

# Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

## Downtown Assessment



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

## **Downtown Assessment**

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## Downtown Assessment

Downtown is the visual, civic and cultural heart of the community and located at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. It is linked to the region's perimeter highway system via Birch, Galloway and Cameron Streets (east-west) and Fifth, Wells, State and Harding (north-south).

### Major Downtown Issues

The following are the major issues that should be discussed and resolved during the course of this *Comprehensive Plan* update:

- 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 (2010) 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 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 is expected to include a 575-car parking structure with first floor shops facing Barstow Street shops being built by the City. 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 additional visitors to Downtown? Should a "town square" be created on the present*

*site of the US Bank drive-through branch? 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 when that facility moves 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?*



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

## **Accomplishments since the 1995 *Downtown Plan***

These major accomplishments have occurred during the 19 years that have elapsed since the 1995 *Downtown Plan*:

### **1995 through 2004**

- 1.** 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Bellinger Street realigned
- 2.** Convention Center feasibility study completed (referendum defeated this project).
- 3.** Downtown Development Zone created
- 4.** Phoenix Steel remediation project completed
- 5.** Design for Phoenix Park, with Farmer's Market and Trailhead facility completed
- 6.** Senior Center facility built
- 7.** Acquisition with FEMA grant of properties north of Madison Street.
- 8.** Xcel Energy remediation project completed
- 9.** Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., Board of Directors formed.
- 10.** Soo Line property redeveloped.
- 11.** S-bridge with riverfront trail completed
- 12.** Luther Hospital expansion accomplished
- 13.** West Riverside office building created
- 14.** County Courthouse expansion completed, twice
- 15.** Royal Credit Union office building constructed

### **2005 through 2014**

- 16.** The *Comprehensive Plan* was updated and adopted in 2005, including a chapter on Downtown plans and policies.
- 17.** Trail improvements under the North Barstow Street bridge and Farwell Street
- 18.** Construction of the Chamber of Commerce building and related trail extension
- 19.** City reconstruction of the Railroad Street parking lot and trail
- 20.** Extension of the Chippewa River State Trail east to Hastings Way and north to Chippewa Falls
- 21.** The southern limit was established for the then-Luther Midelfort Hospital and Clinic
- 22.** The *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan* was adopted in 2010, addressing the area west of the Chippewa River from Marshall to Fulton Street.
- 23.** Barstow Street and Graham Avenue were changed to two-way streets and rebuilt with new sidewalk treatments.
- 24.** The *Waterways Plan* was updated in 2012, addressing many riverfront land use, redevelopment, design, and park or trail issues.

25. Significant development occurred in the North Barstow District. A total of 215 housing units and 30,000 square feet of commercial space have been built or renovated in the North Barstow District. Three of the six new buildings have either housing or offices above first-floor retail space.
26. JAMF Software established its 65,000 square foot headquarters and research-and-development building next to the Royal Credit Union headquarters and Phoenix Park.
27. The Mayo Clinic Health System built a 166-bed tower. .
28. The site plan was approved for the first phase of *The Confluence*. This partnership of a private developer, the University and the City would create 116 units of student housing, a performing arts center with three theaters and 1900 seats, University class rooms, space for retail businesses and restaurants, underground parking, a public plaza and riverfront path improvements.
29. A new public parking lot was built at the corner of Madison and Forest Streets.
30. The Post Office building and property was purchased by the Redevelopment Authority.
31. A new Downtown Post Office was scheduled to open by December 2014.
32. The former Parks and Recreation Department building was redeveloped into 22 apartments, The Biscuit Lofts.



The JAMF Software headquarters building and adjacent new housing

## Prior Downtown Plans

Several plans for downtown have preceded this one:

- *Eau Claire Central Business District Plan*, 1980
- *Eau Claire Historic Preservation Plan*, 1988
- *Downtown Parking Plan*, 1986
- *Physical Survey of Downtown Eau Claire*, 1993, Eau Claire Main Street Association
- *Downtown Element of the Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan*, 1992
- *Urban Design Plan for Downtown Eau Claire*, 1994, Main Street Association
- *Downtown Plan*, 1995
- *Downtown Action Agenda*, 2001
- *Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan*, 2012, Downtown Eau Claire, Inc.

## Downtown Market Assessment

A market assessment was prepared in 2001 for the *Downtown Action Agenda* by HyettPalma, Inc., consultants to the National League of Cities, which led the preparation of the *Downtown Action Agenda (2001)*. The major points of that assessment remain valid today and are summarized below.

### Assets

Eau Claire boasts a large and varied downtown with many assets that can be leveraged to further enhance Downtown and its appeal. These include:

- **The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers:** The rivers and their confluence are among Downtown's first and foremost assets. The rivers are the single common element that connects all portions of Downtown, and the more Downtown is connected to the rivers, the more unique and compelling Downtown will become. Therefore, the rivers must be used as a critical theme on which both Downtown economic development and the City's overall quality of life can be leveraged.
- Downtown and Eau Claire have a **rich history** that should be reflected through Downtown's enhancement.
- **Downtown Eau Claire is already a center for the arts.** Here can be found the State Theater, the Eau Claire Regional Arts Center and Council, the Chippewa Valley Theater Guild, the Chippewa Valley Symphony, the Eau Claire Children's Theater, and the Phillips Memorial Library with its popular program for all ages.
- **Downtown is a government center** with City, County, State and Federal offices located there. As a result, Downtown has a thriving array of professional offices attracting those businesses that tend to cluster around and do business with government offices and agencies.
- **The Convention Center** and adjoining hotel are located in Downtown and are being remodeled. They will continue to bring business and leisure travelers to the heart of the City.
- **The farmers' market** and Phoenix Park are completed, both of which will act as Downtown attractions.
- Downtown is home to a major and highly respected institution that draws from a very large area, the **Mayo Clinic Medical System Hospital and Clinic.**
- Downtown has experienced a high degree of **private sector investment** over the years that includes health specialty retail, food, service and office establishments, the Banbury Place adaptive use project, River Plaza and River Edge.
- Downtown is fortunate to have the **commitment of the City Council** whose members have declared Downtown's enhancement to be a high priority. Without this commitment, the enhancement of any Downtown would be extremely difficult.
- Downtown's enhancement is receiving attention from four **active business improvement districts, Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., and private, non-profit organizations.**

## Concerns

Despite its impressive list of assets, Downtown Eau Claire is not without needs and issues, and the community is not without concerns for Downtown's future, which include:

- The community's citizens feel it is **very important that Downtown be further enhanced in a specific way**. They want the enhancement effort to result in an increase in the number of Downtown retail businesses, restaurants and destinations, an improvement in Downtown's appearance, incorporating the rivers into Downtown's operations and image, and greater communication and coordination among all entities involved in Downtown's enhancement.

## Opinion Survey Results

Two surveys were conducted in preparation for the 2001 *Downtown Action Agenda* to gauge the health of Downtown as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners and managers of businesses located in the project area and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary trade area. Although progress has been made, the opinions expressed through these surveys seem to still retain much validity, so they are summarized below.

1. Other than parking, all improvements that rated "very important" by a majority or a significant percentage of residents had to do with **Downtown's businesses**, e.g., the variety of businesses, recruiting retail, quality of retail, and business hours.
2. Of the seven improvements rated "very important" by a majority or significant percentage of residents, four dealt with Downtown's **retail businesses**, .e.g., variety of retail, recruiting retail, quality retail and business hours.
3. All improvements desired by residents involved the **variety of businesses** in Downtown and the convenience of patronizing those businesses. This is important to note since the two factors that residents cited as determining where they shop were convenience and variety or selection offered.
4. When asked what else could be done to increase their patronage of Downtown, residents reiterated the importance of increasing the **variety of retail shops** and increasing the **variety of unique restaurants**. Business owners agreed; their number one response was to provide more variety in retail and specialty stores. In addition, residents emphasized the importance of **capitalizing on the historic aspect** of Downtown and on the riverfront.
5. In terms of specific businesses, residents expressed a desire primarily for unique **restaurants** (preferably along the water), unique **retail** stores, **apparel** stores, **art**, craft or gift stores, and a greater variety of **entertainment** options. Again, business owners agreed, saying that Downtown needs a greater variety of unique restaurants, more boutiques, an apparel stores for men, women and children.

## Land Use and Development

Downtown Eau Claire is composed of four districts located around the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers:

1. South Barstow District
2. North Barstow District
3. West Riverside Neighborhood and the Medical Center District
4. Courthouse District.

The following text and Figure 13-1, Downtown Development Landmarks, describe key development or redevelopment sites, parks and pedestrian or bicyclist paths. The reference numbers in this list correspond to the numbers on Figure 13-1. The 2014 pattern of land use is illustrated by Figure 13-2.

### Recent Development Sites

1. **The L.E. Phillips Senior Center**  
Built in 1996, the center offers social, educational and fitness programs.
4. **West Riverside Office Building**  
This 17,000 square foot, three-story office building was a pioneer in the resurgence of the West Madison Street corridor.
6. **The Biscuit Building**  
This former school building enjoyed new life previously as a City office building and now as 22 apartments.
7. **Mayo Clinic Hospital Addition**  
The Mayo Clinic Health System Hospital and Clinic added a 166-bed wing overlooking Half Moon Lake in 2012.
8. **Major Hospital and Clinic Parking Structure**  
To support its new bed wing and other growth, the hospital and clinic erected a 446-space parking structure. Care was taken to ensure that its southern façade and landscaping an attractive image to the housing on the other side of Fulton Street, which has become the southern border for the medical center.
9. **County Building Expansion**  
This 300,000 square foot building included space for an expanded jail, law enforcement offices (for both the County and the City) and a remodeled courthouse.
10. **Phoenix Park Neighborhood**  
Site of the recently completed 315 Riverfront Terrace and 312 Wisconsin buildings. Both include one- and two-bedroom apartments (some with loft ceilings) and first-floor retail space, underground tenant parking,. Surface parking for the retail businesses.

**11. Phoenix Park Neighborhood**

The site of 222 Wisconsin, the remodeled Livery restaurant and bar, and commercial office and service business space. 222 has one- and two-bedroom apartments and retail space.

**12. Phoenix Park Neighborhood**

The third phase of this downtown neighborhood has three apartment buildings with underground parking.

**14. JAMF Software**

This 65,000 square foot corporate office building, built in 2014, for a successful home-grown technology company is a significant addition to the district.

**16. Royal Credit Union**

The Royal Credit Union corporate headquarters was the first private development to occur on the former site of Phoenix Steel, a brownfield reclamation led by the City. The building is four stories tall with 100,000 square feet of floor area.

**19. Eau Claire Area Economic Development Corporation and Chamber of Commerce**

This is a multi-tenant, 18,000 square foot office building that took advantage of the river views and left space for the public trail extension.

**21. Public Library**

The L.E. Phillips Public Library provides an important cultural dimension to the Downtown.

**23. Convention Center**

The Eau Claire Convention and Civic Center brings many visitors to Downtown to use its meeting facilities. It is linked to a major parking structure owned by the City and the Lismore Hotel, which is being remodeled.

**Potential Redevelopment Sites**

**2. Oxford Avenue Corridor West**

The Oxford Avenue corridor north of Madison Street, in the heart of the West Bank Redevelopment District, was identified in the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan* as a location for new housing, office and retail investments.

**3. Oxford Avenue Corridor East**

The eastern portion of the Oxford Avenue corridor benefits from river frontage. A public pedestrian and bicyclist path is sought along the top of the river bluff to link the High Bridge path to the State Trail near Fulton Street.

**5. Charleson Lumber Redevelopment Site**

The Charleson Lumber Company was the last remaining descendant of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century lumber mills. This site, which is partially within the 100-year floodplain, is being purchased by the City of Eau Claire for bike trail expansion. The building is expected to be adapted and re-occupied by another business.



Figure 13-1  
Downtown Development Landmarks

**13. Block 7**

This site is presently used for surface parking but is being studied for redevelopment as potentially a combination of office, shops and restaurant space.

**15. Galloway Street Parking Structure**

In 2015, the City was joining forces with Royal Credit Union and JAMF Software to create a parking structure with approximately 5000 spaces. Daily and hourly parking would also be available for the general public. The appearance of the structure will help it blend into the redeveloped landscape of the District. Green spaces and other features will be incorporated into the spaces between the parking structure and nearby buildings. A graphic showing the location of the parking structure is presented on page 13-15.

**17. Post Office Redevelopment and Relocation**

The current site of the US Post Office building is a prime redevelopment site, as the Postal Service relocated its operation to a private storefront on Madison Street in 2014.

**18. East of Barstow Street**

Several blocks east of Barstow Street are becoming ripe for new investment as a consequence of the private and public actions in the western half of the District. In 2014, the Green Tree hotel was being remodeled. Previously, the Volume One newspaper occupies a renovated historic building here. Other properties include aging industrial buildings, surface parking lots, bars and a convenience store.

**20. The Confluence**

As mentioned previously, this partnership of a private developer, the University and the City would create 116 units of student housing, a performing arts center with three theaters and 1900 seats, University class rooms, space for retail businesses and restaurants, underground parking, a public plaza and riverfront path improvements. The site plan for Phase One was approved in 2014. State funding assistance for the University's phases was not fully approved yet in 2014.

**22. Convention Center Hotel**

The Convention Center hotel, under new ownership, was being renovated and upgraded in 2014. It will be renamed The Lismore.

**24. US Bank Site**

This site next to between City Hall and the library is probably underutilized as a drive-through bank and detracts from the pedestrian environment of Downtown. The 2012 Downtown Redevelopment Plan by DECI called for the site to be re-purposed as a "town square" park.

**Parks and Trails**

**25. Phoenix Park**

This public riverfront open space has been the keystone of Downtown revival in recent years. It includes the State Trail, the farmers' market, an amphitheatre, a shelter building and other paths.

**26. Forest Street Park**

The City cleared aging houses from the river floodplain and created a park that includes a community garden and a trail.

**27. Trail around Half Moon Lake**

This pedestrian and bicyclist path now makes a complete and continuous loop of the lake and connects to other paths that lead to the north and the south.

**28. Trail in a Former Railroad Corridor**

Leads directly to the State Trail bridge.

**29. State Trail**

The Chippewa River State Trail runs through Owen Park and First Avenue Park before crossing the river to a trail head building in Phoenix Park. A second route across the river is available on a bridge where Grand Avenue once crossed.

**30. Potential Trail Link**

Long-term plans aim to extend a pedestrian and bicyclist path from that State Trail bridge to the “High Bridge,” which was being redecked in 2014 for non-motorized use. This route could either run as a signed-only route on First Avenue as it does now or could run through a potential future linear park that could be created if the City were to acquire the 13 houses between the street and the river, all of which are in the 100-year flood plain. The High Bridge was previously owned by the Northwestern Railroad.

**31 East Bank Trail**

Disjointed segments of a public riverfront path exist from the S Bridge to Dewey Street and from Grand Avenue to Lake Street. The latter section is in poor condition. The hope is to some day have a continuous path all the way from Archery Park to the University. Full completion might never happen, but the additions that will result from the confluence project will establish the corner and create a focal point in a key location.



*Figure 13-2  
Pattern of Downtown  
Land Use, 2014*

## Circulation and Parking

### Street System

The average daily traffic count on the major Downtown streets in 2012 is presented by Figure 13-3.

The system of streets in Downtown includes these arterials:

**Birch-Madison-Cameron Streets:** Provides east-west linkage across the community. Connects on the east to Hastings Way and the relocated Highway 153. Connects on the west to Highway 12 (Claremont Avenue) and potentially to I-94 via County Highway E.

The City and County have urged the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to plan and build an interchange where Cameron Street currently passes under I-94 but the State has not been receptive to the idea because of budget limitations. That interchange would greatly improve access to Downtown and the medical center from I-94 and the west.

Birch Street has been widened and realigned to provide much better access from the east.

**Wells-Third-Bellinger-First Streets:** Provides north-south movement west of the Chippewa River linking the North Crossing to Water Street. This route was improved during the 1990s.

**Farwell Street:** Provides the best movement across the South Barstow District and links Madison Street to the south entrance to downtown (State Street) or to the southeastern entrance (Harding and Brackett Streets).

**Galloway Street:** Serves as a parallel reliever to Birch Street as access to and from Downtown. Would benefit from a bridge at the railroad track.

Minor arterial streets include Main, Lake, Barstow and Graham. Barstow and Graham have been revised to work as two-way streets again for the sake of traffic calming and pedestrian movement. Traffic conditions are being monitored to gauge the effect of this change.

Chippewa River bridges are on Madison and Lake Streets. The Eau Claire River is spanned at Barstow, Farwell and Dewey Streets. Grand Avenue once carried motorized traffic over the Chippewa River but now only serves pedestrians and bicyclists.

### Transit

The City's bus routes converge on the downtown transfer center at Farwell and Main Streets, giving the area good transit service.

### Bicycling

Generally speaking, access to Downtown by bicycle is difficult because of lack of either striped lanes or wide curb lanes and high amounts of auto traffic.

The community's major bicycle route, the Chippewa River State Trail, enters Downtown from the southeast through Owen Park in the West Side Neighborhood, crosses the Chippewa River on a former railroad bridge and arrives at a new trailhead building in Phoenix Park at the rivers' confluence. That asphalt path also runs to the east along the Eau Claire River then north along a railroad corridor. No on-street striped lanes exist in Downtown although a few miles have been introduced elsewhere in the city.

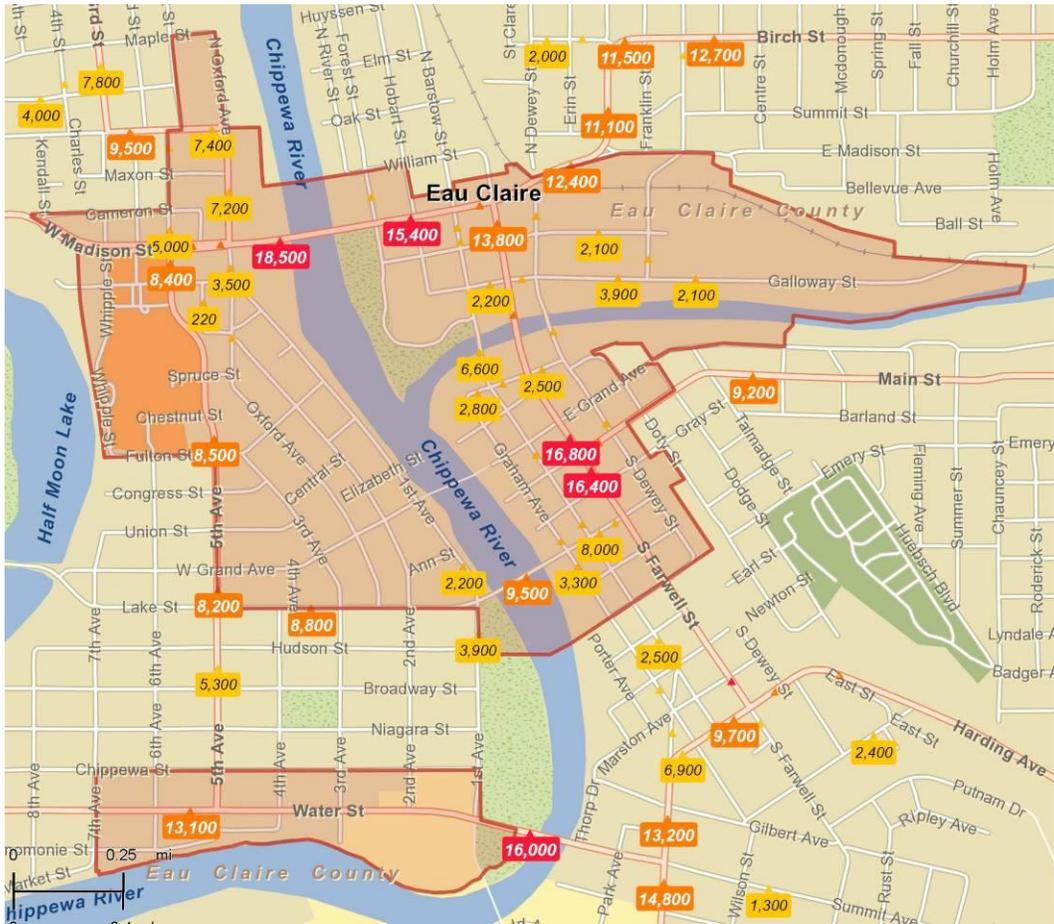


Figure 13-3  
Average Daily Traffic Counts, 2012

**Parking**

Parking for new development in the North Barstow district will be provided by a combination of surface, structured and on-street spaces.

The Eau Claire Parking Utility provides nine public parking lots and two ramps in the Downtown containing 1,100 spaces. Private off-street parking is also available for the general public and reserved for tenants.

On-street parking is available along every block in the South Barstow District except along the arterial streets – Farwell, Lake and Madison (with a few minor exceptions). Parking is also prohibited in some locations near Mayo Hospital and Clinic and the County Courthouse. Unlimited free parking is allowed on residential blocks but other locations have some restrictions: The Barstow-Graham retail area has a one-hour limit; South Barstow fringe locations and some cross-streets allow two hours free or else have 2- or 10-hour meters.

A Downtown parking study was being prepared by the City in late 2014. Its results will be summarized in this chapter when it becomes available.

**North Barstow District Parking:** The recently developed residential and mixed-use building in the North Barstow District each have underground parking for tenants. Surface parking is provided for business customers.

**Galloway Street Parking Structure:** In 2014, the City was preparing to partner with Royal Credit Union (RCU) and JAMF Software to build a 550- to 570-space parking structure in the center of the block bounded by Riverfront Terrace, Galloway Street and Barstow Street.



Figure 13-4  
Proposed Galloway Street Parking Structure

**Parking for The Confluence:** The Confluence mixed-use redevelopment at Graham Avenue and Eau Claire Street will include parking beneath the buildings.

**Mayo Hospital and Clinic Ramp:** The Mayo Health System hospital and clinic has generated a great demand for additional parking but has managed to provide a sufficient number of spaces in structures and surface lots for its use. There has been some off-site spill-over parking in the adjacent residential neighborhoods but it has been minimal.

**Civic Center Parking Ramp:** This facility is in a very convenient and central location but it is underutilized. And needs some physical improvements, including better signs.

**On-Street Parking:** On-street parking is available in the South Barstow District but spaces are limited. The City continued to provide on-street spaces along Barstow Street and Graham Avenue after they were rebuilt in 2013. The presence of this parking helps to improve the public’s perception of parking availability.

**Riverfront Parking:** Quite a bit of land is devoted to parking along the riverfront in the South Barstow District, either as surface lots behind buildings or in a structure. However, parking is an inappropriate use of valuable riverfront land, and that practice will likely be phased out as redevelopment occurs.

## **Urban Design**

Greater Downtown Eau Claire has several design strengths and weaknesses along with opportunities for improvement. This section describes those characteristics with photos and text.

### **Riverfront**

The South Barstow District and the West Riverside Neighborhood do not adequately address and take advantage of the amenity of the riverfront. In those locations, the river is lined with the blank backs of buildings, parking lots or structures, obsolete industries, trash storage and disused private spaces. In contrast, the opposite corners, the North Barstow and Courthouse Districts, each have attractive riverfront parks, plazas and paths lined with housing and/or offices.

However, in 2014 great progress was about to occur in the South Barstow District with the *Confluence* redevelopment and its housing, restaurants and public plaza.

### **South Barstow Street**

South Barstow is Downtown's "Main Street," so its private and public components should be maintained to the highest possible levels of quality. The street and sidewalk improvements installed in the 1980s were rebuilt and replaced in 2013. Some of the buildings themselves are in need of improvements to the façade, signs, doors, windows, window displays (or lack thereof), and awnings or overhangs.

### **Grand Avenue**

Grand Avenue is a compact and well-maintained collection of mostly turn-of-the-century commercial buildings with small shops, offices and upper-story apartments. Locations such as these give cities a sense of charm, tradition and place. Every effort should be made to keep the businesses vital and the public spaces attractive. The pedestrian promenade element of the Chippewa River State Trail along First Street, to which Grand Avenue connects, is a marvelous complement to the commercial district.

### **Historic Architecture**

There are several fine examples of historic architecture in Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods. Preserving and improving these landmark buildings is a key element of any downtown strategy. Rehabilitation of these structures must be sensitive to their design, and nearby redevelopment and infill must be responsive to the context of the block and district.

### **Pedestrian Environment**

Sidewalks exist among most block faces in Downtown, and many blocks have building facades including windows and doors, a tree canopy, porches or interesting land uses. However, in a few locations the façade design or land use is not conducive to walking. Many of the windows have been covered, store window displays are few, and on some buildings the original façade materials have been covered or replaced with modernist skins.

Fortunately, the sidewalks and street "furniture" are now in now in good condition along Barstow Street, Graham Avenue, West Grand Avenue, West Madison Street and Riverfront

Terrace. Each street in the North Barstow District is being improved for walking as adjacent redevelopment occurs.

Parking spaces along the curb buffer the pedestrians from some of the effects of street traffic, a helpful addition to the pedestrian environment.

Off-street parking, whether in surface lots or structures, degrades the sidewalk environment for pedestrians. Parking lots should be buffered with plantings, low masonry walls or fences. Structures may be softened through façade design, plantings or, possibly, storefronts.

### **Upper-Story Conversions**

Use of second and third stories, either for housing or offices, increases the economic viability of buildings and adds vitality to downtown because they add residents or employees to use Downtown's services and amenities.

### **Auto-Oriented Business Facilities**

The typical design of facilities such as convenience food restaurants, gasoline stations or other drive-throughs are oriented toward automobile traffic. Consequently, they detract from the pedestrian environment and are inconsistent with the traditional appearance of Downtown that is essential to economic success.

### **Transitions to Residential Districts**

Ideally, downtown would be a mixture of shops, offices, housing, cultural and entertainment land uses. However, at its edges, there will always be a change to a predominately residential district. The quality of that transition around Downtown Eau Claire is critical to the continued well being of the housing.

### **Gateways and Paths**

Downtown Eau Claire should be recognized and celebrated as a special neighborhood in the community. Entrances to the Downtown can be defined through site planning, architecture, lighting, landscaping, public art and street design. Likewise, routes to and through Downtown for motorists or pedestrians should be defined with streetscape elements and signs.

### **Sign System**

Although signs leading from the perimeter of the community to Downtown have been installed, there is still a need for additional signage, if nicely design. A downtown sign system should convey information succinctly, reinforce image and identity, be understandable by diverse users.

## Progress toward Objectives since 2001

Much progress has been achieved since the adoption of the *Downtown Action Agenda* in 2001. To demonstrate that fact, “vision statements” from that plan are presented below with notes about how each is being addressed.

1. **Active and Alive:** Downtown Eau Claire would be filled with lots of people, be attractive in winter and summer, boast historic buildings and interesting architecture, be filled with a variety of things to do such as dining, arts, specialty store and family-oriented destination, and it would be “alive after five.”

*New restaurants and bars have opened. The Thursday night summer concert series and the farmers’ market draw large crowds.*

2. **Design:** Downtown would be “historically accurate and consistent” in terms of building facades, signs and street life, which would be “quaint, pretty, old town.” Downtown would be made even more attractive with decorative pavers on walks, with landscaping that includes “local and regional vegetation,” with architecture that not only reflects our past but that reflects our future,” and by realizing that “architecture is art.”

*New buildings in the North Barstow District reflect historic themes in terms of position relative to the sidewalk, height, windows and doors.*

3. **Town Square:** Downtown would include a Town Square that is centrally located, includes a clock and foundation, and is surrounded by thriving businesses. Town Square would be highly used all year ‘round to the point where the community would wonder, “How did we ever function without it?”

*The public plaza planned for The Confluence will help answer this need. A plan by Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., called for a “town square” on this site of the US Bank drive-through branch.*

4. **Art Center:** Downtown would be an art center with performance spaces for chamber music, orchestral music and theater with a place for artists to show and sell, and with public art in the form of large murals and a variety of outdoor sculpture.

*The Confluence is expected to include three stages and University class rooms.*

5. **Rivers:** The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers would be a highlight of downtown. They would be used and beautified with greenways and parks along the rivers, fishing and boating on the rivers, and “more attractive uses along the rivers than parking.”

*The update of the Waterways Plan (2012) reinforced this notion. Phoenix Park, the Confluence plaza and First Avenue Park all implement it.*

6. **Walking:** A “true pedestrian culture” will have been created in Downtown. This would mean that “people are willing to park and walk” and they would have something to walk for” such as historic buildings, scenic views, unique shops, etc.

*We’re not fully there yet, but we’re moving in the right direction.*

- 7. Access:** Access to Downtown would be made easier by improving pedestrian access to and from adjacent neighborhoods, by completing the bike trail head, and by making Barstow Avenue more accessible from the trail.

*The design for The Confluence included the concept of a dedicated pedestrian and bicyclist bridge over the Eau Claire River to the Chippewa River State Trail in Phoenix Park. There is already such bridges at Grand Avenue and the State Trail on the former railroad bridge.*

- 8. Phoenix Park:** The Phoenix Park project would be completed and the farmers’ market would be located in a “more attractive space.”

*Done and done.*

- 9. Private Investment:** Private investment would be encouraged to commit Downtown. This investment would broaden the range of uses Downtown to include:

- More specialty shops “that you can’t find anywhere else” *Some*
- Art, culture, education and entertainment *Emphatically yes*
- More residents living in Downtown in apartments facing the river and in loft apartments *Yes*
- A local grocery store *Not yet*
- Outdoor cafes *Yes*
- Restaurants with river views *Coming with The Confluence*
- Specialty shops and restaurants lining a riverwalk *Coming with The Confluence*
- More Downtown employees and residents to support the business base *Yes*
- Services for Downtown residents and neighborhood residents *Yes*
- A multi-use facility for sports events, exhibits and conventions *Expected to happen at the County Materials site on Menomonee Street by 2020*
- Mixed-use buildings facing the water and containing shops, offices, apartments and parking. *Happening in both North and South Barstow Districts*

- 10. Nearby neighborhoods:** The importance of revitalizing the neighborhood around Downtown would be understood and supported.

*This is evidenced by several neighborhood plans prepared by the City. Progress is slower than hoped.*

- 11. Users:** Downtown’s varied mix of activities would attract a variety of users including:

- Downtown residents and employees *The numbers are growing*
- Nearby neighborhood residents *More work is needed here*
- Students *The Confluence will include student apartments*
- Eau Claire residents
- Families and seniors
- Outdoor-minded people such as bikers, runners and skaters *Yes, plus tubers*
- Residents of surrounding smaller communities
- Tourists.

- 12. Parking:** To accommodate all these users, Downtown would have adequate parking, and the public would perceive this parking as being both convenient and readily available.

*The conversion of Barstow Street and Graham Avenue to two-way movement makes on-street parking easier. The City is investing in a major parking structure in the North Barstow District.*

- 13. Promotion:** Downtown would be marketed with more promotion of the arts and what is available in Downtown; there would be more coordinated special events; and leaders would “work with the media to tell the whole story.”

*DECI, the Chamber of Commerce and the Eau Claire Area Economic Development Corporation consistently use Downtown arts, entertainment and public life in their marketing materials. .*

- 14. Shared Enthusiasm:** There would be great excitement and enthusiasm around Downtown. This would mean that “the community and government are excited about the project.” The community would show that “we believe in ourselves – we can make this happen!” Private-public partnerships would be formed to implement projects. An “oversight entity” would be in place to effectively and efficiently implement the *Downtown Action Agenda* with continuing community input.

*Downtown Eau Claire, Inc., is funded in part by the City to serve as that implementation body.*