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THROWBACK

Throwback: Another reimagining of Watertown's downtown riverfront

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Part of Groth's design project as he finished his architecture degree at the University of Minnesota. Viewing the east bank of the Rock River from the southwest.

STEVE GROTH Contributed

WATERTOWN — Architecture/design firm Rinka of Milwaukee recently unveiled conceptual plans that the City of Watertown could consider when evaluating the future of the riverfront — and riverwalk — downtown. But can you believe ideas have been circulating in the *Daily Times* since at least 1982?

In the Aug. 18 edition, just a couple weeks away from precisely 42 years before Rinka's second community feedback session last month, architecture student Steve Groth's ideas were published in the paper. Today, he is a Senior Architect and Specifications Manager at Ramlow/Stein in Milwaukee.

"The project was located in the First Street parking lot north of Main Street," Groth says. "Its main elements were a new library (which was being debated in the city at the time), a community theater, a historical museum, community meeting space and a riverwalk that stretched from Main Street to Cady Street.

"The south end of the riverwalk ran through the first floor structural bay of what was then Kusel's Department store, rather than around the building, to connect to Main Street. It also included an informal outdoor amphitheater and boat slips so people could experience the riverwalk from either the water or the land."

Groth dubbed his idea the “Watertown Cultural Center.”

Today, many of the uses he imagined for his building have been constructed elsewhere in Watertown. The library was renovated and expanded in its present location (though the main entrance shifted to South Water Street from West Main Street), a community theater exists in The Market, the Watertown Historical Society operates its museum on the grounds of the Octagon House (including the original First Kindergarten building) and there's community meeting space in a few City-owned locations, including the renovated library.

As for a Riverwalk, there exists one today on both sides of the Rock, primarily south of the Main Street Bridge. It remains to be seen if a plan like Groth's — or that presented by Rinka — will come to fruition.

Tim Sullivan