

# 2021 DOWNTOWN MARSHFIELD STRATEGIC PLAN



Main Street Marshfield invited board members and stakeholders to participate in a strategic planning session in December of 2021. The group participated in a series of activities as part of an evening planning session to reconfirm the organization’s vision and mission, and to set new short and long-term goals for the organization which will continue the positive momentum which has carried downtown forward in recent years.

The group reconfirmed the mission and vision for the organization, as follows:

➤ **Vision:**

- Our vision is to honor the history of our downtown while looking for new ways to invigorate and stimulate the economic vitality of businesses within the district. We aim to make Downtown Marshfield a vibrant destination and create experiences that provide a sense of family, community and togetherness for all residents and visitors.

➤ **Mission:**

- To energize and strengthen Downtown Marshfield.

## PROCESS & BACKGROUND

The 2021 strategic planning process was designed to build on previous efforts, including the previous 2015 Downtown Master Plan, 2017 Roger Brooks Study and 2019 Placemaking Plan, among others. The organization has made significant progress in successfully implementing recommendations from these plans, and this progress and changes in local economic and business conditions were used as a basis for future planning.

### *Summary of Previous Plans*

The following elements were included in previous plans and have since been completed.

- Improve 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Connection (partially complete)
- Parking lot improvements, rear entrance enhancements
- Develop new park (Wenzel)
- Review Parking Regulations (ongoing)
- Encourage historic renovations and redevelopments (ongoing)
- Business outreach and assistance (ongoing)

The following items were identified but have not yet been attempted/completed:

- Improve/add Wayfinding signage and online information
- Develop ped/bike network and improve crossings

- Expand outdoor dining
- Downtown map and guide, visitor kiosks, targeted itineraries
- Enhance downtown greenery, plantings, add benches
- Enhance business curb appeal and merchandising
- Improve alleys and rear facades

## WORK PLANNING

Although the organization has adjusted many of its programs and events, it still maintains a focus on all Four Points of Main Street. Examining the budget, time and expense breakdown, the following observations were made:

- By work plan, the greatest number of activities were dedicated to economic development, followed by an even split among initiatives on design, promotions and organization.
- By staff time, promotions occupied just under half of staff time, followed by organization. Limited staff time was dedicated to design or economic development.
- The 2021 budget similarly allocates nearly half of revenues for promotions, with the remainder split between design and organization overhead. Limited dollars are allocated to economic development initiatives.
- Organizational income is derived by largely public funds, with the BID, City and EDB comprising just under 50% of revenues, while grants, program revenues, sponsorships and event proceeds evenly represented among the other half.

Main Street Marshfield joined the state program in 1990. Since then, levels of activity have ebbed and flowed with the economic and organization leadership. In the past ten years, Main Street Marshfield has welcomed; 88 net new businesses, 699 net new jobs, \$2.7 million in private investment (improving 32 properties and boosting property value by 11.5%), \$22 million in public investment (including the plaza), and an average of 682 annual volunteer hours.

## ECONOMIC TRENDS

Downtown Marshfield plays an increasingly important role in the local economy. The table below highlights downtown's

relative market share in various economic areas for the community. While downtown only represents 1.4% of the City's geographic land area, it encompasses at least twice that percentage of the economic activity in each area measured and generates nearly \$700,000 annually in tax revenues for the City and County.

	City	Downtown	Market Share
Assessed Value	\$1.6 b	\$49 m	3%
Businesses	2,019	343	17%
Employment	12,875	1,877	15%
Population	18,222	352	1.9%
Retail Sales	\$184 m	\$41 m	22%
Restaurant Sales	\$13 m	\$5.2 m	40%
Hotel Rooms	446	99	22%

Geofencing studies conducted in the market demonstrate that downtown attracts an average of 8,000 unique visitors per month, with 70% of traffic from within 60 miles and 37% from within the City itself. Event days draw visitors from a greater distance, with 50% traveling more than 60



# STRATEGIC PLAN RESULTS

Using the previously provided information as a frame of reference, the group participated in three interactive activities designed to identify, prioritize and address opportunities and challenges facing downtown in the next 20 years which should be addressed by Main Street Marshfield and its partners. These activities included; identifying opportunities and challenges facing downtown, brainstorming improvements that can be implemented in the near term with investments of time and money, developing a 20-year vision for successful revitalization outcomes, and identifying strategic objectives, partnerships and activities which should be pursued over the next 1, 3 and 5 years. The outcomes from these activities are profiled in this section.

## *Opportunities & Challenges*

National and local economic and social trends as well as local development and investment initiatives present opportunities and challenges that will impact downtown Marshfield. Some of these specific trends that participants identified as potentially relevant and impactful with regard to future planning included:

### *Opportunities*

- Increase awareness of existing businesses and amenities
- Increase residential footprint downtown
- Second Street corridor development
- Increase/change perception/awareness of downtown housing options, add missing types
- Create incentives to support new businesses downtown with specific types/hours to meet needs
- Expand marketing of downtown and events to specific demographics
- Explore demand for services – personal and professional, meetings, restaurants and hotels
- Many organizations are currently in planning mode, ability to coordinate. Bike/Ped Plan.

### *Challenges*

- Workforce limitations
- Buildout cost for restaurants
- Need for critical mass to make extended hours profitable
- Finding entrepreneurs with growth mindset, understanding of downtown vision
- Need for continuity, follow-through of plans, collective vision and action
- Traffic and noise (limitation for pedestrians, potentially for residential)
- May need to focus support on businesses with growth mindset/not everyone equally to be effective
- Continue to evaluate plaza offerings to complement and support business activity
- Need to develop side and parallel streets as destinations – enhance rear entrances
- Central Street is no longer a state highway south of Veterans – have ability to implement change

Because Marshfield doesn't exist in a vacuum, the group also discussed the competitive position of the community in the marketplace; how do residents see ourselves, and how do outsiders view us?

- Communities similar to/competitive with Marshfield:
  - Stevens Point/Plover, Wausau, Appleton, Eau Claire, Wisconsin Rapids
- How are we distinct from these places:
  - Historic fabric intact
  - Available storefronts downtown for new businesses
  - Plaza/programming and other pocket parks
  - Recreation hub (zoo, ballpark, waterpark)
  - Central location in the state
  - Diverse business mix downtown, including retail selection
  - Historic theater
  - Restaurant destination
- How do people view Marshfield?
  - Clinic (name only now, since other locations exist)
  - Single Destination City – many don't explore beyond what they come for
  - Locals are generally not advocates for the community/downtown
  - Need to survey visitors to see what outsiders really think/experience

### ***Time & Effort Goal Setting***

Participants were asked to envision being given \$1 million to invest in downtown which could be spent on only one improvement to help prioritize investment. They were also asked to identify tasks which could be accomplished by 1,000 talented volunteers in the district for a one-week period of time. The purchases/efforts identified as opportunities for each are outlined below.

#### *\$1 million investments*

- Pedestrian safety elements (crosswalks/flashing beacons)
- Recruiting new businesses/upgrading existing businesses
- Marketing of downtown (multi-media campaign)
- Reduce street lanes on Central
- Upgrade residential units/fill vacant floors
- Add physical amenities – green space, seating, flowers
- Promote infill – hotels, convention center, residential
- Update storefronts/facades
- Connect downtown to neighborhoods/destinations

#### *1,000 volunteers*

- *Facade squad – paint storefronts, paint murals, do simple improvements*
- *Provide services for businesses – IT, accounting, legal, marketing, merchandising*
- *Marketing collateral/materials – storytelling, social media, develop an event*
- *Habitat-style projects – build a park, etc.*
- *Cleaning downtown*

## 20-year Vision

After discussing various aspects of desired improvements, participants brainstormed specific things that represent their vision for downtown Marshfield in 20 years. These vision statements could be associated with physical or visual aspects of the downtown, or with social, cultural or experiential objectives. All identified vision elements are listed below.

- Population growth – city and downtown (city goal ~35,000)
- Uniform facades and signage, all dated facades restored
- 3 additional destination restaurants
- Additional green space
- Expanded presence of Jurustic art
- Increased downtown residential units/full upper floors and housing options
- Abundant downtown retail stores, limited storefront vacancy, complementary businesses that encourage longer visitor stays
- 2<sup>nd</sup> street corridor completed (with a focus on people and the pedestrian experience)
- Focus on quality over quantity
- Evening and weekend retail, dining and entertainment options
- Residents and stakeholders invest in the community
- Expansion of ‘downtown’ area (people already perceive it to extend to zoo), expand side streets and streets parallel to Central
- Rebranding events, attracting new people to downtown
- Feeling of unique/special experience in downtown Marshfield
- Better pedestrian experience (noise, safety)
- Feature/signature building or amenity downtown- iconic (photo worthy) destination
- Schools are a draw here – how can we leverage?
- Embrace winter (sledding hill, skating, build on wonderland lights)
- Indoor hangout destination (including family friendly elements)
- Rooftop dining, heated patios/domes
- Live Music

Participants were lastly asked to select three of the identified opportunities, challenges or vision items from any of the three sessions as an area where they felt that efforts should be focused in the next five years, without which the organization/downtown could not successfully transition to a more vibrant future. The group chose items associated with three primary goals, identified below, along with the initiatives identified as priorities under each:

### Improve the Pedestrian Experience

- Slow traffic
- Reduce truck traffic
- Focus on pedestrian friendly amenities
- Explore street configuration options
- Address perceptions of safety
- Traffic calming measures
- Child and family-friendly design/elements/accommodations

### Enhance Downtown Aesthetics

- Increase beautification elements (art, planters, etc.)
- Façade improvements

- Better decorations year-round
- Beautify storefronts, create uniform downtown look
- Promote historic preservation
- Strengthen design ordinances

#### Residential Development

- Expand housing options downtown
- Market residential opportunities
- Provide incentives to renovate vacant/older units
- Improve existing/incentivize new downtown living
- Quality housing replacing vacant/underutilized lots
- Increased residential footprint/build residential on edges of downtown

#### Establish Downtown as a Destination with a Brand Identity

- Increase marketing of existing businesses and services
- Collaborative marketing efforts/comprehensive marketing plan
- Created curated itineraries that emphasize specific businesses/destinations
- Incentivize new businesses that fill existing gaps
  - Event Center
  - Food Venues
  - Additional Retail
  - Incentivize evening hours
  - Create a destination (i.e. Titledown)
- Support entrepreneurs with growth mindset
- Add winter activities
- Coordinate events with branded marketing
- Complete second street corridor/establish development opportunity

For each targeted focus area, groups were asked to set one or more specific goals which represented the opportunity they wanted to capture with the identified initiatives. They then had to specify a measurable outcome associated with successful implementation, to identify a lead party and necessary partners, and to recommend 1, 3 and 5 year activities which would be required to sustain momentum toward the goal. As a closing activity, groups reported their findings, and participants collectively identified appropriate measurements for setting goals and tracking progress for each broad category of goals. The following pages highlight the recommendation of this strategic planning activity.

## ***Enhance the Pedestrian Experience***

**Activities:** Address traffic, Mitigate noise, Improve safety

**Measurement and Tracking:** Reduce traffic speed, reduce through truck traffic, Number of crosswalks, Pedestrian foot traffic activity, Decibel levels, Accident data, Visitor surveys

### **Goal 1: Reduce Traffic Speed and Reduce Through Truck Traffic**

**Partners:** City- council, police, streets, downtown businesses

**1-Year Activities:** Develop a traffic calming plan. Explore cost/benefits of crosswalk art/beacons, stoplight timing, other measures. Conduct outreach to trucking companies to re-route trucks voluntarily.

**3-Year Activities:** Implement traffic calming measures, secure funding for additional measures, establish formal alternative traffic route

**5-Year Activities:** Fully implement pedestrian and traffic plan.

#### **Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:**

- One important element for slowing traffic is to understand current traffic speeds, driver behaviors and pedestrian trends. Some strategies to help understand existing conditions to create a more refined improvement plan are outlined below:

- Cars not stopping for pedestrians:
  - Sheboygan Falls had a concern with cars not stopping for pedestrians downtown, creating real and perceived safety concerns. A group of high school students researched the problem by trying to cross the street at numerous crosswalk locations in and around downtown at various points of day/days of week and recording the number of cars that stopped (or failed to stop) for them (including police/municipal vehicles). They then presented this information to the City Council, effectively raising the awareness and responsiveness to the issue.
    - For solutions, the plan included a mix of flashing beacons at the most popular crosswalks (geofencing data can help determine this, or trail cameras/traffic count systems), and flag buckets at other popular crosswalks. Curb bumpouts (real or painted) narrowing the drive lanes and precluding cars from passing in the right/parking lane also helped.
- In Rice Lake, their four-lane Main Street creates heavy traffic and speeding concerns, especially during rush hour. A placemaking tech visit to address vehicular speeds found the following: a speed survey conducted prior to the visit determined that average vehicular speeds were 41 mph. The tech visit consisted of building two parklets on opposite sides of the street at a major intersection with significant pedestrian activity. During the active installation phase, speeds dropped to 34 mph with the pedestrian activity and general desire to see what was happening. After the parklets were completed, whether or not individuals were seated in the parklets, average speeds increased to 35 mph. While many officials dismissed the idea of parklets as they felt nobody would want to dine on the street given the speed and noise, the project showed that parklets, even without outdoor dining (the parklets featured seating areas, reading areas and yard games) the parklets were used by visitors and resulted in reduced traffic speeds during their one-week installation period.

**Goal 2: Reduce road noise by 50%**

Partners: City, downtown businesses

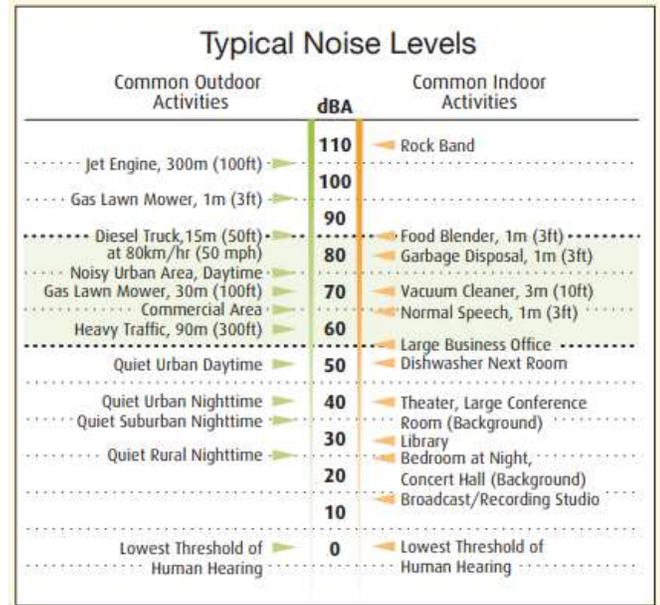
1-Year Activities: Research existing noise levels and sources (trucks, idling, exhaust systems, speed, time of day, etc.). Identify potential solutions and costs/benefits. Develop and test mitigation strategies including soft scape or traffic management.

3-Year Activities: Formalize mitigation plan and implement measures, measure impacts.

5-Year Activities: Achieve mitigation with 50% reduction in sound

Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

- While Marshfield does not have actual noise limits included in its ordinances (with the exception of wind turbines), other communities have established decibel levels in ordinances as related to live music and other outdoor activities – traffic noise is often louder than these levels, indicating the degree to which it can interfere with enjoyment of outdoor experiences.
- Like the pedestrian and vehicular activity enhancements, understanding the levels and nature of current traffic noise is important. Traffic noise is impacted by the number of vehicles, vehicular speed and engine type as well as driving patterns (i.e. acceleration creates more noise than a steady speed).



- o While it takes significantly more cars or higher speeds to substantially increase volume, one truck is as noisy as ten cars, making the reduction in truck traffic the single most effective way to reduce noise. Establishing/relocating an official alternate truck route requires legwork by the municipality, and also a commitment to enforcement by the local police force. Understanding where truck traffic is originating/destined is also important to ensuring that alternate routes meet the needs of local businesses. Establishing certain times for downtown/area deliveries can also limit truck traffic during certain peak pedestrian hours. Voluntary truck route relocations are also possible if a majority of trucks originate from only a handful of sources, which can be the simplest way to reduce traffic in the short term. Truck drivers (and other through-traffic) will also choose alternate routes if pedestrian or other activity downtown makes it a less desirable/slower route, so progress in reducing speeds overall may also benefit this goal.
- o While the downtown hardscape contributes to the impact of traffic noise, reductions in sound from distance and/or sound absorption are fairly limited unless plantings or walls can block the sound directly. While adding greenery and other softscape may improve the pedestrian experience in other ways, it is unlikely to have a substantial effect on actual noise. However, property owners can invest in windows and doors that help dampen noise, thereby making residential units more appealing or business interiors quieter, which may also be useful for enhancing the shopping/residential experience and desirability.

### **Goal 3: Increase (real and perceived) pedestrian safety, Increase foot traffic.**

Partners: City (pedestrian work group, police), downtown businesses

1-Year Activities: Understand existing accident data and locations of perceived safety concerns. Create pedestrian and bicycle route marketing materials, install counter for pedestrian foot traffic

3-Year Activities: Increase perceptions of safety and reduce accidents by 25%, increase ped/bike traffic by 10%. Increase average duration of visitor stay. Survey visitors to determine change.

5-Year Activities: Monitor and sustain progress, increase real and perceived pedestrian safety by 50%, sustained foot traffic growth downtown.

#### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

Obtaining actual data on crashes/accidents or near incidents in the districts from the police department is a great place to start. Understanding pedestrian traffic patterns, as discussed in the first goal, is also important in understanding patterns and flow between existing destinations, as well as for identifying areas where connections could or should exist but do not currently.

Once the group has determined where core pedestrian activity is currently concentrated and desired, a plan can be made to improve the experience in these areas first. There are a variety of factors that influence the perception of safety for pedestrians and bicyclists in the district. Based on research, the key elements influencing pedestrian comfort and safety include:

#### On sidewalks:

- Level of pedestrian activity. More pedestrians = more comfort
- Street lighting – pedestrian-scale lighting illuminating the sidewalk while also allowing visibility into alcoves/alleys/side streets. Warm lighting of 4500 K was most well received.
- Greater sidewalk width, as well as presence of on street parked cars or parklets as a buffer improve perceived safety
- Presence of natural elements/trees/plantings

#### Crossing Streets:

- Number of traffic lanes. More lanes = less comfort
- Well-defined, wide crosswalks with unobstructed views
- Traffic speed

## Enhance Downtown Aesthetics

**Activities:** Promote/incentivize property improvements, add wayfinding and directional signage, add greenery/green space with interactive elements

**Measurement and Tracking:** Number of wayfinding signage locations, number of property renovations, number of vacant storefronts, number of users in parks and plazas

### Goal 1: Create and install comprehensive wayfinding and gateway signage

Partners: City, Private Property Owners, Civic Partners

1-Year Activities: Identify destinations to include, signage locations (gateway murals, vehicular and pedestrian signage).

3-Year Activities: Have design and location plan for wayfinding, work to secure funds to install signage, install at least one gateway mural.

5-Year Activities: Install all signage

#### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

- Geofencing and pedestrian counts can highlight connections between destinations within the downtown. Increasing the amount of time that individual visitors spend in time and the number of businesses visited on a trip is the easiest way to boost downtown economic activity. It is far easier to increase spending by soliciting additional spending from existing customers rather than attracting new customers to the district.
- Where we identify that existing pedestrian/customer connections do not exist, the lack of wayfinding (signage and visual cues), perceived distance between destinations, or lack of awareness of destinations.
  - o Vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding signage that welcome pedestrians to the district, indicate the presence and location of key destinations, location of parking, and potentially even the distance to other destinations can help address these challenges. The illustration at right illustrates the range of wayfinding signage that complement each other to orient visitors. The smaller walkable community sign examples can be used to encourage pedestrians to visit other destinations or even individual businesses by highlighting the proximity of these destinations to their current location in terms of steps or minutes.



## **Goal 2: Promote property renovations and enhancements**

**Partners:** City, Private Property Owners

**1-Year Activities:** Create a master plan for vacant space beautification (to implement when vacancies occur), create window display program for service businesses, identify priority façade improvement projects and hurdles, identify potential patio seating locations/program guidelines

**3-Year Activities:** Implement vacant/empty window program, launch financial/assistance training for property owners, complete at least one façade project from priority list, add one additional patio space

**5-Year Activities:** Complete at least three façade projects and add two new patio seating options

**Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:**

**Patios:** Outdoor dining is one of the top desired amenities by As mentioned in the first goal, and illustrated in the image at right, outdoor patios can benefit both businesses and the district, creating more opportunities for commercial transactions and also increasing the presence of pedestrians on the street, enhancing the pedestrian experience. Both La Crosse and Green Bay have comprehensive patio guidelines that even include patterns for recommended design/construction templates to make it easy for businesses to design and install quality patios, either in parking spaces, on sidewalks or in side yards/rear patios.

**Window Merchandising:** While it is a positive for downtown Marshfield to have vacant spaces that allow for the community to recruit new complementary businesses, vacant windows and/or 'dead' service windows make the pedestrian experience less interesting and may prevent shoppers from venturing as far down the street. Installing art, displays or other elements in these window gaps can help counteract that negative impact.

Some communities coordinate with existing retail businesses to merchandise underutilized window spaces – they can even serve as actual 'window shopping' opportunities via QR code, as in the example here from La Crosse, or interactive installations as in the other image – either to solicit ideas for the future of the space, or to tease the arrival of new businesses. Fond du Lac also engaged a team of local artists and matched them with vacant storefronts for the holiday shopping season to design unique and eye-catching installations.

### **Parklet Impact Statistics**

- 🍷 57% of businesses in communities with outdoor seating saw increase in revenue,
  - 🚶 75% of residents said it made them more likely to walk, shop & dine in a district.
- [streetimpactma.org](http://streetimpactma.org)



### **Goal 3: Add and activate green spaces/vacant lots**

Partners: City, Private Property Owners

1-Year Activities: Inventory existing vacant spaces/parks and track existing usage (number, time of day and type of visitors). Identify potential complementary uses for each space.

3-Year Activities: Update lights and amenities in existing parks according to plan, test programming/amenity concepts in other locations, measure impact

5-Year Activities: Have engaging parks with interactive elements that complement downtown activities/attract target groups. Understand what amenities are desired, have ability to implement popup park options as needed.

#### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

Underutilized spaces create opportunities to provide needed amenities in the district and also to pilot potential amenities to determine what the community wants or needs. As programming of spaces can be time and labor intensive – Main Street does not need to be solely responsible for developing and programming these spaces – private businesses could be given limited time leases for designated spaces to create outdoor amenities (i.e. a popup mini-golf course or rotating food truck license), or civic organizations could coordinate for similar (each civic group designs a mini-golf hole with proceeds from operations going equally to participating organizations).

**Underutilized Space Activation:** Once side lots, parking areas or green spaces have been identified that are largely vacant or underutilized, consider testing out activation concepts to see which uses are most in demand in Menomonie. Evening living rooms, Pooch Parks, Game Yards and other temporary uses may prove popular with downtown visitors. These ideas can be implemented for a limited time with a minimal budget and will help visitors see downtown and spaces in a new way. Nearby property or business owners may need to be engaged to help move equipment indoors at night or monitor use in low-traffic areas if vandalism is a concern.



**Test Before Implementing:** Port Washington (and Cumberland), purchased temporary seating and semi-permanent chalk paint to test out signage and seating options before investing in permanent fixtures. Chairs were put out and their locations noted each evening to see where they were being used. Similarly, test locations for sidewalk and bike lane wayfinding were installed to determine what routes riders preferred to use to access downtown. As a result of the testing, permanent installations were more effective.



## ***Increase Residential Units and Options Downtown***

**Activities:** Incentivize/assist upper floor renovations, support infill development projects

**Measurement and Tracking:** Number of residential units, number of vacant upper floors, units at various rental/sale prices

### **Goal 1: Add new residential units**

**Partners:** City, Private Property Owners, Employers

**1-Year Activities:** Understand existing downtown housing mix/rents/vacancy, identify vacant upper floors/underperforming units and challenges in renovations, understand housing demand, identify infill sites, understand financial tools available

**3-Year Activities:** Create/promote tools to facilitate upper floor rehabs, rezone/promote infill and redevelopment opportunities

**5-Year Activities:** Add at least 150 new residential units downtown.

### **Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:**

While few programs at the state level are directly targeted at upper floor residential units, there are numerous locally-driven initiatives that can help property owners design and improve these spaces to add housing. Some examples:

- **Fond du Lac** contracted with a retired building inspector to offer free walk-throughs of upper floors downtown to offer free advice on the improvements that would be necessary to renovate upper floors into various uses, and to also suggest strategies for minimizing costs (i.e. creating two-story units rather than adding an elevator on a three-story building, adding a first floor rear accessible unit to avoid elevators on a second floor, etc., fire-suppression paint use and stairwell design, etc.). This free assistance without concern about triggering life safety improvements can help reduce perceived risk from exploring renovations.
- **Sheboygan** offers a 50% grant to fund architectural or engineering studies supporting redevelopment of upper floor residential or commercial space. Property owners that move forward with the project can have the remaining 50% of the project cost reimbursed as part of the revolving loan fund application toward the project.
- **Watertown** created a property improvement loan fund offering a 2% rate with a 10% equity requirement for building improvement projects including upper floor renovations. The program can work alone or to supplement bank financing to support upper floor renovation. To encourage use of this program, the City engaged its building inspector to do a comprehensive ordinance compliance assessment and alert property owners with potential issues about potential noncompliance and encourage use of the fund to address concerns.

To support infill development or renovation of existing inner-city homes to attract new households to downtown, other programs might be possible. Two programs offered by La Crosse and Superior, outlined below, are two potential models. Additionally, using the housing renewal program following the closure of a local TIF district can create an additional fund for renovating housing to meet the needs of modern buyers, such as the program in Ripon (and many other communities) outlined in the following pages.

- La Crosse Promise

- \$50,000 grant to acquire and develop an infill property in targeted neighborhoods. \$40,000 for large renovation projects. Pre-planned home designs available, \$50,000 per family in college scholarships and some matching grants from area employers.



- Superior Vacant to Value

- Lots provided at no cost to individuals or developers with a viable infill plan. City has ensured that each lot has zoning to accommodate multiple affordable housing types, including townhomes. Owner occupancy only for 5-year period. Occupancy within 24 months from award date.



- Ripon Rehabilitation Program

- 0% loans deferred until sale for down-payment, closing costs repairs (electrical/plumbing, window/door, roof, lead paint, water/sewer) or key upgrades (expansion, garage addition) for properties 120% of local median or under.



## **Goal 2: Increase awareness/improve perception of downtown living**

**Partners:** City, MACCI, Visit Marshfield, Employers, EDB

**1-Year Activities:** Collect information on existing residential options, testimonials from downtown residents

**3-Year Activities:** Launch downtown living website, tour of downtown living (or include residential offerings in other events i.e. wine walks), identify amenities needed to support additional residential (i.e. green space, parking)

**5-Year Activities:** Survey community to determine change in perception of downtown as residential opportunity

### **Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:**

Many local residents may have a certain perception of the type of units or type of residents that live downtown, which is often based on outdated or erroneous assumptions. Several communities have worked to reframe these perspectives in a number of ways:

Live Here Wausau River District: The River District features a Live Here landing page on their site which highlights residential amenities, as well as links to For Rent and For Sale options in the downtown. <http://www.wausauriverdistrict.org/live-here-1> Beloit is also collecting some short video testimonials from residents that relocated into downtown from other cities to share their stories and experiences as a testimonial.

New Resident Mixers: Many Main Streets/Communities offer regular new resident mixers or ice cream socials – these events bring new residents together, welcome them to the community (and introduce them to volunteer options). Since Marshfield’s wine walk is already popular with new residents and occurs several times per year, adding a pre- or post-event gathering specifically for new residents (and, potentially adding a mocktail element to appeal to non-drinkers), might be a good option.

Tour of Downtown Living: La Crosse and Eau Claire offer tours of their upper floor residential units – similar to a tour of homes where visitors buy tickets to visit new homes, these tours allow visitors to see a wide variety of residential units ranging from new construction to historic lofts, often staged by local interior designers. Many such programs also include at least one unfinished option on the tour within a building that is available, potentially spurring a visitor to purchase and renovate the space.

### THE TOUR OF **UPPER LIVING**

Sunday, October 11th, 2015 Noon – 5pm  
PROCEEDS BENEFIT DOWNTOWN MAINSTREET INCORPORATED

 415 King Street River Center Plaza Apartments	 305 Pearl Street Above Quiba and Market Warehouse	 118 5th Avenue Above Mueller Photography	 509 Main Street Above Monet Floral	 100 6th St. N Gateway Terrace Condominiums
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Tour beautiful downtown residential units, apartments, lofts and condos. See what all the buzz is about living next to unique stores, art galleries, coffee shops, award winning restaurants and Riverside Park!

	Tickets Pre-Event	<b>\$15</b>
	Tickets Day Of	<b>\$20</b>

**Open House Reception** Sponsored by Cabin Coffee at Downtown Mainstreet Inc.  
500 Main Street, La Crosse 12 noon - 5 pm

Purchase tickets at:  
Howes Diamond Jewelers    The Wedding Tree  
Touch of Class    State Bank    Downtown Mainstreet Inc.  
**LACROSSEDOWNTOWN.COM    608-784-0440**

## ***Establish Downtown as a Destination***

**Activities:** Create targeted content, Support business owners to enhance marketing, Increase/broaden social media followers, Fill gaps in hours/business types/amenities to support brand

**Measurement and Tracking:** Social media followers/engagement, Businesses engaged in campaign, Ability to curate viable visits for targeted groups, Brand awareness in market, increased visitor foot traffic downtown

### **Goal 1: Create authentic content for social media with diverse voices**

Partners: MACCI, Visit Marshfield, Volunteers, Businesses, News Herald

1-Year Activities: Identify volunteers in various demographics to generate curated content, establish downtown marketing brand strategy and plan

3-Year Activities: Expand ways to share content, grow social media followers by 20%

5-Year Activities: Evaluate and test, survey community

#### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

Given the highly variable perceptions of downtown Marshfield, and especially considering that individuals with greater familiarity are more positive about downtown, pushing out positive messages more broadly is an important strategy to enhance downtowns reputation in the community. However, Main Street and its various partners typically speak with a single and all-inclusive voice, making it hard to focus on individual audiences in an authentic way. These groups may also have a limited ability to

Targeted Voices: For those audiences that we want to specifically target as either potential customer groups or event attendees, recruiting volunteers that match these demographics and empowering them to do social media platform takeovers or to post regular guest blogs can be an effective way to highlight relevant and authentic experiences.

- For example, **Downtown Kenosha** recruited contributors from several specific groups that were identified either as likely downtown residents or customer groups, including the following: young professionals, mothers of young children and retired couples. Each featured contributor shared a downtown experience once a month, highlighting a unique find, a positive experience and some corresponding posts. By featuring new and authentic voices, the organization was able to grow their followers and positive perceptions among targeted groups.
- **Ord, Nebraska**, noticed that a small but vocal group of residents was responsible for overwhelming most local posts with generally negative comments and responses. They recruited a 'sunshine squad' from among their volunteer base whose job was to respond to key posts by partner organizations with positive feedback or responses. While these positive messages didn't prevent the negative individuals from responding, they did create a more balanced comment feed, and ensured that many locals received far more notifications of positive communication than negative (since the sunshine squad members generally had numerous social media followers).

## **Goal 2: Recruit/Support Existing Businesses/Install Amenities to Fill Gaps in Downtown Experience**

Partners: City, MACCI, Visit Marshfield, Employers, EDB

1-Year Activities: Survey visitors to identify main draws and perceived deficits. Identify missing elements limiting ability of target groups to choose/stay downtown (families, day-trippers, etc.).

3-Year Activities: Develop plan to address lacking elements – recruit new businesses, help existing businesses add goods/services, add/enhance amenities, etc.

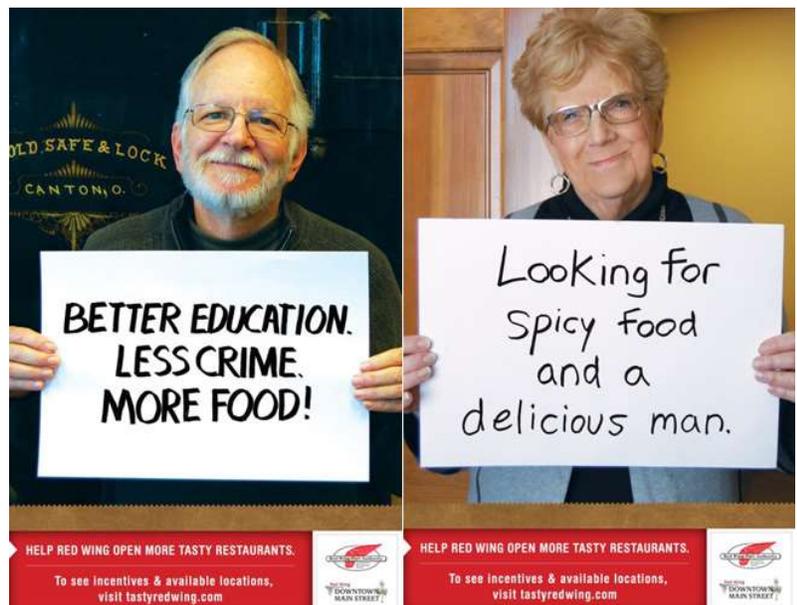
5-Year Activities: Survey visitors, continue to expand offerings, market to new audiences

### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

There were several business types identified by survey respondents as missing or desirable in downtown. There are a few strategies that districts can/have used to recruit needed business types/services to the district.

- **Consignment/Popups:** for retail goods and services, it may be possible to recruit artisans, nearby businesses or other providers to offer goods for sale in a dedicated area within a complementary business. For instance, the wine bar in Verona has an ‘Etsy Corner’ which offers a monthly rotating offering from local makers, which helps these entrepreneurs grow their following and also enhances the experience for wine bar visitors without requiring the host business to invest in inventory.
- **Entrepreneurial/Small Space Development:** Growing new businesses requires that appropriately sized entry spaces exist. Much like a ‘starter home’ for young households, small retail spaces are essential to allow young businesses to get started in a cost-effective manner and grow organically, rather than be forced to purchase more inventory to fill a larger space. Small spaces can be developed along the front of office or other uses or can be created as a collective of small businesses, like an antique mall or cooperative model.

- **Targeted Recruitment:** If there are businesses that are specifically desired in the community, a targeted recruitment campaign that engages the community can be effective. There are almost certainly individuals with connections to the community with experience in almost every industry, and these individuals will be the most likely to succeed in a new business endeavor. The Red Wing Restaurant challenge is one successful example of a targeted recruitment campaign that used creative marketing to solicit chef resumes to open a new restaurant. The top five chef candidates did a taste-off at the



community hall, and the winner (by community vote), received a package of financial and in-kind support from the community to help make them successful (for example: six months free rent in the storefront, discounted plumbing and electrical services, \$5,000 in a bank account at the local bank, free advertising with the local paper/radio station, etc.)

- **General Recruitment:** Lastly, developing a permanent and long-term recruitment strategy is always a best practice. Past studies of startups in our Main Street communities show that it can take 18 months to three years from the point when an entrepreneur first approaches the director with an idea for a business and the time when they secure a space and open a business. It can take significant time to create a business plan, find a suitable space and negotiate a lease and line up financing and inventory. Because of this long runway to startup, there is a significant potential for past prospects to become future entrepreneurs if districts can remain top of mind. Feeling wanted and supported is the number one factor impacting a location decision in instances where entrepreneurs had various community/district alternatives. Maintaining a list of previous inquiries and individuals and periodically sending them updates on new spaces coming available, highlighting new businesses opening and featuring testimonials from existing businesses. This consistent approach to highlighting downtown as a desirable business destination for interested entrepreneurs can create a pipeline of future tenants to occupy vacancies.

### **Goal 3: Identify a community rallying symbol/structure and focal point**

Partners: City, MACCI, Visit Marshfield, Employers, EDB

1-Year Activities: Brainstorm potential iconic imagery for Marshfield

3-Year Activities: Identify potential location/form for imagery – visible, accessible and part of a must-see tour of the area. Consider options viable/changeable in all four seasons.

5-Year Activities: Install or have secured funding and site control for installation.

#### Follow-up Comments & Recommendations:

Offering a unique brand proposition for the downtown is benefitted from signature experiences or imagery that creates a memorable experience for visitors. This type of iconic element can take a variety of forms; public art, fountains, interactive items, businesses, or all the above.

While many iconic images represent costly installations (think the Saint Louis Arch, Milwaukee Domes or Chicago Bean Sculpture), this does not have to be the case. The gum wall in Seattle, Indy interactive letters sculpture in Indianapolis and umbrellas over third street in Wausau are all recognizable installations that were relatively affordable and yet are still on the ‘must see’ list for visitors to these cities.

Identifying both a location and imagery that resonates with the residents of Marshfield will involve significant outreach and should be noted that it may not be universally loved at first by everyone – many installations only become beloved with time.



### ***Transformation Strategy***

## ***Brand Promise & Transformation Strategy***

A key aspect of moving towards the established vision for the community is to establish a brand promise and transformation strategy. This is different than the mission and vision for the organization because it is focused on the experience/message for visitors to the district. This is in contrast to the mission and vision, which are designed to help the organization focus its efforts and work planning.

### Brand Promise:

A brand promise focuses on defining what the district will provide for the target audience. Who are we initially focused on, and what point of differentiation do we offer to that group to persuade them to visit downtown over other available destinations (or over staying home). This does NOT mean that the organization will only focus on reaching this audience. Instead, it recognizes that focusing on being the best option for a specific audience that is most likely to be attracted to the unique advantages currently available in the district has the greatest chance of success. In return, successfully attracting more visitors/more frequent visits from this target group will in turn attract other audiences through word of mouth.

The brand promise identified for downtown Marshfield, which will serve as a primary message over the next 3-5 years is:

*Downtown Marshfield is the premier gathering place for county residents, supporting authentic local experiences in a unique setting.*

This brand promise reflects a product that can be reliably marketed and delivered to visitors today. It is anticipated that this brand promise will evolve as the district implements other work plan items to create a more robust infrastructure to support additional groups and activities.

### Transformation Strategy:

The group spent some time discussing areas where the current downtown environment and messaging might not meet this brand promise – what elements might we need to change or adjust to effectively deliver on this promise? Many of the results include items that are also reflected in the previously identified work plan initiatives but are also listed below. These might indicate places to start work, since they achieve multiple goals.

- Patios, parks and spaces that encourage gathering and hanging out
- We need to talk about what we have differently – focus on these elements rather than trying to message to everyone.
- A focus on highlighting success – successful entrepreneurs, happy new residents, will convey the right message and attract others interested in being part of this success.
- The ability to cross the street and meander is important for lingering and exploring – in the short term, using side streets, rear streets and back patio areas is a strategy for accommodating this until changes to Central can be implemented.
- Evening entertainment/activities are an important aspect of gathering, especially for the target audience of childless individuals. Highlighting date night options that do exist and working with businesses/destinations/creating popups to fill gaps can help meet this need.

Accommodating these new priorities and messaging will involve adjustments to the current plan of work. While some initiatives will be led by other partners with Main Street providing a supporting or advocacy role, Main Street can make changes to existing work plan items this year to move toward these goals. Examples of strategies for adjusting existing events and communications plans are outlined in the following table.

Current Projects	Improve Pedestrian Experience	Enhance Downtown Aesthetics	Increase Residential Density	Deliver on Brand Identity
Your Thursdays	Consider offering free parking during the events to encourage lingering		Market event to adjacent neighborhoods and new residents	Rename event to emphasize groups and gathering Incentivize businesses to be open and participate
Business Support Program		Incentivize businesses to add patios or activate side/back of buildings.	- Explore ways to help property owners add/renovate upper floor units - Explore residential parking permitting system improvements	Encourage joint marketing and events to create unique experiences and encourage visitors to stay longer.
Hub City Days		Incorporate new park activities/ photo ops into event somehow for social media exposure		Include marketing to highlight gathering activities available other summer weekends.

In addition to changes made to existing efforts, outreach to existing and new partners will be needed to make progress in other areas. For instance:

- Realtors are a natural fit to identify/reach new residents to the region, and to educate about the benefits of / opportunities for downtown residential (welcome wagons, invites to events. Posting on nextdoor apps for relevant neighborhoods may also be a volunteer position duty.
- Other potential networks to engage to enhance downtown’s brand as a premier gathering place (both to implement initiatives and test ideas) are the young professionals group,

physician recruiters and business/corporate sponsors. These may also be target groups to market events, as they all include newer residents to the community.

- City staff and civic partners – engaging existing partners to develop strategies around physical and regulatory changes such as parking, zoning and incentives will require dedicated meetings and planning efforts.

## Benchmarking Progress

Once Main Street Marshfield has agreed upon targeted objectives and activities, it will be important to effectively track and communicate progress on these measures. Because MSM already tracks and reports progress to local partners and the Wisconsin Main Street on multiple measures, this tool will increase opportunities for the organization to succinctly display its core areas of focus and accomplishments. The image below illustrates a sample benchmark graphic which could be adapted by the organization to illustrate its successes.

# Main Street Marshfield

## Benchmark Performance Measurements 2022-2027



MainStreet Marshfield works collaboratively with local partners to achieve its vision for Downtown Marshfield as a vibrant destination offering experiences that provide a sense of family, community and togetherness for all residents and visitors.

Based on the successful completion of previous planning objectives, the group initiated a 2021 year end strategic planning session to prioritize activities and set work plan goals. The following items identify areas where Main Street Marshfield anticipates making significant impacts as a result of its efforts over the next five years.

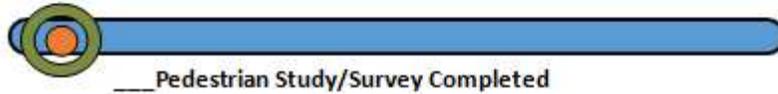
### Improve Pedestrian Experience



#### 5-Year Goal

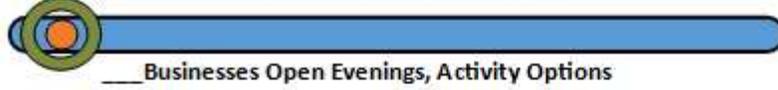
Average speeds 10% or less above posted limits, 50% reduction in truck traffic

### Increased Foot Traffic



20% increase in pedestrian traffic,  
Average stay > 1 hour

### Prioritize Gathering and Unique Experiences



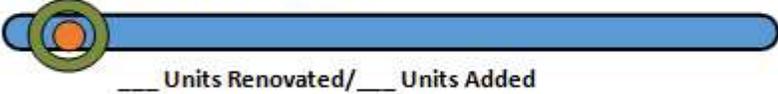
25% of storefronts open one evening per week, custom visitor itineraries highlighting gathering options (date, friends)

### Enhance Downtown Aesthetics



Add 5 outdoor patios, Activate vacant windows, spaces

### Increase Residential Options



150 new or renovated units downtown, downtown living marketing developed

### Develop Downtown Brand



20% increase in followers, 50%+ positive comments, Create signature image

