



Above photo is the Main Street Reconstruction from 1967. Photo attributed to the Watertown Historical Society

Watertown Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force Recommendations

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Introduction

In April of 2021, the City of Watertown commissioned the Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force. The public body was created in response to the anticipated replacement of the Cole Bridge in 2026 and the subsequent reconstruction of 11 blocks of Main Street in 2027. Elected officials and City staff recognized that, although the project would not take place for over five years, strategic planning should be undertaken as soon as possible.

Task Force Composition

Membership of the twelve-person group included the following representation:

- Mayor Emily McFarland,
- One alderperson,
- Two City engineering staff members,
- One City development staff member,
- One representative from Watertown's Main Street Program,
- One representative from Watertown's Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission,
- One business person representing the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce,
- One owner of a business located on Main Street downtown,
- Two community members at large, and
- One representative from Watertown's Youth Advisory Council.

Objectives

The Task Force oriented its activities around two overarching objectives:

1. Provide support for downtown business and property owners before, during and after reconstruction, and
2. Engage the community to compile a set of guiding design recommendations for a reconstructed Main Street.

Using This Report

The recommendations put forth in this report result from the Task Force's work on the second of the group's objectives. The primary intent is that this document be a formal resource for the City of Watertown Department of Public Works as planning for the reconstruction effort proceeds. The secondary intent is that this document serve as a point of reference for City staff, consultants and any other individuals or organizations who may perform planning, engineering or development work in and around Downtown Watertown.

The report includes recommendations and preferences that transcend the scope of the reconstruction project with the expressed desire that transformative planning and other initiatives take place. Recommendations are segmented into two categories: those pertaining only to Main Street and those pertaining to Downtown as a whole. Each category further groups its recommendations based on whether they are:

- Aesthetic Improvements,
- Infrastructure Improvements,
- Pedestrian-oriented Improvements, or
- Planning Recommendations.

Because some of the Task Force's recommendations have the potential to be implemented prior to commencement of the reconstruction effort, each individual recommendation indicates whether the preferred timing of the initiatives: Before or After Construction. Each individual recommendation also indicates which overarching evaluation criteria the item scored highest on.

This report formalizes the community input the Task Force received and gives public voice to the concerns, support and vision of Watertown residents who participated in the effort throughout the year's activities.

Project Background

Main Street in the City of Watertown is simultaneously a downtown corridor and State Highway 19. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) maintains jurisdiction over its state highways and had been monitoring the aging Cole Bridge on Main Street for replacement. When WisDOT informed City of Watertown officials that they anticipated a complete, state-funded bridge replacement in 2026, City officials and staff sought to capitalize on this opportunity by scheduling the subsequent reconstruction of Main Street.

The 11-block reconstruction effort would span the entire width of the road, building facade to building facade, encompassing the right-of-way. In order to make the project less onerous on downtown businesses, reconstruction would be strategically planned in short segments with extensive signage and support in place. In addition to deteriorating street and sidewalk surfaces, the utility infrastructure was in need of replacement. Water mains below the street were over 100 years old, in some cases. The last time Main Street had undergone a comprehensive reconstruction of this nature was in 1967. This was a fact that impressed upon the Task Force the understanding that infrastructure is long-lived. The group was to guide an effort that would likely be in place for another 40-60 years.

Visioning Process

Informational Review

The Task Force had its first meeting on April 27, 2021 and began to outline its approach to the next 8 months of work. The team started by reviewing formal plans and documents pertaining to Downtown Watertown, including:

- 2014 Watertown Riverfront and Downtown Redevelopment Initiative,
- 2016 Riverfront Design Plan, and the
- 2019 City of Watertown Comprehensive Plan.

To further their understanding of precedence cases, existing conditions and regulatory constraints, the Task Force invited presentations from:

- WisDOT (one community member on the Task Force was an employee at WisDOT),
- State of Wisconsin Main Street Program, and the
- Watertown Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission.

The team also reviewed recently completed Downtown development projects (Sharp Corner Park), those currently underway (Watertown Public Library), and those forthcoming (Watertown Town Square) in order to further guide design.

Establishing Objectives

In order to ensure that the Task Force was taking a principles-based approach to creating design recommendations, a set of overarching project goals was sought. The team began by compiling a long list of broad concepts that were desired to govern design. These concepts were to become the project objectives to be used as criteria by which to evaluate the design recommendations. The list of concepts was further refined through a scoring system whereby task force members rated each item. The final tallies were recorded and the outcome was a set of five project objectives to be used as evaluation criteria.

The five objectives were:

1. High Quality Design
2. Pedestrian Friendly
3. Retail / Commercial Oriented
4. Universal Accessibility and Improved ADA Compliance
5. Forward Looking and Responsive to the History of Main Street

Brainstorming Design Strategies

After the criteria-set was established, the task force began a similar process of compiling a long list of design “wants and needs”. These included items from “roundabouts” to “green infrastructure” to “bike lanes”. The team then rated and scored these ideas using a criteria matrix to see how well they fit project goals. During this process, it was acknowledged that there were some items on the list that did not pertain specifically to Main Street, but to the Downtown

as a whole. The group felt these items were equally important and decided to include a separate set of recommendations for Downtown Watertown. At the end of the ranking and scoring process, two sets of recommendations with roughly twenty items each were produced.

Public Engagement

With a draft set of recommendations in place, the task force began undertaking public engagement activities. A series of presentations was given in various venues throughout the Watertown community. A video recording of the presentation was hosted on the task force's webpage to be viewed by those who could not attend in person. Feedback, input and ideas were received in-person at events and via printed and online surveys. This input was incorporated by the task force as the team re-ranked its recommendations into the following finalized lists.

The Recommendations

Recommendations pertaining to Main Street

Aesthetic Improvements

MS.1: Plan for installation and updating of murals.

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: Before

Downtown Watertown has existing murals prominently installed on various buildings. Creating a mural program which builds upon existing conditions can help cultivate and promote the identity and branding of the community. These kinds of initiatives are an excellent opportunity to engage with local community groups, arts groups, and schools arts departments. Building partnerships strengthen community bonds and foster emotional investment in Downtown Watertown. Additionally, the City may want to consider hosting a design competition to create further interest and engagement in downtown revitalization processes.



MS. 2: Plan for art and/or sculptures on sidewalks

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: After



Another great way to engage the local arts community and foster engagement downtown is through public art installations. Downtown placemaking strategies in cities across Wisconsin have utilized this strategy to harness both the power of interactivity and aesthetic improvements.

MS. 3: Install pedestrian-level flowerpots

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: After

Softening aesthetics on Main Street and adding splashes of color add to the pedestrian experience and aesthetic appeal Downtown. The City should cultivate relationships with existing organizations operating Downtown in order to develop a shared maintenance strategy and an equitable plan for implementation. Businesses and property owners Downtown should be consulted in determining the best approach for installation and maintenance.

**MS. 4: Install well-designed trash receptacles**

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design;

Pedestrian Friendly

Preferred Timing: After

Both for their own visual appeal and in order to maintain a well-cared for appearance along Main Street, well-designed trash receptacles should be installed at strategic locations. The City could consider incorporating Watertown branding and logos into the designs.

MS. 5: Create strategic plan for “vistas” on Main Street

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: Before

Great urban design takes into consideration the existing visual assets present in a community. Watertown’s Main Street crosses the Rock River at the Cole Bridge, houses numerous historical structures and features prominent community buildings. The City should consider strategically taking advantage of the visual appeal of these assets by considering “view-sheds” and maintaining space where appropriate. Prior to reconstruction of Main Street, the City should consider creating a visual asset inventory to assist in planning for view sheds and vista locations.

MS. 6: Install Main Street entrance feature

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Responsive to Main Street history/forward thinking

Preferred Timing: After or During



Harkening back to a previous era in Watertown's history, the City should consider installing an entrance feature over Main Street. Such structures provide a clear indication to both vehicle and pedestrian travelers that they have entered a unique district within the City and sets the stage for what's to come.

MS. 7: Install permanent “parklets”

Top two evaluation criteria: Retail/Commercial Oriented; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: After or During



Permanent parklets, essentially extensions of the curb that repurpose former parking spots, provide valuable space for eating and gathering. Well-designed spaces integrate landscaping and built in seating to create a more inviting streetscape and allow for more space along the existing sidewalk for pedestrian flow.

Infrastructure Improvements

MS. 8: Update and upgrade utilities throughout construction

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: During

Whenever possible during reconstruction, the City should take advantage of opportunities to make utility upgrades in anticipation of changing technology and infrastructure needs.

**MS. 9: Conduct evaluation study of parking on Main Street**

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: Ongoing

An analysis of parking on the Main Street corridor will provide the City with a better sense of space utilization rates during a variety of days and times. A study of this kind may inform the task force’s recommendation to install permanent parklets or curb bump-outs by identifying under-used spaces.

MS. 10: Install infrastructure for electric vehicle charging stations

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: During

Vehicle technology is evolving at a rapid pace. While the installation of electric vehicle charging stations may not be prudent at this point in time, ensuring that conduit and necessary infrastructure is put in place will facilitate the potential for future connections.

MS. 11: Install traffic lights that allow for pedestrians to stop traffic

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; Universal accessibility/ADA

Preferred Timing: During



A safe, walkable environment is critical to a vibrant downtown. Traffic lights that allow for pedestrian control give priority to foot traffic and enhance the visiting experience for people of all physical capabilities.

MS. 12: Improve design of traffic lights

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; high quality design

Part of the appeal to a community's streetscape is uniqueness and differentiation. Wherever possible, finding opportunities to incorporate uniqueness of

design should be prioritized. Upgrading the design of traffic lights is a subtle aesthetic improvement that could also take into consideration improvements that would enhance visibility to vehicle traffic.

MS. 13: Install taller lampposts

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: During

Lampposts along Main Street are ideal locations for hanging artistic banners, promoting events and highlighting community branding. The current height of these lampposts leaves hanging installations susceptible to damage from tall vehicles. Installing taller lampposts provides additional space to ensure that hanging materials do not get damaged.

**MS. 14: Install infrastructure to accommodate 5G on light poles**

Top two evaluation criteria: Retail/Commercial oriented; High quality design

Preferred Timing: During

Connectivity in public spaces has become an expectation. Communities that are proactively planning for infrastructure that facilitates greater levels of internet connectivity are better suited to meet the needs of residents and visitors alike. As much as landscaping and streetscaping, internet capabilities have become a part of placemaking economic development strategies.

MS. 15: Underlight Cole Bridge

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: After or During

Installing mounting infrastructure and hookups for underlighting the Cole Bridge will allow for future, surface-mounted lighting fixtures. The additional lighting will enhance the pedestrian experience and create ambient lighting along the Rock River that can be viewed from the Town Square and other nearby locations.

Pedestrian Oriented Improvements

MS. 16: Widen sidewalks

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly, Universal accessibility/ADA

Preferred Timing: During

A hallmark of a vibrant downtown is that it is walkable and geared toward pedestrian traffic. Wider sidewalks allow for, not only better pedestrian circulation, but for downtown businesses to temporarily locate amenities on the sidewalk as well.

MS. 17: Create meeting spaces

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; High quality design

Preferred Timing: During



Having visitors stay and linger on Main Street helps give our downtown businesses more opportunities to attract customers. Spending time in well-designed gathering spaces and having conversations with fellow community members activates Main Street.

MS. 18: Install well-designed seating at pedestrian friendly intervals.

Top two evaluation criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: After

Watertown has one of the longest historic Main Streets in the state of Wisconsin. Strategically placed seating enhances downtown walkability, gives respite for visitors and facilitates community connections by giving people space to gather and talk.

MS. 19: Install well-designed wayfinding signage

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; Retail/Commercial oriented

Preferred Timing: After

One of the most critical strategies to creating a more pedestrian friendly environment is the installation of high-quality wayfinding signs. Pointing out to visitors where important activity centers are, where public parking is and where points of interest can be found, makes the Main Street experience less stressful and more enjoyable.

MS. 20: Install curb bump-outs to improve traffic calming measures

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; high-quality design

Preferred Timing: During

Curb bump outs in strategic locations help slow speeding vehicles, provide additional space for landscaping and allow businesses to showcase some of their wares outside their storefronts. When installed at pedestrian crossings, bump outs enhance safety by shortening the distance needed to cross the street.

MS. 21: Relocate crosswalks for improved pedestrian flow and safety

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; Universal accessibility/ADA

Preferred Timing: During

As part of a larger circulation system downtown, relocating crosswalks on Main Street can improve walkability and help vehicle traffic become more aware of increased pedestrian presence.

MS. 22: Incorporate features for the blind and deaf into crosswalks

Top two evaluation criteria: Universal accessibility/ADA; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: After or During

Main Street Watertown should be accessible for all people. Installing features in crosswalks that assist those who are visually or auditorily impaired creates a more inclusive environment for residents and visitors alike.

MS. 23: Create continental crosswalks for improved pedestrian safety

Top two evaluation criteria: Pedestrian friendly; High quality design

Preferred Timing: After or During



Continental crosswalks are striped, high-visibility crosswalks that alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians. Generally, these incorporate parallel striping of a yellow or white color, but communities can be creative with design to incorporate different images or city/downtown branding.

Recommendations pertaining to **Downtown Watertown**

Aesthetic Improvements

DT. 1: Plan for installation and updating of murals.

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

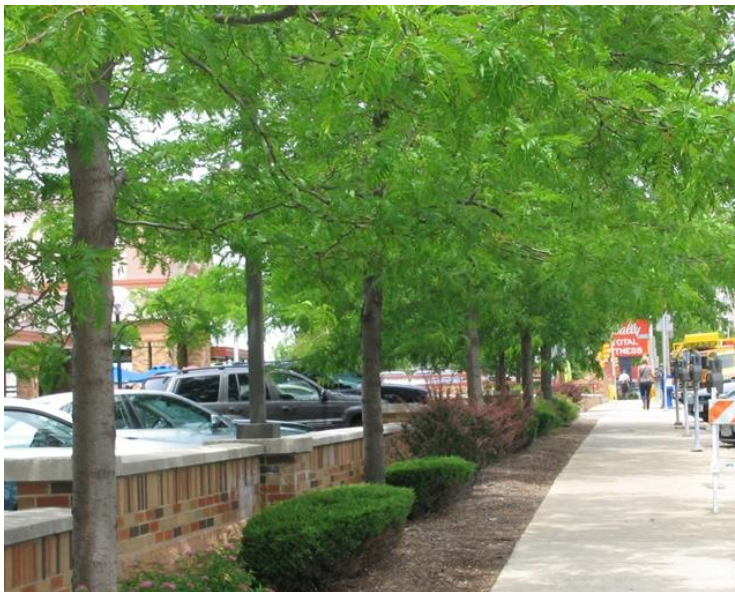
Preferred Timing: Before

Recommendations for mural installation are outlined under the mural strategy for Main Street.

DT. 2: Improve aesthetics of existing parking lots

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: Before and/or After



Increasing the visual appeal of existing public parking lots is more than just an aesthetic improvement. Having consistency of design and well-marked signage helps make clear to visitors where public lots are and how they can be accessed.

DT. 3: Remove vegetation to open views to the river and create vistas

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: After

Watertown is blessed to have the Rock River run right through downtown. In order to take full advantage of its presence, it is recommended that obstructions and unmanaged brush be cleared in order to open up more viewing opportunities.

DT. 4: Install trees and/or plantings to soften aesthetic

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: After or During

Incorporating greenscape into various locations throughout the downtown helps to soften the built environment, reduce urban heat effects and improve overall aesthetics. Maintenance is always a concern. The City and/or downtown organizations may want to explore different partnerships to facilitate collaborative maintenance of landscaping downtown.

Infrastructure Improvements

DT. 5: Infrastructure for decorative lighting and electrical use

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: During

Installing mounting hardware for hanging lights and decorations and strategically placing outlets and/or USB charging hookups are relatively low-cost ways to add value to downtown streetscapes and further placemaking strategies.

DT. 6: Install infrastructure for electric vehicle charging stations

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: During

Recommendations for installing electric vehicle charging station infrastructure is outlined in the Main Street section of this report.

DT. 7: Install infrastructure to accommodate 5G on light poles

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Retail/Commercial Oriented; High quality design

Preferred Timing: During

Recommendations for installing 5G infrastructure is outlined in the Main Street section of this report.

DT. 8: Reconstruct and improve seawalls along the river in the Downtown.

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: Before, During, After

While already a priority for the City, this report recommends special attention be paid to seawall stewardship. This critical infrastructure allows development along the Rock River and needs to be continually prioritized in capital projects.

Pedestrian-Oriented Improvements

DT. 9: Install well-designed wayfinding signage

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Pedestrian friendly; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: After



Recommendations for installing wayfinding signage is outlined in the Main Street section of this report.

DT. 10: Create meeting spaces

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Pedestrian friendly; High quality design

Preferred Timing: During

Recommendations for creating meeting spaces is outlined in the Main Street section of this report.

DT. 11: Create and/or identify space for winter activities and programming

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Pedestrian friendly

Preferred Timing: After

Bringing visitors downtown year-round is a priority for assisting downtown businesses. Finding opportunities and locations to create winter events will ensure that Watertown avoids becoming a seasonal destination only.

DT. 12: Temporarily close off parts of certain streets for programming

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Pedestrian friendly; Universal Accessibility / ADA

Preferred Timing: After

Part of creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown means changing the perception of the use of streets. By temporarily closing off street sections for events and programming, the City sends the message that downtown prioritizes foot traffic. This strategy also gives downtown businesses more opportunities to attract pedestrian visitors.



DT. 13: Install a multi-purpose bubbler.

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Pedestrian friendly; High quality design

Preferred Timing: After or During

Multi-purpose bubblers are as much “pet-friendly” as they are pedestrian friendly. These universally accessible devices have a foot pedal to release water for animals.

Planning Recommendations

DT. 14: Perform comprehensive parking study in the Downtown, with the intention of planning for future parking needs and minimizing parking loss for Downtown businesses.

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: Ongoing

The City has already begun this process. In early 2022, a professional consultants was brought on board through a grant facilitated by the Wisconsin Main Street program to evaluate existing conditions and future opportunities when it comes to parking strategies downtown. This study builds upon previous studies the City has commissioned. Evaluating parking needs is a continual process that may change as Downtown continues to develop.

DT. 15: Perform transportation network evaluation in the Downtown, with the intention of redesigning one-way streets and planning for bike usage

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Retail/Commercial Oriented

Preferred Timing: Ongoing

Downtown Watertown has several one-way streets that were designated as such over forty years ago. The City should re-evaluate these choices and consider taking a multi-modal, systems view of the downtown transportation network.

DT. 16: Create implementation plan for developing the Riverwalk north of the Cole Bridge.

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: Pedestrian friendly; High quality design

Preferred Timing: Before and After

The riverwalk downtown has the potential to be a featured attraction for Downtown Watertown. The City should explore capitalizing on existing Riverwalk designs by prioritizing a strategy for installing path infrastructure north of the Cole Bridge.

DT. 17: Develop a plan for creative alley restoration and public art

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Responsive to Main Street

History/Forward Thinking

Preferred Timing: Before



Turning downtown Watertown's alleys into places for creative art installations and event programming transforms what some might view as an "eyesore" into community assets. The City should consider creating a "creative alley" plan and engage downtown businesses and property owners in its development and implementation.

DT. 18: Plan for green infrastructure improvements in the Downtown

Top Two Evaluation Criteria: High quality design; Responsive to Main Street/Forward Thinking

Preferred Timing: Before

In addition to the aesthetic appeal and softening that greenscaping presents, installing green infrastructure can be an excellent way to address stormwater management. The City should begin having conversations with downtown property owners in order to communicate the benefits of stormwater management and to outline alternative approaches.

Conclusion

The opportunity to guide the vision of Main Street in Downtown Watertown only presents itself once in a decade. The recommendations set forth in this report by the Task Force reflect a carefully conducted process of strategic thinking, proactive design and public engagement. One of the objectives of this Task Force was to present this document to the City's Public Works Commission in order to have recommendations incorporated into the 5-year capital planning process. With the formal adoption of this document by the Committee, and the subsequent use of this document by Watertown's Public Work's Department and Engineering staff, the goals and objectives of the community will be manifested in a reconstructed Main Street.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force Members

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