefully with street-front retail, are the land uses that are most appropriate and likely. Of course, the development would want to take advantage of the river views, its greatest amenity.

The Graham Avenue riverfront holds tremendous potential for new development that takes advantage of the river views and Downtown lifestyle, as illustrated above.

Riverfront - Grand Avenue to Main Street – the 300 Block

The second-priority site is probably the next block to the south along the Chippewa riverfront, the block from Grand Avenue to Main Street.

This site has a bank branch building, an attached drive-through teller, surface parking and much riverfront pavement. Retain the 320 Graham Building because it has historic architectural merit and recent improvements; it also provides an appropriate frontage along Grand Avenue.

As with the site to the north, housing and/or office with retail frontage and river vistas are desired.

Town Square Park

Between City Hall and the Phillips Library is another branch bank building, built in 1960, with a drive-through teller and excess paving. Highly auto-oriented land uses such as drive-throughs of any kind are incompatible with the pedestrian emphasis sought for Downtown.

Consider optional land uses for this site such as a two-story office building or a public plaza and park, a "town square". It would be important to be architecturally compatible with the historic three-story City Hall building and the one-story library with its landscaped site.

Arguments for the open space use of the site are its proximity to the proposed "convertible street" in front of the State Theatre and its role as forecourt for the two civic buildings.

A small park or plaza between the library and City Hall could create a stronger civic area and anchor the eastern end of an improved Eau Claire Street.

Bus Transfer Site

Conduct a study to determine the best alternative location and the cost feasibility of moving and improving the central bus transfer site. The site, located along Farwell Street between Main and Gray Streets, could then be re-used as parking (interim) or development.

The "Wood Motors" Block

The "Wood Motors" site has long been eyed for as the location for the improved bus transfer facility, perhaps even in a vertical mixed-use configuration with housing or offices above, drive-through bank teller lanes (mentioned above) and retail frontage.

YMCA Site

Seek a new use for the current YMCA building and site if that activity relocates.

The School District Administration Building

Work with the Eau Claire Area School District to find an adaptive re-use for the upper floors of the former high school that is now used as district offices. Lack of parking either on-site or off-site is a major limitation for any use including seniors' housing.

North Barstow District

Block 7

This is the last major site of the first phase of the North Barstow District renaissance. It is a full block bounded by Wisconsin, Galloway, Barstow and Hobart Streets. Its anticipated use is rental apartments with underground parking and retail shops along Barstow Street.

Huebsch Building and Site

This building and its large riverfront site have great potential.

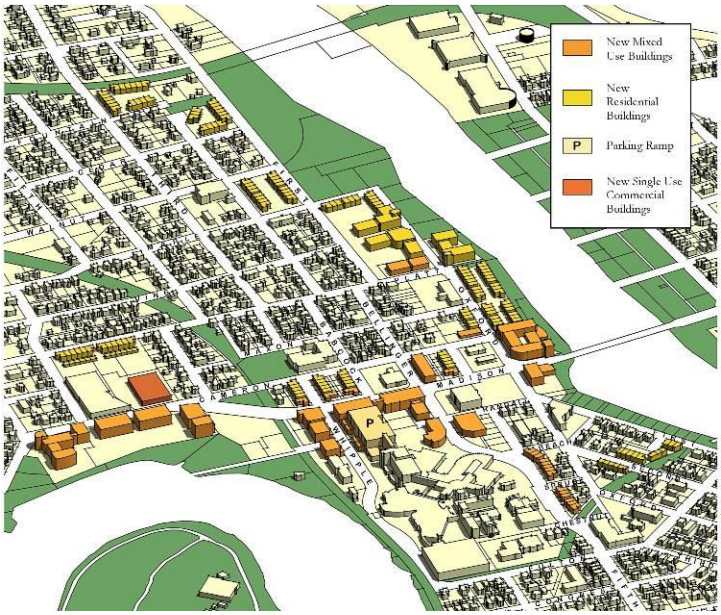
One option would be to remove the dilapidated industrial building and build housing, possibly with a commercial component facing Dewey Street.

The other option would be to restore and remodel the building as a mixed-use with retail on the first floor, restaurants on the first or upper floors and housing or offices on the upper floors. Additional development is encouraged to the north while leaving a green public edge along the river.

West Madison District

Oxford Avenue Corridor

This corridor could be the next major area of change for Downtown. The Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority should continue to give a high priority to the Oxford Avenue corridor, which runs from Madison Street in Downtown north to the High Bridge. The Redevelopment Authority will continue to assemble properties and seek developers who will invest in a way consistent with the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan*. See also the policies under Objective 11.



The Oxford Avenue and Madison Street corridors are major opportunities for the community to help revitalize a neighborhood, increase downtown housing and businesses, support the Mayo Clinic Hospital and extend the riverfront greenway. Shown here is a sketch from the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan*.

Objective 4 – Riverfront Development

Encourage the use of the riverfront and adjacent open spaces as a key-organizing feature for public facilities and private development

There is no doubt that the river views and adjacent greenways were key to landing the RCU headquarters building, the JAMF Software headquarters, the Confluence multiple-use redevelopment, and the Phoenix Park Neighborhood housing. Likewise, the riverfronts will be the amenity that drives the market for redevelopment along Graham Avenue in the South Barstow District and the redevelopment of the Oxford Avenue corridor in the Madison Street District.

Policies

1. **Riverfront Parks and Paths**

   Continue to use public open space as a key organizing feature for development, and maximize pedestrian activity by establishing an interconnected open space system. Extend linear parks and greenways from the Downtown into adjacent neighborhoods and beyond.

   Promote the ability of the public to reach the river edge to experience its views and vistas, launch tubes, fish and put their feet into the water. Link non-riparian sites to the riverfronts via the street network.

   Please also refer to the policies under Objective 6, Walking and Bicycling, as well as the Parks, Trails and Greenways Plan chapter

2. **River-Oriented Development**

   Continue to follow the policies of the Land Use Plan chapter, which advocate for riverfront development that takes advantage of the views to the water, orients a good face toward the river, and cooperates with City efforts to create linear riverfront parks and trails.

3. **Connections to the Riverfront**

   Link non-riparian properties to the rivers via sidewalks with generous landscaping and decorative lighting, streets that terminate at the bluff, overlooks and open vistas.

Riverfront parks and views have drawn very substantial private investment to Downtown.

Objective 5 - Downtown Design and Enhancements

Encourage the consistent use of Downtown design principles for buildings and public spaces to guide all public and private developments in the Downtown.

Policies

1. Downtown Design Principles

Prepare a set of design guidelines for Downtown as supplements to the City Zoning Code to guide public and private improvements in the Downtown. Build upon these points:

- Recognize and preserve **good design from the past**, maintain the Downtown's unique characteristics, and encourage improvements compatible with the character of the Downtown and its principal districts.
- Emphasize the **relationship of buildings to the street** by facing buildings toward and situated close to the public street. Each building along a street should have many windows and doors that face that sidewalk. Streets should be lined with buildings without intervening parking lots.
- Improve **public spaces** and ensure that the Downtown's appearance enhances efforts to improve economic activity.
- Acknowledge the **rivers** and encourage all development to draw from this beginning and enhance the Downtown's unique riverfront setting.
- Identify sites suitable for public or private **landmarks** that enhance the identity of the Downtown. Site new structures in a way that orients the visitor and organizes the development pattern.
- Use **building edges** to define the streets, edges and paths between spaces and use "build-to lines" so structures enclose and define streets, plazas and parks so that open space does not feel barren, uninviting or exposed to the weather. Animate these edges with windows – not blank walls.
- Generate **activity day and night** by designing buildings to create a mixture of uses along streets.
- Design interesting **public spaces** and carry attention to detail to the design of individual blocks, buildings, and smaller courts and streetscapes that result in attractive pedestrian environments.
- Provide **sidewalks** and pedestrian pathways that allow people to walk easily throughout the Downtown and to cross streets safely.
- Allow and encourage Downtown property to be used more **intensively** than in the rest of the city. Overall, land should be developed significantly more densely than it is elsewhere in Eau Claire. The highest development densities should be in the South Barstow District and on the larger redevelopment sites. Density should generally decrease and make a smooth transition to the surrounding existing residential neighborhoods.

- Provide a **mixture** of types of development in Downtown, including shops, offices, housing, medical buildings, schools and services. The City should favorably consider redevelopment proposals that include two or more types of land use on the same block or the same building as long as the central principles of density, relationship to the street, walking and quality are maintained.
- Downtown buildings and sites should have high quality, long lasting **materials**.
- Downtown should take better advantage of its greatest natural attributes, the **views of two rivers**, and especially the confluence point. Riverfront land should not be used for parking or other outdoor storage, nor should buildings present their worst sides to the rivers. The river should either be lined with public parks and walkways or land uses that benefit from the location such as apartment buildings, offices and restaurants. Ideally, there would be a public open space corridor between the top of the river bluff and the adjacent private river-oriented development.
- Views to **parking lots** should be softened by landscaping, which may include low brick or stone walls, grassy berms, shrubs, trees or opaque fences. Fences should be used to separate dissimilar and incompatible land uses such as commercial buildings or parking lots from housing.
- **Façade renovations** must be consistent with the original architecture of the building in terms of window or door size and location, detailing of cornices, lintels and window frames, façade materials, patterns and colors, and sign placement, materials and lighting.

A central design principle for Downtown is to have numerous doors and windows along the sidewalk. The images on pages 12-4 and 12-22 also illustrate this idea.

2. Streetscape Design

Ensure that street edges in the Downtown are improved with decorative lighting, trees and other features to add visual interest and facilitate walking. A hierarchy of streetscape elements should be established along the Downtown roadway corridor system and at key roadway intersections.

Downtown Loop System

A high level of improvements should be installed along the central street loop system of Barstow, Madison, Bellinger, Fifth and Lake. Include features such as:

- Pedestrian-scale lighting with banner arms and weather-resistant electrical outlets along designated streets
- Scored concrete sidewalks 5 to 16 feet wide
- Trees in grates
- Decorative paving in crosswalks
- Decorative railing or landscape buffers along edges of parking.

Other streets in the Downtown should include improvements with:

- Eight foot wide scored concrete walks
- Pedestrian-scale lighting
- Striped paving in crosswalks
- Landscape buffers along the edges of parking lots

Intersection Emphasis

Implement a hierarchy of intersection treatments along Downtown roadway corridors to reinforce transitions between streetscape level treatments. A high level of improvements should be provided at these key intersections:

- Lake Street at Graham and Farwell Streets
- Eau Claire Street at Barstow and Farwell Streets.

Farwell Street

Study the feasibility of rebuilding Farwell Street to three lanes (two through lanes, one turning lane and a raised median) with greater space for trees, bicycling, corner bump-outs and pedestrian safety.

Gateway Entry Features

Install prominent gateway design features at highly visible approaches to Downtown to signify arrival in the Downtown. Possible entry feature elements could include:

- Entry monument
- Flower and shrub planting area
- Art or sculpture feature
- Decorative paving plaza and outdoor seating area
- Ornamental fencing

Examples of streetscape improvements, including trees, boulevards, decorative lighting, banners and planted median.

3. Downtown Land Use Plan

Design Downtown as a place to **live, work and play**.

Ensure that the long-term future pattern of land use conforms to the general pattern illustrated by Figure 12-2, Downtown Land Use Plan. It is understood that it may take a long time to achieve this pattern, and during the transition period there will be temporary inconsistencies and incompatible relationships.

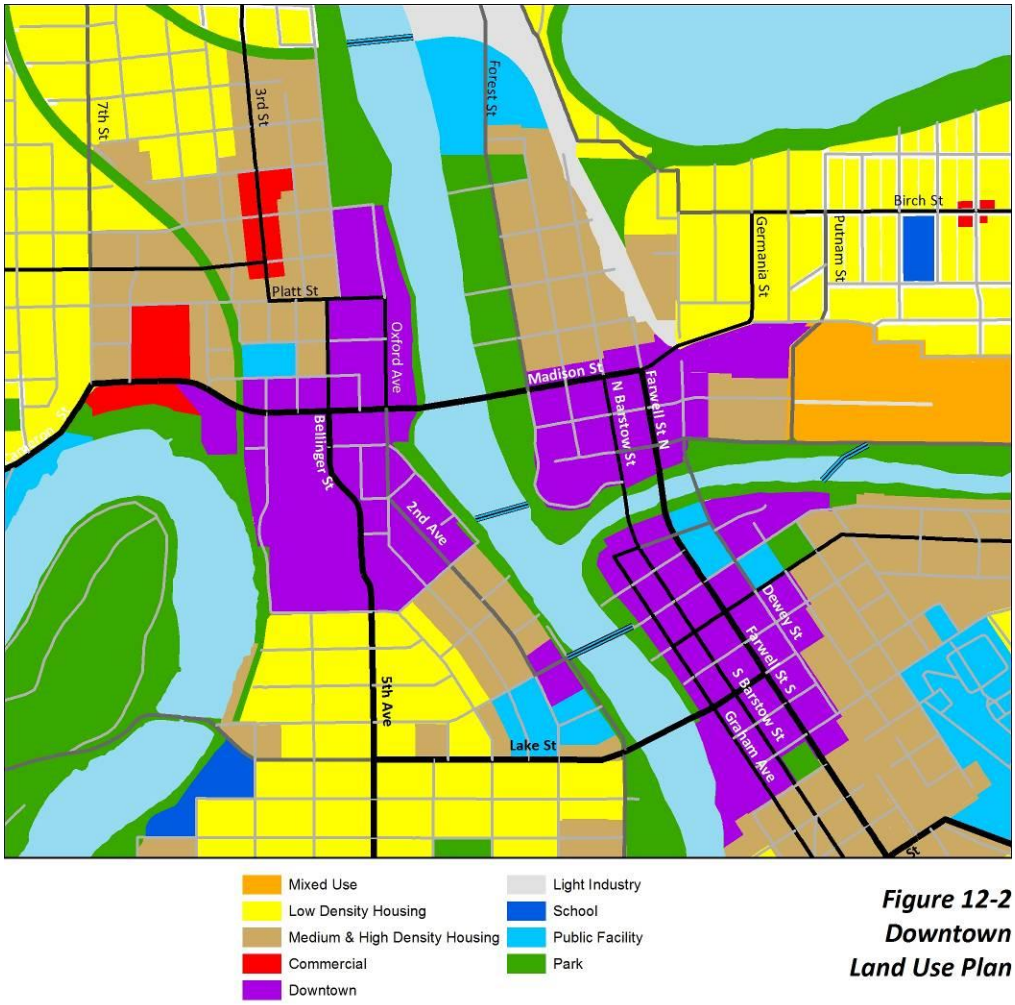


Figure 12-2 Downtown Land Use Plan

Changing market conditions or unforeseen opportunities may make it appropriate to deviate somewhat from this pattern. Such plan amendments are acceptable as long as the key principles continue to be followed. The City intends that the Downtown planning area eventually consist of a variety of business, housing and public land uses that are built in a relatively dense and urban manner.

4. Town Square Park

Create a "town square" style park, preferably between City Hall and the Library, or where the parking lot is currently at the northeastern corner of Barstow Street and Grand Avenue with substitute parking nearby. Please refer also to the Town Square Park policy on page 12-13 and the Eau Claire Street Promenade policy on page 12-23.

5. Business Signs

The City sign regulations as they pertain to Downtown were amended in 2013 with the help of a committee of Downtown representatives. The Central Business District Sign District was also created. Those improvements notwithstanding, these principles should be observed:

- Thought should be given in the **design** of each building to sign location, size, lighting and materials on the façade of the structure. A horizontal band should be established on each façade to contain all wall signs. Generally, individual letters should be used and backlit plastic panel signs should not be allowed.
- Encourage the use of **perpendicular signs** that are artfully designed to include a logotype or symbol of the business, be indirectly lit and be sized in careful proportion to the space they inhabit.
- **Wall signs** should fit into the building architecture, and projecting signs should artfully convey the nature of the business.
- **Freestanding pylon** (aka "banjo") signs should not be allowed in Downtown because they would detract from the desired urban appearance of Downtown and compete with building locations.

6. Wayfinding Signs

Implement a coordinated way-finding sign system to direct motorists to Downtown from the perimeter of the community, to major Downtown attractions (e.g., the County Courthouse) or to parking and back out to the freeways. These signs should be well-designed and made of high-quality materials so as to convey permanence and civic pride.

7. Public Art

Encourage the use of special decorative features in both public improvements and private development to add visual interest, express local pride and convey cultural heritage.

Artistic features should be integral to and designed in conjunction with the building, public space or facility rather than being an afterthought or appendage. Public art may be as subtle as a relief on the face of a manhole cover or as dramatic as a granite water feature. Other examples may include sidewalk pavings, street intersection pavings, neon sculpture, brick patterns on building walls, sculpture, murals and seasonal banners.

Public art should be made of high-quality, long-lasting materials and executed by designers who are experienced with outdoor settings, architecture or public works.

Public art can take many forms

Public art should be included in both public improvements and private development to add visual interest, express local pride and convey cultural heritage.

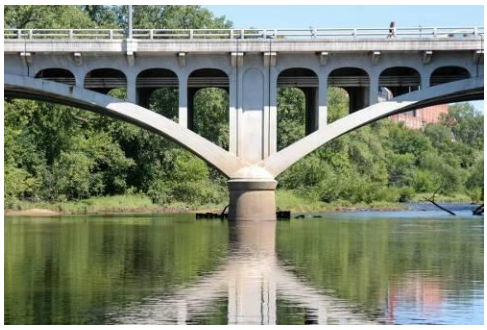
Consider adding a **mural** to the eastern face of the Civic Center parking structure above Gibson Street, overlooking the possible new public park between the City Hall and the library.

8. The River Bridges

Ensure that the new bridges at Water and Madison Streets are carefully designed to enhance the appearance of the rivers.

Consider adding **lighting** to one or more bridges.

The river bridges are highly visible public features and, therefore, should be designed for beauty as well as function.



The river bridges in Downtown are a major visual asset. As they are rebuilt, appearance should be a prime consideration. Night-time lighting is an idea that could add to their beauty.

9. Building Improvements and Architecture

Encourage well-designed exterior improvements to buildings and structures to enhance the architectural and economic value of the Downtown.

DECI should lead the way with loan funds supported by the City to ensure an ongoing rehabilitation program to improve and upgrade the facades of existing buildings. Such programs may include technical and design assistance as well as financial incentives.

Historic facades should be restored on every building where the brick has been painted, the original façade material covered or where the original pattern of windows or roofline have been altered.

The design and display of business signs and awnings should be incorporated into the overall design of the building exterior and be consistent with general Downtown design standards for signs. Building and property owners should be encouraged to remove graffiti within 24 hours.

Building restoration and new construction should both follow traditional principles for proportion, rhythm, openings and position relative to the street.

Objective 6 – Walking and Bicycling

Enhance the ability to walk and bicycle Downtown by ensuring safe and attractive routes throughout Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

Policies

1. Walking

Continue to acknowledge the importance of walking in Downtown and continue to rebuild public sidewalks and greenway paths.

Install features such as striped crossing marks and "countdown" signals help pedestrians cross the street.

Complete the following key pedestrian connections in the Downtown:

- Wisconsin Street from Banbury Place to the Farmers Market in Phoenix Park
- Eau Claire and Gibson streets from the proposed City Hall Plaza to the Chippewa Riverfront
- Main Street from Dewey Street to the riverfront
- Grand Avenue from the County Courthouse across the river to City Hall
- Lake Street from Carson Park across the river to Barstow Street
- The South Barstow pedestrian path along the Eau Claire and Chippewa River frontages through the planned Haymarket Plaza. .

The streets identified above should become strongly pedestrian in character without disrupting vehicular traffic flow, should serve as direct linkages between parks, landmarks and other activity centers, and should provide visual cues about their function and destination. Land uses along the connections should be made active and safe. Gaps in the connection enclosures should be filled with compatible land uses.

2. The Eau Claire Street Promenade

Eau Claire Street should be rebuilt as a "convertible street" from Farwell Street to Graham Avenue so that it can be temporarily closed to auto traffic and used for events, performances, celebrations and strolling. Sidewalks would be improved with special patterns, flat curbs with trench drains would be used, tent tie-down rings would be embedded, and the street pavement would be decorative.

A **"town square" park** between City Hall and the Phillips Library could anchor the eastern end. Please refer also to the Town Square Park policy on page 12-13.

A rendering of Eau Claire Street rebuilt with sidewalks, low curbs and other improvements.

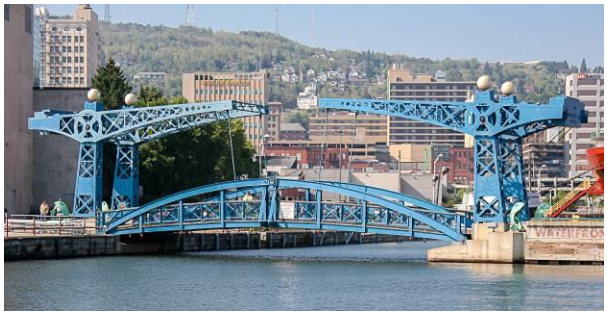
3. The Proposed Grand Avenue Pedestrian Mall

The 2012 *Redevelopment Strategy and Vision Plan* included a proposal to close a portion of Grand Avenue to vehicles and rebuild it as a pedestrian mall with spaces for entertainment and vendors. This idea should be held in abeyance at least until there is much more Downtown employment, housing and foot traffic. In the meantime, the proposed "convertible street" on Eau Claire Street could serve this function.

Pedestrian malls were once a popular idea but they have proven to be harmful to downtown merchants and expensive to maintain. Only in locations with very high pedestrian counts such as the Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis have these been successful. It is preferable to animate a street with shop fronts, sidewalks, auto traffic and parking.

4. Confluence Pedestrian Bridge

Study the feasibility of a pedestrian bridge across the mouth of the Eau Claire River linking Phoenix Park to the plaza and trail at The Confluence. This feature would likely be wildly popular and extend the effect of the riverfront greenway.



A well-designed bridge for walking and bicycling at the mouth of the Eau Claire River could make a dramatic statement and become an icon for the community.

5. The Riverfront Greenways

Complete the riverfront greenway and trail system in these Downtown locations:

- Dewey Street to Lake Street and eventually south to Water Street via Thorp Drive; an interim route could include the street sidewalks south of Lake Street
- From The Chippewa River State Trail bridge north along the western bluff of the Chippewa River to the High Bridge walk-bike river crossing

6. Bicycling

Implement the city-wide bicycle system plan as it applies to Downtown.

Require new development to provide bicycle locking or storage devices, just as they provide parking for autos. Install public bicycle devices in some locations in parks and along sidewalks where there is insufficient private parking.

Continue to prohibit bicycling on public sidewalks that abut buildings.

Objective 7 – Street System

Maintain a street system that supports land development while honoring the importance of walking and bicycling.

The *Comprehensive Plan* anticipates improved access from the peripheral highway system. Cameron Street should be linked to I-94 to complete the east-west cross-town arterial that includes Madison and Birch-Galloway streets. The Barstow-Madison-Lake-Fifth Avenue loop will interconnect the four districts. Directional signs, special landscaping and lighting around the loop will aid orientation.

Policies

1. **Street and Highway Connections**

   Coordinate with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Eau Claire County to ensure that street and highway system connections to the Downtown are improved, particularly the City-proposed interchange at I-94 and Cameron Street.

   When the time arises, study the need to improve and enhance First Street from Old Wells Road to Platt Street to accommodate additional traffic generated by the planned riverfront redevelopment.

   Extending Birch Street via River Prairie Drive to the realigned US Highway 53 improved access to and from that major artery. Now, Galloway Street should be improved to supplement Birch Street and take some of the through-traffic out of that residential neighborhood.

2. **Loop System**

   Enhance the Barstow, Madison, Lake and Fifth loop system and connect Downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods and to other major city districts such as the University.

3. **Street Design**

   Incorporate all streets in the Downtown as part of the public open space system serving both pedestrians and vehicles. Lighting trees, benches and awnings should be used to enhance the street environment. The character of each street should be considered when deciding upon building setbacks and open spaces. Sidewalks should be required for both sides of every street.

4. **River Bridges**

   Accomplish the rebuilding of the river bridges at Madison and Water Streets.

   Ensure that river bridges are beautifully designed because they are highly visible and long-lasting pieces of public investment.

5. **Bus Transit Center and a Passenger Rail Depot**

   Maintain the Downtown as the location for the main transit access hub. Encourage the construction of a new multi-modal bus transfer center in Downtown that incorporates a design that allows the integrated exchange of users among buses, autos and bicycles.

   If passenger rail service is established to Eau Claire, ensure that the station is Downtown, west or east of Banbury Place.

Objective 8 – Parking

Provide surface and structured parking consistent with Downtown design principles to meet mixed use parking needs

A detailed study of the parking system in the North and South Barstow Districts was presented by a consultant in 2015. Among its conclusions were the findings that there is plenty of parking for the current and immediately forecast demand but that the system is not used and managed properly.

Policies

1. The City-Owned Parking Structures

Enhance, repair and generally rehabilitate the City-owned Civic Center parking structure and the two-level City-owned deck on Graham Avenue.

The Civic Center ramp is dark, dreary and foreboding. Spot repairs to the concrete are needed soon to extend its life. Other recommended improvements are better lighting, white concrete sealant, bright and friendly signs, and a glass-enclosed stair tower on the Eau Claire Street frontage. The 2015 parking study includes additional description and support.

It is unfortunate that the Graham Avenue deck abuts the river and that it was not designed to support an "air rights" structure above itself. When its useful life has expired, a use more appropriate to the waterfront should be found while the parking supply is replaced nearby if not on-site.

The North Barstow parking structure was approved in early 2015 for three levels and 575 parking spaces, enough to serve the RCU, JAMF and attached buildings; it was engineered to accept a fourth level and accommodate demand from Block 7, to the north, and elsewhere if desired. The structure includes attractive façade materials, bicycle parking and a landscaped site to help it harmonize with the surrounding buildings.

Proposed Galloway Street parking structure and nearby development

2. System Management

Follow the recommendations of the 2015 parking study regarding the allocation of revenues to the municipal parking utility, meter durations and pricing, enforcement, use of technology, City employee parking locations, and customer service.

Review and update the off-street parking regulations in the zoning code with the aim of reducing the number of spaces required.

It is important to improve enforcement so the parking supply is used appropriately. Better enforcement will move some of the parked cars from street meters to off-street lots or ramps and help balance the system.

3. Design

Require that all new public and private surface parking lots include hardy perimeter landscaping, uniform signage, curbing or car stops, and paving. When necessary, require that existing lots be retrofitted with these features. The edges of surface parking lots should be softened with landscaping, ornamental fences or low masonry or brick walls. Where possible, buildings will be used to screen parking from street view.

Vehicle access to parking lots should be limited to locations designated by the City for reasons of traffic safety and flow.

Parking structures should be designed for visual compatibility with nearby buildings. Lining the first level at the street with shops helps greatly.

Ideally, surface parking Downtown should be located to the rear of buildings and never between the building and the street. However, when parking is beside the building and meets the sidewalk, it should be softened with landscaping, a low masonry wall or a sturdy fence.

4. Bicycle Parking

Ensure that bicycle locking loops are provided in key locations throughout the Downtown such as the parking structures, in the parks, at the transit center, and near major destinations. Consider using on-street bicycle parking “corrals” where appropriate.

5. On-Street Parking

Allow parking on each street where it is judged feasible with respect to space and safety. The objective would be to have parking along most street segments for the sake of adding to the public parking supply and to provide an additional sense of protection for pedestrians from the traffic.

Objective 9 – Housing

Make Downtown the hippest and most attractive place to live in Eau Claire.

Housing is an important component of any successful Downtown because it adds vitality night and day and supplements the customer base for certain Downtown shops. Additionally, it adds a residential option not found in most parts of the city. For those reasons, and to protect nearby residential neighborhoods and historically-significant properties, it is important to improve and expand the Downtown housing stock.

The North Barstow District redevelopment has opened opportunities for new rental apartment housing in new buildings along Riverfront Terrace and Wisconsin Street. As of 2015, there were six new buildings with a total of 205 one- or two-bedroom units, all located close to the sidewalk in buildings two to four stories tall.

Three buildings include ground-level commercial space totaling 15,400 square feet (including the relocated US Post Office).

Among the 205 units there are 140 underground parking spaces. Additional residential parking is available in on-site or adjacent surface lots; some tenants do not have cars, while some units have two tenants who each have a car. When the off-site surface parking on Block 7 is redeveloped, that contract parking would presumably shift to the municipal parking structure planned to the south.

1. Additional Housing Opportunities in Downtown

Look favorably on any reasonable proposal to build new housing in or around Downtown, especially along the riverfronts and in mixed-use structures. Owner-occupied housing should be given special emphasis.

Administratively support additional housing in these and other locations in Downtown:

- Block 7 – bounded by Wisconsin, Galloway, Hobart and Barstow Streets
- The Oxford Avenue corridor – refer to the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan*
- East of North Barstow Street – prepare a master plan for this area
- North of East Madison Street – prepare a master plan for this area
- Graham Avenue along the riverfront

Mixed-use buildings that include retail space on the first floor with housing above are a desired but not mandatory arrangement in Downtown.

Objective 10 – Courthouse District

Maintain the Courthouse District while protecting the integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhood.

The Courthouse District is bordered by Fulton Street on the north, the Chippewa River on the east, Lake Street on the south and Fifth Avenue on the west. It includes the County Courthouse complex, West Grand Avenue and the surrounding residential neighborhood. The County facilities occupy only a small portion of the district and do not extend south to the entire frontage of Lake Street.

The County facilities were expanded in 1995 and again in 2012. The City's police department now shares space with the County Sheriff there. After discussions with the neighborhood, firm boundaries for the County complex have been established.

The 2012 law enforcement addition

The County campus serves as the key anchor for this district and has been improved to provide additional space, take better advantage of its riverfront setting and provide a somewhat better transition to the surrounding neighborhoods.

In coordination with the expansion of the law enforcement wing, the First Avenue Park was created as an element of the greenway and state trail system, and Second Avenue was rerouted.

The Grand Avenue pedestrian bridge, closed to automobile traffic in 1980, provides a connection to the South Barstow District on the east bank of the river. A walk-bike path and a riverfront park connect this district to the state bicycle trail and the North Barstow district.

Policies

1. Economic Orientation

Continue to support the focus of the Courthouse District on housing, churches, small offices, personal service firms and small retail or food establishments, primarily oriented to serve the residents and employees of the district and County complex users.

The district commercial area on West Grand Avenue should be actively marketed as a unique, pedestrian-oriented business district serving area residents, area employees and County campus users. The City should also encourage marketing of housing along the river bicycle trail to take advantage of expanding trail use by providing 'bed and breakfast' inns near the riverfront.

2. Neighborhood Preservation

Guide the direction and limits of future County expansion to create certainty for adjoining property reinvestment. Commercial and office uses should not be allowed to encroach into the nearby residential area. Business properties should continue to be well maintained. The City will encourage the preservation of existing homes and neighborhood character; it will continue to work with the Historic Randall Park

Neighborhood Association and property owners to ensure compliance with the Housing Code, leading to continued housing reinvestment and improvement.

The Neighborhoods and Districts Plan chapter provides additional guidance on this subject.

3. Courthouse Expansion

If the County facilities expand, they should go up not out. Any additional building expansions should respect the importance of maintaining high-quality housing in this district.

4. West Grand Avenue Business Improvement District

Continue to support the efforts of the West Grand Avenue Business Improvement District to represent and enhance the businesses and commercial properties in the area.

An image of the historic West Grand Avenue business district

Objective 11 – West Madison District

Encourage the continued growth of the West Madison District as a health care services activity center area anchored by the Mayo Clinic Hospital campus, related office uses. convenience retail and support businesses, new housing and riverfront parks.

The West Madison District is roughly a 35-block area bordered by Cameron Street on the north, the Chippewa River on the east, Fulton Street on the south and Half Moon Lake on the west. The district includes the Mayo Clinic Hospital, the Bellinger-Madison business district, the L.E. Phillips Senior Center, the West Riverside Office Building.

The key anchor for this district is the Mayo Clinic Hospital, whose long-term commitment is a major, positive force for the district; a major bed wing was added in 2012.

The Madison-Bellinger commercial area serves as a neighborhood retail area. The riverfront park and greenway system is planned to be extended north through the district.

In 2011, the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan* was prepared and adopted by the City. That neighborhood includes the Madison Street corridor, the medical center and the Oxford Street corridor; it extends from Fulton Street on the south to approximately Marshall Street on the north and 7th Avenue on the west, encompassing a residential neighborhood.

A former school building at First and Oxford Avenue, once occupied by the City's Park, Recreation and Forestry Department offices, has been remodeled as housing.

The City purchased the former Charleson Lumber property at the corner of Madison Street and First Avenue in 2014 and has sold the building for use as a brew-pub. The City will keep the floodplain open space below the dike for the riverfront greenway and trail.

The Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority has been acquiring properties in the Oxford Avenue corridor for resale to developers as sites for residential or commercial buildings consistent with the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan*. Some riverfront land will be retained to provide additional greenway and park space.

There is some interest in the community in creating an indoor market in the Oxford Street corridor (just north of this District) or elsewhere in Downtown that would provide locally-grown foods, ethnic meals, arts, crafts, specialty clothing, and so forth.

Policies

1. Hospital and Clinic Growth

Encourage the hospital's involvement in the development of the surrounding commercial area in a way that promotes a pedestrian-scale community commercial district. Building setbacks and sidewalks should define and enclose the street to make the area pedestrian-friendly and safe. Fulton Street should remain the southern limit of medical services expansion; growth upward or east is preferred.

The Mayo Clinic Hospital reaffirmed its commitment to Eau Claire by adding a major bed wing.

2. Redevelopment Planning

Work with the Mayo Clinic Hospital and other property owners to guide the redevelopment of the frontages of Madison and Bellinger Streets. The *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan* suggested how buildings, parking and streetscape could be designed in that area.

3. Park and Pathways

Continue development of the riverfront park and trail system as recommended by the neighborhood plan.

4. Business Development

Encourage the economic orientation of the Madison Street commercial area as a neighborhood retail area that supports both adjacent residential neighborhoods as well as provides services to hospital employees, patients and visitors. Retail and food businesses serving area residents and hospital users should be encouraged to locate along Madison.

5. Attached -Family Housing

Encourage the development of well-designed multiple-family housing in order to provide a range of housing options for employees in the district, particularly for people who work at the Mayo Clinic Hospital.

Housing designed for the elderly should also be considered, particularly near the LE Phillips Senior Center, which is along Madison Street.

Plan Action Steps

The City will take these steps to implement the recommendations of the Downtown Plan.

Table 12-1
Downtown Plan Actions

Action	Timing
DECI Activities. Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., will continue to market, recruit and advocate for Downtown, working with owners, tenants, the City and the Redevelopment Authority of Eau Claire.	Ongoing
The Confluence. Complete performing arts center and the Plaza at The Confluence, the public and private multiple-use redevelopment near Eau Claire Street and Graham Avenue.	2018
Block 7. Accomplish the redevelopment of Block 7 and the liner building, possibly including additional parking in the Galloway Street ramp.	2018
Graham Avenue. Achieve redevelopment and remodeling along this street, particularly key riverfront parcels.	2016 - 2030
Bus Transfer Center. Study, relocate and improve the bus center.	2020
Eau Claire Street Promenade. Improve the streetscape and rebuild this as a "convertible street" for use during festivals.	2020
Oxford Avenue Corridor. Redevelop this area consistent with the recommendations of the *West Riverside District Plan*.	2016 - 2030
Riverfront Greenways. Fill gaps and extend the greenway system along both rivers; improve neighborhood connector streets.	2016 – 2030
Streetscape Loop. Improve landscaping and lighting in the street loop of Barstow, Madison, Bellinger, Fifth and Lake.	2016 – 2030
Farwell Street. Study the feasibility of reducing driving lanes and adding streetscape and pedestrian amenities.	2025
City Hall Plaza. Redevelop the underused property between City Hall and the Phillips Library as either office or public park.	2025
Bridges. Build beauty and interest into the river bridges as they are replaced.	Ongoing
Confluence Bridge. Study the feasibility and build a walking and bicycling bridge at the mouth of the Eau Claire River.	2019
Master Planning. Prepare a plan for the revitalization of the areas east of North Barstow Street and north of Madison Street.	2016 - 2020
Parking. Implement the recommendations of the 2015 parking study. Reduce the number of off-street spaces required.	2016