

# July Fourth Celebration Committee - Report

Dear Eau Claire City Council Members,

On behalf of the July Fourth Celebration Committee, designated to gather public input and find options for the Eau Claire Fourth of July Fireworks celebration, we are happy to share our recommendations with you.

## **Community Feedback**

Reaching out to the Eau Claire community and City departments involved a lot of time and energy spent by committee members to hear from as many groups as possible, including veterans, business owners, neighborhood residents, City staff, and the community.

An online community-wide survey was launched in late November and made available for approximately two weeks. The survey was advertised and distributed through local media outlets, social media, various community websites, and eNewsletters; a paper version was also available. With over 1100 responses, the answer to whether a traditional fireworks show is supported in Eau Claire was clear; 81% indicated they support a fireworks show. Over 66% said they support the idea of more events during the day to create a bigger community celebration. And 60% said they want the fireworks show itself to be larger. With all of this to consider, the recommendation of the Committee is not only to continue the fireworks show but also for the Council to support other events and celebrations on the Fourth of July. The results from our public input survey are attached for your review.

## **City Department Feedback**

City Departments that coordinate to make the annual fireworks show possible include the Community Services Division, which prepares the parks in advance of the event, coordinates with fireworks vendor, and performs clean-up and teardown afterward, Eau Claire Fire and Rescue, which responds in the event of medical or fire emergency or water rescue in Half Moon Lake or our rivers, and the Eau Claire Police Department which handles traffic, crowd control, and other patrol needs or emergencies. While each of these departments has appeared before the Council and shared their expert perspectives on safety and location, information and recommendations that the Council used to make decisions in previous years, the public likely did not hear these presentations and is left feeling "out of the loop" as to why there is a need to move the fireworks show from a location that had been a long-held tradition. Attached are brief reports from City departments and the fireworks vendor himself; they are compelling. The City should share these documents with the public; they will help our community understand the safety concerns and need to move the fireworks display to a new site.

## **Location**

While the overwhelming support for a return to Carson Park should be noted and considered for future events, returning the fireworks display to Carson Park is not a recommendation that can be made responsibly. Concerns about location safety were initiated by the fireworks technician and shared by City staff. While the City has made some changes to eliminate those concerns and keep the show in

# July Fourth Celebration Committee - Report

Carson Park, they are not enough. A safe fireworks show in Carson Park would mean significantly reducing the size of the show, a move the community does not support (only 10% support.) As such, the public survey, staff, and vendor input led to a clear case to return to the High Bridge as the launch point. The survey found that not only was it the public's preferred choice to be downtown, but the staff and vendor expressed support for the option from a safety, staffing, and enjoyability standpoint.

## **Community Concerns**

PTSD is real and its impact on people's lives should not be underestimated. On its July 4<sup>th</sup> page, the City details how people can get help planning ahead for events that may trigger an episode, what to do if someone needs immediate help, and how to get long-term care. They offer similar types of planning and response recommendations for pets (specifically dogs) who may also be affected by fireworks. These are great resources, and while each person's experience is unique and should be treated by a professional who is familiar with their specific medical diagnosis, we think a more robust educational campaign well in advance of the holiday would do more to help educate the public and in turn, help those who suffer PTSD during the 20-minute firework show put on by the City.

What seems to be of greater distress to residents (and harder to plan for) than the show is the sudden, unexpected use of what are believed to be illegal fireworks in the community surrounding the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday. The Eau Claire Police Department and departments nationwide struggle to respond to these types of complaints; these outbursts are often short-lived, and their locations are hard to pinpoint because of how sound travels.

Each year, Eau Claire Police Department sends out a directive to officers and the communications center on a process for responding to fireworks complaints. Chad Hoyord, Deputy Chief of the Patrol Division, says, "We do this because the volume of fireworks complaints during that time is beyond the scope of trying to respond to every general complaint. It focuses on more specific complaints with a specific address and not the generalized ones like "I saw a firework in the Randall Park Neighborhood." They also have their communications teams push out the city ordinances related to fireworks, and they do interviews with media outlets too. Typically, this begins a week prior to the 4th. We think the message explaining what constitutes an illegal firework should begin more than a week before the holiday.

An educational campaign including information from the Eau Claire City-County Health Department, Veterans Affairs, and Eau Claire Police Department, and shared by the City and other partners may do a lot of good to help educate the public about the impacts that illegal fireworks may have on Veterans and others who suffer from PTSD.

The wider community's desire to have a fireworks show and the need to be mindful of those with medical conditions and neighbors who live near the display site is a hard balance.

## **Recommendations**

In conclusion, we urge the City Council to seriously consider continuing the fireworks display in Eau Claire and continue using the High Bridge as its launch point. Our residents, event partners, and staff

# July Fourth Celebration Committee - Report

have indicated support for it. The community is in support of additional activities that celebrate the holiday, and we encourage the Council to support such efforts.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this incredible event. We look forward to witnessing the positive impact this event could have on our amazing city and hope to see you downtown on the Fourth!

Sincerely,

The July Fourth Celebration Committee

# Eau Claire Fireworks Public Survey

## Where do you live?

- The City of Eau Claire
- Eau Claire County, but not in the city of Eau Claire
- Wisconsin, but not in Eau Claire County
- Minnesota
- Everywhere else

## Do you support having a fireworks show in Eau Claire?

- It is a must have event.
- I support it.
- I do not care.
- It's inconvenient and needs to change
- I hate everything about fireworks

## Would you support any of the following?

- A bigger fireworks show
- Events during the day to compliment the Fourth
- Reducing the fireworks show
- Replacing the fireworks with a different type of celebration
- Cancelling the fireworks
- Rotating a bigger fireworks show around Eau Claire and the neighboring communities

## What is your first choice for a location for the fireworks if held?

(fill in the blank)

## What is your second choice for a location for the fireworks if held?

(fill in the blank)

**There have been concerns about traditional fireworks shows, including environmental and health impacts. Please tell us your order of importance by giving them a numerical rating of 1 being the most important consideration to you and 7 being the least important consideration to you.**

- Impact on people with PTSD
- Impact on pets
- Fallout
- Debris in trees or waterways
- Smoke – breathing
- Smoke – air quality
- Excessive noise

(blank space to rank responses)

# Eau Claire Fireworks Public Survey

**Fireworks had been held in Carson Park for a number of years, but concerns about safety and staffing difficulties by Police and Fire and the Fireworks Launcher have prompted the City to look for other possible sites for the fireworks show. Please tell us your preferred locations for possible future shows by giving them a numerical rating of 1 being your first choice for the show and 5 being your least favorite location.**

- East Hill (2020-2022)
- High Bridge (2023)
- Grand Avenue Bridge (Clearwater Winter Fireworks location)
- Somewhere outside of the downtown area
- A different location in the downtown area

(blank space to rank responses)

Survey dates: November 21, 2023 through December 4, 2023

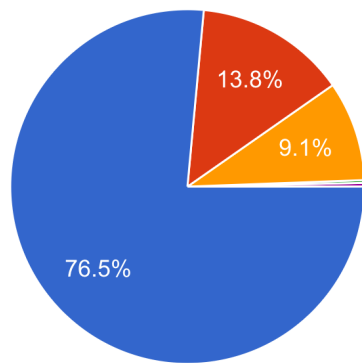
All questions required

Email required

# Community Fireworks Survey Results

## Where do you live?

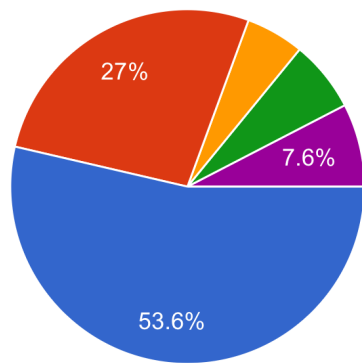
1,186 responses



- The City of Eau Claire
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- Wisconsin, but not in Eau Claire County
- Minnesota
- Everywhere else

## Do you support having a fireworks show in Eau Claire?

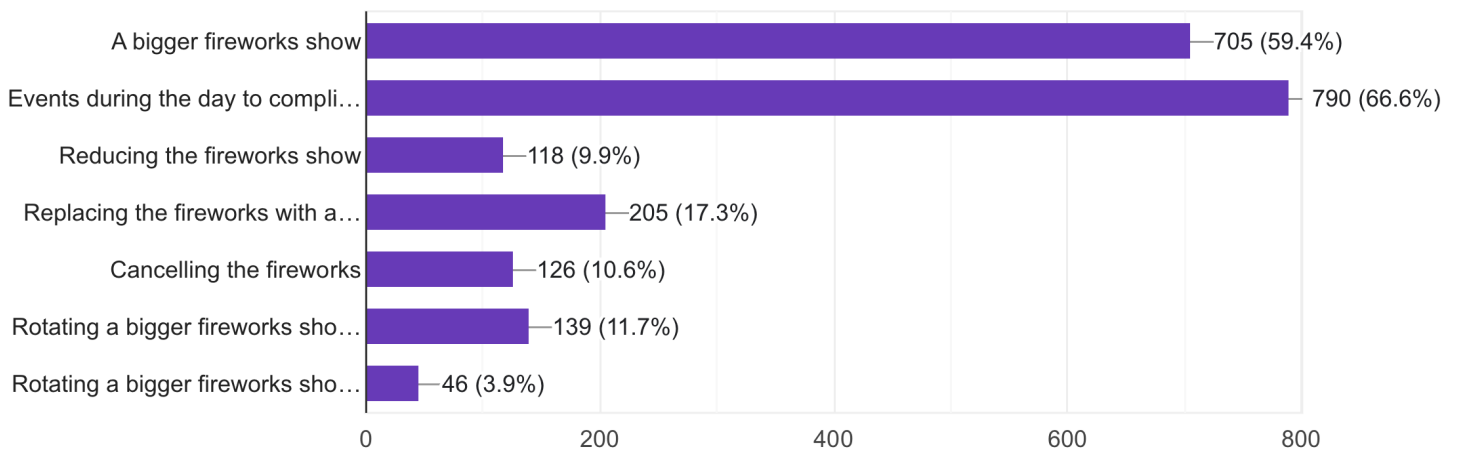
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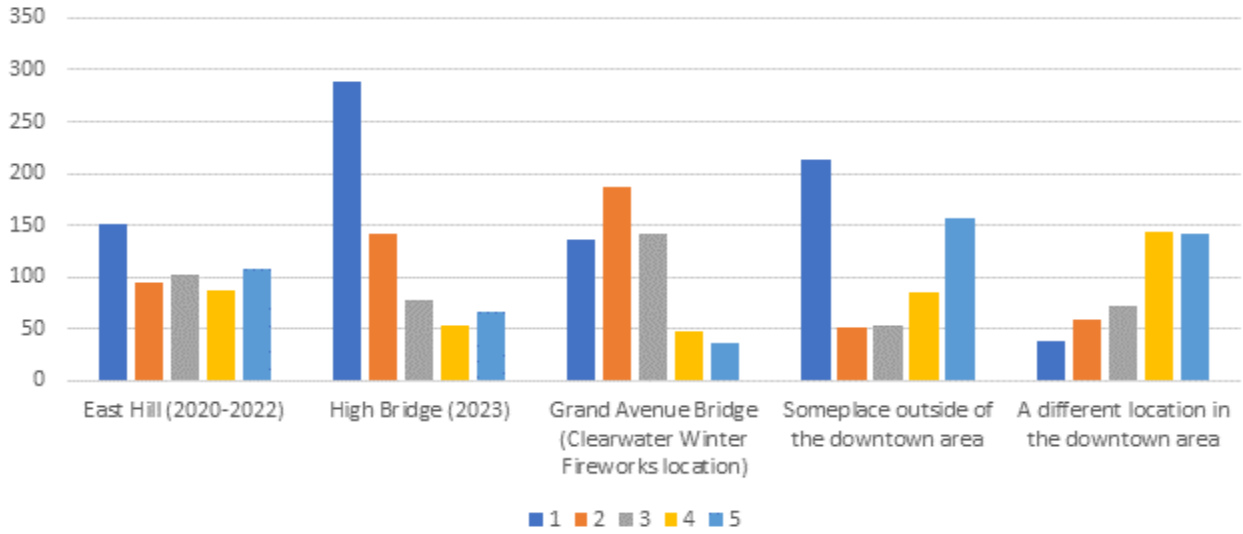
## Would you support any of the following?

1,186 responses



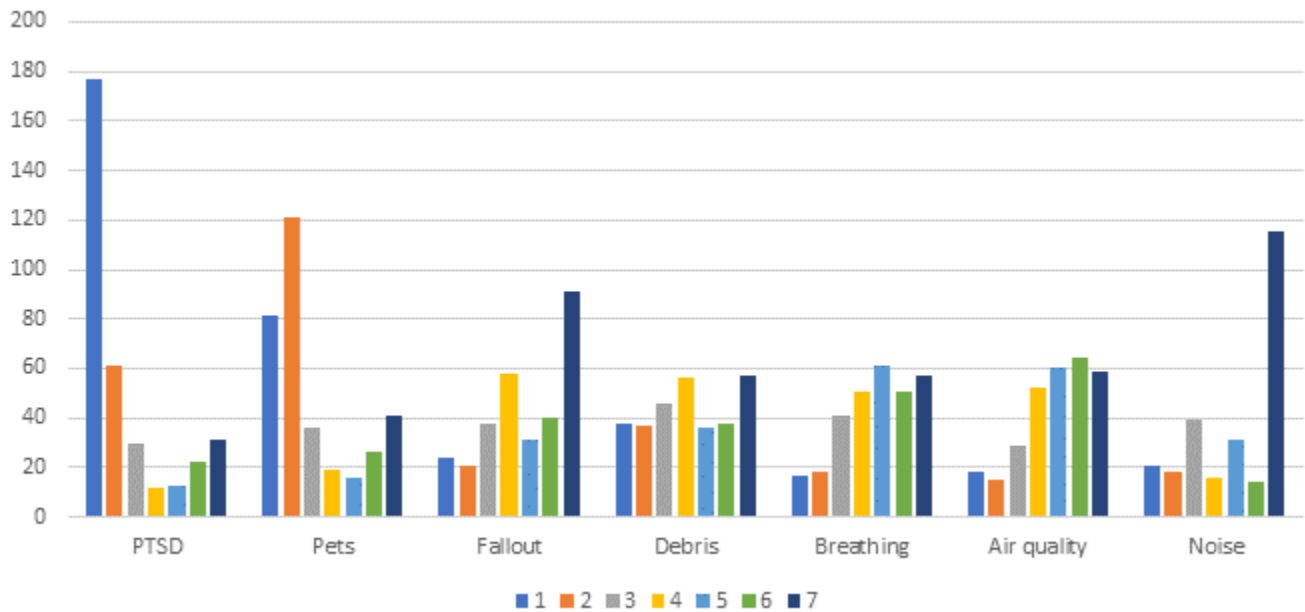
# Community Fireworks Survey Results – contd.

## Preferred Location – Other Than Carson Park



## Ranking of Concerns Associated with Traditional Fireworks Show

1. PTSD
2. Pets
3. Debris
4. Breathing
5. Air Quality
6. Fallout
7. Noise





Phone: (715) 839-5039  
CommunityServices@EauClaireWI.gov

From a Community Services Department perspective, Carson Park presents numerous challenges as the base location for our annual fireworks display. With public safety being our primary focus, it becomes difficult to maintain a clear fall-out zone for the fireworks display due to the layout of the facilities, park amenities, and the natural terrain and tree density. Additionally, with only two access points in and out of the area, there are ongoing concerns about safe and effective traffic flow in and out of the park before, during, and after the event for both spectators and public safety professionals.

Relating to the fireworks show itself, the Community Services Department has had frequent conversations with the fireworks vendor on ways to enhance the show for community members; however, it has been found that Carson Park restricts the vendor's ability to expand the display size in ways other communities can. Finally, because of its location and intended use as a park, the facility demands numerous hours of labor, which includes overtime, to prepare the facility and its surrounding access points for the event, along with the need for a large canvas of the entire park after the event to ensure all debris, such as bottles and cans, are collected, guaranteeing a safe public space for families and their children to enjoy after the event.

While we will always cherish the historical aspect of Carson Park as a staple of the community, we maintain that as the city has grown, the facility has not, hindering our ability to ensure a safe public space for our community members to enjoy such a longstanding tradition. Importantly, we feel that as our community grows, we must remain amenable to growing alongside it. Therefore, beyond the fiscal savings and operational efficiencies that accompany a move similar to that of 2023, we remain committed to working with the community to hold the event in a space that improves public safety, reduces congestion, and provides opportunities for premium viewing while maintaining a balance that is amicable to our department and those we serve.

###





*Eau Claire*  
**POLICE**  
★★★★ Serving Since 1872 ★★★★★

**Matt Rokus**, Chief of Police  
721 Oxford Avenue, Suite 1400  
Eau Claire, WI 54703

To: The July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration Committee

The 4th of July fireworks display in Carson Park has a long history I can personally speak to – having worked the fireworks show myself for 25 years. While it has been a much-enjoyed tradition, the celebration has grown in both the number of events and attendees. This growth is accompanied by notable risks to public safety.

The natural features that make Carson Park beautiful, also create challenges. Away from the stadiums, there is limited lighting. Carson Park is essentially an island with a single point of entry and exit. The heavy traffic flow requires significant public safety staff to manage, taking us away from our other public safety responsibilities. Our Police Officers need to ensure that first responders such as additional officers, firefighters and EMS can get into and out of the park in the event of an emergency. This has to be accomplished simultaneous to thousands of attendees both entering and leaving the park through limited access points.

Even when we're talking about "Midwest Nice" people as we have here in Eau Claire – large groups of people can be difficult to manage and cause harm, even if they don't intend to – as an example, 10 years ago, there was a situation where pedestrians overtook the designated emergency lane, and we were unable to get an ambulance into the park to attend to someone having a cardiac event.

From a policing standpoint, when officers are tied down to directing traffic, it keeps them from being in the crowd. In 2022, there was a fight involving around ten people right after the fireworks show concluded. One of the combatants was threatening another person with a knife. Because of the size of the crowd leaving the park, it was difficult for officers to enter the park and respond to the fight scene. There have been times when, in the process of trying to flee police, a person has jumped into Half Moon Lake, and then the Fire Department had to launch a boat to pull them out.

And not to put too fine of a point on it, but I feel like I should mention the elephant in the room, and that's the potential for something none of us wants to think about, an active threat. Sadly, we have to prepare for the possibility of someone who wants to cause harm to a large congregate of people. We have seen it recently at the Waukesha Christmas Parade, concerts, fairs and festivals. Members of both the Police and Fire Departments have to prepare for this possibility. Having adequate public safety staff readily available to rapidly respond to such a threat is critically important. The geographic qualities of Carson Park, combined with this type of unique event, make this difficult.

Let me reassure you, though, that we understand there's a lot of interest in holding the fireworks in Carson Park, and if the Council decides to return the fireworks show to Carson, we will do our very best to make that work, as we always have, in order to protect the community we have sworn an oath to serve.

Sincerely,

Matt Rokus  
Eau Claire Chief of Police

Chad Hoyord  
Deputy Chief

Derek Thomas  
Deputy Chief

Kelly Thompson  
Administration

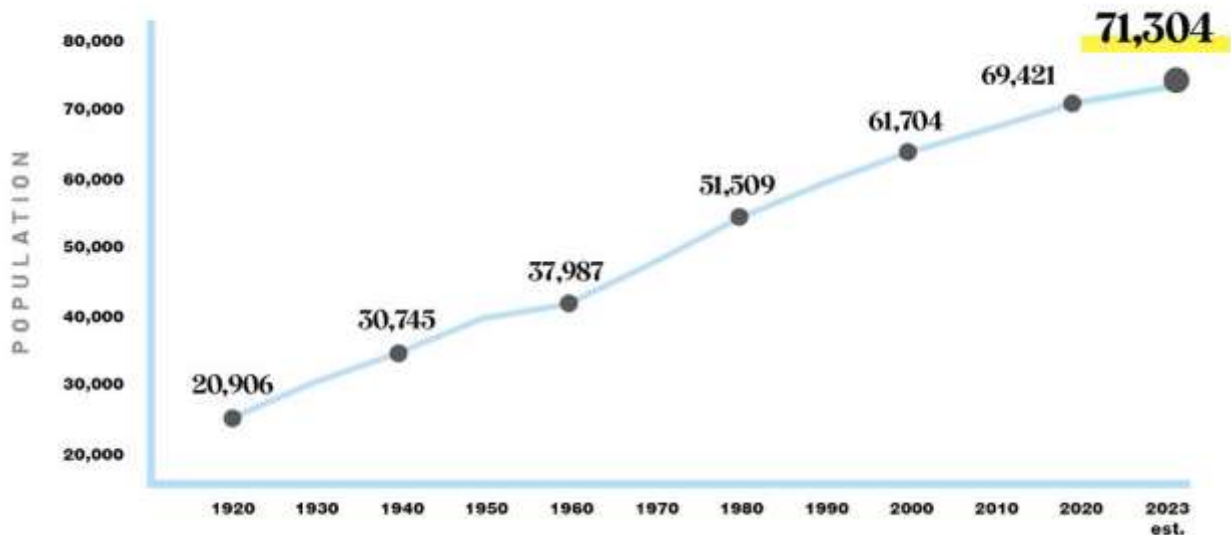
Greg Rosno  
Communications Center



In the past, Carson Park was an ideal place to host the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fire works display but much has changed over the years which necessitated the change in venue.

### Population growth.

The City of Eau Claire is growing. While historically Carson Park may have been a good place to host the fireworks, the attendance of people coming to the park has also increased. “Eau Claire’s latest estimated growth amounts to a 2.7% increase in population over the past three years, making it the second fastest-growing large city in the state, behind only Madison, which grew an estimated 4.4% between 2020 and 2023” (Giffey, 2023). What this data does not show is the probable increased attendance from people from around the area, such as Altoona, Chippewa Falls, etc.. who also come to the park to see the show.



Data Source; VolumeOne 10/31/2023

### Limited Space.

With increased attendance in the park, it also presents challenges of where to put people in relation to the fall out area or hazard area. The Fire Dept. looks at the hazard potential and takes the input from the

pyrotechnic professionals to determine what the minimum safe distances are for the attendees of the show. For example, according to NFPA 1123, one 8” mortar shell has a **minimum** safe distance of 1120’.

According to NFPA 1123 (2012) **Minimum Site Size Requirements**. “The site for the outdoor land or water display shall have a radius at least as great as specified for those items in the display with the greatest required radius. For aerial shells, the exhibition or display shall be arranged so that the fireworks are to be fired are at least 70 feet for every 1-inch diameter of aerial projectile with a minimum distance of 100 feet from the nearest building, nearest public roadway, and nearest point of location of any persons viewing the exhibition or display.

- The distance between the discharge site and bulk storage areas of materials that have a flammability, explosive, or toxic hazard shall be twice that required by the minimum site size requirements.
- No spectators or spectator parking areas shall be located within the display site.
- The area selected for the discharge of aerial shells shall be located so that the trajectory of the shells shall not come **within 25 ft** (7.6 m) of any overhead object.

The display area includes the discharge site, the fallout area, and the required separation distance from the mortars to spectator viewing areas. The display area does not include spectator viewing areas or vehicle parking areas.

**Table 5.1.3.1 “Distance from Mortars to Spectators”:**

Mortar Size:	3”	4”	5”	6”	7”	8”	10”	12”
Minimum Secured Diameter of Site:	420’	560’	700’	840’	980’	1120’	1400’	1680’

If we look at the grid I have attached below for the 2011 Fireworks show at the Park, you can see that one 8” mortar shell, which is commonly used today as part of the finally and was used during the Festival Foods sponsored show in 2011, it would take out the majority of the spectator space. (I used the total football field, being 360’ long, to measure an estimate.)



### **Limited Means of Egress**

The Park is essentially an island on an Oxbow lake with only two means of entry onto and off of the island. This creates a lot of challenges for emergency services to get apparatus such as firetrucks, ambulances, and police cars onto and out of the Park during special events. The Fireworks show brings in a lot of spectators and puts them essentially into a confined space with a high potential of something going wrong. After all, we are dealing with explosives that tend to not always work as intended and these shows have gotten a lot bigger over the years.

With a high volume of people, there is an increased probability of someone having a medical emergency inside the park. The fire department has encountered medical emergencies in the past during the fireworks show where access to the patient and transport to the hospital was delayed due to the amount of people and limited means of egress. Chief Rokus mentioned these issues before and is correct that from an emergency preparedness and response standpoint, Carson Park would be a choke point if a mass casualty occurred from an errant mortar shell or a bad actor.

Having grown up here and watching the show as a kid at Carson Park, it feels a bit strange to not have it there anymore, but it has outgrown the Park and needs to move to a safer location.

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January 2, 2024

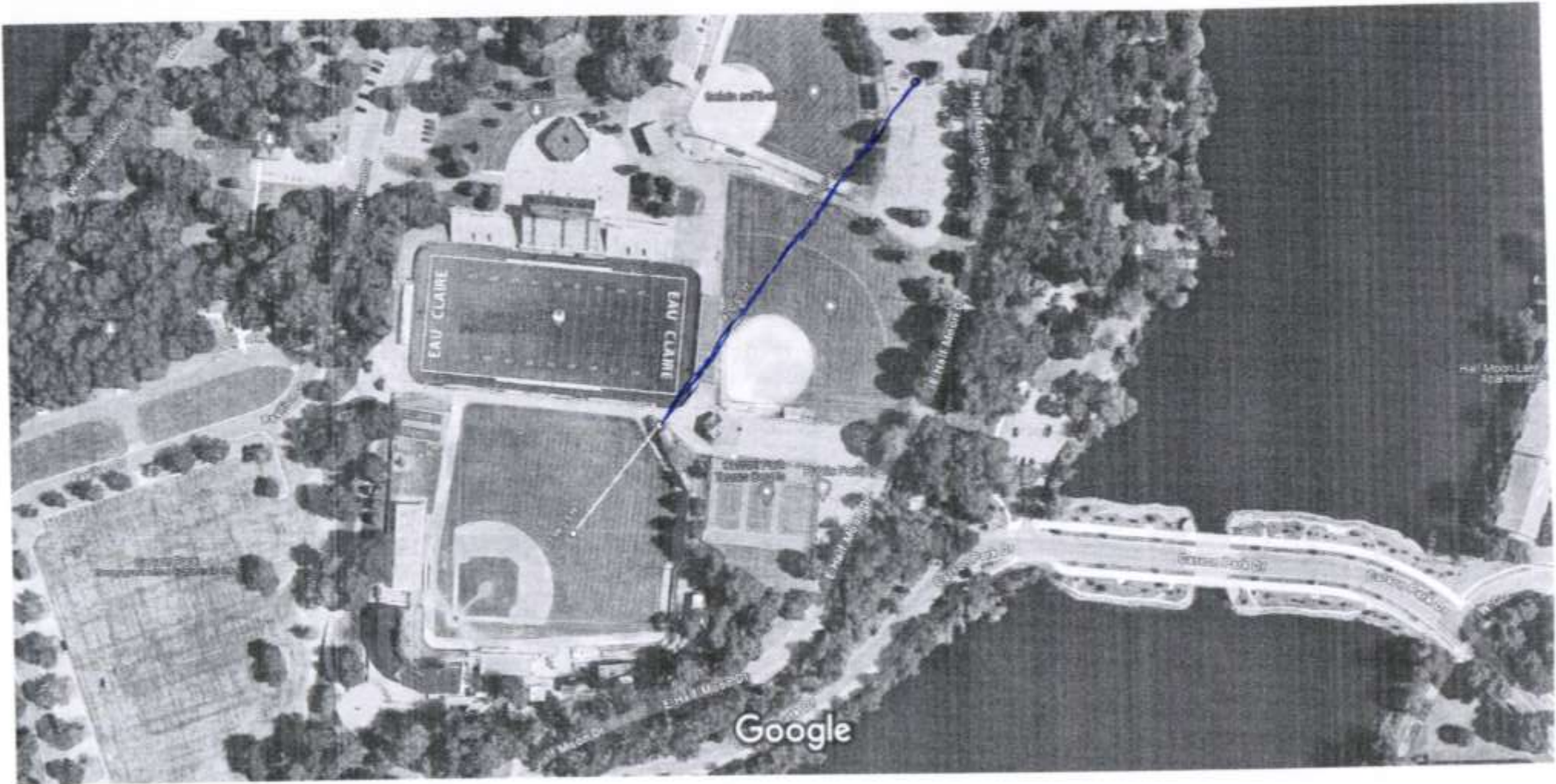
I have attached an aerial photo of where we shot the fireworks and the baseball stadium. The dark line is the distance a 6" shell would travel horizontally in the event a rack blew apart, and a shell was shot from a mortar tube as it lay on the ground. The white line after the dark line is the distance the hot stars (the effects you see in the sky would travel). This distance clearly is in an area where spectators (aka families and children) like to sit and view the fireworks.

Keep in mind this would be the worst-case scenario. In my 25 years of shooting fireworks, this has never happened at one of my shows, but I have seen this happen at a show in Wisconsin, where a shell ended up traveling almost horizontally and went through a barn wall 400' away and then exploded. Luckily no one was hurt because the shell exploded inside the building. These shells travel at 100' per second. There would be no warning; it would just happen.

Now, this could potentially happen at any shooting location, but what concerns me most is the fact that several City departments have expressed concerns that a mass casualty event at Carson Park (fireworks or otherwise) would be difficult to respond to. Now that they have made this admission publically, I feel that the City and any display operator would be acting negligent and open themselves up to liability if they choose to continue shooting fireworks at Carson Park and something (however unlikely) was to happen.

Ken Schroeder  
ACE Pyro LLC  
WI Firework Project Manager  
715-829-0374  
[Ken@acepyro.com](mailto:Ken@acepyro.com)

Google Maps



Imagery ©2024 Google, Imagery ©2024 Airbus, CNES / Airbus, Maxar Technologies, USDA/FPAC/GEO, Map data ©2024 100 ft

Measure distance

Total distance: 799.25 ft (243.61 m)



**April 26, 2023**

## **Pedestrian High Bridge**

This is by far the most desirable location from as Fireworks display operation point of view for the following reasons:

Elevated launch site over water. This provides better viewing from multiple locations up and downstream from the following city owned parks North riverfront park, Forest St Park, Kessler Park, and Cannery district park. It would also allow viewing from the four bridges immediately downstream from the High Bridge. The two parking ramps would also be good viewing sites as well as several businesses that are located along the riverfront as well as several new high-rise apartment buildings. This site is also desirable for fire safety since 75% of the debris fallout area would be over water. I have attached an article regarding the WI DNR views of fireworks debris in WI waterways. We would also be able to safely shoot the same size shells that we shoot at Carson Park. These shells from 2.5" to 8" in diameter

Security is the number 1 priority of a fireworks display operator's job. In the past at Carson Park, we have struggled from the start of day all the way up to the end of the day dealing with spectators who either want to get close to the fireworks or inadvertently wander into our designated safety zone. The ability to block off both ends of the bridge to prohibit unauthorized people from entering our shoot site is essential for a safe and enjoyable show.

The High Bridge has the least number of buildings nearby. The east side of the river has the Cascades Paper Company warehouse made of concrete and the City shops/transit garage (brick building) these building do not fall within are safety zone but even if they did the chances of people being in them on the fourth of July is less likely than residential or other commercial buildings. The west side of the river consists of the northern half of the Cannery District Park and seven residential dwellings. Once again, these houses do not fall within are required safety distances.

As far as road closures are concerned, we don't anticipate any road closure necessary from a fireworks standpoint. The city may want to consider closing a portion of 1st St. between Bolles St and Cedar St. for emergency access.

I believe the City of Eau Claire needs to look at the fireworks more like the City of La Crosse does. La Crosse shoots the fireworks from the top of Granddad's bluff overlooking the city. This



is a more distant view approach to viewing fireworks versus being right on top of them as in the past at Carson Park.

I think the City of Eau Claire would be better served by shooting the fireworks display from the High Bridge where it can be viewed by more of the city's residents in more of the city's parks from a location that the city has deemed as a historic structure that needed to be saved.

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## **DNR: Chemicals in fireworks decline rapidly in water**

Duke Behnke

Appleton Post-Crescent – July 8, 2017

Neenah is one of the cities that annually shoots off fireworks over the Fox River.

Question: Why does the DNR look the other way when cities like Neenah, Menasha and Green Bay shoot off fireworks over the water on the Fourth of July? Isn't there a law against polluting waterways? The debris is falling into our drinking water.

Answer: The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources sent me a one-page document, dated July 5, concerning its stand on launching fireworks over water.

The document said "studies have shown chemicals in fireworks decline fairly rapidly in surface waters."

The DNR recommends the use of fireworks that contain no or low perchlorate, which the Environmental Protection Agency has identified as a health concern in drinking water.

It also recommends a plan to minimize and remove debris from the water, including a cleanup immediately after a fireworks show and a more thorough cleanup the following day to comply with the state statute on littering.

Mike Kading, Neenah's parks and recreation director, said any noticeable debris that falls on land is picked up or swept up by park employees or by the city's fireworks contractor.

The water isn't combed for debris.

"Anything in the water is negligible," Kading said. "It's just fragments of paper. It biodegrades really quickly."

The DNR said fireworks have no known effects on fish or groundwater and no known long-term effects on human health.

"Sensitive populations should take the same precautions as they would for fireworks that are set off over land to avoid short-term air-quality impacts," the DNR said.

No DNR permits are required for setting off fireworks, though a permit might be needed to anchor the firing platform or to stage the platform barges.

"Given lack of potential impacts and short duration of increase in pollutants, wastewater permits are not needed," the agency said.

###