

Background

The City of Kaukauna is renowned for its vibrant history and a community of firsts. Kaukauna is lucky to have one of the most historic city cores and some of the oldest buildings in the state of Wisconsin. 64 commercial buildings, between uptown and downtown, are over 100 years old and another dozen buildings are over 70 years old. The historic charm of the city's core is one of its greatest assets, but unfortunately old building needs a lot of work to remain usable and aesthetically pleasing. Without continued investment and maintenance buildings can degrade and create obsolescence.

Kaukauna has come to a crossroads where many of its downtown buildings are seeing their age. From façade degradation to interior neglect, the downtown is losing its vibrancy. The cost to repair an exterior historic building can often be 10's of thousands of dollars. Similarly, the cost to renovate and bring units up to code in a 100+ year old building is very cost prohibitive to many businesses. Business owners and building owners who just saw one of the largest economic downturns in US history, are not flush with thousands of dollars to renovate their buildings.

To revitalize and breathe new life into our downtown, the city needs to get serious about programs that will fix our aging buildings, reduce vacancies, provide code complaint units, and attract new foot traffic to the city's core.

The planning department took a walking tour and asked businesses about their perceptions of the downtown and if they believe investment in the buildings would help. The answer was a resounding "yes" on both fronts. Business owners are by and large concerned about the city's downtown health and a number of business owners stated they would use both façade improvement grants and interior renovation grants to improve their facility.

Currently the city operates a loan program through the Redevelopment Authority. While this loan program has helped many, it serves as a gap financing for subprime loans. The RACK program finances those who cannot obtain a traditional business loan and only offers modest financial incentives.

Planning staff proposes a three-pronged approach to "Renewing" Kaukauna's city core/downtown spaces:

1. **Façade Improvements**
2. **Interior Improvements**
3. **Downtown Beautification**

Façade Improvement Program

The first prong to Renew Kaukauna's city core is assisting with the aged exteriors of our downtown buildings. Downtowns that are well maintained and have inviting architecture have increased tourism and increased customer base, according to American Planning Association and the Downtown Council Association. Successful historic downtowns, like Cedarburg, Wisconsin, commit to investment of the exterior of their historic buildings through façade

improvement programs (FIPs). FIPs are not just common in historic city's but throughout our region: Appleton, Oshkosh, Neenah, Menasha, Green Bay, Fond Du Lac all have various forms of FIPs in their community. While FIPs are common they take different forms in all communities. Kaukauna can tailor the FIP to our downtown's needs. Projects including tuck pointing, masonry renewal, siding replacement, crown maintenance, trim repair, soffit repair, fascia repair, window replacement, and many other exterior projects could be included in this program on a 50/50 matching grant basis.



Images from Cedarburg WI

Interior Renovation

The second prong to Renew Kaukauna's core is to improve the interior of the buildings. Many of the commercial and residential units in the city's core are either underutilized or vacant. Historic buildings are cost prohibitive to bring up to code, many businesses and landlords will opt to simply let a building sit idle instead of fixing the inside. Providing, 1/3 matching grants, for



Downtown Appleton Lofts

interior renovations can help to solve this issue. The interior improvement program would cover items that stay with the building: electric, HVAC, plumbing, walls, and other structural components. Characteristics of a Successful Downtown written by UW Extension illustrates the need to have a contiguous line of businesses. Vacancies and under utilized businesses causes a break in the line of business and give the visitor an impression of disjointedness and lack of selection.

Vacancies or underutilized store fronts deter customers from walking the length of a downtown. In addition, more high-quality residential units in the downtown creates a close market of people who will frequent downtown businesses and keep it vibrant.

Downtown Beautification

The final prong to Renew Kaukauna's core is to beautify it through art and vegetation. Art, trees, and flowers create a vibrant welcoming space for shoppers and residents. Many downtowns in the region, including Appleton and Oshkosh, have started successful downtown mural programs. Interesting "Instagram" murals bring many young people from the surrounding communities into the downtown. In addition to art, vegetation creates a calming and relaxing experience. In a world where Amazon can deliver goods to your doorstep, the shopping experience and atmosphere has become the key reason people come to vibrant downtowns. Working with local artist to creating downtown murals and providing funds for more planters and trees in the downtown will serve to create the positive experience.



Oshkosh and Appleton Mural Projects

Proposed Budget Breakdown

Note: RACK Matching \$150,000

1. \$175,000 - Façade Improvements
2. \$ 100,000 – Interior Improvements
3. \$ 25,000 – Downtown Beautification

