

Spring Splash® Taskforce Meetings Summary



Greater Whitewater Committee, Inc.



**Whitewater Rental
Association**

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Executive Summary

The Spring Splash® Taskforce convened representatives from the City of Whitewater, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, and the community to address challenges associated with the unsanctioned annual Spring Splash® event. Over three workshops, participants identified safety, resource strain, and public perception as primary concerns, and developed strategies to enhance event management. Key recommendations include hosting a centralized, University-led event prioritizing safety and student engagement, implementing a robust communication strategy, and leveraging joint jurisdiction for enforcement to balance public safety with community impact. The taskforce's collaborative process has laid the groundwork for a safer, more organized event while fostering stronger partnerships between stakeholders.

Stakeholders in Attendance

A cross-section of City, University, and community members came together over a series of three taskforce workshops in October-December 2024. 10-15 attendees attended each of the three workshops. An outside facilitator guided the workshops and developed this report to allow for full participation by all community stakeholders. Participants included representatives of the following organizations:

CITY	UNIVERSITY	COMMUNITY
City Administration	UWW Chancellor's office	Business owner
City Police Department	UWW Police Department	Landlord(s)
City Fire Department	Student Government Advisor	Rental Association
City Economic Development	UWW Dean of Students' office	
City Council members (2)	Greek Life student reps	
	Student Government reps	

Goal of Workshops

The goal of the three workshops was to bring together members of the Whitewater community to discuss the annual Spring Splash® event. The event is an annual, decentralized party weekend including house parties and bars in downtown Whitewater, typically held toward the end of the spring semester. The event is not sanctioned by either the City or the University and the trademark for the event is held by Wisconsin RED, a Wisconsin-based apparel and lifestyle brand.

The unsanctioned nature of the event has led to challenges in communication between community members, the University, and the City. The City of Whitewater Police Department has (in recent years) taken a lead role in managing the public safety response for the event, with support from surrounding jurisdictions. This has an outsized resource cost for a community the size of Whitewater, a burden which is shouldered by residential and business taxpayers.

The goal of this taskforce was to evaluate what future steps should be taken by the city and the University to lead to best outcomes surrounding Spring Splash®. Participants graciously gave their time to participate in guided activities over the three meetings to contribute to this final report.

Workshop #1 – Identifying Best and Worst-Case Scenarios

In the October meeting participants had the chance to share honestly their hopes and fears about what the future of Spring Splash® might look like. Responses fell into the following categories.

HOPES FOR SPRING SPLASH®

Controlled and safe event
Well-organized event
Fun and safe
Collaborative
Revenue-generator for businesses
Good PR for City/University

FEARS FOR SPRING SPLASH®

Resource drain / Unsafe
Uncontrolled event
Health and safety risk
Financial liability
Disorganized
Bad PR for City / University
Dirty

After identifying the best and worst-case scenarios, participants framed their concerns into actionable questions and voted on which questions were the most important to answer over future taskforce meetings. Questions generated were:

1. How might we make Spring Splash® less resource-draining? *
2. How might we educate ALL parties (students, residents, landlords, businesses) to make informed choices around Spring Splash®?
3. Should we (or are we able to?) add more elements of control and structure to Spring Splash®? *
4. How might we educate business owners to monetize from this event?
5. How can we positively message around Spring Splash®? *
6. How might we manage Spring Splash® in as safe a manner as possible? *

Questions with an asterisk received the most votes to be discussed in a future meeting.

Workshop #2 – Generating Ideas to Answer our Questions.

In the November meeting participants focused on brainstorming as many ideas or solutions as possible to our four actionable questions we designated the month earlier. This workshop aimed to generate numerous ideas for deeper exploration. Ideas generated (sorted by question) are listed here:

How might we make Spring Splash® less resource-draining?

- Centralized event location

- Reduce carry-ins/outs with authorized vendors.
- Emergency management planning hub
- Plan of action for stray parties
- Map resources in advance.
- Communication strategy
- Education for community members, students
- Engage students in their desires.
- Communication between City / Public Safety / UWW
- Rebrand the event.
- Engage students in organization and post-event cleanup.
- Engage local businesses in events.
- Set expectations with attendees about local origins and consequences.

Should we (or are we able to?) add more elements of control and structure to Spring Splash®?

- Need to have an established “owner” of the event to maximize communication.
- Do communications come from Wisconsin RED? From UWW?
- Engage Greek Life in messaging.
- Leverage social media outlets such as Barstool.
- Will an attempt to structure or formalize drive the event underground?
- Determine liability and ownership of events.
- Leave event only to UWW students.
- Avoid locations with major roads, water, railroad to reduce liability.
- Make the event a controlled, destination event with a major headliner music act, wristbands for attendees.

How can we positively message around Spring Splash®?

- Success defined by the level of organization, decreased arrests, property damage, and an established liability structure.
- Need an all-in strategy on communications to reach as many parties as possible and set expectations for residents and students, event attendees.
- Leverage multiple platforms (including social media accounts) to reach as many individuals as possible.
- UWW student government takes ownership of social media accounts?
- Work with a marketing consultant or agency to develop messaging.
- Be up front with students about the challenges of this event – not to scare them, but to be honest.

How might we manage Spring Splash® in as safe a manner as possible?

- If an event is hosted on campus, it can be centralized at a student hub, it will not negatively impact traffic, parking. There are concerns that if the event is not done well, it will not attract student attention. It needs to strike a balance of being structured and secure but still providing an experience students want. An event on campus cannot be dry if students are going to attend.
- If the event is hosted in the downtown area, it offers greater access to businesses. But a downtown location may cause traffic congestion and there are certain streets which cannot be closed. There are uncontrolled variables in the downtown area such as railroad tracks, water, traffic, parking, and the question of where the event could or should be hosted.
- Landlords have concerns about property damage resulting from house parties – need to ensure that there is adequate messaging around house parties and enforcement.
- Messaging to community members will be centered around behavior expectations and safety planning.

The group narrowed down their large lists of ideas to five ideas they wanted to explore further at the final workshop.

1. Host a centralized event in downtown Whitewater – open to all.
2. Host a centralized music festival on UWW campus – open to all.
3. Host a centralized event with non-drinking options (location to be determined) – for students only.
4. Implement a unified message with a multi-platform communications strategy.
5. Bring down the hammer! Enforce strongly during the event.

Workshop #3 – Gaining Consensus and Identifying Next Steps

The final workshop brought together representatives to evaluate the pros and cons of each idea and come to a consensus on conclusions about the future of Spring Splash®. Only four representatives, including one from the Chancellor's office and three students, could attend the final workshop due to its timing near the semester's end and winter commencement. No representatives from UWW Police Department attended the final meeting due to the schedule conflicts.

We derived four conclusions from the five final ideas established in the previous session to evaluate. These four conclusions were:

Conclusion #1: The centralized event should be for students only.

Conclusion #2: The #1 goal of the event is SAFETY, even at greater cost to the community.

Conclusion #3: Measures of success will be evident immediately through quantity of violations / citations.

Conclusion #4: Enforcement efforts should be focused on life safety and avoiding property damage.

The group split into pro and con factions – assigned a perspective to take (even if they did not personally agree with this perspective) on each conclusion. Each group had a chance to argue their perspective and discuss, debate club style. Following the discussion, members of the group voted that they agreed with the conclusion or disagreed, with the ability to add additional comments.

Pros and cons for each conclusion, as well as additional context noted are listed below:

Conclusion #1: The centralized event should be for students only.

PROS

On-campus event is safer/contained
Student engagement > on campus
Needs to be student-driven
Could use student fees to fund
Needs student buy-in
Downtown events are more organic?
Event open to all, targeted to UWW?

CONS

Would a public location be able to restrict entry?
public space, private access = negative PR
Poorly executed event = more house parties
Need a strategy for underage attendees.
Need a definition for “students.”
Prairie Street location = backyard parties
Students want to bring non-UWW friends.
More education on fines for hosting parties
Intention of event not community-centric

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

The event needs to be well-organized, have student buy-in and be student-driven. If the event feels like it is driven by administration without student input, it will flop and drive the event further underground. The group identified key elements for a successful on-campus event: a popular musical act, permitted food and alcohol vendors, clear carry-in rules, and tournaments like beer pong and beer darts. Students expressed a desire for a clear, known policy for non-UWW student entry (such as colored wristbands). The two distinctive perspectives on event location were as follows:

ON-CAMPUS EVENT

Higher student engagement
Higher control / containment
UWW = primary public safety
Clearly targeted to students

OFF-CAMPUS EVENT

May feel more organic in downtown.
Open to new safety hazards
City of Whitewater = primary public safety
Who is event for. Students? Community?

Most of the group (8/9) was in consensus the future direction for Spring Splash® should be a formal, University-hosted event held on campus, but open to non-students. UWW Public Safety would be the primary responding agency, with backup support from the City of Whitewater PD and surrounding agencies.

Conclusion #2: The #1 goal of the event is SAFETY, even at greater cost to the community.

Note: In discussing this conclusion, we built upon the idea that this would be a centralized event held on the UWW campus.

PROS

Student safety = UWW priority
UWW drives incident action planning
Using student funds to support safety
City's values / vision = welcoming

CONS

Students naïve to safety concerns off-campus
City PD often painted as “the bad guys.”
Safety is not a resource drain.
Concern of risk of litigation / liability

The group was unanimous in consensus the goal of a formal, organized event within the Spring Splash® weekend is to increase SAFETY for all.

Conclusion #3: Measures of success will be evident immediately through quantity of violations / citations.

PROS

CONS

Need data beyond quantitative (historical)
Not all violations / citations are same weight.
Need positive success measures, too.
Will take multiple years to measure success.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

As discussed in previous meetings, the brand Spring Splash® is trademarked and owned by Wisconsin RED. Any new initiative that the community or University takes to host a

centralized, organized event will have to be branded differently. Participants estimate that it may take up to three years for the brand to fully be recognized and successful in the community.

As noted above, the entire group disagreed with this conclusion. It was agreed upon unanimously that success measures must include more than qualitative aspects and may take years to evaluate the intervention's effectiveness.

Conclusion #4: Enforcement efforts should be focused on life safety and avoiding property damage.

Note: This conclusion suggests that resource constraints would not allow public safety departments to enforce a zero-tolerance policy surrounding this event.

PROS

Dean of Students manage student conduct
Consequences can shift behavior
Community concerns around property
Property damage = clear enforcement

CONS

Do not want “snowball effect.”
Need clear definition of life safety.
No bias in enforcement
Crowd reaction to limited enforcement

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

If the event is hosted on campus, there is a great opportunity to route jurisdiction of some infractions (such as underage drinking) to the University / Dean of Students for their review. This could ensure that City Police (and supporting jurisdictions) are focused on life safety and property damage, but that enforcement still occurs for illegal behaviors. There was discussion around increased education and awareness around the penalties for illegal behaviors (hosting underage parties, for example.) Setting clear expectations around penalties and enforcing could shift behaviors.

The group was unanimous in consensus that enforcement cannot and should not only focus on life safety and property damage, but that an education campaign combined with joint jurisdiction on alcohol infractions will allow City police departments to focus their efforts.

Next Steps

As a final exercise, the group used an assumption map (axes of certainty and risk) to plot assumptions about a future Spring Splash® event alternative. The assumption map resembled such – using the questions “How much understanding do we currently have?” and “How bad would it be if we were wrong about this?” to plot each assumption.

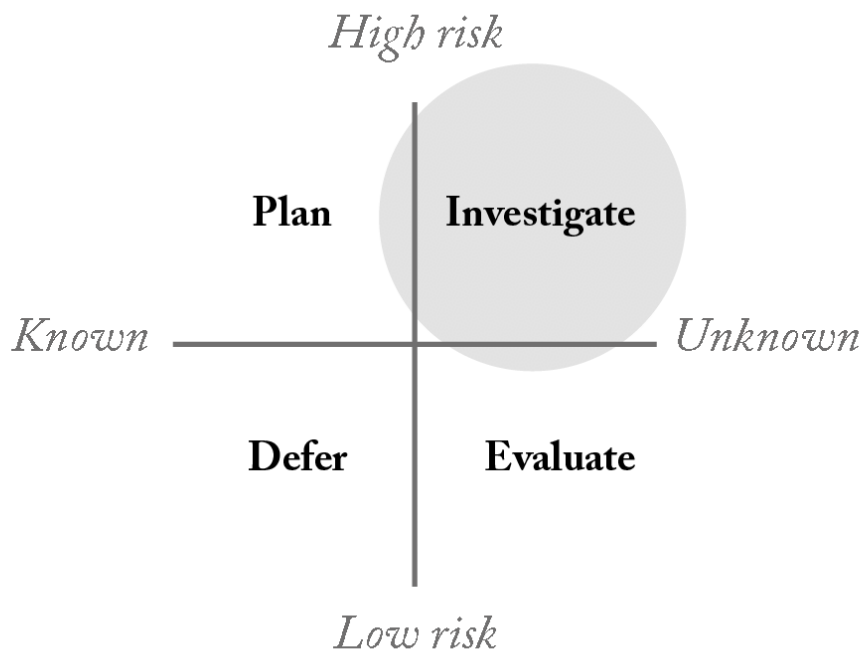


Figure 1: Image credit to PIP Decks

Each quadrant determines the future course of action around the assumption.

Assumptions Which Require Further Planning

- A large-scale, centralized event that would be open fully to the public will pose safety issues for attendees and for businesses/employees.
 - Response: Having the event hosted on campus would allow for some containment / control on access. This would be a larger concern if the event were hosted in the downtown area.
- A large-scale, centralized event that is open to the students only will not attract or garner buy-in and participation from students.
 - Response: As discussed in our workshop, students highly desire the ability to bring non-UWW friends to this event. A strategy needs to be set in place to control and contain entry, but also make the event open beyond the UWW

student population. It is also critical that students have voices and insights into what this event looks like.

Next Steps: Planning meetings between university leadership, University public safety and City Police Department. The more proactive public safety entities can be, the safer the event will be. Determine the role and influence which student entities (Student Government, Greek Life, student organizations) can have in designing this event.

Assumptions Which Require Deference to Another Deciding Entity

- Nobody will take ownership of this event because of the liability of “owning” the event.
 - Response: The University has expressed interest in supporting an official event as a part of the Spring Splash® weekend. This would add clarity to who “owns” and holds liability for the event.
- Making this event safer (through planning and enforcement) will be a drain on resources for the city and regional public safety departments.
 - Response: If the event is formalized with a host location and the University takes the lead in incident action planning, public safety departments are less concerned about the resource needs.
- Students and University parents will have a negative perception of the City of Whitewater and local first responders if enforcement is “too heavy” around this event.
 - Response: This is the status quo. University of Whitewater Police Department taking primary jurisdiction, and strategizing ways for some infractions to be managed by university leadership is a way to improve student and parent perception while still maintaining safety.
- It is too hard to reach people today. We will not reach everyone with our messaging, even if we have a broad communication strategy.
 - Response: While it is true that universal communication is a difficult standard to reach, if the event is “owned” by the University, there are more direct tools at the University’s disposal to reach students (text message alerts, social media posts, geofenced social media campaigns, etc.)

Next Steps: Planning meetings within University (students, leadership) about the location, nature of this event, as well as an enforcement response plan (who has jurisdiction over which issues?). University leadership takes responsibility for student-facing communications on event safety, consequences, and best strategies to reach UWW and non-UWW attendees.

Assumptions Which Require Further Investigation

- We will have accomplished our goal of making this event safer if we see a reduction in citations and arrests.
 - Response: The University and local public safety should complete a full post-mortem on this event after the fact, gathering anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative data. Quantitative data alone is not enough to measure success, and it will take multiple years of this new approach to Spring Splash® weekend to effectively measure if the intervention has been successful.

Next Steps: Post-event planning meeting to review various types of data, identification of events that were successful and those which need refinement before 2026.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Spring Splash® taskforce meetings have provided a good foundation to address openly the challenges and opportunities surrounding this event. Stakeholders from the City, University and broader community identified concerns and goals, brainstormed solutions and established a clear roadmap moving forward.

The consensus reached highlighted a commitment to safety, student engagement, and balancing the goodwill of this event for the students and University community with broader community impact. This process has demonstrated that parties with widely varying perspectives can come together and engage in proactive planning.

The taskforce recommendation is that a centralized, University-led event be held on campus, while ensuring that there is opportunity for student buy-in and engagement. A communication strategy paired with a joint-jurisdiction enforcement approach will help to mitigate risk and generate a more positive experience for all parties. These three meetings demonstrate the importance of continuing ongoing dialogue and maintaining healthy town-gown partnerships in the City of Whitewater.