

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eau Claire Downtown Action Agenda 2001

The ***Eau Claire Downtown Action Agenda 2001*** was defined by HyettPalma, Inc., and is based on:

- Discussions held with many members of both the private and public sectors of Eau Claire;
- Data collected by the City's staff;
- The results of a retail, office, and housing market analysis completed for Downtown; and
- The professional and technical expertise of HyettPalma, Inc.

A summary of the ***Eau Claire Downtown Action Agenda 2001*** appears below.

■ **Downtown Eau Claire Today**

Two surveys were conducted as a part of this project to gauge the health of Downtown Eau Claire as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners and managers of businesses located in the project area and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary trade area. A summary of the survey responses follows.

Frequency of Trips -- Residents of Downtown's primary trade area reported coming to Downtown with great frequency -- almost half (47%) said they come Downtown between 1 and 7 times a week.

Purpose of Downtown Trips -- When asked why they currently come to Downtown Eau Claire, the number one reason cited by residents was "visiting the library" -- with 14% giving this response. The next two responses were cited with similar frequency. These were:

- Post office (13%); and
- Eating in restaurants (12%).

Therefore, one of these three purposes -- library, post office, and restaurants -- was cited by almost two-fifths (39%) of residents surveyed.

Shopping Preferences -- Those surveyed were asked where they do most of their family shopping at this time, other than grocery shopping. Not surprisingly, 50% of residents said they do most of their shopping at Oakwood Mall.

When asked the reason for choosing a particular shopping area, residents equally stressed the importance of convenience (cited by 37% of those surveyed) and of the variety/selection offered (cited by 36%).

Downtown Characteristics -- Residents and business owners surveyed were asked to rate a list of 19 Downtown characteristics as being "good," "fair," or "poor" at this time.

The characteristics rated "good" by a majority of both residents and business owners were:

- Helpfulness of salespeople (78% residents, 68% business owners);
- Feeling of safety (70% residents, 58% business owners); and
- Knowledge of salespeople (58% residents, 54% business owners).

Downtown Improvements -- Trade area residents and Downtown business owners were asked to rate a list of possible Downtown improvements as being "very important," "somewhat important," or "not important" at this time. Five of those improvements were rated "very important" by a majority of both residents and business owners. These were:

- Increase the variety of retail goods (74% residents, 64% business owners);
- Improve the availability of parking (70% residents, 73% business owners);
- Recruit additional retail businesses (69% residents, 68% business owners);
- Improve the convenience of parking (69% residents, 73% business owners); and
- Increase the variety of restaurants (52% residents, 55% business owners).

■ **Downtown Eau Claire Tomorrow**

A series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings were held to define the community's preferred vision of Downtown Eau Claire -- as it would ideally exist in the year 2007. Those participating in the sessions said that, by the year 2007, Downtown Eau Claire would be filled with lots of people, be attractive in winter and summer, boast historic buildings and interesting architecture, be filled with a variety of things to do -- such as dining, arts, specialty stores, and family-oriented destinations -- and it would be "alive after five."

By 2007, Downtown Eau Claire would be known far and wide as having the following image.

***A Downtown that is very alive, flourishing,
and bustling with lots of activity.***

***A Downtown of beautiful rivers and beautiful buildings
that reflects our history and our future --
“from sawdust to silicon.”***

***A Downtown with great restaurants, shops, and entertainment
that is a model for other communities to emulate
and a great destination for your next vacation.***

***A strong arts and cultural center that draws lots of people,
that draws from events held elsewhere, and
that is a hub between Minneapolis and Madison.***

***A fun, friendly, clean, and safe
family destination.***

***A Downtown of clean water, clean air,
and extensive bike trails that has its own identity.***

***A community that believes in and supports itself and
where there is action behind the Downtown dreams.***

Eau Claire residents support their Downtown!

■ **Downtown Retail Market Opportunities**

Taking steps to further enhance Downtown Eau Claire, and barring a significant decline in the national or regional retail economy, it is conservatively anticipated that Downtown may have the potential to support the development of between approximately 32,000 and 56,000 net square feet of additional retail space by the year 2007 -- which could include expansions or sales increases by existing Downtown Eau Claire retail businesses and/or the construction of new retail space.

■ **Downtown Office Market Opportunities**

It is estimated that approximately 100,000 to 120,000 square feet of additional office space could potentially be supported in Downtown Eau Claire between now and the year 2007. This represents an increase in demand based on both the expected continued enhancement of the area and an anticipated small increase in area households during the same time period.

■ **Downtown Housing Market Opportunities**

Every effort should be made, consistent with the implementation of the overall Downtown enhancement program, to introduce more quality, market-rate housing into Downtown Eau Claire. And, in addition, every effort should be made to maintain the highest level of quality housing in the valuable neighborhoods surrounding and in proximity to Downtown Eau Claire.

Specific housing initiatives which should be encouraged in Downtown Eau Claire include:

- The introduction of additional loft apartments in the upper floors of existing commercial buildings throughout Downtown;
- The development of mixed-use buildings in the Historic Waterfront, North Barstow, and Medical Center Districts, with retail and office uses on the first and lower floors and with housing in the upper floors;
- The development of new mixed-use buildings along the eastern bank of the Chippewa River in the Historic Waterfront District, with restaurants on the first floors and housing in the upper floors -- with both uses having maximum views of the river;
- The adaptive use of appropriate existing buildings -- such as the Huebsch Building and the "old" high school which is now used as the Eau Claire Area School District Administration building -- to include housing, or housing and a mixture of other uses identified as appropriate for each specific Downtown district; and
- The preservation of valuable and historic single-family housing in all sections of Downtown.

Rather than placing arbitrary or artificial limits on the number of housing units appropriate for Downtown Eau Claire, it is suggested that the absorption of units in the marketplace be used as the indicator of demand. And, that every effort be made to develop the greatest number of market-rate units possible in and near Downtown when market conditions allow.

■ **Overview of Downtown**

Today, Eau Claire boasts a large and varied Downtown with many, many assets which can be leveraged to further enhance Downtown and its appeal to the buying public. These include, but are not limited to, the following.

- The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers -- and their confluence -- are among Downtown's first and foremost assets. The rivers are the

single common element that connects all portions of Downtown. And, the more Downtown is connected to the rivers, the more unique and compelling Downtown will become. Therefore, the rivers must be used as a critical theme upon which both Downtown economic development and the City's overall quality-of-life can be leveraged.

- Downtown and Eau Claire have a rich history, from Old Abe to Hank Aaron and beyond, which must be reflected through Downtown's enhancement.
- Downtown Eau Claire is already a center for the arts. Here can be found the State Theater, the Eau Claire Regional Arts Center and Council, the Chippewa Valley Theater Guild, the Chippewa Valley Symphony, the Eau Claire Children's Theater, and the L.E. Phillips Memorial Library with its popular programs for all ages.
- Downtown is a government center -- with City, County, State, and Federal offices located there. And, as a result, Downtown has a thriving array of professional offices, attracting those businesses that tend to cluster around -- and do business with -- government offices and agencies.
- The Holiday Inn and Convention Center are located in Downtown, bringing both business and leisure travelers to the heart of the City.
- The farmers market is located in Downtown and the emerging Phoenix Park project is underway -- both of which will act as Downtown anchors.
- Downtown is home to a major and highly respected institution that draws from a very large area -- the Luther Midelfort Mayo Health System.
- Downtown has experienced a high degree of private sector investment over the years, which includes healthy specialty retail, food, service, and office establishments, the Banbury Place adaptive use project, River Plaza, and River Edge.
- Downtown is fortunate to have the commitment of City Council -- whose members have declared Downtown's enhancement to be a high priority. Without this commitment, the enhancement of any Downtown would be extremely difficult.
- Downtown's enhancement is receiving attention from active Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as well as private, non-profit organizations.

- Downtown is surrounded by neighborhoods and these neighborhoods are represented by active civic associations.

This is indeed an impressive list of assets. However, Downtown Eau Claire is not without needs and issues. And, the community is not without concerns for Downtown's future. The major needs, issues, and concerns facing Downtown Eau Claire include the following.

- Community members have voiced concern over the fact that many past plans have been conceived for Downtown and that these have resulted in what some call "superficial improvements." While this might be true, it should be realized that -- in this day and age -- this situation is typically found in a city the size of Eau Claire.
- The Highway 53/Hastings corridor is a burgeoning commercial area that is experiencing rapid business growth and development. This, some feel, is putting Downtown further and further behind the curve with every passing day -- and, therefore, makes it all the more critical to speed up the Downtown enhancement effort.
- The community's citizens feel it is very important that Downtown be further enhanced -- in a specific way. They want the enhancement effort to result in an increase in the number of Downtown retail businesses, restaurants, and destinations; an improvement in Downtown's appearance; incorporation of the rivers into Downtown's operations and image; and greater communication and coordination among all entities involved in Downtown's enhancement.
- The community greatly wants to see "more action" -- implementation of quality, immediate, and long-lasting actions that result in the enhancement of Downtown's economy and the City's quality-of-life.

The Action Agenda will give Eau Claire the tools necessary to:

- Improve Downtown's appearance;
- Improve communication and coordination among those involved;
- Retain and recruit businesses to Downtown; and
- Strengthen Downtown's economy.

However, it will be difficult to successfully implement the Action Agenda -- in a

way that yields the desired results -- unless the community embraces the following challenges.

- Local individuals must step forward and make a commitment to implementing the Action Agenda. No person or entity outside of the community can fill this role.
- Private sector leadership, as well as public sector commitment, are both critical to the success of the Downtown enhancement effort.
- All those involved must understand that this is a long-term project -- which will require a long-term effort and commitment.
- The private and public sectors must unite -- among themselves and with each other -- and adhere to the gameplan for the long haul.
- The time for planning, discussing, rehashing -- as well as the time for divisiveness, distrust, and discord -- must come to an end. And, an era of unity and action must begin.

■ ***Course of Action***

The following ***Course of Action*** should be implemented, by both the private and public sectors, to attain the community's vision for Downtown Eau Claire and to capture the economic opportunities identified in the Downtown market analysis.

Downtown Eau Claire should be enhanced to create and reinforce the four districts shown on the following map. The recommended four Downtown districts are the:

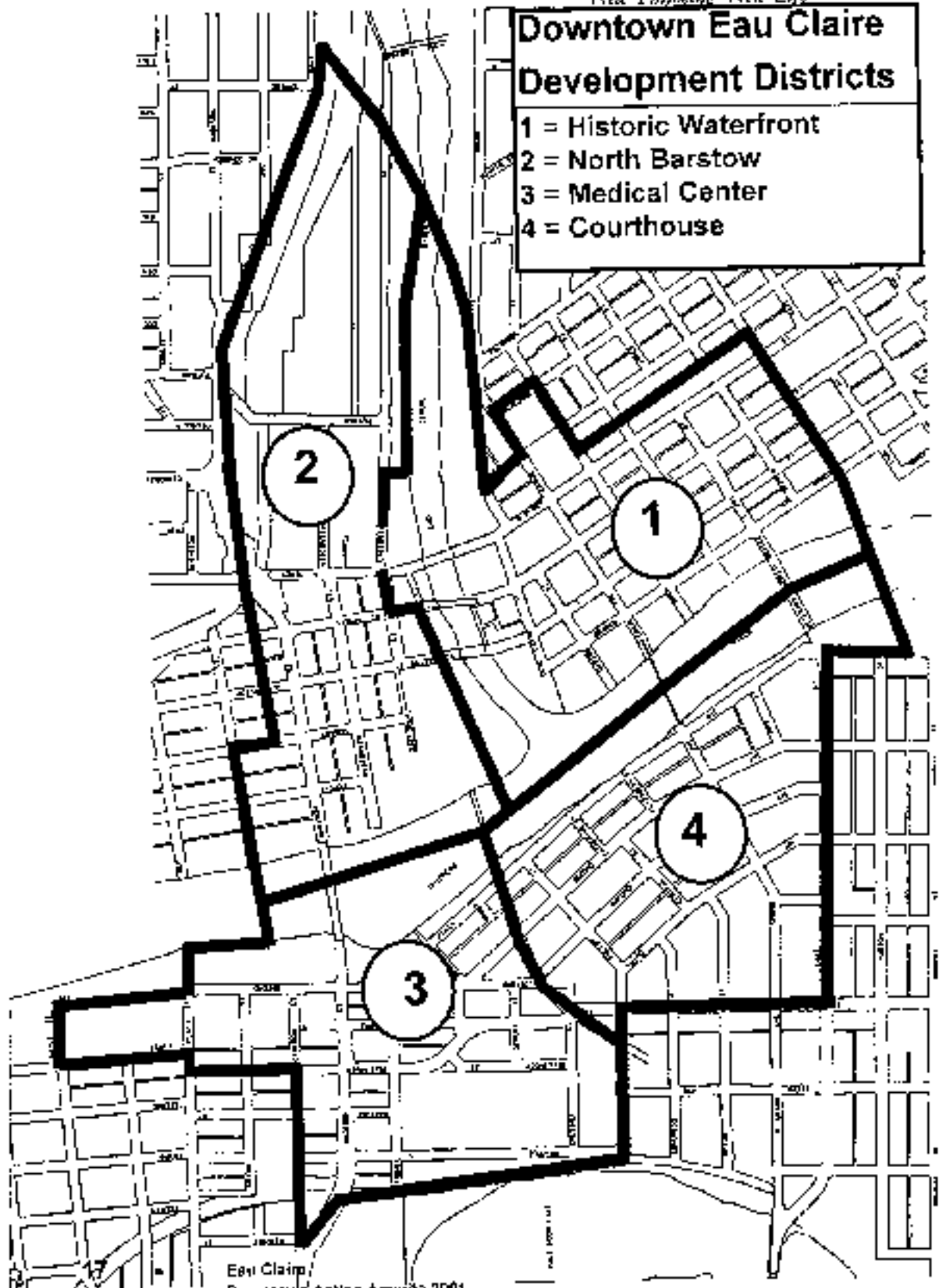
- Historic Waterfront District;
- North Barstow District;
- Medical Center District; and
- Courthouse District.

The following Course of Action includes:

- A discussion of specific actions that should be implemented in each of the four districts; and
- A discussion of actions that should be implemented in Downtown, as a whole.

**Downtown Eau Claire
Development Districts**

- 1 = Historic Waterfront
- 2 = North Barstow
- 3 = Medical Center
- 4 = Courthouse



Eau Claire
Downtown Action Agenda 2001



National League
of Cities

HjettPalma

ACTIONS FOR EACH DISTRICT

The following actions should be implemented in each of the four districts discussed below.

■ **Historic Waterfront District**

The Historic Waterfront District is a very special part of Downtown Eau Claire since it is:

- The traditional heart of Downtown;
- Where Downtown's arts, entertainment, and specialty businesses are clustered;
- Where preservation of Downtown's older architecture is very important -- since that architecture creates a quaint atmosphere and ambience within Downtown; and
- The portion of Downtown that is most pedestrian-oriented.

Economic Orientations

The Historic Waterfront District should be further enhanced to have the following economic orientations.

- South Barstow should be enhanced as the prime Downtown location for art, entertainment, specialty retail, and food establishments. These uses should be located in the first floors of buildings along South Barstow. Housing and offices should be located in the upper stories of these structures. And, the South Barstow spine is also an appropriate location for lodging facilities -- both in free-standing buildings and in upper floors.
- Graham should be enhanced to include the maximum amount of uses that can benefit from views of the water. This should primarily include housing in the upper floors of existing and infill structures and restaurants with river views in first floor spaces. Creating a row of restaurants along the water will allow a "riverwalk" -- which is desired by the community -- to be established, where pedestrians stroll and diners sit at outdoor cafes.
- South Farwell is now, and should continue to be, the location for offices and institutions. And, as Downtown's economy is further enhanced, it is anticipated that South Dewey will experience redevelopment activity, making it a corridor for office and institutional uses as well.

Actions

The following actions should be implemented to further enhance the Historic Waterfront District.

- **Parking**

The issue of Downtown parking must be addressed with the following actions.

- **Existing Civic Center Parking Ramp**

This facility is in a very convenient and central location, yet it is underutilized. To rectify this situation the following actions should be taken.

- An audit of the ramp should be conducted by ramp users.
- Improvements to the ramp that should be considered include installing brighter lighting, making the entrance more inviting, painting the interior to make it feel larger, beautifying the exterior, replacing the first floor tables and benches, and repairing the fountain so that it is in working condition (rather than removing the fountain).
- User-friendly signs should be erected announcing that the ramp is “open to the public.”
- Consideration should be given to offering free two-hour parking in the ramp -- rather than the current one-hour of free parking.

- **On-Street Parking**

The following steps should be taken to maximize the availability of on-street parking.

- The number of on-street parking spaces throughout the Historic Waterfront District should be maximized.
- The possibility of creating shallow, angled parking -- such as parking at an angle less than 45° -- on one side of South Barstow should be analyzed by a traffic engineer.
- To enforce parking time limits, the City should consider using a tag recordation and escalating fine system to penalize repeat offenders within the Historic Waterfront District.

- **Future Ramp**

To increase parking supply, consideration should be given to constructing a parking ramp -- in the near future -- on the current site of the Transit Center surface parking lot.

- **Waterfront Parking**

No additional surface level parking lots should be constructed along the waterfront.

- **Parking Brochure**

An attractive brochure should be produced, which displays the location of all Downtown parking facilities -- both on- and off-street -- available for use by customers and employees.

- **Public Improvements**

The following public improvements should be made within the Historic Waterfront District.

- **South Barstow**

The streetscape along South Barstow should be reconstructed from building line to building line, including:

- A new roadway;
- New walks with decorative pavers;
- Street lights that are decorative, “historic,” and pedestrian in scale;
- Landscaping; and
- On-street parking.

Serious consideration should be given to removing the maximum number of “bump-outs” and introducing the maximum number of additional on-street parking spaces, with angled parking, if deemed feasible.

- **Town Square**

A Town Square should be created next to City Hall, along Eau Claire Street and running from South Farwell to South Dewey Streets. The Town Square should include a clock, a fountain, and open space for community gatherings.

- **Eau Claire Street Promenade**

A small waterfront plaza has been created at what would be the western foot of Eau Claire Street, near the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. To connect this plaza to the Town Square, and to further connect this district to the waterfront, a promenade effect should be created along Eau Claire from Graham Avenue to South Farwell Street through the use of landscaping.

- ***Destinations***

Two Downtown destinations that should receive attention are shown below.

- ***YMCA***

It is understood that the YMCA is in need of additional space. Since it is a major activity generator and community gathering spot, the YMCA should be encouraged to expand in its current location, if at all possible. If doing so is not feasible, then the YMCA should be encouraged to locate in another structure within Downtown.

- ***Children's Museum***

A group has been formed to create a children's museum in Eau Claire. Every consideration should be given to locating the facility within Eau Claire's Historic Waterfront District.

- ***Housing Development***

The development of additional upper story housing units throughout the Historic Waterfront District is extremely important in order to create a more vibrant commercial district with people living, working and patronizing the core of Downtown Eau Claire 24-hours per day, 7-days per week, 365-days per year.

- ***Loft Matching Grant Program***

In order to induce developers to place more housing in the upper floors of existing buildings in Downtown Eau Claire, consideration should be given to the creation of a Downtown Loft Matching Grant Program.

- ***Parking to Accommodate New Housing Occupants***

Developers of any new housing structures in Downtown should be required to accommodate the parking needs of residents on-site. For existing Downtown buildings that are rehabbed for use as housing -- and for new structures that cannot possibly accommodate parking needs on-site -- consideration should be given to creating a resident parking permit system that would allow residents to use off-street parking spaces -- around the clock.

- ***Building Improvements***

The following steps should be taken to encourage building owners to:

- Retain and improve their older buildings;
 - Ensure that infill buildings are designed to complement and blend with the old; and
 - Pay attention to the exterior improvements and design of both old and new structures.

- ***Incentives***

Currently a facade loan program is in place and available in Downtown. To make this program more appealing -- so that it is used more frequently -- consideration should be given to:

- Increasing the maximum loan amount available to between \$7,500 and \$10,000 per facade; and
- Retaining a qualified preservation architect to offer design assistance to those interested in participating in the facade loan program.

- ***Design Guidelines***

To make the City's existing design guidelines even more valuable as guides for the appropriate enhancement of Downtown's buildings, they should be augmented with illustrations showing the "do's and don'ts" of building rehab.

- ***Business Signs***

The use of perpendicular, building mounted business signs should be allowed in the Historic Waterfront District.

- ***Awnings***

The use of canvas awnings should be encouraged on buildings within the Historic Waterfront District.

- ***Graffiti***

Graffiti should be removed within 24-hours of its appearance.

- ***Public Safety***

To increase the feeling and perception of public safety, additional foot patrols should be assigned to the Historic Waterfront District.

- ***Business Retention and Recruitment on South Barstow***

Business retention/recruitment efforts on South Barstow should involve the steps specified in the section of the Action Agenda titled "Actions for All Districts."

- ***Redevelopment Sites***

The RDA is planning to complete a site specific redevelopment plan to address all properties acquired by the RDA. This is an excellent initiative that should be implemented as quickly as possible. In doing so, the recommendations contained in this document regarding "redevelopment sites" should be considered.

The following sites are appropriate for redevelopment in the Historic Waterfront

District.

- ***Farmers Store Plaza and Adjacent (West) Surface Parking Lot***

The Farmers Store Plaza building and the surface parking lot located on the west side of this building are appropriate for redevelopment. Uses which would be appropriate for this site include:

- Retail and entertainment uses on lower floors;
- Restaurants on lower and upper floors;
- Offices on lower and upper floors;
- Housing on upper floors; and/or
- A mixture of these uses in a building complex.

- ***Chippewa River Frontage***

The property along the Chippewa River, from Eau Claire Street to Lake Street, is appropriate for redevelopment. Development occurring here should:

- Be in the form of mixed-use buildings that take advantage of river views;
- Be filled with housing on the upper floors and restaurants on the first floors;
- Retain a greenbelt along the river that is open for public access;
- Not allow any visible parking -- instead, parking should be constructed on the lower floors of buildings or in sub-surface decks;
- Be designed to recreate the streetwall along Graham; and
- Allow for outdoor dining.

- ***Eau Claire Area School District Administration Building***

When deemed appropriate, consideration should be given to redeveloping the former Eau Claire High School site for multi-family housing. If feasible, parking to meet the demands of residents should be accommodated on-site.

- ***Riverside Deck***

To encourage the development of additional housing in Downtown, the City should consider selling the air rights above Riverside Deck for market-rate housing development by the private sector. If this occurs, the City should require

that the developer replace any existing parking spaces that are lost to development -- and create additional parking to serve the structure's residents.

- ***Wood Motor Site Parking Lot***

When market conditions allow, the former Wood Motor site -- which is currently used as a surface parking lot -- would be appropriate for the development of an office building on the portion of the site facing South Farwell Street, with a parking ramp constructed on the portion of the site facing South Dewey Street -- similar to the Downtown Holiday Inn/rear parking ramp configuration.

- ***North Barstow Street District***

This district is the most eclectic of the four Downtown districts, in that it contains a mix of uses ranging from light manufacturing to retail to offices to residential properties. In addition, this district includes the following two significant occurrences:

- Located on the eastern end of the district, the successful adaptive use of a tire plant for a mixed-use development (a project called Banbury Place); and
- On the western end of the district, the assembly of property by the RDA for open space and to pave the way for new development.

In between these two is a residential area that should be further strengthened.

Economic Orientations

The North Barstow District should be further enhanced to have the following economic orientations.

- On the east, the developer of Banbury Place should continue placing businesses and creating residential units in the complex, as has been the case to date.
- On the west, the commercial area should include mixed-use development containing offices, housing, retail businesses, and open space. Businesses in this area should serve residents of the district, residents to the north, and residents of the community as a whole.
- In addition, this district should include the construction of housing in proximity to businesses and the Chippewa River and Eau Claire River.

Actions

The following actions should be taken to further enhance the North Barstow

District.

- The Phoenix Park project should be completed as quickly as possible.
- Banbury Place should continue to be further strengthened, as is being done by the property's owner.
- The residential area located between Banbury Place on the east and the commercial area on the west should be retained and further enhanced as a quality residential enclave within the North Barstow District. And, members of the North River Fronts Association should continue in their efforts to do so.
- There are plans to redesign Madison Street Hill. This initiative should move forward and include improvements that enhance pedestrian access between the adjacent neighborhood and Downtown, enhance pedestrian safety, and result in traffic calming.
- Design guidelines should be prepared for this district which address the exterior appearance of both existing commercial buildings and infill commercial structures.
- The feasibility of developing sub-surface parking in this district should be explored. However, due to the water table level, it is anticipated that above ground parking will be necessary. Therefore, developers of new commercial structures in the district should be required to build parking garages as part of their projects.
- ***Redevelopment Sites***
The RDA is planning to complete a site specific redevelopment plan to address all properties acquired by the RDA. This is an excellent initiative that should be implemented as quickly as possible. In doing so, the recommendations contained in this document regarding "redevelopment sites" should be considered.

The following sites are appropriate for redevelopment in the North Barstow District.

- ***Banbury Place***

The highly successful Banbury Place redevelopment/adaptive use project should be given every level of encouragement and support to continue placing businesses and creating residential units in and near the complex, as has been the case to date.

- ***North Barstow Street Redevelopment District***

Every effort should be made to continue the acquisition of property in the area

bounded by Madison Street, North Barstow Street, Railroad Street, and the Chippewa River to accommodate land area needs for Phoenix Park and to create opportunity sites for appropriate new development.

Appropriate uses for the acquired sites include:

- The planned Phoenix Park improvements, as per the December 2000 plan titled ***Phoenix Steel and Forest Street Redevelopment Area Guide for Future Green Space and Park Improvements***;
- Mixed-use projects in new structures adjacent to the park, including retail and office uses on the first and lower floors, with housing in the upper floors; and
- When and if deemed feasible and appropriate, renovation of acquired historic structures, with retail and office uses placed on the first floors of structures and with housing and offices in the upper floors.
- ***Xcel Energy (Northern States Power) Office Buildings and Site***

Xcel should be encouraged and assisted to make every effort to seek a quality -- preferably local -- developer to undertake an extremely high quality, mixed-use project on the site of the existing office buildings. While the existing buildings may be appropriate for adaptive use, it is likely that the project would be more attractive to the development community if the buildings were removed.

Specific uses which would be appropriate for the site include:

- Retail and entertainment uses on the lower floors;
- Restaurants on the lower and upper floors;
- Offices on the lower and upper floors;
- Housing on upper floors; and/or
- A mixture of these uses in a building complex.
- ***Former Greyhound Bus Depot and City Parking Lot***

This property is appropriate for the development of a mixed-use project which includes retail on the first floor, restaurants on the first or upper floors, and housing or offices on the upper floors.

- ***Huebsch Building and Parking Area***

This property is also appropriate for the development of a mixed-use project which includes retail on the first floor, restaurants on the first or upper floors, and

housing or offices on the upper floors.

■ **Medical Center District**

This district contains a number of community landmarks, including:

- Luther Midelfort Mayo Health Systems;
- The L.E. Phillips Senior Center;
- The West Riverside Building; and
- The City's Parks & Recreation Community Center.

This district includes two commercial areas in addition to the hospital area. These are:

- A mixture of commercial uses along Madison; and
- A light manufacturing and warehousing area along the Oxford Avenue corridor, above Cameron Street.

Economic Orientations

The two commercial areas that exist within the Medical Center District, in addition to the hospital, should be further strengthened to have the following economic orientations.

- The Madison Street area should be comprised of neighborhood convenience retail and medical support businesses (such as a florist, cafe, gift shop, etc.) -- that serve residents of the area as well as hospital employees and users.
- The Oxford Avenue corridor, north of Cameron Street, should continue to function as a light manufacturing, warehousing, and service area.

It is assumed that the hospital area will continue to be a dominant element of the district.

Actions

The following actions should be taken to further enhance the Medical Center District.

- The commercial areas within this district -- on Madison, along Oxford, as well as the hospital area -- should be kept as clustered and compact as possible.

- Additional retail and food businesses that can serve area residents and hospital users should be encouraged to locate along Madison. Medical offices should also be encouraged to locate here.
- Efforts to place landscaping along Madison should be continued, since this is a major entrance to Eau Claire's Downtown.
- Owners of businesses located in the commercial area along Oxford should be encouraged to keep the area as organized and orderly as possible, as they appear to be doing.
- While some housing exists in the Medical Center District, it should be realized that commercial pressure will always be intense here due to the magnitude of the hospital complex.
- Efforts should be made to retain multi-family housing in this district for those who would especially benefit from living in proximity to the hospital complex -- e.g., seniors and hospital employees.

Redevelopment Sites

The RDA is planning to complete a site specific redevelopment plan to address all properties acquired by the RDA. This is an excellent initiative that should be implemented as quickly as possible. In doing so, the recommendations contained in this document regarding "redevelopment sites" should be considered.

- ***Madison/Bellinger Street Redevelopment Area***

The area bounded by Madison Street, Bellinger Street, Randall Street and the western boundary line of the Medical Center District is appropriate for accommodating the continued expansion needs of the hospital complex and associated medical and neighborhood convenience uses. Appropriate uses for this area include:

- Retail and food businesses that serve area residents and hospital users; and
- Medical-related offices.

Additional surface-level parking fronting on either Madison or Bellinger should not be developed in this area.

- ***Park and Recreation Community Center***

In the event that the center is relocated, the site would be appropriate for the development of offices or housing -- either in the existing building, if feasible -- or in a new building(s).

■ **Courthouse District**

This district is comprised of a variety of uses, including:

- The County government complex;
- A large number of impressive, quality historic homes and apartments; and
- A compact commercial area, centered around Grand and First, and represented by the West Grand Avenue Business Improvement District (BID).

Economic Orientation

The commercial area within the Courthouse District should be further strengthened to have the following economic orientation:

- Professional offices, personal service firms, and convenience retail and food establishments;
- To serve the residents and employees of the district, as well as County complex users.

Actions

The following actions should be taken to further enhance the Courthouse District.

- The BID should continue its work in representing and enhancing the commercial area.
- Members of the nearby Historic Randall Park Neighborhood Association should continue their work toward saving and further enhancing the area's housing stock.
- The commercial area represented by the West Grand Avenue BID should not be allowed to sprawl into the nearby residential area.
- It is understood that the County complex is in need of expansion. Plans to do so should be supported. At the same time, the County should remain mindful of the importance of maintaining quality residential uses in this district.
- Property owners in the commercial district should be encouraged to continue to maintain their properties to the highest standards.
- In the future, if vacancies occur in the commercial area represented by the West Grand Avenue BID, the BID should seek to fill those vacancies using the list of uses recommended in the Action Agenda.

- The commercial area should be actively marketed as a quaint, walkable business district serving area residents, area employees, and County complex users.

ACTIONS FOR ALL DISTRICTS

The following actions should be implemented in all four Downtown districts.

Riverfront Trail

The Riverfront Trail system is an amenity that is highly regarded by the community. Therefore, the trail system should be completed throughout Downtown, as is now planned, at the earliest possible date.

Wayfinding System

The City is in the process of having a wayfinding system designed. As it relates to Downtown, the wayfinding system should:

- Be creative in terms of design of signs;
- Include monument signs at the edges of the project area which read “Welcome to Downtown Eau Claire;”
- Include signs directing motorists to, and marking the major entrances of, the Historic Waterfront District; and
- Include signs along the Riverfront Trail that direct trail users to Downtown’s various business districts.

Business Retention

The City is active in the area of business retention and currently:

- Conducts one-on-one consultations with Downtown business owners;
- Keeps an inventory of Downtown building space; and
- Administers loan programs.

All of these business retention initiatives are important, should be commended, and should be continued. In addition, the following business retention actions should be taken.

- ***Snow Removal***

To improve customer access from on-street parking spaces to businesses, snow banks that form at the curb as a result of plowing should be removed.

- **Window Displays**

All first floor businesses along South Barstow Street -- whether retail, art, office, or other uses -- should maintain creative, eye-catching window displays. And, these should be changed on a regular basis, ideally every two weeks and not less than once a month.

- **Window Lighting**

All first floor businesses along South Barstow Street -- whether retail, art, office, or other uses -- should keep their display window lights on until at least 11:00 PM every evening.

- **Tree Lights**

At one time, the street trees on South Barstow were decorated with white lights. These should be reinstated at the earliest possible date since they were much appreciated -- and now sorely missed -- by the community.

- **Open Doors**

Business owners should be encouraged to open doorways in common walls shared by businesses. Doing so would allow customers to walk from store to store without going outside during inclement weather.

- **Adjacent Neighborhoods**

As was stated earlier, there is a symbiotic relationship -- as well as a direct relationship -- between a Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. And, to a large degree, the health of one affects the health of the other. Therefore:

- Efforts should be continued to protect and further enhance the viability and quality-of-life of Downtown's adjacent neighborhoods;
- Consideration should be given to completing a Neighborhood Action Agenda -- much as has been done for Downtown -- in order to establish a clear course of action for further enhancing the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown;
- The private and public sectors should continue to cooperatively address and mitigate the impact that speculative and rental housing have on these neighborhoods; and
- Those living in adjacent neighborhoods should never lose site of the importance of Downtown's continued enhancement -- since as Downtown is further improved so will be the vitality, livability, and appeal of its adjacent neighborhoods.

- **Social Services**

Downtown should not house all, or even most, of the community's social service programs. Instead, community leaders should strive for parity -- ensuring that

Downtown houses its fair share of social service programs and other areas do the same.

Business Recruitment

For Downtown's economy to be strengthened as much as possible, there is a need to:

- Recruit additional retail businesses to Downtown;
- Increase the number of retail businesses located in Downtown; and
- Develop a clear economic orientation for each of Downtown's four districts.

- ***Focus***

The business recruitment effort should be focused in the Historic Waterfront District, and specifically on South Barstow Street.

- ***Top List***

Emphasis should be placed on recruiting the following types of businesses to South Barstow Street:

- Restaurants -- first-rate, of varied types, with outdoor seating;
- Casual apparel;
- Casual shoes;
- Art galleries;
- Gifts;
- Books;
- Home furnishings and accessories; and
- Small variety store.

- ***Offer All Incentives to Prospects***

All incentives offered through the enhancement effort -- from all sources -- should be extended to qualified, appropriate new business prospects.

- ***City Approvals***

The City should streamline all permitting and approval processes to ensure that they are both pro-business and pro-quality.

Marketing

An overall, comprehensive marketing campaign must be defined and implemented for Downtown Eau Claire. That campaign should include the following elements.

- ***Media Relations***

A concerted effort must be made -- on a regular and on-going basis -- to get positive stories about Downtown Eau Claire placed with media sources.

- ***Special Events***

The groups involved in holding and developing new special events in Downtown should come together to:

- Create one or two signature special events in Downtown;
- Hold these events annually;
- Grow the events each year in terms of both attendees and sponsorships;
- Ensure that the events reflect and tie into the unique economic orientation being created for Downtown;
- Specifically target the events to appeal to area-wide residents and visitors; and
- Hold the events in the Historic Waterfront District.

Special events that might be considered are a waterfront art fair or a "Taste of Eau Claire."

- ***Web Site***

A Downtown Web site should be used to market Downtown to area residents, visitors, and students -- and it should be noted that visitors rely heavily on the Web in making travel decisions and students do so for buying decisions.

- ***Downtown Brochure***

A brochure is needed that:

- Lists all businesses and attractions within Downtown -- by district; and
- Includes a special insert solely about the Historic Waterfront District, since this is the area that can become a destination for

shoppers, diners, art patrons, and visitors.

The Downtown brochure should be professionally designed, reflect the quaint, historic image being created for Downtown, and widely distributed.

- ***Downtown Directories***

A number of on-street directories have been placed in Downtown. These should be kept well-maintained at all times and stocked with the Downtown brochure.

- **Partnership for Success**

The most successful Downtown enhancement efforts nationwide are those that are implemented by a partnership among the private and public sectors. For Downtown Eau Claire to reach its full potential, Downtown's key private and public sector leaders and constituents **must** plan together and implement together -- in partnership. A shared direction, a unified voice, and **action** -- on the part of that partnership -- are essential for Downtown success. The Downtown partnership, described below, is recommended to be the vehicle that will allow this to happen.

- **Downtown Partnership**

Over the last two decades or more, a number of business/management entities have existed in Downtown Eau Claire. These have included a Downtown business association, which became the promotions arm of a newly formed Main Street association, which evolved into City Center Corporation and Clearwater Development. And, City Center Corporation's Board of Directors has reorganized itself several times to attempt to meet the needs of Downtown.

Those involved in these entities have been extremely well-meaning. However, with completion of the 2001 Action Agenda, it is time to wipe the slate clean and form a new management entity -- an entity specifically designed to be able to implement the Action Agenda.

The recommended new management entity should be called the Downtown Partnership.

- ***Composition***

The Downtown Partnership must be incorporated as a private, not-for-profit organization having a Board of Directors. The Board should be comprised of:

- Eau Claire's City Council President;
- An Eau Claire City Councilmember, chosen by the Council;
- Eau Claire's City Manager;

- The President of the Downtown BID;
- The President of the West Grand Avenue BID;
- The Chair of the RDA;
- The CEO of Luther Midelfort;
- The CEO of the Eau Claire Regional Arts Council;
- A Bank CEO;
- A major Downtown property owner;
- A major Downtown business owner;
- A major Downtown real estate developer; and
- Other community leaders -- both from within and outside of Downtown -- deemed to be essential for implementation of the Action Agenda.

In addition, it is suggested that the Partnership establish a Downtown Business Committee. This committee would allow Downtown's retailers, food establishment owners, and other interested business people to work together.

- ***Staff***

The Downtown Partnership must have the assistance of a highly qualified director with experience in Downtown economic enhancement.