

Public Works Department

To: Mayor McFarland and Common Council Members

From: Andrew Beyer, P.E.

Date: September 26, 2024

Subject: Downtown Watertown Traffic Study and 2028 Main Street Reconstruction: Evaluating the Conversion of Third and Fourth Streets to Two-Way Traffic

Background

In 2022, the Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force recommended adding bump-outs at several intersections along Main Street, including Third and Fourth Streets, as part of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) 2028 Main Street Reconstruction Project. The Task Force also suggested a traffic study to assess the feasibility of converting one-way streets to two-way traffic in the downtown area. WisDOT later analyzed the potential for bump-outs at these intersections if Third and Fourth Streets were converted to two-way traffic. Their findings indicated that bump-outs would not be feasible due to insufficient turning radii for trucks. However, the bump-outs would work if the streets remained one-way.

In 2024, the City of Watertown allocated funds for the downtown traffic study, which was awarded to raSmith through a Qualification Based Selection process. Preliminary analysis from raSmith confirmed WisDOT's conclusion that converting Third and Fourth Streets to two-way traffic would require the removal of the proposed bump-outs. Despite this, raSmith's research showed that the intersections would still function acceptably for traffic flow under two-way traffic, with potential economic and safety benefits from the conversion. Traffic count data also revealed a significant decline in volumes since the early 1990s, suggesting surplus capacity for future growth.

In August 2024, both the Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Task Force and the Public Works Commission reviewed the findings. They recommended removing the bump-outs to allow for the possible conversion of Third and Fourth Streets to two-way traffic as part of the 2028 reconstruction project. In September 2024, the Public Safety & Welfare Committee reviewed the findings and approved a draft ordinance, which would convert Third Street and Fourth Street to two-way traffic between Madison Street and Western Avenue. The draft ordinance would go into effect in 2028 in conjunction with the WisDOT Downtown Main Street Reconstruction Project from Church Street to Market Street.

Budget Goal

1. Proactively maintains and improves our parks and infrastructure in an effort to ensure quality, safety and compliance

5. Promotes and fosters innovative approaches for community development and growth

Financial Impact

Infrastructure expenses to be placed in 2028 budget. Conversion to two-way traffic may have positive economic benefits to businesses.

Recommendation

Repeal §500-5 One-way streets and alleys of the following streets to take effect in 2028:

Name of Street	Location	Direction of Travel
Fourth Street {Amended by Ord. No. 72-36}	From Western Ave. to Madison St.	North
Third Street {Amended by Ord. No. 72-36}	From Madison St. to Western Ave.	South