THE CITY OF WATERTOWN

MEMO

Engineering Division of the Public Works Department

To: Chairperson Davis

From: Nathan R. Williams, Civil Engineer I

Date: October 28, 2026

Subject: Public Safety and Welfare Meeting of November 4, 2026

Review and take possible action: S. Fifth Street One-Way to Two-Way Traffic Conversion

Background

The Public Safety and Welfare Committee has asked to review one one-way street at each monthly meeting. This is to evaluate each street in detail, as they were generally evaluated in the Downtown One-Way to Two-Way Street Conversion Study, prepared by engineering consultant raSmith. This month, Fifth Street, between Western Avenue and Jefferson Street, is under review. Letters were sent to property owners on October 21, 2026, informing them of the upcoming meeting and welcoming feedback regarding the proposed change.

Below is an excerpt from the raSmith study, regarding the pros and cons of street conversion:

One-Way

+ Higher vehicular capacity

– Faster travel speeds (less desirable in urban downtown setting)

+ Shorter travel times

– Potential for wrong-way movements

+ Simplified pedestrian crossings (cross one travel direction at a time)

Two-Way

+ Slower travel speeds

– Longer travel times

+ Simplified circulation for motorists

+ Improved business visibility

+ Fewer street signs

+ Improved conditions for vulnerable users with slower motor vehicle speeds

raSmith's analysis of Fifth Street is as follows:

"5th Street: All but one block has a width of 34 feet or greater and would operate as two-way with minimum 9-foot travel lanes in each direction and parking on both sides. The block between Milwaukee Street and Wisconsin Street has a width of 30 feet. Parking restrictions on one side of the street could be considered on this narrow block, or it can operate with limited side-by-side opposing traffic and parking on both sides."

Staff verified the measurements from raSmith's report. Fifth Street between Western Avenue and Jefferson Street is one-way with parking on both sides. The FOC to FOC (face of curb to face of curb) width varies, as shown below:

- Western Avenue to Milwaukee Street is 36'
- Milwaukee Street to Spring Street is 30'
- Spring Street to Jefferson Street is 34'

As per the report prepared by raSmith, a minimum width of 28' FOC to FOC is acceptable for two-way traffic with parking on both sides in local, residential areas. To note, city subdivision standards for newly platted streets require a minimum width of 34' FOC to FOC when parking is provided on both sides.

There is a double-yellow marked centerline on S Fifth Street between Market Street and Jefferson Street, and the width in this area is also 34' wide FOC to FOC, with parking on the east side only.

Budget Goal

1. Create a community where all can feel safe and strive for economic success.

4. Involve those who are impacted before making decisions.

Financial Impact

Should the street be converted without reconstruction, financial impact will be negligible and require only signage changes.

Should S Fifth Street between Milwaukee Street and Spring Street be converted with reconstruction (initiated for the sole purpose of widening this block of street to standard city width for two-way traffic and parking on both sides of the street), costs are anticipated to be approximately $150,000. This cost includes only new pavement and curb and gutter, and any improvements needed for storm, sanitary, and water could increase the overall cost to the city budget significantly.

Recommendation

The Engineering Division recommends converting S Fifth Street from one-way to two-way traffic. The following are suggested options for motions to send the conversion to Common Council for review:

- Convert S Fifth Street from Jefferson Street to Western Avenue in the month of May 2027, no later than May 31st, with a recommendation to remove parking on the west side of S Fifth Street between Spring Street and Milwaukee Street.
- Hold conversion of S Fifth Street from Jefferson Street to Western Avenue until such a time that S Fifth Street from Milwaukee Street to Spring Street can be reconstructed and widened to standard city width for two-way traffic and parking on both sides of the street.

Attachments:

- Site Map
- Letter to Property Owners