

Draft for Public Discussion

# ***Eau Claire Waterways Plan***

***Discovery  
Chapter***



Prepared by



with assistance from



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# Eau Claire Waterways Plan: Discovery

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The Land of Sky Blue Waters: Looking up the Chippewa River from the Short Street bridge

## Introduction and Purpose

### The Need to Update the Eau Claire Waterways Plan

Eau Claire, the major city and an economic leader in Western Wisconsin, is located at the junction of I-94, US 29 and US 53. But just as importantly, it is situated at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, a world-class water resource. Thus, the Eau Claire region has potential to support additional growth and economic development by leveraging and protecting its natural heritage.

The 1988 *Waterways Plan* by the City of Eau Claire has served the community well but many of its ideas have been implemented, attitudes about the rivers have evolved, and fresh political energy is needed in support of the rivers and creeks.

### The Contemporary Role and Importance of the Waterways

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers were the economic foundation and reason for urban settlement in this magnificent valley, and they remain so today – perhaps more than ever.

In the contemporary era, and moving forward, the rivers and creeks of the Lower Chippewa River Valley will play an increasingly important role in economic development. Nowadays, they can and should be the focus of efforts to enhance quality of life, recreation and a sense of place. Those are important factors in attracting the creative class entrepreneurs, visionaries and business leaders that will nurture innovation that creates jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Water quality has improved in the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers to the point that tubing and fishing have become highly popular summertime escapes; the beautiful Phoenix Park has risen from the ashes of a steel manufacturing plant at the rivers' confluence; downtown redevelopment proposals are now orienting housing, offices and hospitality toward the water; a recent neighborhood revitalization plan hinges on transforming a mile of disused riverfront to park and trail; and local medical and educational institutions now are making concerted efforts to leverage the natural qualities of the rivers for healing, enrichment and growth. In short, competition for connection to the rivers has become intense from all quarters of the economic spectrum.



Water quality for recreation has greatly improved in the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers.

## Introduction and Purpose

The waterways of the Eau Claire urban region have re-emerged as a primary driver of regional economic development, and that role is expected to grow throughout the foreseeable future. A rising percentage of future jobs requiring a college education or creative skills can be expected to be attracted to locations within a quarter mile of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers in this urban area – but only if river corridor land use and transportation are properly managed. These resources – in combination with good-quality parks, schools, infrastructure, services and neighborhoods -- can grant the Eau Claire region a decided advantage in its national competition for the best and the brightest during the coming decades.

In addition, our awareness of the ecological wealth and importance of the river valleys has grown immensely. The City of Eau Claire is near the midpoint of the Chippewa River watershed, which is of continental ecological significance because it is home to such a number and diversity of fish, plant, bird and prairie species. To achieve the community's goals of economic development and quality of life, it will be essential to reverse past harms, restore lost habitat and protect river-related ecosystems through the urban area and throughout the watershed.



The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers are leading an economic rebirth of the City of Eau Claire and the region.

## A New Approach to Land Use and Public Investments

A major element in the process of rediscovering the value of the rivers will be to rethink the use of nearby land. Beyond the protected floodplains and backwater estuaries, many critical, long-term decisions will have to be made that balance natural protection, recreation, visual access and economic development. Every reach of the rivers must be carefully evaluated for its use as housing, business or public space. The economic value of the waterways is now derived from not just historic activities such as power generation, manufacturing and extraction but – perhaps more importantly -- contemporary benefits such as viewing, playing and appreciating. As our transportation and energy systems have evolved, so should our use of the rivers.

Benefits of moving toward this more enlightened use of the waterways include:

- Improved neighborhood conditions, increased redevelopment potential and increased property values; the creation of lasting value
- Economic development attracted by improved quality of life and desirable building sites
- Opportunities for active and passive recreation
- Increased spending by people coming to enjoy the rivers
- Improved pedestrian and bicyclist circulation by linking destinations along a spine of river-front routes
- Enhancement of the Chippewa River State Trail and its branches
- Preservation and enhancement of natural and historic sites.



This major local credit union invested in a Downtown headquarters to take advantage of views near the rivers' confluence .



Careful river corridor planning will promote economic development, recreation and ecological stewardship.

### The Waterways Public and Agency Engagement Process

To build the political support for investments in a time of constrained budgets, the local population should be encouraged to use, enjoy, understand and appreciate the rivers. A connected system of parks, trails, access points and wild areas is building a critical mass of citizens that love and work for the waterways. Political support and sustained funding has grown as beneficial results have been shown in economic development and quality of life. This planning process has begun to rekindle political awareness and support for the river corridors.

The waterways planning process was crafted to result in ideas that can be put to work in the short term and over the decades; the proposals were broadly endorsed and engendered political support; and the process helped create “champions for the plan” who will stand up for it through thick and thin.



A vigorous process of public and agency participation helped improve the plan and build political support.

The process of public and agency engagement and communication was woven through each phase of the planning process. Key actions in that regard were:

**Project Advisory Committee:** A committee of citizens and officials that guided the project, offered ideas and reviewed proposals.

**Meetings with Agency Staff:** Met with representatives of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the US Army Corps of Engineers to understand their plans, regulations and resources and to review plan ideas.

**Meetings with Commissions:** Met with the Plan Commission, the Waterways & Parks Commission and City staff members to use a group process to identify opportunities, challenges and issues regarding public and private development.

**Meetings with Major Landowners and Businesses:** Met with major waterfront landowners and businesses to hear their thoughts on the use of the waterways and review plan ideas.

**Meetings with Economic Development Organizations:** Met with representatives of the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority and the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce to hear their concerns and review plan ideas.

**Draft Plan Reviews:** Distributed and reviewed drafts of the plan chapters with all concerned groups.

**Project Website:** Distributed meeting information, contact names and draft plan elements through a page on the City’s Website.

## Discovery

### Major Planning Issues

The major planning issues that were discovered during this process are summarized below.

**Bank Treatments:** How should the river banks be treated in terms of artificial versus natural conditions? Should all be the same? To what extent should waterfront buildings be visible either from the water or the opposite shore?

**Views of the Water:** Should some river bank vegetation be cleared to improve views to the water? Can this be done selectively? Which locations are most important to open?

**Water Access:** What should be done to improve access to the water for recreationalists including anglers, boaters, and tubers? Should additional boat launches and fishing piers be built? If so, where? Should stairs be built to improve public access down the bluffs to the water? How important is it to be able to touch the water?

**Waterfront Access:** Should there be public access to the waterfront whenever feasible, including adjacent to private land redevelopment?

**Additional Park Land:** Should additional land be acquired for parks and trails along the upper Eau Claire or along the lower Chippewa River?

**Redevelopment:** To what degree should the City promote redevelopment of deteriorated, underutilized or incompatible properties near the waterways?

**Pedestrian Bridge:** Should a pedestrian bridge be built over the Eau Claire River near the confluence?

**Multi-Use Paths to the Waterfronts:** When and how should a multi-use path be extended all the way around Half Moon Lake? Should additional former railroad corridors be re-purposed as multi-use paths?

**Creek Water Quality:** What should be done to reduce harmful flows to the creeks including thermal pollution?

**Riverfront near the Sewer Plant:** Should public access and the boat launch be re-opened near the Treatment Plant after clean-up?

**Water Safety:** What should the City do to improve the safety of tubers and other river users?

**Waterfront Zoning:** How should the zoning ordinance be amended to accomplish the objectives of this plan? Should building setbacks be increased?

**Invasive Species:** Should the City work to rid the corridor of invasive plant species?

**Industrial Development:** Should industries along the river that are not dependent on the water be phased out?

**Gravel Mine Areas:** What should be the long-term use of the land now devoted to aggregate mining and processing?

**Structures in the Flood Plain:** Under what circumstances, if any, should the City attempt to buy and clear structures that are in the flood plain (e.g., for linear park and trail; for general flood impact reduction)?



## Planning Context

This section describes how the current conditions along the rivers came to be. It is helpful to understand past actions, laws, plans and assumptions so that the current situation can be put into its proper context. Since nothing is ever static and because change is ongoing and inevitable, the current environment is best understood as one a point in time along the long arc of history.

### Regional Location

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers converge in the heart to the City. The Chippewa is the major stream with a watershed of 6,630 square miles above this community. It is one of the major contributing rivers to the Mississippi River from Wisconsin and meets that river near Pepin.

The Eau Claire River, in contrast, is much more shallow and drains approximately 880 square miles. Even the water color of the two streams differs, as can be seen in the photo below. In 1767, when Jonathan Carver was exploring and mapping what was to become the Chippewa River for the King of England with several Chippewa Indians paddling *pirogues*, they came upon a stream entering the Chippewa from the east, which was running clear while the Chippewa had been muddy, and they exclaimed, “Eau Claire! Eau Claire!” Hence the name.



The confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Riv-

Dells Pond, the most visible geographic feature on the map, was used for several decades during the logging era to collect and sort logs cut many miles up river before they were sent to sawmills near the falls just around the bend.

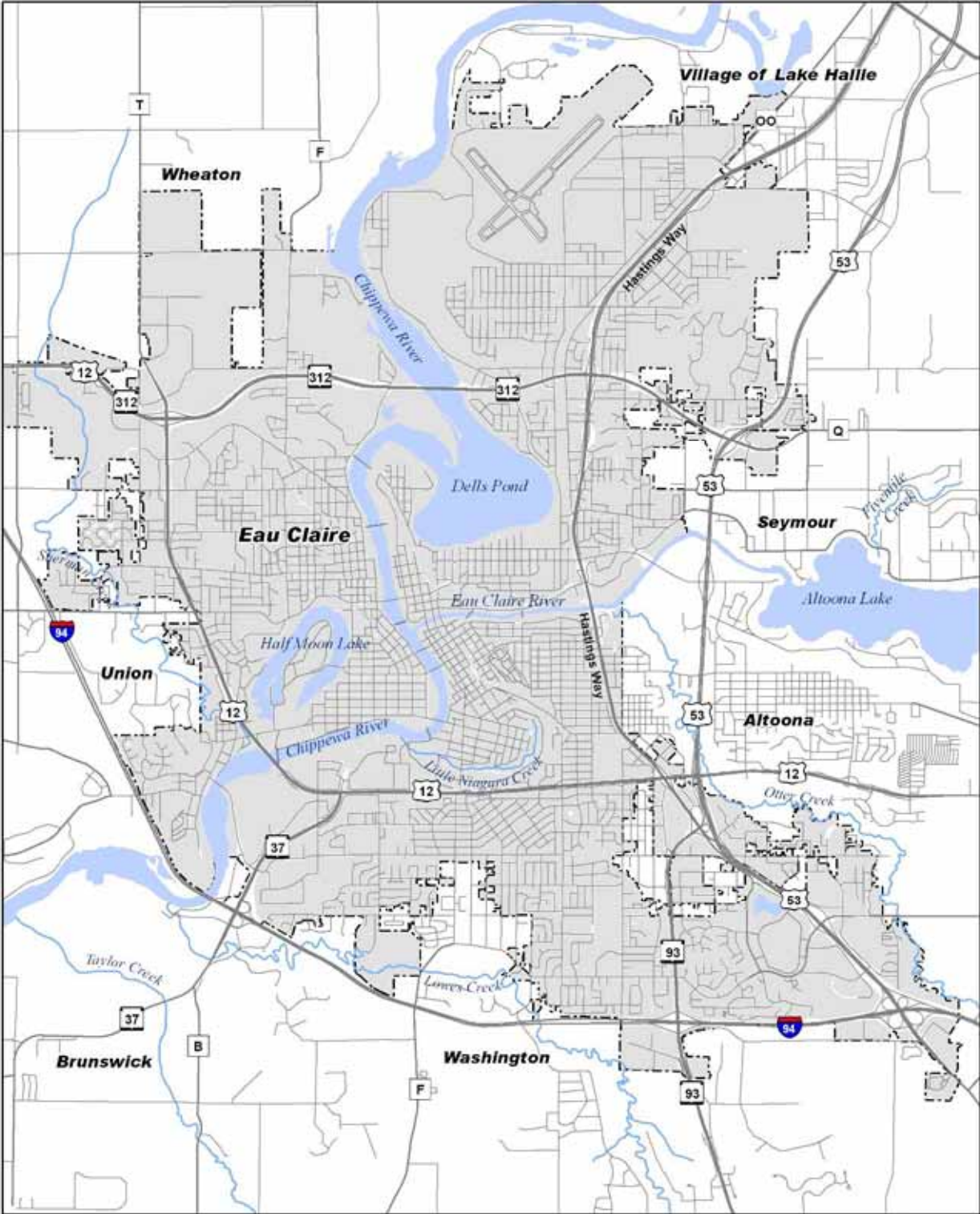
An ancient oxbow of the Chippewa River was once cut off by nature to form Half Moon Lake on the western side of the city. Later reconnected to the Chippewa River by a log flume and tunnel, the water level in this lake is now supplemented by pumping.

There are four creeks running into these two rivers:

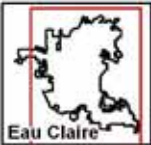
- **Sherman Creek** rises in the Town of Union and serves a large watershed on the western edge of Eau Claire.
- **Taylor Creek** and **Lowes Creek**, both in the Town of Brunswick, meet the Chippewa River downstream of the city.
- **Otter Creek** runs from south to north on the eastern side of Eau Claire and forms part of the boundary between the Cities of Eau Claire and Altoona.
- **Little Niagara Creek** winds through the Putnam Park gorge and discharges near the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.



Figure 1 illustrates the location of these water bodies relative to the rest of the City of Eau Claire and nearby communities.

The same features are illustrated by Figure 2, Aerial Photograph, which also conveys the pattern of urban development and major roads.

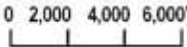


**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**



-  Study Area
-  City Limits

**Figure 1**  
**Regional Location**



## Past Plans for the Waterways

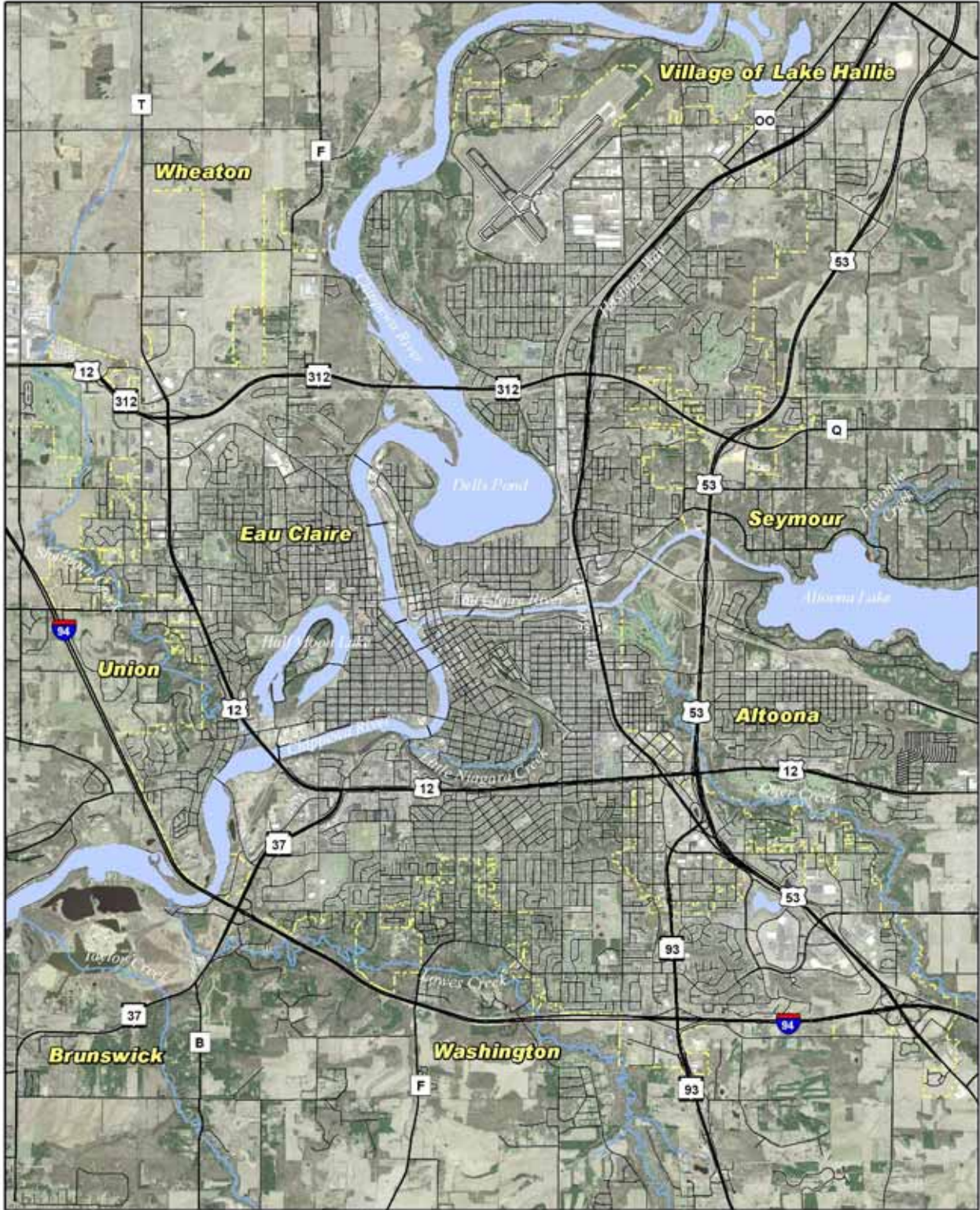
Several plans by the City of Eau Claire have guided land use and public improvements along the rivers, lake and creeks in the last 25 years. Each has built on a previous plan and advanced the community's thinking about the use of the river corridors.

1. **Eau Claire Riverfront Study**, 1975: Far-sighted for its day, this plan suggested several ambitious parkland acquisition, flood control and public improvement projects along the rivers but had yet to accomplish the change in mindset about the river corridors that would come in the next decade.
2. **Eau Claire Land Use Plan**, 1982: This policy plan set the stage for the 1988 *Waterways Plan*.
3. **Eau Claire Parks Plan**, 1982: In 1982, this city-wide plan provided general guidelines for recreation along the rivers but focused mainly on "inland" parks.
4. **Report on the Waterways of Eau Claire**, 1985: This report, prepared by a citizens' committee appointed by the City Manager, gave for the first time coordinated direction to the City's waterways efforts and enthusiasm to the idea of shaping the waterways into a place of community pride.
5. **Eau Claire Park and Open Space Plan**, 1986: For the first time, desired park improvements along the Eau Claire waterways were systematically and specifically planned.
6. **Staff Committee Report on the Waterways**, 1986: A staff report built on the 1985 citizens' study and listed public improvements deemed feasible along with additional design ideas.
7. **Eau Claire Waterways Plan**, 1988: This seminal plan is the foundation for the present document. For the first time, the community embraced the idea that the City should strive over a long time

frame to acquire a band of public land, paths and access points known as the Greenway along or near the waterways to the extent feasible. Industrial use of the waterfronts that is not dependent on the water was acknowledged but given lower priority than public access, recreation, other economic development, neighborhood quality and environmental protection. Improved water quality and riparian ecosystems were honored as essential public obligations. Land redevelopment and economic progress were linked to more sensitive use of the river edges for the first time in Eau Claire.



The 1988 *Waterways Plan* included an ambitious and far-sighted menu of future public improvements and land redevelopment projects. Most of those projects have been completed; it has been a remarkable 23 years of progress on the Eau Claire waterfronts. Table 1 lists those items, progressing generally from north to south, and indicates their status. Numbered projects are parks and trail improvements while lettered projects were considered periodic, long-term efforts (several of which have now been completed).

The most important of these projects were the extension of riverfront paths in many locations and the redevelopment of the contaminated Phoenix Steel factory and site.

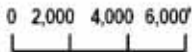


**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**



-  Study Area
-  City Limits

**Figure 2**  
**Aerial Photograph**



Of particular note is the fact that the improvements in 1988 *Waterways Plan* linked back into the neighborhoods and outside the City. The rivers were viewed as the backbone of a city-wide approach to revitalization, economic development and recreation.

Refer to Table 1 for a list of the many projects recommended by this plan and their status.

7. ***Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan***, 1992: The idea was advanced of extensive riverfront linear parks and trails with linkages back into the neighborhoods, riverfront land uses that take better advantage of the views, and redevelopment of inappropriate waterfront land uses.
8. ***Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan***, 2005: The 2005 comprehensive plan reiterated and strengthened the push for waterfronts parks and trails, riverfront redevelopment and downtown revitalization. It called for district plans that address certain riverfront locations.
9. ***Eau Claire Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Plan***, 2010: The recent city-wide bike-ped plan inventoried existing facilities and proposed projects to improve the function, safety and enjoyment of bicycling and walking. It built upon many ideas from the 1988 *Waterways Plan*.
10. ***West Clairemont Avenue Educational and Medical District Plan***, 2009: Funded by major institutions and the City, this plan called for improved connections to the Chippewa River frontage as part of its theme of creating “a district focused on mind and body wellness.” On a typical day, there are more employees, students and visitors in this district than in any other part of Eau Claire.
11. ***West Riverside District Plan***, 2010: With the aim of creating linear parks and trails, this plan specifically identified three-quarters of a mile of land acquisition and redevelopment along the banks of the Chippewa River from the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge near Anderson Street down to the Chippewa River State Trail Bridge.

**Table 1**  
**Projects Recommended by the 1988 Waterways Plan**

| Planned Project                        |   | Com-<br>pleted | Photo |
|--|---|----------------|-------|
| <b>1988 through approximately 1993</b> |   |                |       |
| 1                                      | Pave Riverview Park parking lot   | ✓              |       |
| 2                                      | Construct Riverview Park boat landing   | ✓              |       |
| 3                                      | Construct Riverview Park picnic area  | ✓              |       |
| 4                                      | Construct bike path on the North Crossing   | ✓              |       |
| 5                                      | Construct Dells Dam scenic overlook   | ✓              |       |
| 6                                      | Build paths from Phoenix Park   | ✓              | 1     |
| 7                                      | Re-deck the Milwaukee Road railroad bridge from the planned Phoenix Park to the west side of the Chippewa River as part of the Chippewa River State Trail | ✓              | 2     |
| 8                                      | Acquire land from Dewey Street to the S Bridge  | ✓              |       |
| 9                                      | Create a park in the Haymarket lot  |                |       |
| 10                                     | Create linear park between Eau Claire and Main Streets  |                |       |
| 11                                     | Construct West Side Greenway Trail from Grand Avenue to former railroad Milwaukee Road ROW near Anderson Street   |                | 3     |
| 12                                     | Construct path on former RR ROW from river bridge to Carson Park  | ✓              | 4     |
| 13                                     | Create path along south side of Eau Claire River from Park Boyd to Archery Park   |                |       |
| 14                                     | Improve Owen Park   | ✓              |       |
| 15                                     | Construct path south from Owen Park, across the river and through the UWEC campus   | ✓              |       |
| 16                                     | Acquire property and relocate some parking between Third and Fifth Avenues south of Water Street  | ✓              | 5     |
| 17                                     | Extend the path from Third to Fifth Avenues south of Water Street   | ✓              | 6     |



1



2



3



4



5



6

| <b>Planned Project</b>                 |  | <b>Completed</b> | <b>Photo</b> |
|--|--|------------------|--------------|
| 18                                     | Extend the path from Fifth to Seventh Avenues south of Menomonie Street  |                  |              |
| 19                                     | Acquire property and extend the trail from Tenth Avenue to the former railroad bridge  | ✓                | 7            |
| 20                                     | Redesign the Carson Park ring road   | ✓                | 8            |
| 21                                     | Relocate the parks maintenance building to create park space   | ✓                |              |
| 22                                     | Build a fishing dock on Braun's Bay  | ✓                |              |
| 23                                     | Extend a walking path through the University Arboretum (Putnam Park)   |                  |              |
| 24                                     | Re-deck the former railroad bridge east of Clairemont Avenue for walking and bicycling   | ✓                | 9            |
| <b>1993 through approximately 1998</b> |  |                  |              |
| 25                                     | Build paths through the City water wells area  |                  |              |
| 26                                     | Acquire and develop Northwest Community Park   |                  |              |
| 27                                     | Acquire the abandoned railroad corridor north of Seymour Street and build a bike-ped path toward a State Trail that would extend to the City of Cornell.                         | ✓                | 10           |
| 28                                     | Build a path along the south side of Dells Pond  |                  | 11           |
| 29                                     | Build a picnic shelter in upper Mt. Simon Park   | ✓                |              |
| 30                                     | Build a trail through the northern end of Mt. Simon Park   |                  |              |
| 31                                     | Extend a ped-bike route from Mt. Simon Park to Forest Street either on an easement or along the streets  |                  |              |
| 32                                     | Extend the ped-bike route south to Hobart Playground   |                  |              |
| 33                                     | Build a path from the Central Maintenance facility south to Madison Street along the east side of the Chippewa River   |                  | 12           |
| 34                                     | Build a ped-bike route on the street along the west side of the Chippewa River from the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge near Marshall Street to the North Crossing highway |                  |              |





7



8



9



10



11



12

| Planned Project  | Completed | Photo |
|--|-----------|-------|
| 35 Redevelop the Phoenix Steel site with mixed-use buildings, riverfront park and paths, improved water access, interpretative facilities, a trail head building for the Chippewa River State Trail, and a festival area.      | ✓         | 13    |
| 36 Build a trail along the north side of the Eau Claire River from Dewey Street to the S Bridge  | ✓         | 14    |
| 37 Acquire land and build a bicycle path on an abandoned railroad ROW from the S Bridge to the northern edge of the City as part of a State Trail to Wissota State Park and the City of Cornell                                | ✓         |       |
| 38 Build a hiking path on the face of the steep and wooded bluff from Boyd Park to Archery Park.   |           |       |
| 39 Extend a path from the north side of the Chippewa River along an abandoned rail line across Menomonie Street to a planned picnic area in Carson Park and north along the east side of Half Moon Lake to Grand Avenue        | ✓         |       |
| 40 Create a picnic area on the east side of Half Moon Lake and make Lake Street a park entrance  | ✓         |       |
| 41 Rebuild deteriorated stairways in Carson Park   |           |       |
| 42 Reconstruct portions of the nature trail in Carson Park   |           |       |
| 43 Build a bicycling multi-use path from the former railroad bridge on an abandoned rail corridor to the southern limits of the City as part of the Chippewa River State Trail. Alternatively, route this path near the river. | ✓         |       |
| 44 Build a boat launch near the City's waste water treatment plant   |           |       |



13



14

## Discovery and Issues

| <b>After approximately 1998</b> |  |   |    |
|---------------------------------|--|---|----|
| 45                              | Build an overlook west of the airport  |   |    |
| 46                              | Build a playground in the neighborhood west of the City well field   |   |    |
| 47                              | Extend a trail north along Riverview Drive to the park from Starr Avenue   |   |    |
| 48                              | Extend the trail south from the intersection of the Chicago-Northwestern Railroad tracks and Starr Avenue to McDonough Park either along the railroad corridor, along the top of the bluff overlooking Dells pond or on the streets.               |   |    |
| 49                              | Rebuild the path from McDonough Park down to Dells Pond  |   |    |
| 50                              | Extend a path west from McDonough Park to the vicinity of the CNW tracks at Dewey Street, where it would link to project #51   |   |    |
| 51                              | Continue to extend a path along the southwestern edge of Dells Pond toward Mt. Simon Park. Until waterfront property is acquired, route the path on Eddy Street.   |   |    |
| 52                              | Consider relocating Hobart Playground to the center of the neighborhood.   | ✓ |    |
| 53                              | Acquire property and extend a trail north from Madison Street to the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge near Anderson Street.   |   | 15 |
| 54                              | Acquire property and extend a trail between the State Trail Bridge and Madison Street. In the meantime, route the trail along First Street.  |   |    |
| 55                              | Acquire easements and extend a trail along the north bank of the Eau Claire River from the bridge near Boyd Park to Highway 53. (Presently, a path also runs along nearby Galloway Street but curves north away from the river before Highway 53.) |   |    |
| 56                              | Acquire easements and extend the river bank trail east of Highway 53 and link it to the County's trail system.   |   |    |
| 57                              | Extend an off-road path south from the planned Eau Claire River trail along the western side of Hastings Way to Highland Avenue then east to link to the County's trail system in Altoona.   | ✓ |    |
| 58                              | Complete the path loop around Half Moon Lake   |   | 16 |



15



16

|    |  |   |    |
|----|--|---|----|
| 59 | Build a toilet building at Birch Pavilion in Carson Park.  | ✓ |    |
| 60 | Improve the boat landing at Braun's Bay in Carson Park   | ✓ |    |
| 61 | Extend a trail across the river at Short Street then southeast along Short Street through a gravel mining area to Ferry Street Park on the riverfront. |   | 17 |
| 62 | Build a picnic area in Ferry Street Park.  |   |    |

**On-Going Projects**

|   |  |   |    |
|---|--|---|----|
| A | Acquire properties between Eddy Street and Dells Pond for linear park and trail  |   |    |
| B | Acquire in-holdings in Mt. Simon Park  |   |    |
| C | Acquire and remove houses in the flood plain between the Chippewa River and Forest Street.   | ✓ |    |
| D | Redevelop the area south of Madison Street between Forest and Barstow Streets  | ✓ |    |
| E | Redevelop the block southeast of the intersection of Galloway and Farwell Streets.   | ✓ |    |
| F | Acquire property along the west side of the Chippewa River between Madison Street and the State Trail Bridge for conversion to a linear park |   | 18 |
| G | Acquire land or easements along the north side of the Chippewa River in the 600 block of Menomonie Street to complete the path               |   |    |
| H | Privately redevelop the frontage north of Market Street along the Chippewa River   |   |    |
| I | Continue to acquire properties that abut Half Moon Lake, especially on the eastern shore   |   |    |



17



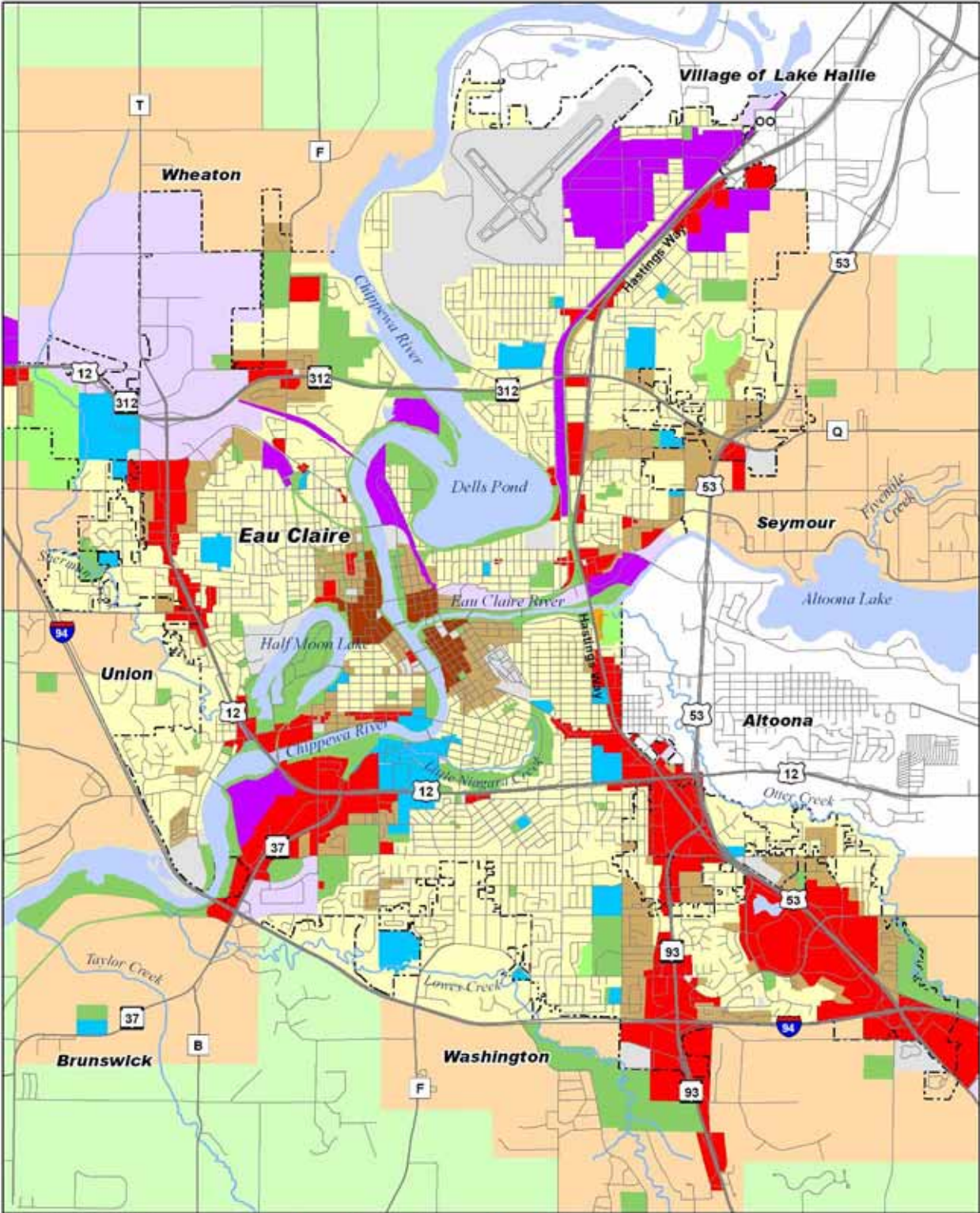
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### Planned Land Use from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan

The Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2005 and included a city-wide map of desired future land use, policies regarding riverfronts and stream corridors, riverfront parks, and waterfront access and trails.

Figure 3, Land Use Plan from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, is a reproduction of Figure 18-1, Planned Land Use, from the 2005 *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan*. A review of that map indicates that park land is planned along the majority of the two rivers as well as around Half Moon Lake. Other planned riverfront land uses includes Low Density Housing, Downtown (a mixed retail, office and residential district), Commercial, Public Facility (the University, a cemetery, and the City's waste water treatment plant or maintenance garage), and Agriculture. The entire spectrum of planned land uses can be seen on Figure 3 just a short distance removed from the waterways.

Along Lowes Creek, there exists Lowes Creek County Park near Highway 93. Another County Park is planned near the mouth of Lowes Creek along the Chippewa River, and a future Community Park is designated near the intersection of Deerfield Road and Lowes Creek Road. However, along Sherman and Taylor Creeks, there was no land planned as public park in the Comprehensive Plan. (Taylor Creek is in the Town of Brunswick.)



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

- Future Neighborhood
- Low Density Housing
- Medium & High Density Housing

- Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Downtown
- Light Industry
- General Industry

- School
- Public Facility
- Park
- Golf Course
- Agriculture or Very Low Density Housing

**Figure 3**  
**Land Use Plan from the**  
**2005 Comprehensive Plan**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

### Relevant Policies from the Comprehensive Plan

The following *Comprehensive Plan* policies are directly relevant to this *Waterways Plan* update.

#### Land Use Plan (2005) Objective 5: Riverfronts and Stream Corridors

**Guide waterfront land use to river-dependent industries, parks, housing and offices and similar land uses that take advantage of the rivers.**

The pattern and design of land development or open space along waterfronts is an important objective in Eau Claire because of the great number of miles of river or creek edge in the community.

#### Comprehensive Plan Policies

**1. Chippewa River Land Uses:** Guide land use along the Chippewa River to take advantage of the dual benefits of the river –aesthetics and water. Thus, the pattern of land use and zoning will emphasize land uses that take advantage of the river views such as mid- and high-density housing, offices, parks and trails, and hospitality businesses such as restaurants or hotels; and industries that need water for manufacturing such as the Cascades Group paper mill; and, of course, marinas. New industrial locations along the Chippewa River are not expected at this time.

Use the Downtown Action Agenda 2001 as a guide for development and design guidance near the confluence with the Eau Claire River. In the northwestern quadrant of Downtown, along the Oxford-First Avenue corridor, evolve business land uses to housing or offices with public park and a trail along the water's edge.

**2. Eau Claire River Land Uses:** Continue to change the Eau Claire River frontage from industries and parking to a more compatible mixture of linear park, offices, housing and some industry.

**3. Sherman Creek:** Plan a mixture of urban development along Sherman Creek that includes single-family housing along most of its length, occasional parks, the vocational-technical school and industry (near US 12). Although the edges of Sherman Creek may be subdivided for housing, require parcelization, setbacks and easements for floodplain protection as indicated by the federal Flood Insurance Rate Map. Protect steep slopes from erosion, and wooded locations along the creek should be preserved.

**4. Otter Creek:** Allow Otter Creek to wind through low-density residential neighborhoods, and create a major new park along its western edge south of Prill Road. Expand the Urban Sewer Service Area east of Otter Creek north of Prill Road, and extend sewer service to annexed land there.

**5. Lowes Creek:** Protect the edges of Lowes Creek from erosion and deforestation as housing is built nearby. A large stretch of the Lowes Creek edge abuts Lowes Creek County Park.

### **Parks System Plan (2005) Objective 3: Waterfront Access and Trails**

**Improve public enjoyment of rivers and streams in Eau Claire by creating new park land, acquiring easements for access and protection of open space, and linking existing parks with paths where possible.**

Eau Claire has 32 miles of waterfront including the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers and Half Moon Lake. For quality of life, economic development, sustainable property values and environmental protection, the community owes it to itself to line these water bodies with continuous public open space.

#### **Comprehensive Plan Policies**

- 1. Riverfront Parks:** The City will continue to extend public parks, plazas, walkways and overlooks along the Chippewa River and along the Eau Claire River from the confluence to Altoona or the future Birch Street bridge. In some locations, existing development may make this impossible in the foreseeable future, but redeveloped sites should include some public access along the waterfront. (Refer also to Policy 1 under Objective 3, Waterfront Access.)
- 2. Waterfront Linear Parks:** Eau Claire will work to acquire land in the form of continuous linear open space corridors called greenways along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, Dells Pond, Half Moon Lake and Otter Creek. The Otter Creek corridor between the Eau Claire River and Southeast Community Park has particular promise, and that effort should be coordinated with the City of Altoona.
- 3. Half Moon Lake:** The City will continue to acquire properties around Half Moon Lake as they become available until all lakefront property is publicly owned.
- 4. Priority Locations:** The City will concentrate on negotiating the acquisition of land (or at least a pedestrian easement) along sites where riverfront

development is about to occur.

**5. Walking and Bicycling:** Eau Claire will build paths for walking and bicycling in the riverfront greenways where conditions permit. Care will be taken to protect the ecological integrity of the floodplains, wetlands and bluffs. In some locations, benches, overlooks and occasional larger park nodes will be included. Waterfront bicycling paths will be linked to the city-wide network of paths via other paths or on-street striped bicycling lanes.

The City will monitor use of the trails and where pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts occur because of traffic levels or design, bicycle traffic may be separated from pedestrian traffic.





## Current Zoning

Figure 4 presents a generalized interpretation of the current zoning pattern. The 32 types of zoning districts have been collapsed into 8 for the purposes of this map.

Zoning allows the City to regulate the allowable ways in which property may be developed in order to accomplish the Comprehensive Plan, provide for an orderly and harmonious community, and protect property values.

The pattern of zoning tends to reflect the Land Use Plan Map from the *Comprehensive Plan*. However, the land use plan map is generalized, and the zoning allows a finer interpretation.

In some locations, the City is trying to change the way land is developed through the use of the Comprehensive Plan, so the zoning of some of those parcels may be inconsistent with how the property is presently being used. This is true in some locations along the waterways.

When an owner wishes to change the zoning of his land, he presents an application to the City and the request is evaluated in light of the *Comprehensive Plan* and other officially adopted factors. The City itself may also initiate a rezoning.

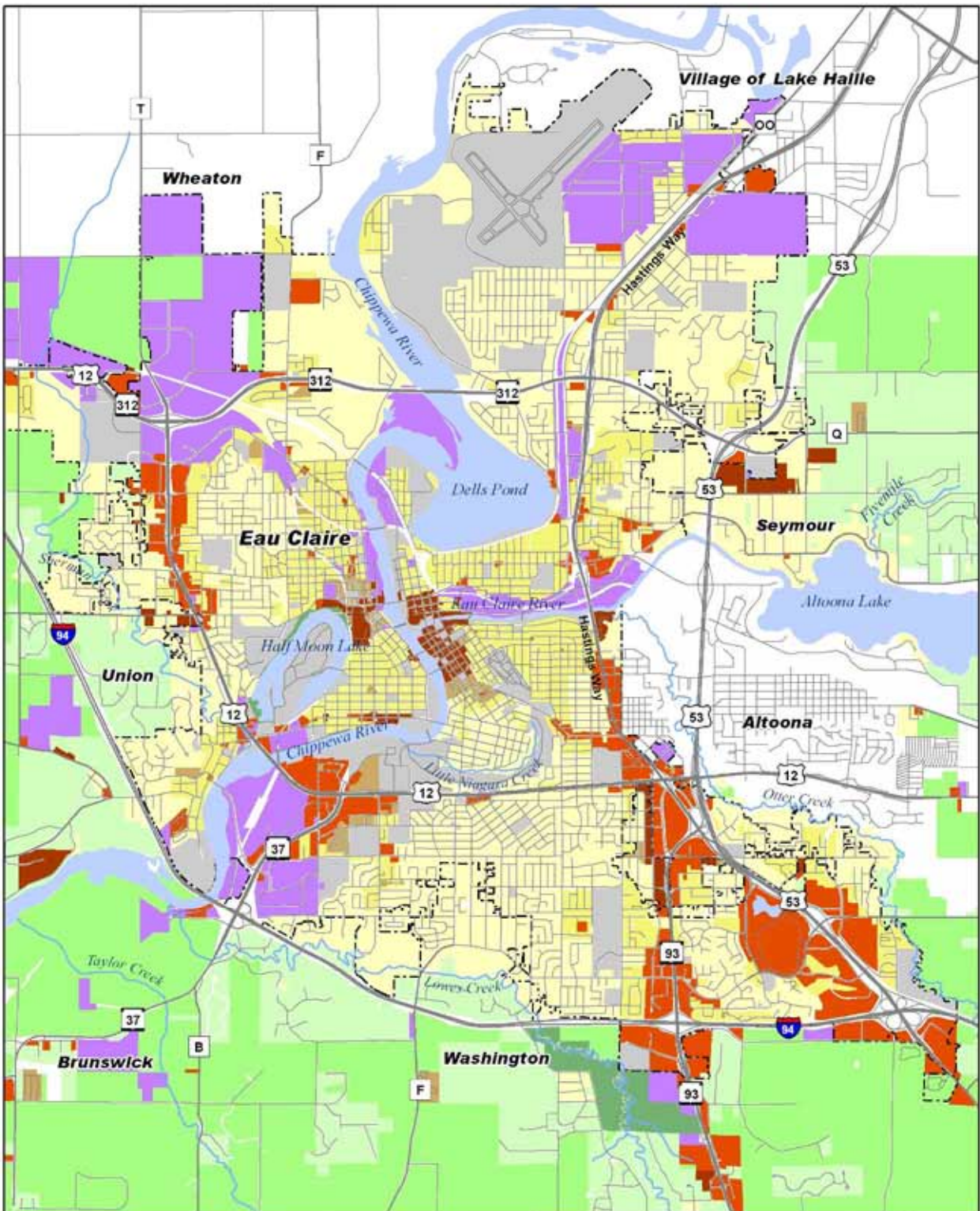
## Zoning Regulations

The Waterway and Greenway Development Guidelines (described below) have been adopted by reference into the Eau Claire Zoning Ordinance (Section 10.20.100). That Section also: (1) prohibits development in lake or river shorelines that are steeper than 12 percent and (2) requires that buildings be set at least 30 feet from the Ordinary High Water Mark or 10 feet from a greenway perimeter.





## Waterway and Greenway Development Guidelines

The *Eau Claire Waterway and Greenway Guidelines* were adopted by the City Council in 1989 upon the recommendation of the Waterways and Parks Commission and the Plan Commission to supplement the zoning ordinance and further the objectives of the 1988 *Waterways Plan*. The guidelines (not standards) apply to all land development along the two rivers, four creeks and Half Moon and Hallie (partial) Lakes. They address:

- Preserving shoreland vegetation and topography
- Controlling erosion
- Preserving unique natural features and vistas
- Orienting new buildings toward the water
- Setting structures at least 30 feet from the Ordinary High Water Level (except bridges, water recreation facilities, private docks and similar reasonable items)
- Using appropriate exterior building materials facing the water
- Landscaping and screening structures from view from the water
- Regulating signs and exterior lighting
- Maintaining scenic views.



**Eau Claire Waterways**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Low Density Residential    |  Industrial              |
|  Medium Density Residential |  Public or Institutional |
|  High Density Residential   |  Agricultural            |
|  Commercial                 |  Rural Homes             |
|  Downtown                   |  Conservation            |

**Figure 4**  
**Zoning,**  
**2011**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

## Land Use and Development

### Economic Development

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers were once the reason for founding this city and were for a century or more the driving engines of the local economy. Water power and transportation gave rise to several lumber mills, a major paper manufacturer, wood products companies and lumber yards. From those basic industries (which brought outside money into the locality) sprang numerous support business and others that served the workers and their families. Early railroads served these major exporters and provided an essential service to many other industries as well. The falls on the Chippewa River (now obscured by a dam) provided mechanical power for the mills and, later, electrical energy.

Changes in transportation and power generation have lessened the focus on the rivers for those needs, and many industries have moved away, leaving decayed evidence of themselves.

Nevertheless, there are still major local industries that depend on the rivers, and new enterprises may flock to the water for other reasons.

This section provides an overview of the current major businesses and industries along the river corridors. Please refer also to Figures 5a and 5b, Existing Land Use.

### Northern Limits to Dells Pond

The Chippewa Valley Regional Airport occupies a large land area that nearly abuts the river at the northern edge of the City. The airport provides jobs directly while supporting the local economy through commercial and private flight operations.

### Dells Pond to the Confluence

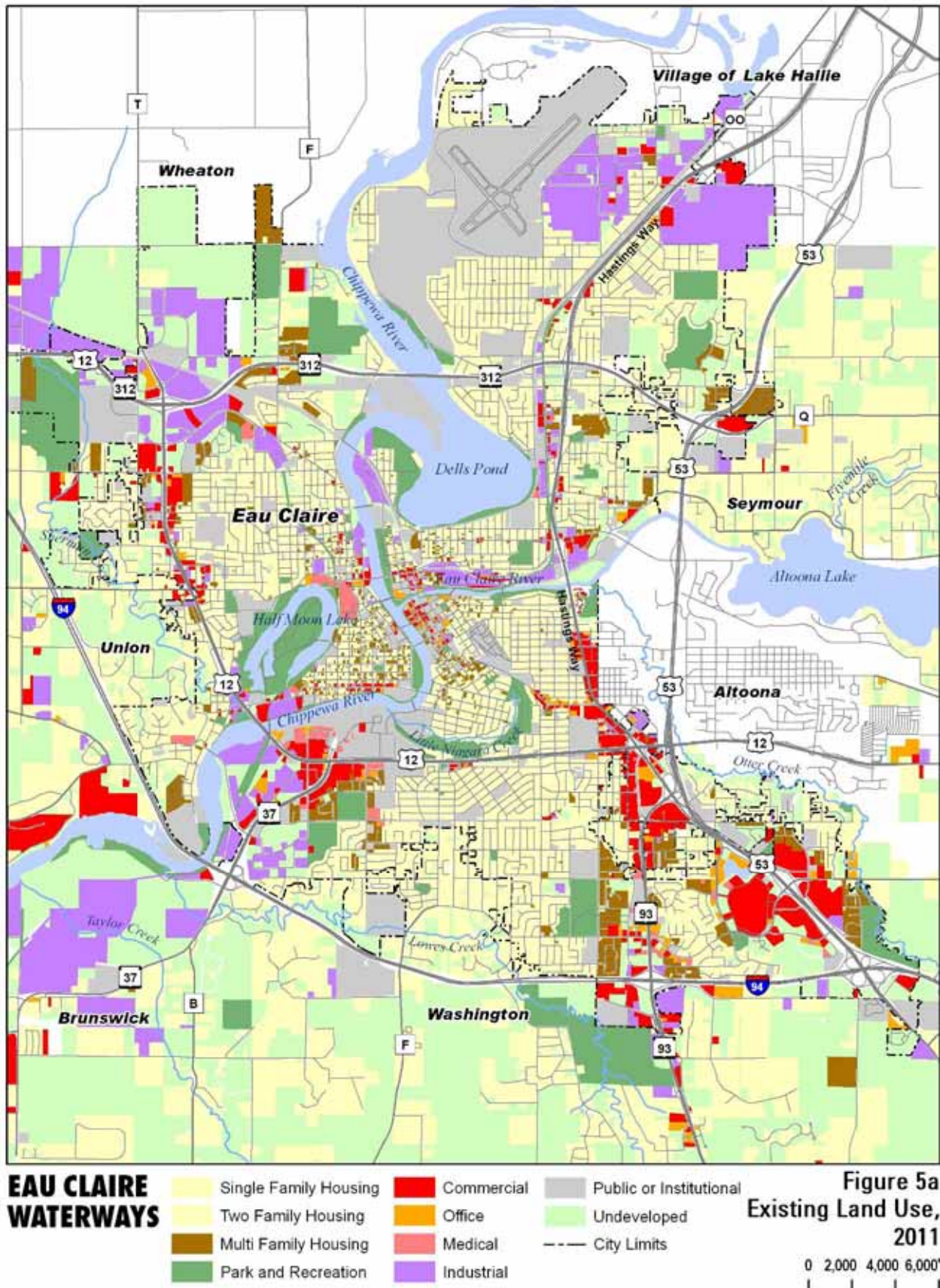
Xcel Energy operates a major substation on Dells Pond and generates power at the Dells Hydro Plant. The original dam was built in 1878 during the logging boom and replaced in 1924, 100 feet downstream of the original structure. The plant has a capacity of 9.3 megawatts.

Cascades Group operates a major plant near the dam with 250 employees that produces toilet paper, paper towels and related products. The plant uses river water for processes and cleans the effluent in its own treatment plant. New machinery is expected to be installed soon, meaning that the plant will remain in Eau Claire for many years. Power is generated from natural gas, not river flow. The manager would like to see Forest Street vacated through the plant area for safety and security. All material goes in and out by truck; there is no rail or river shipping.

Next door stands the City's public works and bus maintenance complex.



On the western bank along Oxford Avenue, there is nearly half a mile of riverfront occupied by obsolescent industrial buildings that are planned for redevelopment to housing and park.





The Royal Credit Union headquarters office building anchors the Barstow multi-use redevelopment district, which includes small shops and restaurants. This and nearby buildings are a splendid example of investments that take advantage of the riverfront. .

### The Confluence to Clairemont Avenue

Downtown Eau Claire includes a variety of offices, small, owner-operated shops, restaurants and bars, government buildings, multiple-family housing, the public library, museums and performing arts facilities and other regional attractions.



Parts of the Downtown riverfront are devoted to surface parking or the backs of buildings. Public access to the waterfront is minimal and the rivers are not being used well as a means of attracting development. There is much redevelopment potential, and a plan was being prepared in 2011 for private and public improvements.

The Clairemont Avenue Educational and Medical District is the largest concentration of jobs and daily visitors in the entire Valley. It includes the University campus, the Chippewa Valley Technical College, Sacred heart Hospital, Marshfield Clinic, Midelfort Clinic and several other medical offices.

The campus of the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire hosts 10,700 undergraduate students, 625 graduate students and 796 faculty members in 28 major buildings on its 333 acre campus that straddles the Chippewa River near the mouth of Little Niagara Creek.

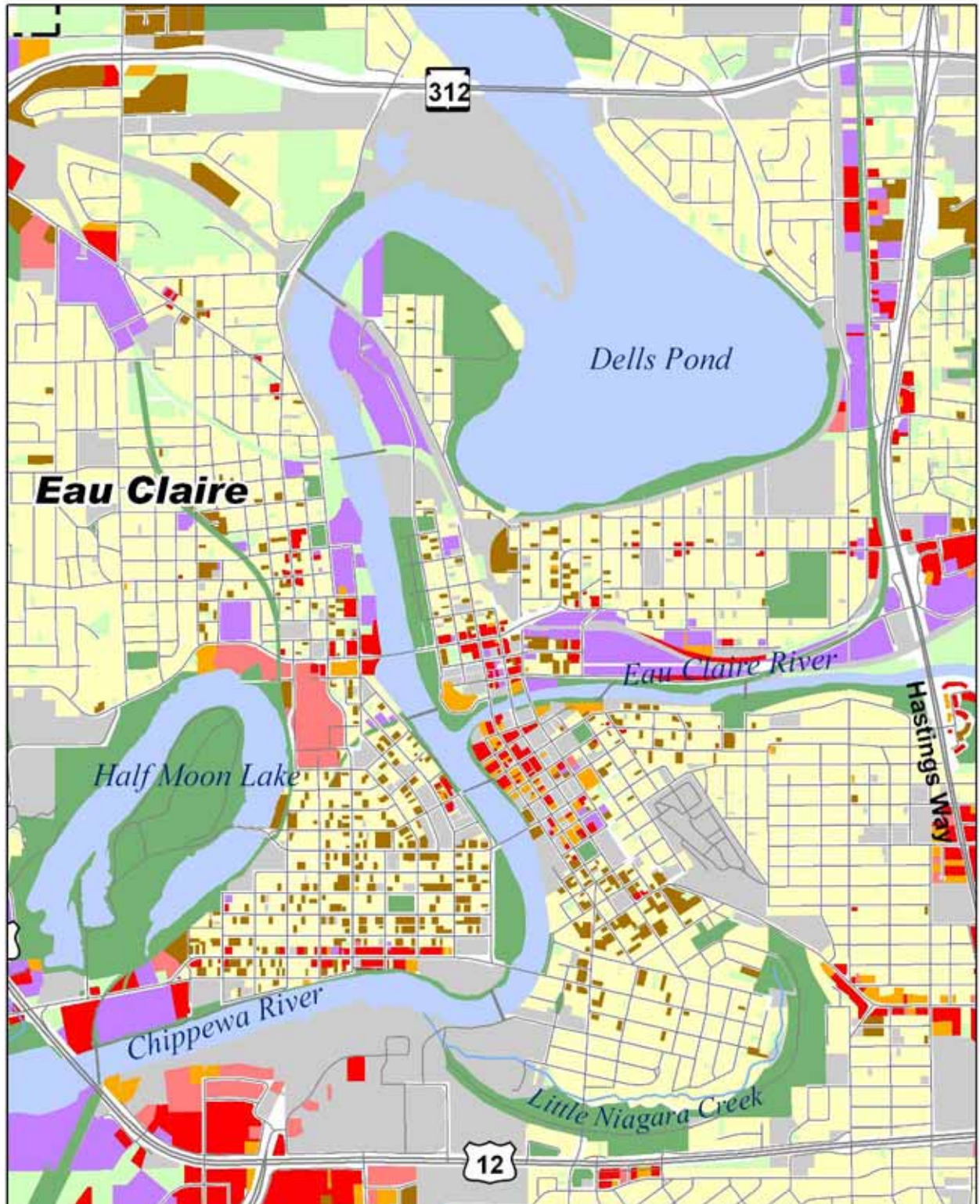
Nearby, the Chippewa Valley Technical College offers a wide variety of courses in many program topics, a mixture that continuously evolves to meet the needs of regional employers. Consequently, there is no definite long-term plan for the college. The college presently maintains two groups of facilities at this campus:

- The Business Education Center
- A Health Education Center, located south of Clairemont Avenue.

Sacred Heart Hospital maintains a major complex of buildings in the district with 1,350 employees and is associated with Oakleaf Medical Network and Marshfield Clinic, which has a building in the western part of the district as well as in other Wisconsin cities. The hospital serves western Wisconsin and has experienced a growing volume of activity with more than 9,000 hospital admissions and 125,000 outpatient visits annually.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration maintains a 25,000 square foot building along the northern side of Clairemont Avenue near Stein Boulevard. Its major tenant presently is the Department of Transportation.

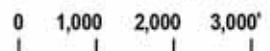
Midelfort Clinic, affiliated with Luther-Mayo Hospital in Eau Claire and the Mayo medical



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

- |                       |            |                         |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Single Family Housing | Commercial | Public or Institutional |
| Two Family Housing    | Office     | Undeveloped             |
| Multi Family Housing  | Medical    | --- City Limits         |
| Park and Recreation   | Industrial |                         |

**Figure 5b**  
Existing Land Use, 2011



system, has a building south of Clairemont Avenue at Stein Boulevard. Access is via Kenney Avenue and Stein Boulevard.

On the western side of the Chippewa River, the central administrative and justice facilities of Eau Claire County stand just a block from the river, providing many jobs but co-existing uneasily with the residential neighborhood.

Several small shops and restaurants along Grand Avenue serve the neighborhood and greater downtown; they benefit from a comfortable relationship to the nearby riverfront and trail.

The lively Water Street commercial districts serves the campus clientele and the rest of the city with a lively mixture of shops, restaurants and bars. The State Trail runs just behind these buildings.

Just above the Clairemont Avenue bridge, several heavy industrial properties are remnants of an earlier age of riverfront land use thinking, dating to the time of the lumber mills. None of these activities uses the water for transportation today.

The County Materials concrete girder plant is limited in its productive capacity in that location and could be persuaded to relocate but for the cost. Nevertheless, the State Trail has been extended through the floodplain behind those properties to cross the river on a former railroad bridge.

### **Around Half Moon Lake**

The Luther-Mayo Hospital and Clinic dominates the space between the Chippewa River and Half Moon Lake and provides hundreds of well-paying jobs.

The Luther Midelfort Hospital and Clinic provides Eau Claire and the surrounding communities with a 304-bed acute care hospital and medical specialties ranging from comprehensive cardiac, cancer, orthopedic and trauma services to women's and family primary care. The clinic, added in 1995, is a five-floor medical office building attached to the hospital that has grown to become one of the largest multi-specialty groups in Wisconsin with more than 200 physicians representing almost every medical specialty.

In 2010, two five-story bed towers totaling 358,000 square feet and a new western entrance were added to the hospital. Supporting that expansion was an 800-stall, four-story parking structure.

Although the eastern boundary of the medical campus is set at Bellinger Street, two blocks from the Chippewa River, the relationship of the campus to the river is limited principally by lack of riverfront public open space in the neighborhood.

At the southern end of Half Moon Lake near Menomonie Street, a large, open property offers an opportunity for a significant development; care should be taken when designing that site.

### **Clairemont Avenue to the Southern Limits**

Downriver of the Clairemont Avenue bridge the character of the river changes, at least on the left descending bank. In this reach, there is no housing. Rather, large tracts of land are devoted to sand processing, aggregate mining, floodplains, woods and other open space; motels and other businesses stand on top of the bluff, which is far



removed near Hendrickson Drive ((State Highway 37). This pattern of open land extends to the southern limits of this study area. The floodplain broadens downriver of Interstate 94 so that the mining and concrete operations are set further from the water. The State Trail runs through the heart of the mining and close to the river.

Major landowners are Red Flint Rock Company, American Materials Company and County Materials Corporation. Mining operations that are currently active are expected to continue for at least another 30 years. Sand processing could end sooner. One major landowner has presented an ambitious plan for housing and commercial development between Clairemont Avenue and I-94, but that possibility is at least ten years away.

The City's wastewater treatment plant commands the point near I-94. It will be upgraded starting in 2012.



Sand mining and processing along with concrete manufacturing dominate the east side of the Chippewa River frontage downriver of Clairemont Avenue

## Eau Claire River

The dominant business facility on the Eau Claire River is Banbury Place. Started in 1917 for the Gillette Safety Tire Company and once the third largest tire factory in the United States (eventually owned by Uniroyal – BF Goodrich, Banbury Place is a 1.9 million square foot multi-use, multi-tenant facility stretching along the banks of the river.

Banbury Place accommodates a mixture of light manufacturing, commercial warehousing, service, retail, public and private offices, self-storage, and luxury warehouse-style residential apartments.



The S Bridge and Banbury Place

Upriver from Banbury Place is the headquarters and supply yard for Market & Johnson Construction, one of the largest builders in the region. Nearby is the YMCA of Eau Claire.

The downtown edge of the Eau Claire River has witnessed some new development (office, trail, library) but the section closest to the confluence is obsolescent and in need of redevelopment. The river edge near the confluence is a concrete retaining wall and the buildings do not take advantage of the remarkable setting.

## Housing and Neighborhoods

This section describes housing, land use and neighborhood conditions along the waterways. Please continue to refer to Figures 5a and 5b, Existing Land Use, 2011.

### Northern Limits to Dells Pond

Along the left descending bank are established neighborhoods of single-family homes. Visual or physical access to the water for residents whose homes do not abut the bluff can be had at the dramatic overlook along Airport Road or the extensive Riverview Park. A charming neighborhood feature is the tall stairway that links Redwood Drive to Welsh Drive. The City Water Wells field provides additional wooded public open space and trails next to the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport.

On the opposite bank, there are a couple large-lot neighborhoods, open space and land controlled by Excel Energy for a major substation. This semi-rural area is likely to remain in that character. The City owns land there as a public river access and a link between Northwest Community Park and the river; a link is still needed west to Jeffers Road.

Most locations along this reach have tall banks that separate the neighborhood from the river.



The stairway between Redwood and Welsh Drives is a charming but hidden public amenity.

### Dells Pond to the Confluence

Residents of the mixed older housing in these North Side neighborhoods have access to the Chippewa River at Mt. Simon Park and the newer Forest Street Park.

Just above the rivers' confluence is Phoenix Park and the associated Barstow mixed-use redevelopment – both of which are a major success story for Eau Claire and an example of what can be achieved along the river. The park is a beautiful band of green space, amphitheatre, trails, farmer's market and focal point for the Chippewa River State Trail. The new buildings, which replaced a polluted industrial site, include housing and small shops anchored by the handsome headquarters of Royal Credit Union overlooking the confluence. The redevelopment is still underway. Visual and physical access to the river are both superb; many tubing expeditions are launched from this point.

Along the right descending bank, the age of the mixed housing increases from north to south as the river approaches the center of the community. Tall banks offer dramatic overlooks but the only public open space along the river here is Dommer Park. The recent plan for the West Riverside District proposes to extend the linear park and trail from the confluence to the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge. This park would serve to leverage substantial reinvestment and stabilization for that neighborhood.

A former railroad corridor hosts a path that runs between Phoenix Park and Carson Park at Half Moon Lake. Two other former railroad lines cross the West Riverside neighborhood, providing opportunities to link to the riverfront and the rest of the extensive local trail network.

### The Confluence to Clairemont Avenue

The left descending bank includes the downtown, the Historic Third Ward, the mouth of Little Niagara Creek, the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Putnam Park and the Clairemont Avenue Educational and Medical District.

The downtown has the challenge and opportunity to use the river to promote redevelopment and improved access. In 2011, a study was underway to design mixed-use redevelopment and a public park on the south bank of the confluence, extend a path along the river and link the riverfront park east toward City Hall along Eau Claire Street. These projects will help turn the downtown toward the river as an amenity and a powerful economic development feature. Other downtown streetscape improvements are also contemplated.

Below the downtown, the river edge is fronted by stately old homes on larger lots. The edge is well maintained in a natural state. Flooding is not a problem here.



Market Street house conditions do not reflect their desirable riverfront bluff location

The neighborhoods along the right descending bank of the Chippewa River are some of the most historic and interesting in the city. They include the historic Owen Park along the low river bank, the charming Grand Avenue commercial district, the Randall Park neighborhood with its historic structures and student housing, and the Water Street commercial district, which serves the University population as well as the broader community. An issue is whether the riverfront woods along Owen Park should be thinned to provide better views to the water.

### Around Half Moon Lake

The Randall Park neighborhood backs up to the east side of Half Moon Lake. The City has been trying to acquire land along that lake edge of better connect the neighborhood to the lake and park while also extending paths.

The northern edge of the lake abuts the Luther-Mayo hospital property, a City beach and several commercial properties. Nevertheless, the edge is nicely wooded and presents a verdant view from across the water.

Lakeview Cemetery is located on the northwestern shore of the lake and potentially presents a problem for extending the path near the lake. However, the City owns this cemetery, and it may be possible to route the path near the top of the lakeshore slope just outside the cemetery grounds.

### Clairemont Avenue to Southern Study Limits

On the western bank, the historic Shawtown neighborhood climbs a hillside from the water.

The City's wastewater treatment plant occupies a large acreage on the western bank above I-94.

Two boat launches south of the waste water treatment plant have been closed in order to restrict public access. The site may be contaminated with hazardous waste, there has been illegal dumping of trash and erosion has been aggravated by off-road vehicles. The City has also been storing materials and debris on the riverfront nearby, a practice that should be ended.

Many acres are devoted to sand mining and processing on the left descending bank below Clairemont Avenue.

South of the freeway, land use is rural and open. There is a large aggregate mining operation here and a concrete batch plant.

### The Eau Claire River

Along the southern bank, most of the river corridor below Hastings Way is devoted to park land. But below Boyd Park, stands an older neighborhood of single-family and converted multi-family structures. There is very little visual access to the river along the southern bluff.

Along the northern side, the riverfront is mostly wooded bluff and floodplain with businesses and industries to the rear. No housing abuts the northern side of the Eau Claire River. Above the pedestrian bridge at Summer Street, the riverfront is entirely open and wooded with tall, steep bluffs.

Downriver of the Farwell Street bridge, the downtown appears along with the green Phoenix Park edge.



Housing along the southern bank of the Eau Claire River has few if any views of the water.



The best views of the Eau Claire River along the southern bluff are from an informal hiking trail that hugs the steep bluff between Archery and Boyd Parks

### Parks and Recreation

The current and planned pattern of parks across the City is illustrated by Figure 6 and Tables 2, 3 and 4.

As can be seen, there are several City parks along the rivers already, and other stretches are planned to be added. Some of the riverfront parks exist by virtue of floodplains, which are mostly unusable for other purposes, steep slopes or abandoned railroad corridors. Other have been more purposefully acquired such as Phoenix, Mt. Simon or Carson Parks.

The entire city-wide system of parks and trail corridors has been illustrated in order to show the relationship among parks and the rivers.

#### Northern Limits to Dells Pond

The expansive Riverview Park is the major facility in this stretch. In combination with the City Well Fields and the perimeter of the regional airport, there is quite a bit of open space in this part of the city.

The Chippewa River State Trail runs on a former rail bed along Hastings Way but does not serve the river corridor.

The magnificent overlook adjacent to Airport Road could be more formally established with a few off-street parking spaces.

#### Dells Pond to the Confluence

Mt. Simon Park offers picnicking, active sports fields, a boat launch and wooded open space. The next opportunity will be to link it upriver and down with a path and, possibly, linear open space.

Forest Park was created by removing houses from a floodplain. It now includes a community garden, levee and open space. A path could eventually run through it to link Phoenix Park to the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge over the river.

Phoenix Park is the jewel of the system by virtue of its location at the confluence, striking design, attractive materials and programming.

Along the opposite bank, there is an opportunity to eventually extend linear public open space and a path all the way from the State Trail bridge (near the confluence) up to the North Crossing bridge path. Branching into the neighborhood from this riverfront green space would be paths on two former railroad corridors.

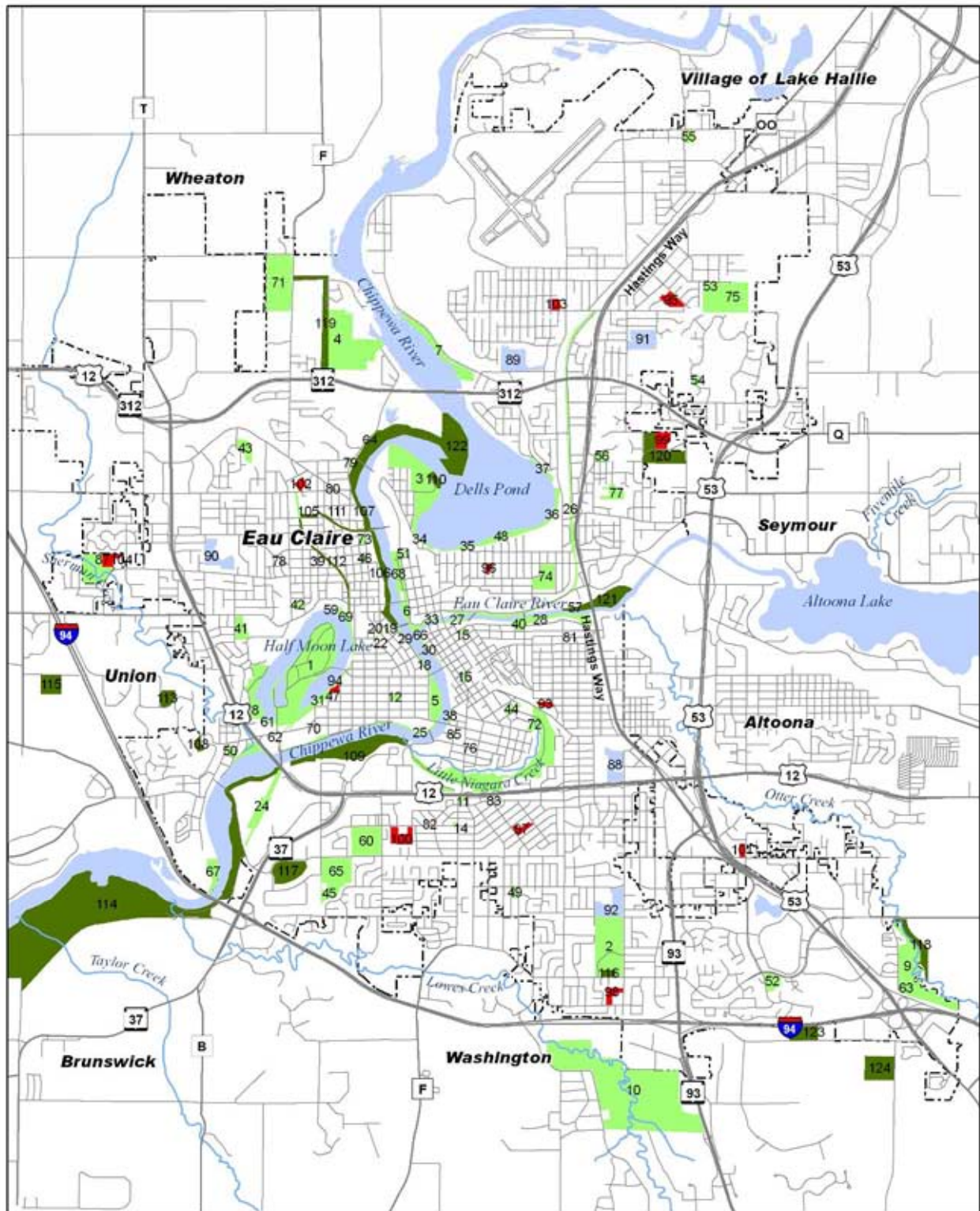
#### The Confluence to Clairemont Avenue

There is potential for a new linear park at the confluence in the downtown in conjunction with mixed-use private redevelopment that takes advantage of the river views. Extending a trail along the entire downtown shoreline would be difficult if not impossible at this time because of nearby stable development; a short riverfront path is possible, however.

The historic Owen Park, the only riverfront park below the confluence, is a low, flat site highly susceptible to flooding. Consequently, it is one of the few places where direct access to the water is easily possible. However, dense vegetation blocks view and to the water. Should it be thinned?

**Table 2**  
**Existing Parks, Parkways, Playgrounds and Special Areas**

|    |                             |                   |    |                            |               |
|----|-----------------------------|-------------------|----|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1  | Carson Park                 | Community Park    | 45 | Grover Heights             | Playground    |
| 2  | Fairfax Park                | Community Park    | 46 | Kessler                    | Playground    |
| 3  | Mount Simon                 | Community Park    | 47 | Lakeshore                  | Playground    |
| 4  | NW Community Park Park      | Community Park    | 48 | McDonough                  | Playground    |
| 5  | Owen Park                   | Community Park    | 49 | Mitscher                   | Playground    |
| 6  | Phoenix Park                | Community Park    | 50 | Newell                     | Playground    |
| 7  | Riverview Park              | Community Park    | 51 | North River Fronts         | Playground    |
| 8  | Rod and Gun Park            | Community Park    | 52 | Oakwood Hills              | Playground    |
| 9  | SE Community Park Park      | Community Park    | 53 | Pinehurst                  | Playground    |
| 10 | Lowes Creek County Park     | County            | 54 | Princeton Valley           | Playground    |
| 11 | Jaycette                    | Neighborhood Park | 55 | Sundet                     | Playground    |
| 12 | Randall Park                | Neighborhood Park | 56 | Zephyr Hill                | Playground    |
| 13 | State Street                | Neighborhood Park | 57 | Archery Park               | Special Area  |
| 14 | State Street                | Neighborhood Park | 59 | Bayview                    | Special Area  |
| 15 | University Park             | Neighborhood Park | 60 | Bollinger Fields           | Special Area  |
| 16 | Wilson Park                 | Neighborhood Park | 61 | Carson Park Entrance       | Special Area  |
| 17 | Wold Court                  | Neighborhood Park | 62 | Carson Park Sign           | Special Area  |
| 18 | 1st Ave. (Grand to Lake)    | Parkway           | 63 | Dog Park                   | Special Area  |
| 19 | 1st tp 2nd                  | Parkway           | 64 | Dommer Park                | Special Area  |
| 20 | 2nd to 3rd                  | Parkway           | 65 | Eau Claire Soccer Park     | Special Area  |
| 21 | 3rd to 5th                  | Parkway           | 66 | Farmers Store              | Special Area  |
| 22 | 5th to Whipple              | Parkway           | 67 | Ferry Street               | Special Area  |
| 23 | Chamber Building Parkway    | Parkway           | 68 | Forest Street              | Special Area  |
| 24 | Chippewa River Trail        | Parkway           | 69 | Half Moon Beach            | Special Area  |
| 25 | Chippewa Trail              | Parkway           | 70 | Hobb's Landing             | Special Area  |
| 28 | EC River (Boyd to Archery)  | Parkway           | 71 | Jeffers Rd Athletic Fields | Special Area  |
| 26 | EC River-northside          | Parkway           | 72 | Kappus Park                | Special Area  |
| 27 | EC River-southside          | Parkway           | 73 | Kessler Open Space         | Special Area  |
| 29 | First Ave (Grand to Fulton) | Parkway           | 74 | Mount Tom                  | Special Area  |
| 30 | Graham Avenue               | Parkway           | 75 | Pinehurst                  | Special Area  |
| 31 | Half Moon Lake              | Parkway           | 76 | Putnam Park                | Special Area  |
| 32 | Library (Farwell to Dewey)  | Parkway           | 77 | Shale Pit                  | Special Area  |
| 33 | Railroad St. Lot            | Parkway           | 77 | Veterans Park              | Special Area  |
| 34 | se dells pond               | Parkway           | 78 | 12th St./Cedar             | Street Island |
| 35 | se dells pond2              | Parkway           | 79 | 3rd St./Old Wells Road     | Street Island |
| 36 | SE Shoreline of Dells Pond  | Parkway           | 80 | 5th St./Folsom             | Street Island |
| 37 | sw dells pond               | Parkway           | 81 | Agnes/Woodland             | Street Island |
| 38 | Thorpe Drive                | Parkway           | 82 | MacArthur/Clark            | Street Island |
| 39 | West Side RR                | Parkway           | 83 | May/E. Lexington           | Street Island |
| 40 | Boyd                        | Playground        | 84 | North end of Keith Street  | Street Island |
| 41 | Buffington                  | Playground        | 85 | Park Avenue                | Street Island |
| 42 | Cameron                     | Playground        | 86 | Roosevelt/McKinley         | Street Island |
| 43 | County Farm                 | Playground        | 87 | Sherman Creek              | Township      |
| 44 | Demmler                     | Playground        |    |                            |               |



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

- Parks Planned in 2005 Comp Plan
- Existing Parks
- Existing School Open Space
- Existing School Playground

**Figure 6**  
**Existing & Planned Parks, 2011**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

**Table 3**  
**Existing School Playgrounds**

|     |                |               |
|-----|----------------|---------------|
| 88  | Memorial       | High School   |
| 89  | North          | High School   |
| 90  | DeLong         | Middle School |
| 91  | Northstar      | Middle School |
| 92  | South          | Middle School |
| 93  | Flynn          | Playground    |
| 94  | Lakeshore      | Playground    |
| 95  | Locust Lane    | Playground    |
| 96  | Longfellow     | Playground    |
| 97  | Manz           | Playground    |
| 98  | Meadowview     | Playground    |
| 99  | Northwoods     | Playground    |
| 100 | Putnam Heights | Playground    |
| 101 | Robins         | Playground    |
| 102 | Roosevelt      | Playground    |
| 103 | Sam Davey      | Playground    |
| 104 | Sherman        | Playground    |

**Table 4**  
**Planned Parks and Trails**

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 105 | Railroad to Trail Conversion                    |
| 106 | Future Oxford Avenue Riverfront Park            |
| 107 | Future First Street Riverfront Park             |
| 108 | Future Neighborhood Park                        |
| 109 | UW Arboretum                                    |
| 110 | Addition to Mt. Simon Park                      |
| 111 | Railroad to Trail Conversion                    |
| 112 | Build Path on City-Owned Corridor               |
| 113 | Future Menomonie Street Playground              |
| 114 | Future Lower Chippewa River County Park         |
| 115 | Future Playground East of County Road TT        |
| 116 | Addition to Fairfax Park                        |
| 117 | Sky Park Area Future Open Space                 |
| 118 | Addition to Southeast Community Park            |
| 119 | Trail between Northwest and Jeffers Road Fields |
| 120 | Northwoods Elementary School Park               |
| 121 | Future Eau Claire River Trail                   |
| 122 | Future Chippewa River Trail at Xcel Substation  |
| 123 | Future park along Old Town Hall Road            |
| 124 | Future Playground at Graff Road                 |



**Putnam Park** provides nearly a mile of green space on a tall, steep bank along the Chippewa River just below the university campus. An informal walking path exists through this arboretum; that route could be improved for greater use. A related improvement would be to link that path to an enhanced streetscape network in the major medical and scholastic district on top of the bluff, as proposed by a plan in 2009.

Putnam Park extends along the gorge of **Little Niagara Creek**. A gravel path follows the creek through this cool, dark valley deep into the Third Ward neighborhood. Little Niagara Creek is fed by a spring and is thus clear and cold and formerly supported Brook trout. Above State Street, it is quite natural. Some restoration to its original condition is planned through the University property.

A bicyclist and pedestrian path unites the university campus across the river. Along the western bank, the City has carved space to extend the **State Trail** along the river bluff behind the Water Street shops. After a two-block detour onto the streets, the path rejoins the bluff at Market Street and runs all the way to a restored railroad bridge just above Clairemont Avenue.

River access was recently improved south of the **Water Street** district by acquiring land and extending a bicycling route through a parking area. Downriver, a few properties impede the extension of that river route.

The City's **Hobbs Ice Arena** and Park Department offices offer a popular boat landing and tubing take-out site.

### Around Half Moon Lake

Parts of Carson Park and Half Moon Lake have the appearance of the unspoiled North Woods. The dense forest of towering white pines coupled with the views across the water to wooded banks help you forget that you are in the middle of a city.

Paths link to the island on an old railroad grade from Phoenix Park and over a former log canal from the river near Ninth Street. A substantial amount of land on the western side of the Lake is in public ownership, and just a few tracts are needed to complete a path all around the lake. Efforts are continuing to acquire the remaining private lots (or to buy easements across them) to complete a lakefront ring of public land and paths.

A nearby hilltop cemetery adds to the sense of openness on the west side.



A fishing dock offer a scenic panorama of the lush, forested banks of Half Moon Lake.

### Clairemont Avenue to the Southern Limits

The Chippewa River State Trail is clearly defined as an asphalt path on its own right-of-way south of Clairemont Avenue. Given the large tracts of floodplain, retired mining area and other open space, potential exists to acquire land to create a public, linear park along the waterfront. If that occurs, the State Trail could remain in its present alignment, be shifted to a new corridor or have a branch line.

South of Interstate Highway 94, the broad floodplain might allow a park with more features, particularly between the State Trail and the river.

On the western side of the river, Ferry Street Park allows easy access to the water for fishing and boating because it has minimal riverbank. Unfortunately, some illegal dumping and riding of off-road vehicles has occurred in this secluded area.

Lowes and Taylor Creeks enter the Chippewa River on the left descending bank of this reach. Sherman Creek meets the river on the opposite bank immediately downriver of Clairemont Avenue near Newell Park.

The islands are owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management rather than the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.



Many acres of forest, wetland and floodplain surround the Chippewa River State State downriver of the Short Street bridge.

### The Eau Claire River

There are many possibilities for recreational access to the Eau Claire River because it has extensive linear parks, trail corridors and virtually undisturbed natural resources. The overall visual effect from the water along the Eau Claire River is one of green, natural solitude as most of the banks are heavily vegetated, obscuring nearby buildings.

Parks and trails along the southern bank include Archery Park, Boyd Park and the trail corridor that leads to the S-Bridge. On the northern side are Phoenix Park and the river trail corridor.

Above Hastings Way, the Eau Claire River is remarkably wild and scenic. There is tremendous potential to create new public open space along the heavily wooded slopes in that reach all the way to the Lake Altoona Dam. Relatively level “shelves” that would be suited for trails wind along the face of the slope. **This is a major opportunity for this plan.** The photos on this page convey some of this potential.

Level areas for commercial development are found along the top of the slope on the western bank near Galloway Street.

Access to the river is fairly good from the nearby residential neighborhoods because of the parkland and trail corridors on both sides. Views of the river are provided by the several bridges especially the walking and bicycling bridges (S-Bridge and Boyd Park Bridge).

A hiking trail has been carved by users along the steep and wooded face of the southern bluff between Archery and Boyd Parks.

Importantly, the City owns the land bounded by Hastings Way, the railroad track and the river. Also owned is the land between the railroad track, Galloway Street and River Prairie Drive.

## Discovery and Issues



Images of the Eau Claire River upriver from Hastings Way indicating the tremendous unspoiled potential for natural resource preservation, habitat protection, recreation and public open space.



Aerial photography clearly depicts the band of forest that extends with minimal interruption from below Hastings Way to Highway 53 and beyond to Lake Altoona.

### Boating, Canoeing, Kayaking and Tubing

**Boating** is popular above the Dells Dam but down-river the shallow water often impedes motors. Likewise, the Eau Claire River is often too shallow below the Altoona Dam for motors. Canoeing conditions are good everywhere.



Tubing has become very popular on The Chippewa River; launch points are Phoenix Park and Owen Park with a take-outs near Water Street and at Hobbs Arena. There is competition for the more convenient parking at Hobbs Arena.

Along the Eau Claire River, there is a need for more or better put-in locations for canoeing, kayaking or tubing. A **canoe** launch is expected to be built near the parking lot in the Waterford development near Hastings Way. On the upper Chippewa River, an additional boat launch on or near Dells Pond would be useful.

**Kayaking** is sometimes good in the Eau Claire River soon after a major rain storm. The ledges make for fun conditions for beginning and intermediate paddlers. Thus, an idea was offered that kayak events could be created by letting large amounts of water out of the Lake Altoona dam for a few hours at a time.

Canoeing, kayaking, motor boating and tubing could be promoted for the sake of economic development as well as local recreation. From Eau

Claire, there could be trips to Chippewa Falls, the Red Cedar River, the Mississippi River and up the Eau Claire River. The concept of a “water trail” could be pursued as it has in other locations such as the Root River in Minnesota, the Milwaukee River and the north shore of Lake Superior. Local maps could be published and the DNR could designate campsites. One objective would be to get river users to stay overnight, eat at local restaurants and generally spend money on shore. Events such as mass floats (like the one already held from Chippewa Falls) and river clean-ups could be sponsored. Local outfitters could get involved.

### Fishing

Water quality in both rivers is good and improving. Consequently, the fisheries are also healthy. Species include walleye, muskie, sturgeon and suckers. The best fishing spot is right below Dells Dam. There is a foot path down the steep slope at that point but it is deteriorated and in need of improvement.

Shore fishing is possible in many locations but there are few fishing piers. Additional fishing piers would be helpful at Riverside Park, Dells Pond below McDonough Park and Owen Park; on the Eau Claire River; downtown; and on Half Moon Lake (much fishing from the causeway).

### Bird Watching

Because the Chippewa River is part of the Mississippi Flyway, many species pass through the valley in the Spring and Fall of each year. Good bird habitat exists at Putnam Park and Half Moon Lake.

Bird watching is a remarkably popular activity and has the potential to generate economic development from visitors. (See: Bird City WI.)

### Environmental Resources

The Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers each have a rich legacy of exploration, settlement, community growth and enrichment that was laid atop an even more abundant natural treasure. It is anticipated that this plan will take advantage of those resources, restore, protect or enhance them where possible, and make them more apparent to the population now and in the future.

#### Natural Environment

##### *Pre-Settlement Vegetation*

Eau Claire is located at the intersection of several types of pre-settlement vegetation, according to the field notes compiled by the initial land surveyors and mapped by the Geological and Natural History Survey of the University of Wisconsin. These included

- Oak savanna in Chippewa County and south of I-94
- Prairie to the southwest along the Chippewa River downriver of Eau Claire and to the north in part of the Town of Wheaton
- Southern Oak Forest where most of the city stands today
- Oak Savanna in the Town Seymour, extending to the Chippewa River
- River bottom forest and sedge meadow in the lowlands.

The original vegetation was determined by the distribution of climate and by soil modified by fire.

Oak savanna is an orchard-like community with a few large bur or white oaks growing in fields of grass. As fires were suppressed during settlement, the oak savannas grew up into forests of oak.

Most of the evidence of the original vegetation, including most of the wetlands and some of the floodplains, has been erased by urban development

along the rivers. The major creeks remain but the smaller tributaries have filled or been supplanted by urban drainage. The forest in the city is now largely composed of a variety of hardy trees planted in yards, boulevards and parks. Nonetheless, some large tracts of modified pre-settlement forest can still be found. Even more rare are undisturbed wetlands or native prairie.

##### *River Banks*

Nearly all of the river edges are lined with steep banks covered with deciduous trees and shrubs. Several of these banks tower over the water, such as the south edge of Dells Pond, the top of the arboretum in Putnam Park, and the upper reaches of the Chippewa River. These and other features are illustrated by Figure 7, Major Natural Features.



The Chippewa River corridor south of the dam to I-94 is characterized by banks rising sharply to an elevation approximately 10 to 20 feet above normal water level. The exceptions to this condition are in the First Street and the "University" reaches where the change is in excess of 50 feet.

In contrast, a few locations have broad floodplains and easy water access along the shore. These once housed sawmills and boat landings; they now typically are parks including Riverview, Mt. Simon, Owen, Putnam and Newell. Below the city, where Sherman, Lowes and Taylor Creeks outflow to the Chippewa, there is also a broad floodplain where sand and gravel have accumulated over the centuries.

The Eau Claire River is quite different in character – its waters have cut a deep “V” valley through the limestone bedrock, creating steep banks in excess of 40 feet with a narrow valley floor. The waters are relatively shallow except in seasonably high water periods. Bedrock is exposed through the corridor on the banks in the river bed. Severe topography has been the controlling factor in the ability of this area to remain in a near-natural state. Surprisingly, of the two rivers, the Eau Claire is the more polluted.

The dam at Lake Altoona is an impediment to canoe travel or a water trail.

### **River Bank Treatments**

Some of the river banks and bluffs are in fair to good natural condition through benign neglect. Original vegetation has been degraded and affected by invasive species (e.g., buckthorn), but the vegetative cover is mostly intact and erosion is not excessive.



Many harmful practices are found along both rivers where the City has placed rock or (worse) concrete rubble to minimize erosion from the current and safeguard the banks and bridges. In some places, trees have grown up through the rip-rap, giving it a somewhat more natural appearance. However, there are ways to accomplish those objectives that are more environmentally friendly and attractive. This practice should be examined during the planning process.

Along the downtown river edge, there are concrete walls that provide a vertical edge. Although they provide no natural habitat and are unattractive, they allow intensive shoreline use. The DNR is generally opposed to such walls.

In other locations, the forest and underbrush has formed a visual barrier to the water. An issue is whether some of that vegetation should be cleared to create views.

Another river bank issue is the use and design of flood levees. The levee along the Chippewa River north of Madison Street is a temporary, un-engineered structure that might not withstand a

major flood. When it is eventually rebuilt, it will be much wider. Trees are not normally allowed on such levees because they compromise its integrity (contrary to common belief). However, the levee would be wide enough to build a path on top.

These problems point out the fact that the City lacks a coherent and environmentally sound policy for how to treat its river banks. It is incumbent on this planning process to devise such a policy and build lasting support for it.

### **Forest**

As noted above, urban development and logging have destroyed most of the original forests, but large tracts of woods remain all around the perimeter of the city as well as on the steep banks of the rivers. Figure 7 shows a ring of natural woods around Eau Claire, particularly in the hilly tracts but also in the flat, sandy areas to the north. That map does not do justice to the urban forest that thrives on almost every block of the community and helps make it livable.

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands also have been substantially lost to development. The few remnants are found principally along the creeks, except for Sherman, which has cut a steeper, narrower gorge. The major wetland complex associated with the rivers is associated with Lowes and Taylor Creeks.

### **Floodplains**

Several locations along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers are in the 100-year (1 percent annual chance) or 500-year floodplains, as illustrated by Figure 7, Natural Resources. This is particularly true down river of the Clairemont Avenue bridge in the vicinity of Lowes and Taylor Creeks. In other locations, tall banks constrain the flood waters along the rivers. Sherman and Otter Creeks

and the Eau Claire River each have very little associated flood plain.

Some locations subject to flooding are encumbered by urban development such as most of the downtown, all of the land east of Second Avenue in the Randall Park neighborhood, parts of the Third Ward neighborhood north of Gilbert Avenue and the commercial or industrial land immediately south of Half Moon Lake. Several properties in the flood plain between the Chippewa River and First Street in the West Riverside neighborhood are hoped to be acquired for linear park and trail space.

Certain locations in the flood plain have been recently acquired for park or other open space, thus lessening the threat to property. Examples are land between the Chippewa River and Forest Street north of Madison Street or the Phoenix Park property.

### **Water Quality**

Water quality has improved in the rivers, creeks and lakes in recent decades. The best quality is now in Half Moon Lake (thanks to the combined efforts of the City and the DNR) followed by the Chippewa then the Eau Claire Rivers.

The creeks all suffer from sediment and fertilizer runoff. Trout have been extirpated in all of the creeks except Lowes because of pollution and also because of thermal pollution caused by urban development. A recent study showed ways that surface water runoff temperatures could be reduced in Lowes Creek but it is a difficult problem because of the substantial nearby development. Otter Creek receives much pollution from farm fields and urban development in its watershed. The green color of the water in the Eau Claire River is caused by algae growth in Lake Altoona, which is promoted by fertilizer runoff.

Further studies and regulations that lead to reductions in non-point source pollution throughout the watersheds would improve water quality and the habitat for all of the species that depend on the rivers and creeks.



This low dam near the mouth of Sherman Creek presents a cool, clear image under the forest foliage.



The Little Niagara Creek winds through a deep, dark ravine on its way to the university campus and the Chippewa River.

### **Wildlife and Fishing**

Wildlife uses the valleys of the rivers and creeks for shelter, food and movement. However, urban development has greatly reduced this potential. Only fragmented habitat remains. The best (although degraded) habitat is around Half Moon Lake, Putnam Park and Dells Pond.

Wildlife habitat along the river banks has been degraded not only by development but also by **invasive species**. Prominent among these is Buckthorn, a shrub brought to this country from Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which out-competes most native species in forested areas. It is found abundantly along the rivers and creeks of Eau Claire. Consequently, habitat for animals, birds and other species is harmed.

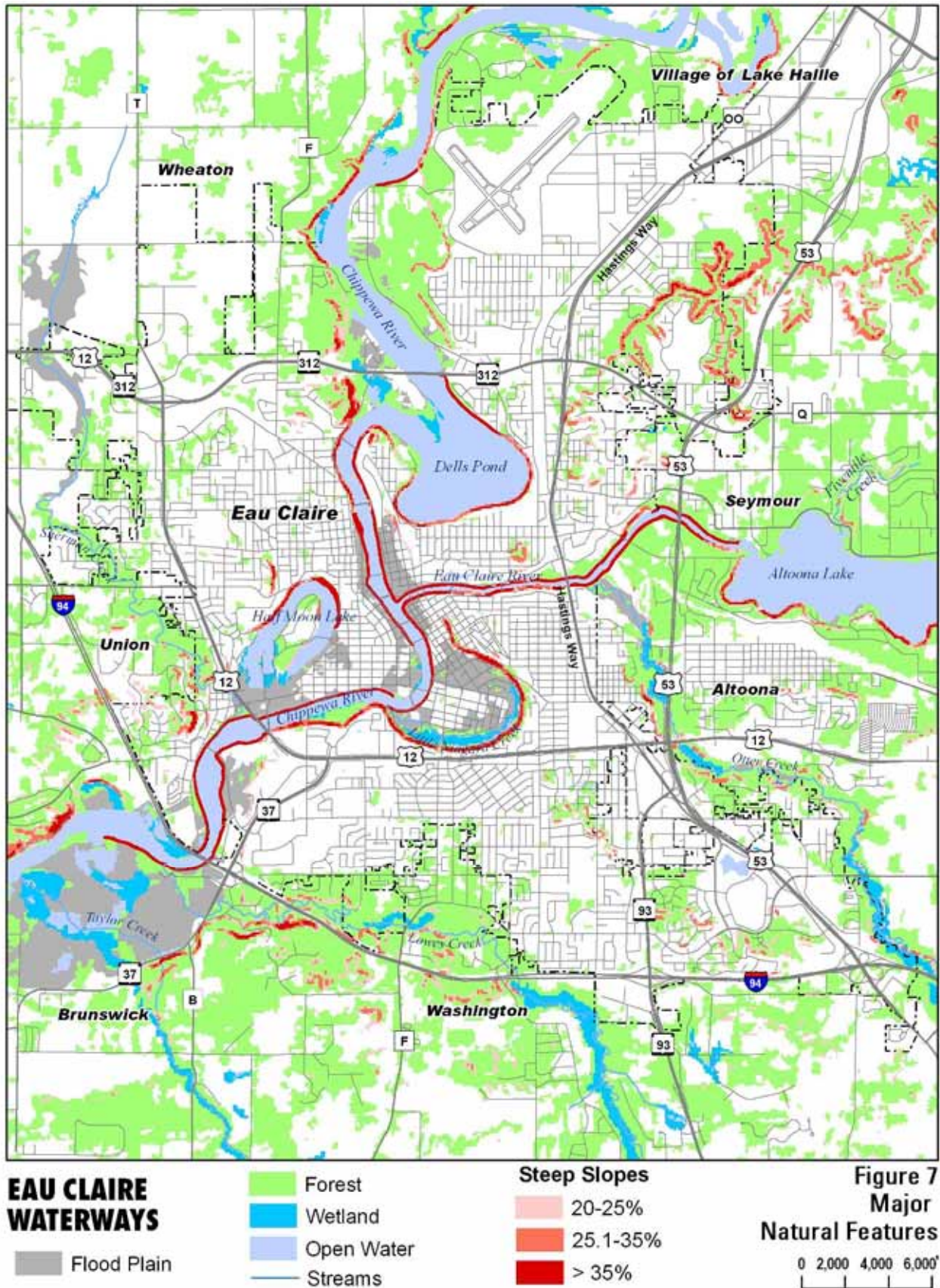
**Fishing habitat** was described in the previous section, Parks and Recreation.

On the northern side of Dells Pond, wildlife habitat is very good on the Xcel Energy property. There is also an eagle nest on one of the islands in Dells Pond. Ice fishing is said to be popular there. Another boat launch, perhaps at Dommer Park, would be useful.



Otter Creek runs shallow, wide and clear as it passes under Prill Road.





## Surface Water and the Storm Sewer System

Water quality depends on proper practices throughout the entire watershed, which in the case of the Chippewa River is 6,630 square miles. The City of Eau Claire has influence over a much smaller area, of course, but has shown excellent stewardship of its water resources. Consequently, there are not major surface water problems to be addressed in this plan along the waterways.

The City adopted a comprehensive surface water management plan in 1993 and received a stringent MS-4 Permit under Wisconsin Rules NR 216. Two Wisconsin Priority Streams are within the City's jurisdiction: Duncan Creek (located in Chippewa Falls) and Lowes Creek.

Through the actions prescribed in its plan, Eau Claire exceeded the level of water quality improvement mandated by 2008 and even by 2013.

A primary element of the City's plan calls for intercepting and treating surface runoff near its source, which is the most effective and economical approach. Thus, the City and private land developers have built catchment ponds and swales near locations that generate large amounts of runoff, such as major commercial or industrial areas. Suspended solids and harmful chemicals are removed through these features, which also reduce the cost of expensive pipe systems.

**Lowes Creek**, a trout stream, has benefited from City improvements that catch warm urban runoff then filter it into the ground water where it cools before seeping back to the creek, much to the benefit of the sensitive fish.

Redevelopment districts have also been the source of water protection measures. In the intensively utilized **North Barstow** / Phoenix Park area, runoff from parking lots is captured and

cleansed in underground tanks before being released to the river.

On the **University campus**, vegetated swales catch and treat runoff before it enters Little Niagara Creek.

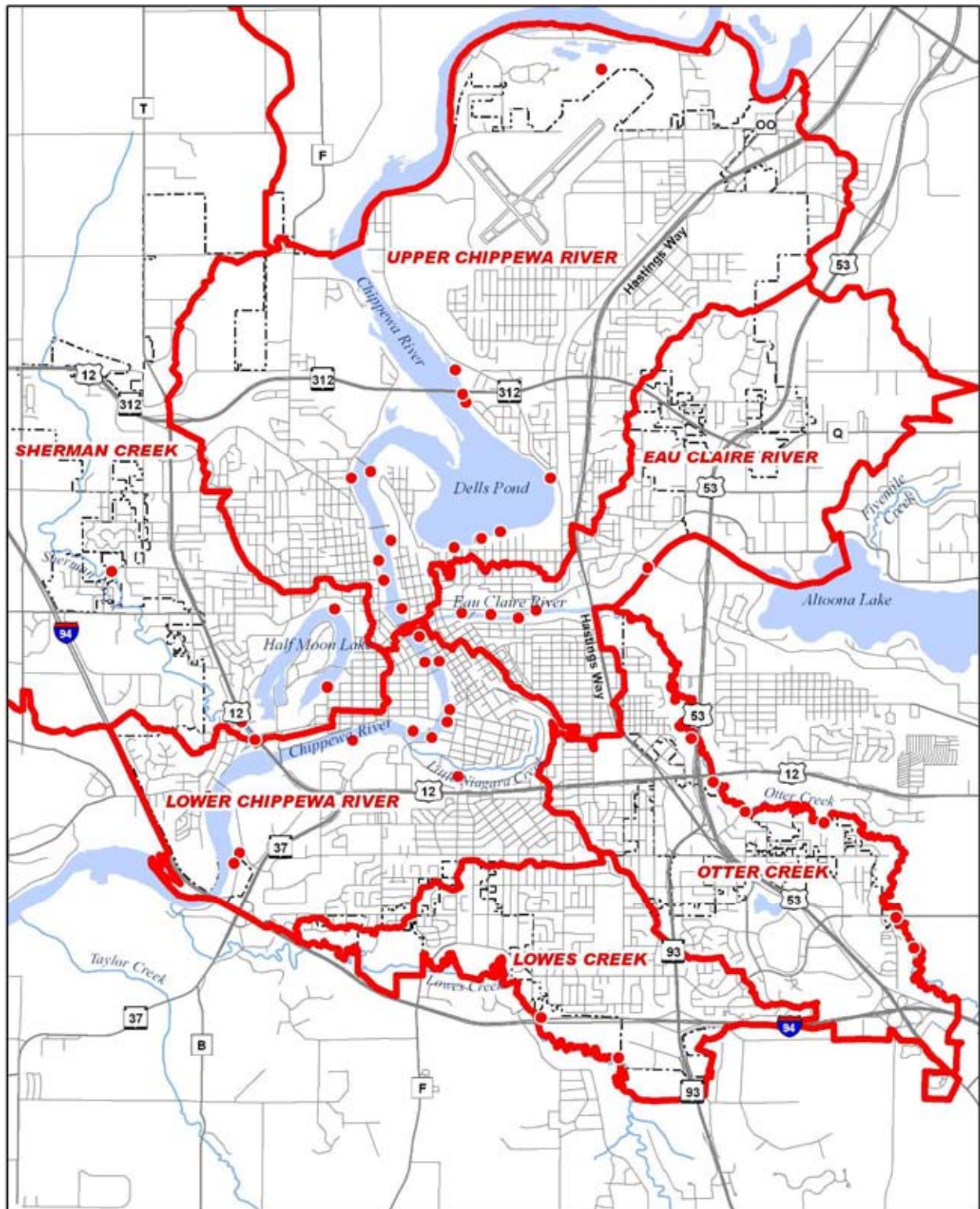
Water quality in **Half Moon Lake** improved markedly after invasive plant species were reduced through the application of herbicides beginning in 2008; in 2011, harmful phosphorus levels were reduced using alum. Beneficial native plants are now making a resurgence.

As noted previously, the water quality in **Sherman Creek** is good as a result of City treatment ponds. Otter Creek, on the other hand, suffers from agricultural runoff and thermal pollution.

As a consequence of the sandy soils, there were few riverine **wetlands** to be lost to urban development in Eau Claire. Also, no tributary creeks are known to have been diverted to underground pipes in the Eau Claire urban area.

Although a few locations are mapped as **floodplains** (including the downtown), there has not been a river-related flood in recent memory. A few urban drainage deficiencies are known and will be rectified. To mitigate flood hazards, houses have been removed in several locations such as along Forest Street, along Second Street near Owen Park, in the present Phoenix Park and near Riverview Drive.

The City has established a **storm water utility** fund to pay for these and other improvements.



**EAU CLAIRE  
WATERWAYS**

● Major Outfall    □ Watersheds

**Figure 8  
Watersheds and  
Storm Sewer Outfalls**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

## Movement

### Streets and Bridges

As a mid-sized, well-established community, Eau Claire has an extensive grid pattern of local streets, many of which lead to the vicinity of the river-fronts but usually stop short of the shoreline.

Likewise, there are five city-owned auto bridges over the Chippewa River, three over the Eau Claire River and one over Half Moon Lake; state or federal designations are on three major auto bridges. These are in addition to the six existing and one planned walking and bicycling overpasses. (See Figure 9.)

However, few segments of road run parallel and close to the rivers for views and access. Some current examples of this practice include short portions of these roads:

- Airport Road near the bluff
- Riverview Drive
- Old Wells Road
- First Avenue (especially near Owen Park)
- Riverfront Terrace (in Phoenix Park – the best example)
- Galloway Street
- Market Street
- Garfield Avenue (on the UW-EC campus)
- Michigan Street (in the Shawtown neighborhood)
- Carson Park Drive.

Unfortunately, these road segments are short and water views are very limited. In most locations, the edges of the waterways are privately owned and developed with housing or commercial buildings, blocking views and access. This is particularly true along the creeks with the major exception of Little Niagara Creek in Putnam Park.

Consequently, perhaps, roads lead to only three public boat launches on the Chippewa, none on the

Eau Claire and one on Half Moon Lake in the City of Eau Claire.

Thus, the bridges offer the best views of the rivers, lake and creeks. Fishing is not allowed from the bridges.

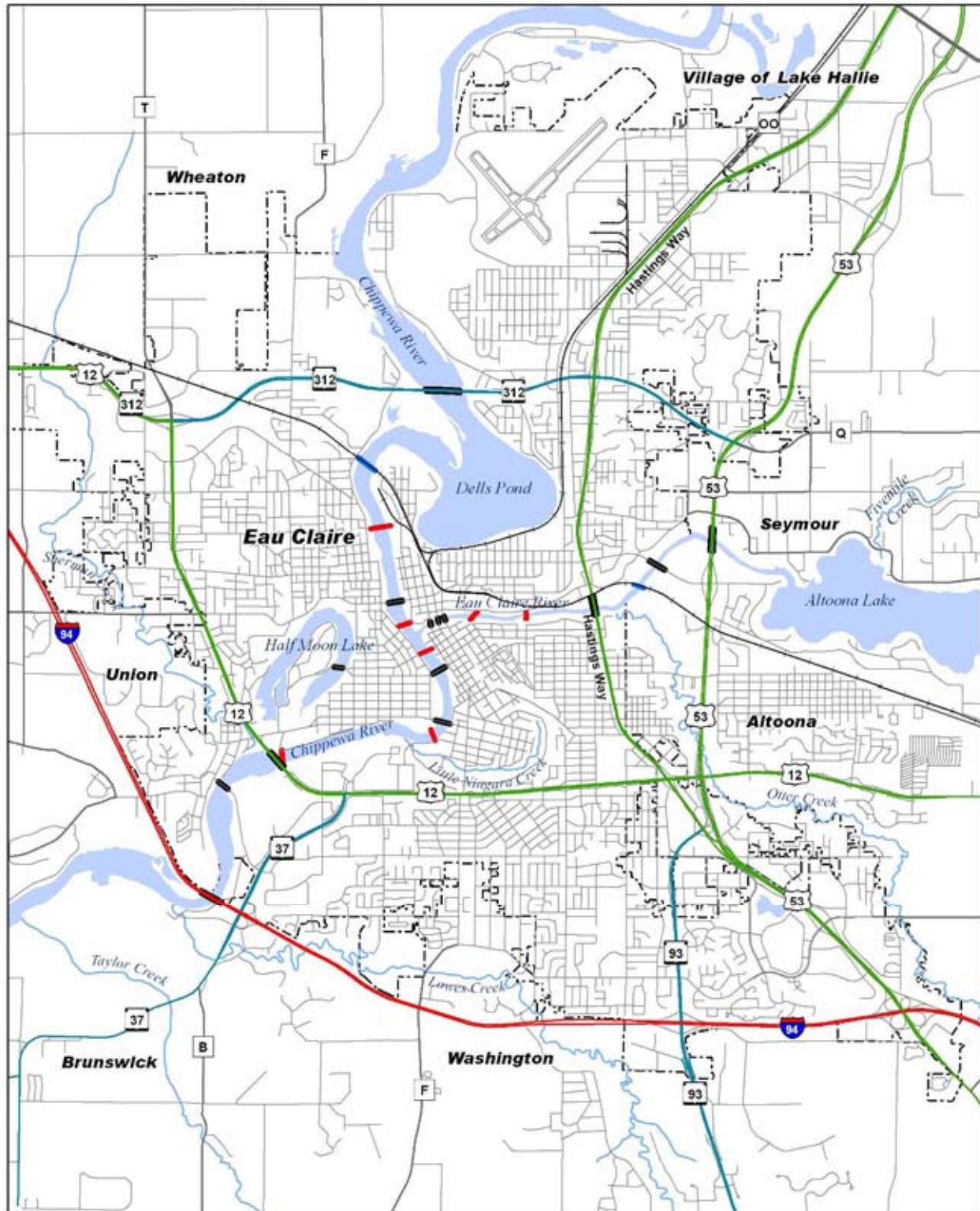
### Bicycling Routes

Eau Claire has a remarkably robust network of off-road bicycling paths for a city of its size, and it is poised to improve. These paths are completed and extended by a more modest set of on-street striped bicycling lanes. Multi-use would be the proper terminology for these paths because walking and other forms of wheeled recreation are permitted. Figure 10 illustrates the pattern of off-street paths, on-street routes and sidewalks.

*The Eau Claire Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Plan* (2010), indicates alignments for additional on-street bicycling lanes, new or improved sidewalks and off-road multi-use paths. Thus, the City is committed to providing these alternative forms of transportation and recreation, which have as their spine the two river corridors.

Bicycling in Eau Claire has benefited from the fact that there were once more railroad lines active in the city than there are now, leaving several corridors for conversion to recreational paths.

A universal shortcoming of the off-road multi-use paths in Eau Claire is that they are all too narrow to safely and comfortably accommodate the traffic volumes and the mixture of pedestrian and wheeled traffic. Perhaps future paths can take this into account.



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

- Interstate Highway
- US Highway

- State Highway
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Railroad

- Auto Bridge (with sidewalk)
- Ped-Bike Bridge
- Railroad Bridge

**Figure 9  
Roads & Bridges,  
2011**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

### **Existing Trails on Former Railroad Corridors**

The Chippewa River State Trail corridor runs from the southwest (all the way from the City of Durand and from Menomonie via the Red Cedar State Trail) up to and across the Chippewa River, then continues on a railroad grade from Galloway Street into the northeastern neighborhoods (from which it will eventually lead all the way along the river to the City of Cornell via the Old Abe State Trail). The Chippewa River bridge near Clairemont Avenue is quite beautiful.

A short trail segment runs from the bridge at Phoenix Park southwest through the neighborhood to Carson Park.

### **Planned Trails on Former Railroad Corridors**

There is great potential to add to these rail-to-trail conversions with two paths in the West Riverside neighborhood. One of these corridors is already owned by the City; the other is owned privately by a citizen but not the railroad.

Another magnificent railroad opportunity is the planned improvement of the former Milwaukee Road bridge near the dam on the Chippewa River. This project will link existing or planned paths on both sides of the river and bring to six the number of exclusive bike-pedestrian bridges over the rivers. That is a remarkable number of such bridges for a community the size of Eau Claire.

Unfortunately, there is no easy link from the Milwaukee Road trestle down to Forest Street, but one could be engineered. Once that is done, the path should be linked south of Phoenix Park and somehow northeast to Mt. Simon Park. Once the river levee in Forest Park is re-built as a permanent structure, the path could go on top of it.

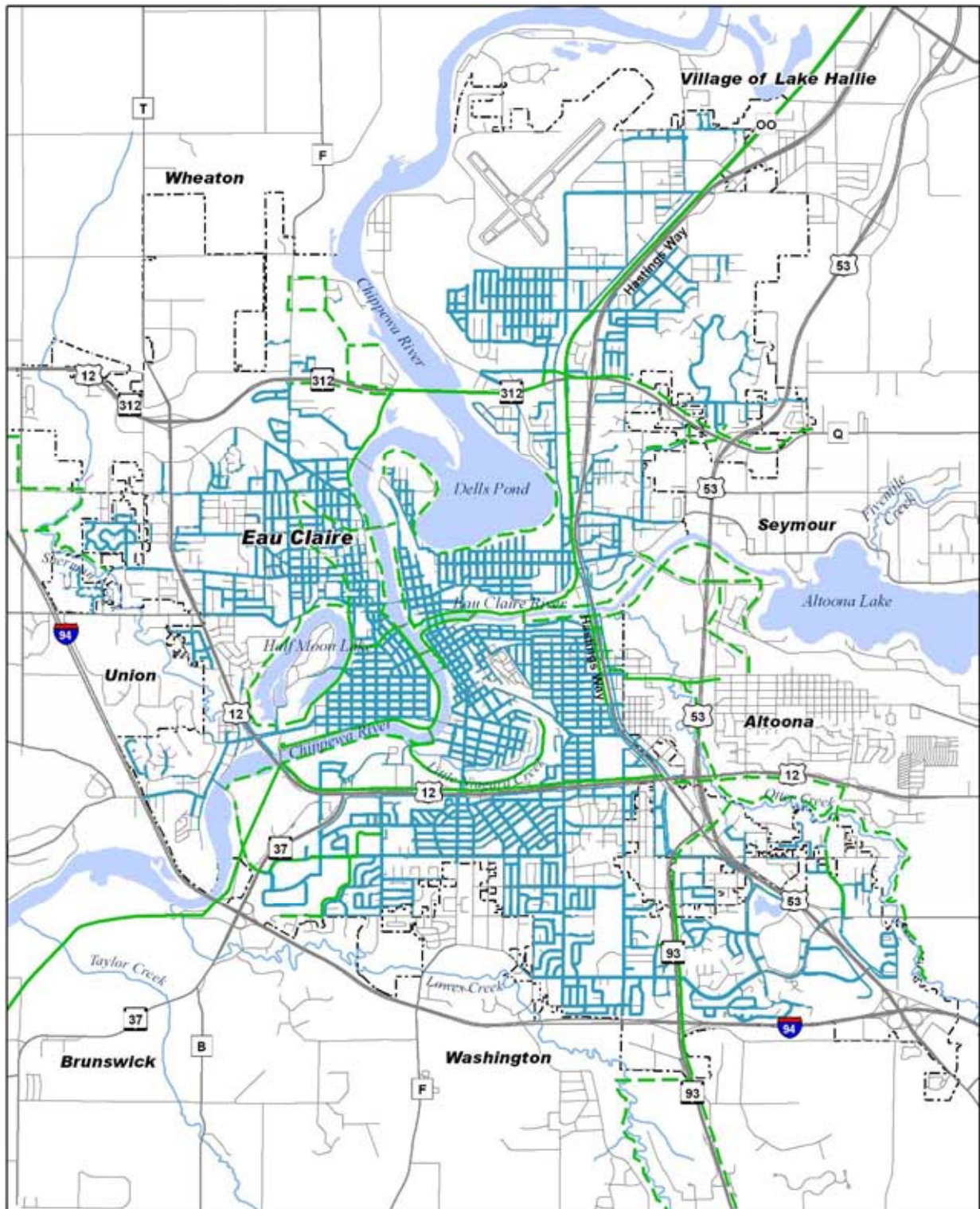
### **Other Off-Street Bicycling Paths**

An important link in the Chippewa River State Trail has been completed from the river bridge near Clairemont Avenue all the way to Phoenix Park. This route is a combination of off-street routes on land acquired by the City, a signed route on a street, paths through Owen Park, and a portion of First Street, a local street that has been dedicated exclusively to walking and bicycling, and another former railroad bridge to the trail head in Phoenix Park.

As a result of the realignment of First Avenue and the Eau Claire County Justice Center building project, there is an immediate opportunity to extend and improve the State Trail from Grand Avenue south to Owen Park, including the improvement of the Lake Street underpass.



This former railroad corridor could be acquired for use as a multi-use path linking the former Milwaukee Road railroad bridge to Roosevelt Elementary School



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

- Off Street Path
- Sidewalk
- - - Off Street Path Proposed
- Street

**Figure 10**  
**Sidewalks & Off Street Paths**



Notable off-road multi-use paths include:

- A firm gravel path along Little Niagara Creek in Putnam Park for autos, pedestrians and bicyclists
- Along Clairemont Avenue from Hastings Way to the Chippewa River State Trail.
- Along Galloway Street opposite the massive Banbury Place.
- Down to the Eau Claire River along the new Highway 53 bridge.
- The Grand Avenue ped-bike bridge replaced an auto bridge
- Several others as shown by Figure 10.

### ***On-Street Bicycling Lanes***

Several local streets or County Roads have striped lanes for bicycling or paved shoulders demarcated by a shoulder that is striped and signed for bicycling. These tend to be toward the perimeter of the community and radial from the center, so that they extend the reach of the off-street paths described above and shown by Figure 10.

### ***Unmarked Bicycling Routes***

Most local streets in Eau Claire are well suited for bicycling because they are built in an interconnected pattern and tend to have relatively low traffic volumes and speeds. Smart bicyclists use these streets and avoid the major thoroughfares. They complement the paths and lanes by extending trips to and from destinations such as home or work.



### **Walking Routes**

Eau Claire has an extensive system of sidewalks that connects to the river multi-use paths described above. Unlike some cities, Eau Claire has sidewalks along nearly all residential streets and portions of some of the major roads. Therefore, walking to the waterways (and elsewhere) is not much of a problem.

The several planned off-road multi-use paths will add to the potential for walking to or along the rivers and the lake.

Recent neighborhood redevelopment plans have wisely emphasized improving pedestrian access to the water through new sidewalks and paths, riverfront land redevelopment and new parks. Examples include the *Clairemont Avenue Educational and Medical District Plan* (2009) and the *West Riverside District Plan* (2010). Such policies represent the continuation of a trend started in the 1980s that emphasizes improved waterfront access for quality of life and reinvestment leverage.

One interesting issue is whether there should be a pedestrian bridge over the Eau Claire River near the confluence that would link Phoenix Park and the public space anticipated on the opposite bank. Such a bridge ought to be highly attractive because it will be so visible; it might become a symbol of the City and be highly photographed. Consequently, it would be expensive to build.

Bridges are highly visible public structures. Consequently, they may enhance or detract from the appearance of the river valleys.

The Water Street bridge over the Chippewa River is planned to be rebuilt in 2015 – an opportunity for exemplary design.

Shown here is the Farwell Street bridge over the Eau Claire River.



## Cultural Resources

### History of the Use of the Rivers

The economic and cultural history of Eau Claire – like many other cities – is closely tied to its rivers. The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers are responsible for this location becoming a settlement, for the ability of European or eastern immigrants to complete the final part of their long journey, for the community becoming a center of lumber milling, and for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century evolution to a diversified economy. Today, the rivers have taken on a new role in the continuing economic and social growth of the community.

Settlers began arriving soon after the land treaties with the Ojibwa in 1837. Wealthy investors such as Frederick Weyerhaeuser discovered the “inexhaustible” supply of white pine forests in northern Wisconsin and organized thousands of men to cut the trees and float them down the rivers. The Chippewa River drains a large area reaching nearly to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, aided by the Flambeau River. Eau Claire became a natural location to establish sawmills because the logs could be impounded at Dells Pond for sorting.

Between 1857 and 1890, Eau Claire had up to sixteen mills sawing along the banks of four holding sites. Mill locations included present-day River-view Park, the vicinity of Cascades Tissue, Banbury Place, the confluence, along Water and Menomonie Streets, and downriver near Short Street. (Plan idea: install markers denoting the locations of the mills and the riverboat landings.)

A skilled lumberjack could walk all the way across Dells Pond or certain other locations when the logs filled the stream in the Spring. This holding area was enhanced when the Dells Dam was built in 1879 at the expense of the City after several years of controversy.

In 1857, a canal was built near the foot of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue linking the Chippewa River to Half Moon Lake, an isolated river oxbow, to hold and sort more logs. It was replaced in 1880 by a more powerful above-ground flume and associated tunnel that started just below Dells Dam. The flume ran parallel to the river below the bluff for 2,000 feet then turned west to a tunnel that ran under the parking lot for present-day Mayo Hospital; its outflow point can still be seen near the City beach. People would swim in the flume when logs were not being pushed through. A downriver outlet for Dells Pond was dug where Race Street now runs.

From the 1850s until and 1880s, nearly every occupation in the Chippewa Valley was tied either directly or indirectly to the pinery. Not only did the lumber companies employ thousands of men to cut the trees then mill them into products, but many other industries and businesses supplied the needs of the mills or sold goods and services to the workers and their families. A few of the lumber companies created vertically integrated monopolies or company towns to supply all the needs of their workers and more.

One such company town, Porter’s Mills, located at Porterville Road in the present Town of Brunswick, once held forty families, a church and a school. Most of the buildings were moved to the City of Stanley in the 1890s, and Porter’s Mills is now a ghost town.

Shawtown was the neighborhood around Daniel Shaw’s mill near Ferry Street. Most it was lost to fire in 1867 but rebuilt.

Fires and floods regularly wiped out other mills. During the 1860s, every mill in Eau Claire burned at least once.

The milled products, including boards, shingles, shakes, lathe and others, were assembled and floated on giant rafts down the Chippewa to the Mississippi River for destinations in the United States and around the world.

The booming lumber industry attracted railroads in the mid-1870s, which enhanced the economic position of Eau Claire and helped it move into other industries. Before then, goods were transported to Eau Claire by steamboats.

By 1884, the pinery had largely disappeared and the local lumber milling industry declined until the 1920s, when only one lumber manufacturer remained. After 1890, the local economy floundered and the population dipped as new industries struggled to emerge. Manufacturers rose and fell, a few highly successful such as the Gillette Tire Company (which later become Uniroyal), and the hinterland sprouted farms and dairies, which needed Eau Claire for goods and services.

The Dells Hydro Dam was built 100 feet down-river from the Dells Dam in 1924 and now generates up to 9.3 megawatts of electrical power. That source and other regional electrical supplies have helped Eau Claire continue to diversify its economy and support many additional households and businesses. Electrical energy also minimized the need for industry to locate or remain on the banks of the river for power.

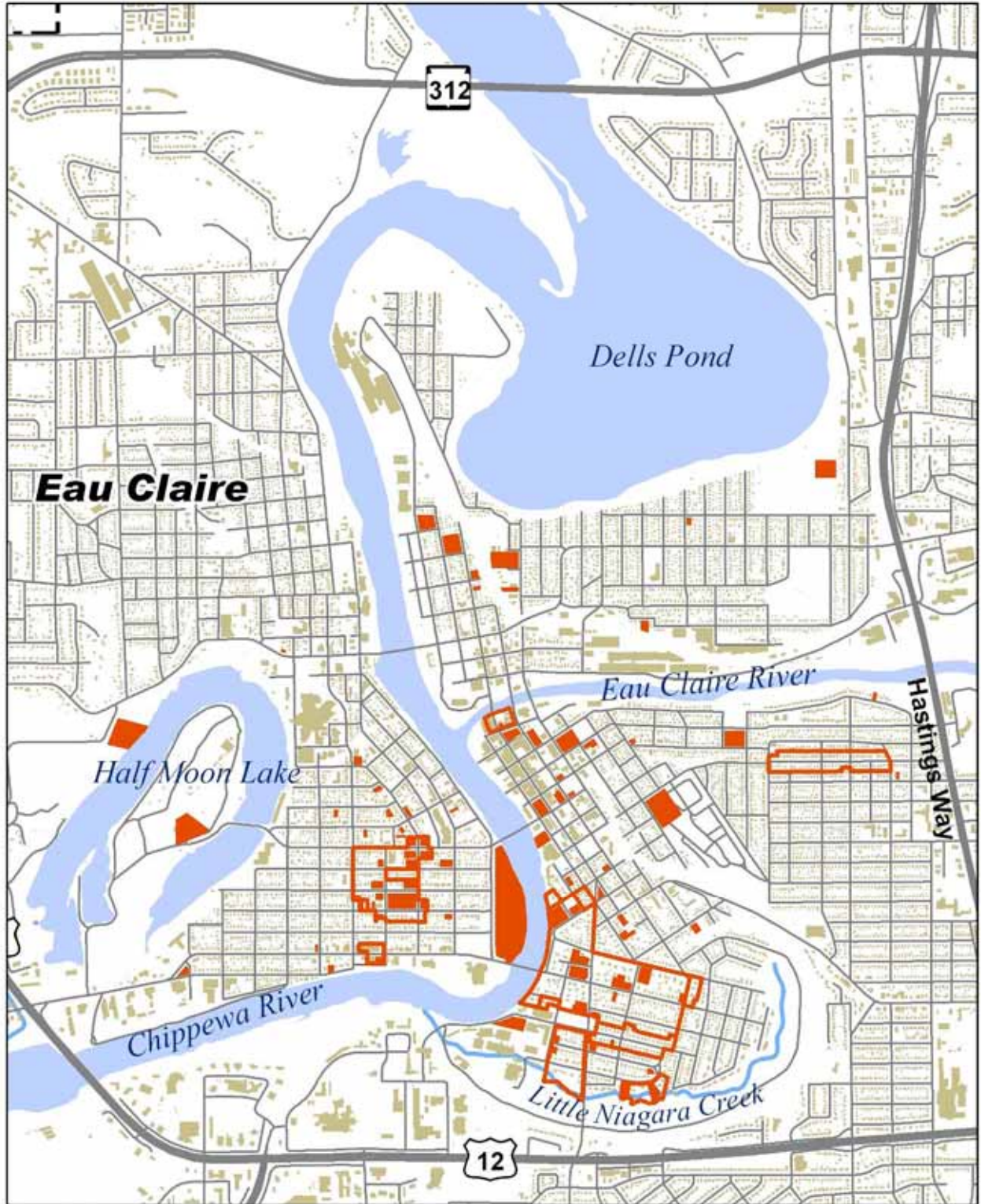
Three separate communities were formed on the banks of the two rivers, which were a major physical divider. IN 1857, the first bridge across the Eau Claire River was built, thereby joining the communities on the east bank. But not until 1869 was a bridge completed across the Chippewa River. Although access was improved by these bridges, a strong rivalry persisted among the communities on the east and west shores. All three communities retained their own governing bodies

until 1872 when Eau Claire was incorporated as a single city.



Today, the rivers are no longer used to float logs or transport goods. Instead, they remain a source of electrical power and, more importantly, that ephemeral “quality of life” experience. Viewing, boating, fishing and tubing on the rivers do not have the direct economic influence that lumber milling once did, but they are invaluable for attracting and retaining businesses and their employees for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Settlement & Survival: Building Towns in the Chippewa Valley, 1850-1925*. Pfaff, Tim, Chippewa Valley Museum, 1994.

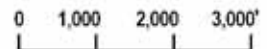


**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**

-  Historic Property
-  Historic District

 Building Footprint

**Figure 11  
Historic Structures  
& Districts**



### Historic Structures and Districts

In Eau Claire, there are a number of structures recognized as historically or architecturally significant by the US Department of the Interior, the State of Wisconsin or the City. It makes sense that most of these are located near the waterways because that's where the community was initially settled. Several are immediately adjacent to a waterway.

There are also eight historic districts listed on the National Register and two local historic districts. Historic Districts are larger areas containing groupings of structures, some of which are individually significant and many others which are supportive but not individually significant.

The waterways and the historic structures exist in supportive harmony. Helping citizens understand the relationship of these historic resources to the waterways builds an appreciation for both and paints a more complete picture of early settlement, the community's social and economic history and the role of the waterways in building Eau Claire.

Many other historic structures no longer exist, having been lost to fire, flood or redevelopment. As stated in the *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan*, it is beneficial to continue to identify emerging historic structures or districts and take appropriate steps to recognize or protect them so that they can contribute to the legacy of the community.

Figure 11 shows the location of the individual properties that are listed on the National, State or City historic registers as well as the designated historic districts in the City. A detailed description of the individual properties can be found in the *City of Eau Claire Landmarks Booklet*, published in 2002.

The eight historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places are:

- The Randall Park Historic District (located in the vicinity of Randall Park)
- The Third Ward Historic District (in the area along State Street from Gilbert Avenue south to Lincoln Avenue)
- The Emery Street Bungalow District (located along Emery Street from Chauncey Street east to Agnes Street).
- The Third Ward Expansion District (located south of Lincoln Avenue.)
- The Park Company District (located east of the University of WI – Eau Claire campus and west of State Street.)
- Water Street Commercial District (located in the 400 block of Water Street.)
- Roosevelt Avenue District (located in the southeast portion of the Third Ward neighborhood.)
- Confluence Commercial District (located along South Barstow Street and south of the Eau Claire River.)

Two local districts have been designated by the City:

- The Randall Park Historic Landmark District
- The Third Ward Historic Landmark District.

Note that historic resources that directly abut a waterway include Owen Park (on the western side of the Chippewa River), the Third Ward Historic District and several individual houses.



An historic house in the Randall Park Historic District

## Summary of Opportunities and Constraints by Location

This section summarizes the key conditions found along the waterways. Refer to Figure 12 for locations.

### Northern Limits to Dells Ponds

1. Need for a link from Northwest Community Park to the riverfront
2. Steep banks, heavy tree cover, rock outcroppings and private ownership of the shoreline limit access to the water except at Riverview Park; despite this, there are still several dramatic vistas.
3. Some flooding potential in undeveloped or large-lot locations
4. Need for improved bicyclist movement to Riverview Park from southern off-road trails; need for a fishing pier at Riverview Park

### Dells Pond to the Confluence

5. Several existing parks but still a need for another boat launch site
6. Tall, wooded banks; some good wildlife habitat, including on the peninsula tract owned by Xcel Energy
7. Opportunities for rails-to-trails conversions into the northwestern neighborhood
8. Major industrial plant, hydro power dam and City public works building
9. Railroad bridge for conversion to trail; need and opportunity for trail additions on both sides; need to link bridge to south and east
10. Opportunities for redevelopment and additional linear riverfront park and trail
11. Recent clearance of some floodplain for parks
12. Phoenix Park has been a tremendous success and enjoys much use, including a farmers' market, concerts and shore fishing; many tubing rides launch here

### The Confluence to Clairemont Avenue

13. Planned acquisition of certain floodplain properties for linear park between Madison Street and the State Trail bridge
14. Opportunities for downtown redevelopment with a river orientation and additional public access to the riverfront, particularly near the confluence point; public and private plans were being prepared in 2011 to address these needs; downtown shoreline deserves either more natural or more urban treatment and beautification; flooding potential exists
15. Opportunity to improve the State Trail south of Grand Avenue in conjunction with the realignment of First Street
16. Historic Owen Park provides scenic water access
17. Rock or concrete rip-rap on the shore in many locations – in this reach and others -- along both rivers
18. Three auto bridges
19. Three pedestrian-bicyclist bridges
20. The UWEC campus with the Putnam Park arboretum, its tall, wooded bluff and Little Niagara Creek
21. The Historic Third Ward neighborhood
22. The lively Water Street commercial area
23. The Chippewa River State Trail; disconnected from the riverfront in one location
24. Despite the industrial and heavy commercial land use along Menomonie Street, the State Trail has been extended through this segment along the shoreline

### Around Half Moon Lake

25. Highly attractive and well-used Carson Park, the jewel of the park system, has a lush, mature forest with a North Woods appearance; another fishing pier would be appreciated.
26. Opportunities for economic development near the northern shore
27. Need to acquire property or easements to complete the loop trail
28. A stronger trail link between the Chippewa River and Carson Park would be beneficial.

### Clairemont Avenue to the Southern Study Limits

29. The western bank is occupied by housing, and roads of the Shawtown neighborhood, limiting park and trail use
30. Islands provide visual appeal, boater interest and wildlife sanctuaries; nighttime partying has been an occasional problem
31. Major sand mining and processing operations along with extensive flood plains and associated lowland forests on the east bank; park and redevelopment possibilities
32. The Chippewa River State Trail
33. Outflows of Sherman, Lowes and Taylor Creeks
34. Ferry Street Park provides easy access to the river but has suffered from illegal dumping of household goods, erosion caused by off-road vehicles, and late-night parties.
35. Downriver of I-94, land use is rural and open; there are undisturbed forests and a broad, natural river with islands and backwaters; opportunity here for a large new riverfront park

### The Eau Claire River – North Bank

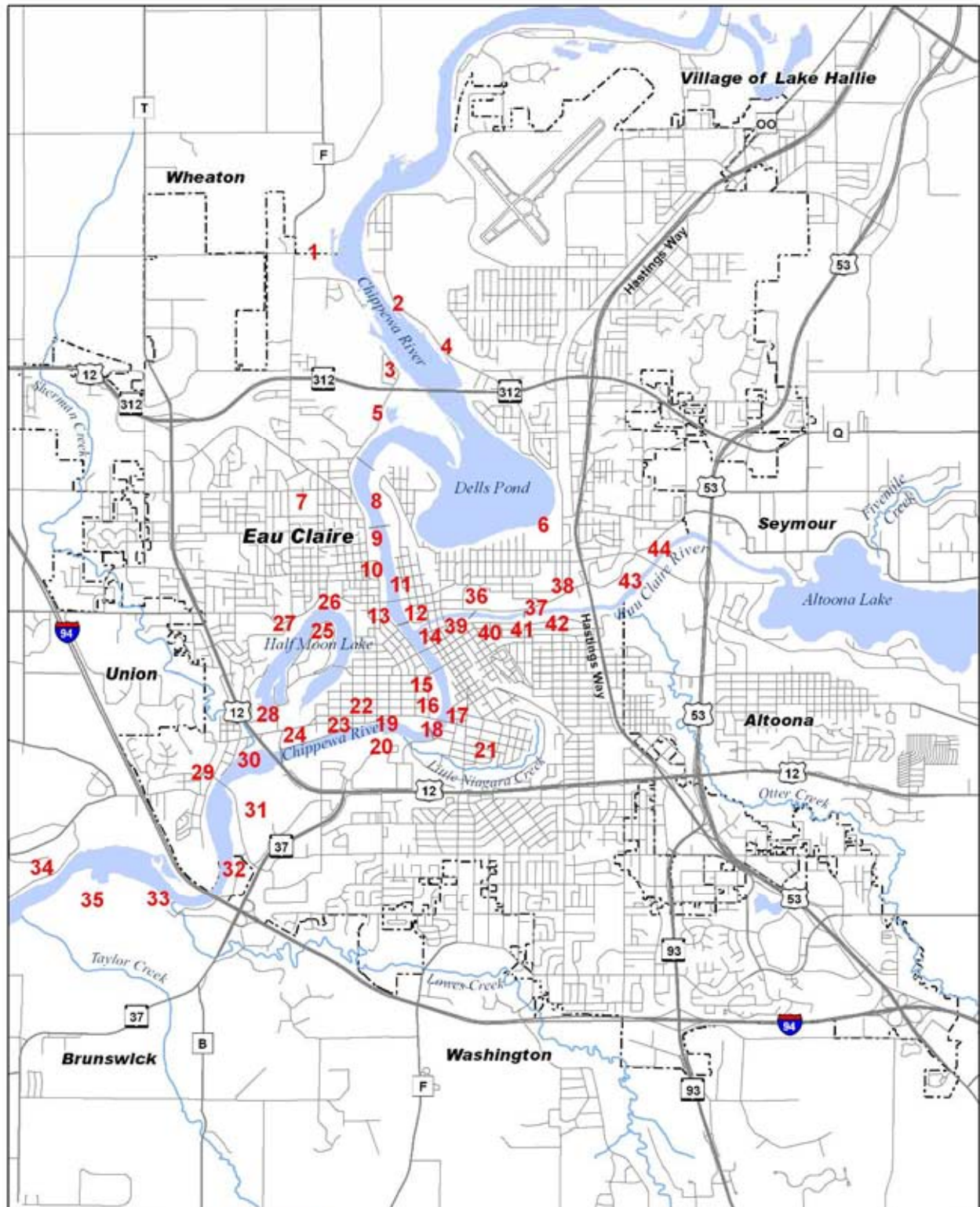
36. The massive Banbury Place multi-use complex; nearby commercial development; opportunity for additional commercial, office or industrial growth
37. The river valley presents a serene and natural landscape but the water is frequently too shallow for navigation; steep, wooded bluffs often obscure views the river; opportunity for additional riverfront park and off-road trail
38. The Chippewa River State Trail

### The Eau Claire River – South Bank

39. Downtown edge including the library, new office, and redevelopment potential.
40. Older housing abutting the bluff
41. Two bridges for walking and bicycling
42. Steep, wooded bluffs with informal hiking trails between Boyd and Archery Parks; the riverfront trail is not continuous

### Eau Claire River – Above Hasting Way

43. Unspoiled dense mixed forests, steep slopes and high bluffs present tremendous opportunities to acquire land for new linear public open space, trails, views and water access. Divided by a railroad corridor. Attractive opposite shore. May include less steep open area. A canoe landing is planned on the opposite shore just up river of Hastings Way. Cooperative action with Altoona may be needed. Sites 43 and 44 may be the greatest opportunities of this planning process.
44. This site has natural characteristics similar to #43. Heavily wooded opposite shore in Altoona. Almost entirely steep, wooded slope.



**EAU CLAIRE WATERWAYS**



**44** Points of Interest

City Limits

**Figure 12**  
**Summary of**  
**Opportunities and Constraints**

0 2,000 4,000 6,000'

A horizontal scale bar with markings at 0, 2,000, 4,000, and 6,000 feet.