
Pequot Lakes Downtown Plan

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I. Executive Summary

Like nearly every community in the United States today, Pequot Lakes is struggling to figure out how to transition to a set of new economic realities. The hyper-growth of the recent past covered up a lot of the financial imbalances created by the City's development pattern. This pattern – typified by horizontal, decentralized growth with a strong auto-orientation – created a lot of long-term liabilities for infrastructure maintenance that the City will now struggle to meet in a more austere age.

As the City is positioned today, the places where it has the greatest level of public investment – the downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods – are also the places where private-sector investment has lagged the most. Unless there is a dramatic shift in this imbalance, large amounts of public infrastructure will need to be abandoned and/or large subsidies from other property owners (predominantly higher-value lake property owners) will be necessary to meet the City's maintenance obligations.

These are not easy challenges, particularly since they call into question the prosperity and growth the City has experienced over the past two decades. The greatest level of prosperity Pequot Lakes has experienced came in the years prior to the housing collapse, a market correction that began nationwide in 2008. It is difficult to confront the realization that our local prosperity was not “real” financially. It would be comforting to believe that the growth and success experienced locally was the result of wise local decision-making, instead of factors beyond the City's control. And it is difficult to acknowledge today that there is no mix of incentives or local programs that can bring back the conditions of 2005.

In short, Pequot Lakes is in a new, evolving reality. It is unclear precisely what the future will bring, but it is becoming apparent that the City will need to adapt to a new set of local economic realities, including:

- **Inconsistent property values.** Since the City's primary revenue source is a tax on property values, it should be keenly aware that property values can vary as the economy fluctuates.
- **Highway realignment.** With the Highway 371 realignment becoming a reality, it's important to recognize the opportunities, challenges and uncertainties ahead.
- **Reduced state and federal support.** As with most small towns, Pequot Lakes has relied on the state and federal governments to fund and finance major infrastructure improvements. Of course, the state and federal governments have long-term, structural financial problems that make them unreliable sources of future funding. Maintaining the City's sewer and water infrastructure – let alone local roads and streets -- without major state and federal assistance is currently unthinkable, but it is likely to be a reality we have to face.
- **Private sector indebtedness.** In recent decades, the City has grown used to the private sector investing large amounts of leveraged funds to develop, and subsequently purchase, both commercial and residential properties. The emerging economic realities of our time suggest this is not a trend likely to continue, which will have large cash-flow implications for the City.

- **Higher energy costs.** Higher energy costs will dramatically change life in Pequot Lakes. Over 70% of the food consumed in Minnesota comes from outside of Minnesota, so energy costs will dramatically impact the cost of food. Every business in Pequot Lakes currently relies on automobiles to deliver their patrons, so current business models will be challenged. Nearly 40% of Pequot's residents are seasonal and there is still a large transient population during tourist season, all of whom will have their mobility decisions challenged. While it is true that higher energy prices present tremendous opportunities, those will only be realized with a change from the status quo.

To be successful in this new age, the City must reorient its initiatives to focus on obtaining a higher return on the public's investments. Nowhere is the disparity greater between the City's financial obligations and the revenue generated by those investments than the neighborhoods surrounding the historic downtown.

Revitalizing the downtown of Pequot Lakes and the neighborhoods that surround it is critical to the long-term financial health of the City.

This plan is an update of an earlier effort that was never formally adopted but was instrumental in shaping City policy over the past nine years. It details the rationale and strategy for renewing downtown Pequot Lakes and the surrounding neighborhoods. It is a practical plan that is in touch with the new realities facing the City.

And in that context, it is important to note that the difficult economy can actually assist us in our revitalization efforts. For example, the typical family spends \$7,000 per year for each automobile they utilize. Where Pequot Lakes can offer a family a high quality of life that only requires them to own one car, the resulting savings can pay for a \$108,000 mortgage. By focusing on this hypothetical family – and what would allow them to live in the downtown neighborhoods of Pequot Lakes without needing that second car – we can start to see a path to renewed private-sector investment.

Pequot Lakes is already a great place to live, with a downtown area that has much to offer. Building on this will not be difficult in a physical sense. Our greatest challenge is not physical, however, but social. We must collectively adapt to the changing world around us, acknowledging that we can't bring back what we never really had. Instead, we must realize that we have the capacity – here in Pequot Lakes – to build a future that is even better than what we dreamed at the height of our "prosperity". This is our challenge.

II. Background

The City of Pequot Lakes was originally built around a railroad stop. The traditional way in which this was done throughout the Midwest was that the railroad company would install the rail line, plat out towns along the line, then sell the platted land to defray their construction costs. The railroad companies used the traditional grid pattern of development, a development style that had been used for human settlement across continents for thousands of years.

The grid layout has its origins with the first cities in ancient Mesopotamia. These places developed a less-rigid block structure within fortified walls. This approach can still be seen in the historic sections of very old towns, such as Paris or Rome.

In the United States, most of the early settlements took advantage of improvements to surveying methods and established along a grid pattern. As settlement went further west, the ease of surveying a grid made it the standard approach to development surrounding railroad stops. Nearly all Midwestern cities established during the 1800's, including Pequot Lakes, have a historic grid layout at their core.



The grid pattern in Athens of Ancient Greece.

The grid approach served cities of this era well. The grid created a fairly dense, walkable development pattern that worked well for people getting off the train and the business owners trying to service them. As the city grew and matured, the grid provided the framework for mixed-use neighborhoods to expand around the commercial district. The entire area was surrounded by farms and hunting areas and was, in nearly every sense, self-sufficient.

Just prior to the Great Depression, as automobiles were starting to become more prevalent, and then following World War II when auto ownership became ubiquitous, the grid design was largely replaced by the curvilinear, suburban design and highway-oriented development. The historic districts of many cities, such as Pequot Lakes, are now surrounded by suburban-style development. The streets in the grid pattern have been subsequently retrofitted for automobile travel. Accommodating automobiles is now the primary design criteria for the public right-of-way in most cities, including Pequot Lakes.

Even so, the core of Pequot Lakes and its surrounding neighborhoods are constructed on the traditional grid. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of this pattern is critical to understanding how to revitalizing it.

Sense of Place

Besides the ease of surveying, the grid pattern provides a number of design advantages that were important in an era prior to automobile-base design. The public realm (the space between buildings now devoted largely to automobiles) provided space for social interaction. The orientation of the homes towards the public realm increased security. Mobility for pedestrians was enhanced by the connectivity

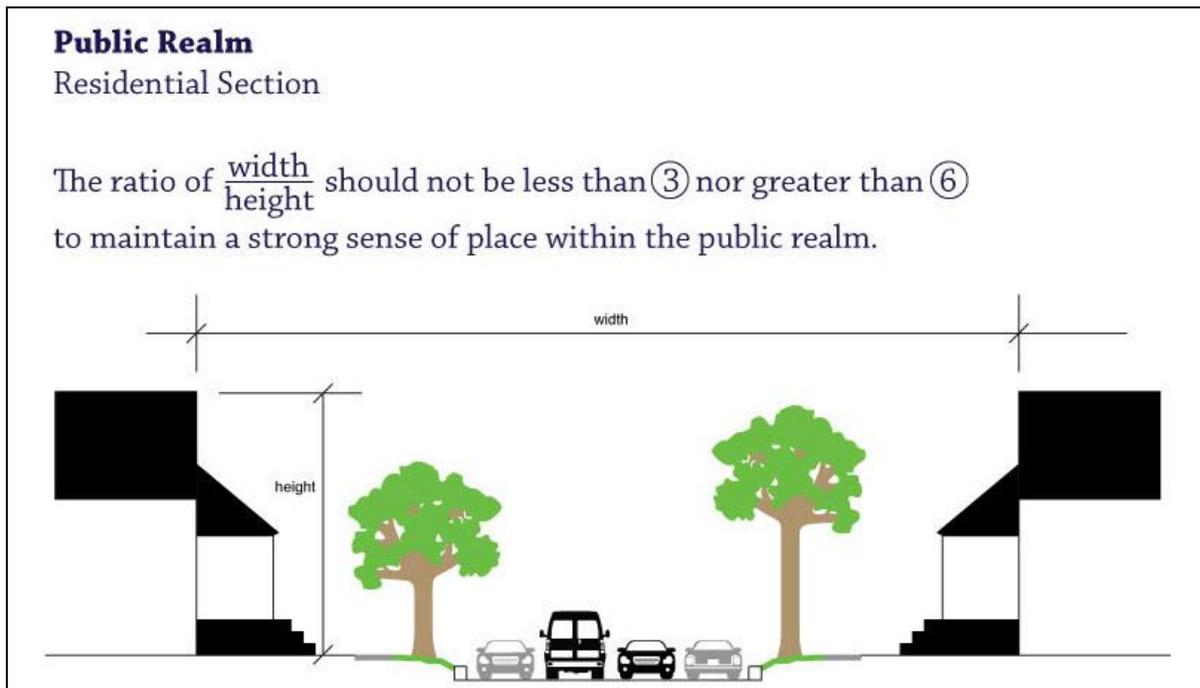
of the grid. Most importantly, the grid provided a platform that could grow over time as the community matured.

The social space of the public realm was created by a design that emphasized the value of that space. The layout and spacing of the buildings created what has been called a “sense-of-place”. This is a design technique that also goes back to ancient times.

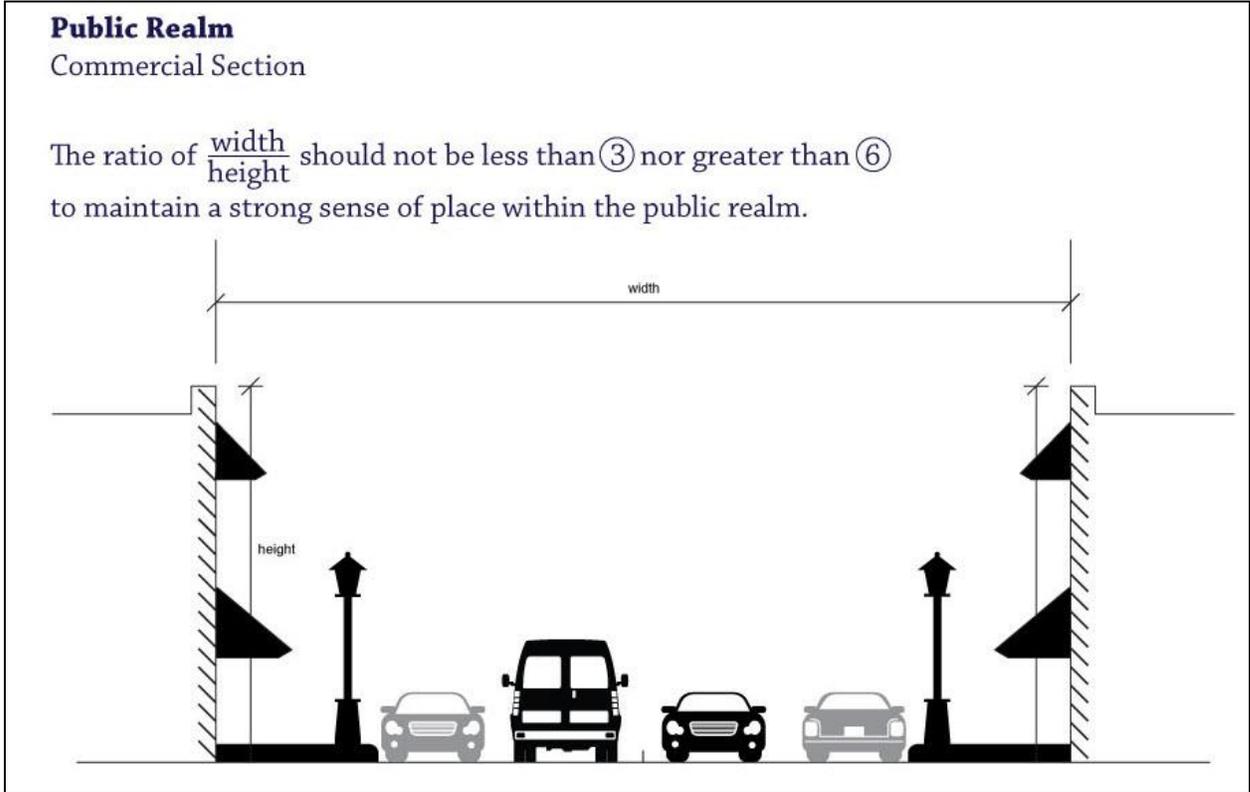
Sense-of-place is easy to understand and identify. A room has a sense-of-place. When you are in a room, it is clear that you are in a place. The feature that gives the room this feeling is the walls. Without walls, the room would not exist and there would be no “place”.

So it is with the public realm. When the buildings on either side of the public space line up and form walls, the public space feels like a room and there is a sense-of-place. The primary design element is to make sure that buildings are properly spaced. If the public space is too narrow because the buildings are too close, the space will feel cramped and the sense-of-place will be lost. If the public space is too vast because the buildings that bound it are too far apart, the effect of the walls will be gone and there will be no sense-of-place.

There is a standard design ratio to obtaining sense-of-place. That ratio of the width of the public realm to the height of the buildings must fall between 3:1 and 6:1. This is how that looks in a predominantly residential neighborhood.



This is how the ratio is applied in a predominantly commercial neighborhood.



In the historical parts of Pequot Lakes, the public realm was scaled and the buildings placed with the intention of creating this sense-of-place. This would not have been a special design criteria – it was simply the standard approach for the period.

Pequot Lakes was still a very small town as the transition was made to a design based on accommodating the automobile. This cut short the maturing process of Pequot's original development pattern. If we are to reactivate these areas, it is important to understand how a historical neighborhood grows and evolves over time.



Evolution of an Historical Neighborhood

The underlying economics of the development pattern of most small towns today differs greatly from the assumptions of the traditional development pattern they were founded upon. As opposed to horizontal growth – which is very expensive to maintain – the underlying economics of the traditional small town was based on the concepts of infill and vertical growth. This was how capital investments were paid for and major infrastructure was maintained over time.

A neighborhood established on a traditional grid would initially have modest private-sector investments. Originally these would not even be served by public utilities.



Over time, new development would fill in between these modest investments. With each new building, the public realm would become more complete and, based on the established pattern, more valuable.



In successful neighborhoods – those that attracted more private-sector investment demand than could be sustained with infill – there would begin to be redevelopment pressure. Over time, structures would be torn down and replaced with structures of higher value.



The neighborhood would continue to mature on the same grid framework. While a small town context would preclude the construction of skyscrapers and other very intense development, mature small-town neighborhoods have a mix of uses (residential and commercial) that together create places of high value. These neighborhoods would surround a central core whose value was based on its proximity and access to the surrounding neighborhoods.



In Pequot Lakes, as in most small towns in the United States that were founded in the railroad era, the natural evolution of places on the traditional development pattern has been disrupted by the great American experiment of suburbanization. Financially, this has left both the traditional neighborhoods and the new areas of suburban development financially fragile, in need of ever-increasing amounts of new growth to maintain long-term infrastructure commitments.

That model is financially unsustainable. To reach a stable economic situation, Pequot Lakes needs to reactivate the natural evolutionary processes that will allow these neighborhoods to grow and mature over time on their historic framework.

III. Downtown Keys to Success

The City has identified the following guiding principles for the future of downtown Pequot Lakes. These principles were developed with the input of residents, business owners and other downtown stakeholders to protect the character of Pequot while promoting growth in downtown.

Key #1: Maintain the character of the downtown while also preserving the individuality and variety of the buildings located there. Continue quality while resisting uniformity.

Downtown Pequot Lakes was not created with a grand centralizing theme. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the buildings in the downtown have a charm and seem to belong in their surroundings. There is a desire to maintain the high quality of the investments made in the downtown, but there is also strong resistance to any type of uniform standard (whether imposed or voluntarily adopted) that would unnaturally alter the character of downtown.

Key #2 Continually strengthen the “destination” of downtown, ensuring that it is a place that will naturally draw people year round.

Studies of the Pequot Lakes downtown have demonstrated that retail shoppers tend to park and then visit all of the available businesses. This “destination effect” – with Pequot Lakes as a destination as opposed to one specific store - is made possible by the number of quality businesses that are located in Downtown. Each time a new quality business is added, the overall draw of the downtown expands, so accelerating the growth of new businesses will create success for all Downtown businesses.

The “destination effect” is further enhanced by how public spaces are designed. Walkways and thoroughfares that are inviting to pedestrians, along with shops that are pedestrian-oriented and scaled, create an atmosphere that is conducive to destination shopping. Public spaces provide extra value when they encourage shoppers to wander from business to business, or to experience the downtown in an enjoyable way that makes them want to return another day.

Key #3: Look to compete regionally where the downtown can offer a specialized and unique experience. Look to compete locally where the downtown can offer a convenient and satisfying experience.

There is sometimes a desire to try and provide everything to everyone and, in a sense, compete with a regional center like Baxter for customers. Giving in to this desire is a losing strategy, while keeping focused on what Pequot Lakes does best is a key to long-term success.

Businesses in Pequot Lakes are most competitive when offering either a unique experience or a custom and high-quality service. These are the things that bring people to town over and over again and capture both a tourist and a local market. The Downtown will struggle over the long run to sustain offerings that directly compete with those offered in the Brainerd/Baxter Regional Center. The large retailers such as Wal-Mart, Target, Best Buy, Cub Foods, Super 1, Home Depot and Menards have agglomerated in Baxter along the TH 371 corridor. These places are highly accessible to the residents of Pequot Lakes. That fact will stifle the size and scale of non-specialized offerings the Pequot Lakes neighborhood can support.

The downtown, when fully developed, will be a significant regional attraction if the experience is different, and more pleasant, than the experience of shopping in other downtowns. The small, locally-owned shops currently provide a unique mix of products and services. This uniqueness should be capitalized on to capture a larger share of the regional market.

Pequot Lakes will not be able to compete regionally for some offerings. In these instances, the convenience of Downtown, combined with the personalized service, can help retain local shoppers that may be enticed to go other places.

The Downtown must maintain a mix of unique offerings that appeal to a regional market as well as convenience and quality service offerings that will retain local customers.

Key #4: Reduce the seasonality of the downtown by increasing the number of residents living within the city's traditional neighborhoods with convenient access to downtown.

In a tourism-based economy, the strong summer months can sometimes be augmented with Holiday shopping and an occasional winter festival. Frequently this isn't enough to support a business. Promoting some offerings that would cater to local needs, while at the same time creating opportunities for more housing units within walking distance of Downtown along with better connections, creates a supply/demand relationship that will generate more opportunity for growth in the downtown.

Key #5: Understand that the highest return investment for the City over the long-term is to improve the use of existing infrastructure, not the expansion of horizontal growth on the periphery of town.

IV. Neighborhood Evaluation

Neighborhood Composition

A brief description of the land use pattern adjacent to the street in question.

Utility Overview

A list of municipal utilities available along the street.

Street Maintenance Revenue

The cumulative total property tax revenue along the street collected over the next 25 years that would be expected to go towards street maintenance. This is based on the city's historical approach to street maintenance spending. Results are calculated on a present (2011 tax year) worth basis.

Street Maintenance Cost

The estimated cost to perform one significant maintenance project on the street over the next 25 years. Results are calculated on a present worth basis.

Percentage of Cost Covered by Adjacent Revenue

The street maintenance revenue as a percentage of the street maintenance cost. Meant to represent how much revenue the current development pattern yields as a percentage of how much the city is obligated to spend to maintain it.

Walkability Score

An estimate of the ability of pedestrians to travel the corridor. In general, the ratings indicate the following:

1. **Very Poor** – The street presents a hostile and dangerous environment to pedestrians and cyclists. Pedestrian and biking activity would be very low.
2. **Poor** – The street environment is not conducive to pedestrian travel or biking. The adjacent land use pattern does not encourage walking.
3. **Moderate** – The street is safely passable by pedestrians and bikers, but the adjacent land use pattern detracts from the pedestrian environment.
4. **Good** – The street accommodates pedestrians and bikers well. The adjacent land use pattern creates an environment that is inviting to pedestrians and bikers.
5. **Very Good** – The street prioritizes pedestrian and biking travel, providing safety of movement and giving them the right-of-way at intersections. The adjacent land use pattern creates a strong sense of place that makes the street comfortable to those outside of a car.

Redevelopment Potential

An estimate of the land adjacent to the street to support additional development and/or more intensive redevelopment of existing structures. In general, the ratings indicate the following:

LOW potential: The adjacent structures have a high value in comparison to the underlying land value. There is little market incentive to purchase structures along this street and either tear them down or significantly renovate them. Improvements or alterations to the street will not have a significant impact on the amount of development along the street.

MEDIUM potential: The adjacent structures have a value that is comparable to the underlying land value. There is some natural market incentive to improve the value of the structure and maximize the underlying land value. Improvements or alterations to the street can have an impact on the amount of development and redevelopment along the street.

HIGH potential: The adjacent structures have a low value in comparison to the underlying land value. This is a unstable situation where there is a market incentive to tear down or renovate underperforming structures. There is strong potential for improvements or alterations to the street to have a significant impact on the amount of development along the street.

Incremental Repair

Low cost strategies that the city can do immediately to improve value along the street.

Ash Street



Neighborhood Composition

Ash Street serves as a local neighborhood street for six single family homes. This narrow, quiet street terminates with the cemetery at the south end and a pine tree at the north end. The street is in close proximity to both the school and downtown area. Ash Street does not have sidewalks on either side, but it has sparse and slow moving traffic, making it fairly accommodating to pedestrians.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$6,453

Street Maintenance Cost: \$47,250

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 14%

Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair:

- Public art opportunity at the south end of the street to terminate the view.
- Improve City owned property so that it can be utilized as a sliding hill in the winter months.

Bell Avenue



Neighborhood Composition

Bell Avenue was originally platted to be a dense, compactly-developed place, much like many other streets in the City. The properties that have been developed along Bell Avenue account for less than half of the lots that were originally platted. Bell Avenue serves as a local neighborhood street for eight single family residences. Although the street is relatively narrow, the large setbacks and wide spacing of the structures make it a generally uncomfortable place for pedestrians.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$3,862

Street Maintenance Cost: \$47,250

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 8%

Walkability Score: Poor

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair:

- None

Brown Street



Neighborhood Composition

Conventional road classification hierarchy would consider Brown Street a neighborhood collector street. It is designed to funnel traffic from surrounding neighborhood streets to the downtown area. The street consists of residential properties along the north side and the cemetery and residential properties on the south side. The eastern half of the street has sidewalks along both sides while the western portion of the street is void of pedestrian areas.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- Water
- Storm sewer (partial on east side)

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$17,858

Street Maintenance Cost: \$282,500

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 6%

Walkability Score: Very Poor

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair:

- Stripe for parallel parking along both sides of the street.
- Remove “no parking” signs.
- Screen utility boxes at the intersection of South Oak and Brown Street.
- Install quality, decorative fencing along Brown Street near the cemetery in order to clearly distinguish the cemetery from the pedestrian’s realm and honor the ancestors of Pequot Lakes.

Front Street



Neighborhood Composition

Front Street runs north and south and consists of commercial businesses on both sides of the street. The businesses located on the west side of the street are arranged in a pedestrian-friendly fashion while the placement of the structures on the east side of the street is predominately designed for automobiles. The southern end of the street's view terminates at the TDS building and the north view terminates with the highway. Front Street has a very high redevelopment potential and is critical to the overall success of the Grow Zone.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water
- Storm sewer

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$54,243

Street Maintenance Cost: \$194,400

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 28%

Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- Mark crosswalks at each intersection.

- Stripe for parallel parking along both sides of the street.
- Place planters or some other type of “separator” to distinguish the Wells Fargo parking lot from the pedestrian friendly downtown area.
- Plant shrubs or small trees near the exiting benches on the church property to make the space a pleasant place to be.
- Install bike racks near businesses.
- Convert City owned parking lot into a courtyard area

Honeysuckle Street



Neighborhood Composition

Honeysuckle Street is classified as a local neighborhood street. It is located at the western edge of the Grow Zone and serves just a handful of single family homes. This street does not have sidewalks but it is easily walkable because of the narrow width and lack of traffic.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- City water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$5,924

Street Maintenance Cost: \$45,000

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 13%

Walkability Score: Good

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- Crosswalk Striping

North Heath Street



Neighborhood Composition

North Heath Street consists mostly of single family residences on the south side and high density apartments on the north side. The street does not have sidewalks on either side and traffic travels at a relatively fast pace.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- City water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$9,619

Street Maintenance Cost: \$96,000

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 10%

Walkability Score: Poor

Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- None

Pine Street



Neighborhood Composition

Pine Street is a local neighborhood street with 22 adjacent single family residences. The street is densely populated compared to other areas of the grow zone. It is in close proximity to the downtown area and the school.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$18,851

Street Maintenance Cost: \$130,000

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 15%

Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: Medium

Incremental Repair:

Striping for sidewalks

South Heath Street



Neighborhood Composition

South Heath Street is a local neighborhood street which serves nine single family homes. The street does not have a lot of traffic because the south end of the street terminates at a vacant, wooded property.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- City water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$9,177

Street Maintenance Cost: \$49,500

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 19%

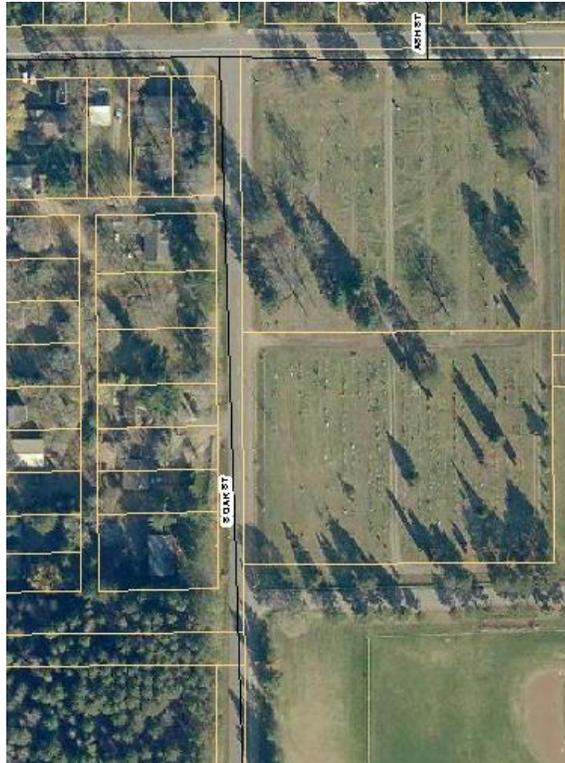
Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- None

South Oak Street



Neighborhood Composition

The portion of South Oak Street in the Grow Zone is adjacent to five single family homes on the west side and the cemetery on the east side. South Oak is classified as a local neighborhood street in the current classification system. The street is in very close proximity to the school.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- City water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$4,703

Street Maintenance Cost: \$78,750

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 6%

Walkability Score: Very Poor

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- Crosswalk Striping.
- Screening of utility boxes at the intersection of South Oak Street and Brown Street.

Spruce Street



Neighborhood Composition

Spruce Street is located near the downtown area and the school. It serves as a local neighborhood street and is adjacent to nineteen single family homes.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$19,618

Street Maintenance Cost: \$128,000

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 15%

Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair:

- Plant trees along street on vacant properties on the west side of the street.

Tower Square



Neighborhood Composition

Tower square is adjacent to Front Street and serves just three properties, two of which are owned by the City. The street has a City owned multi-purpose building and parking lot on the north side and a parking lot and the water tower on the south side.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water
- Storm Sewer

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$330

Street Maintenance Cost: \$25,625

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 1%

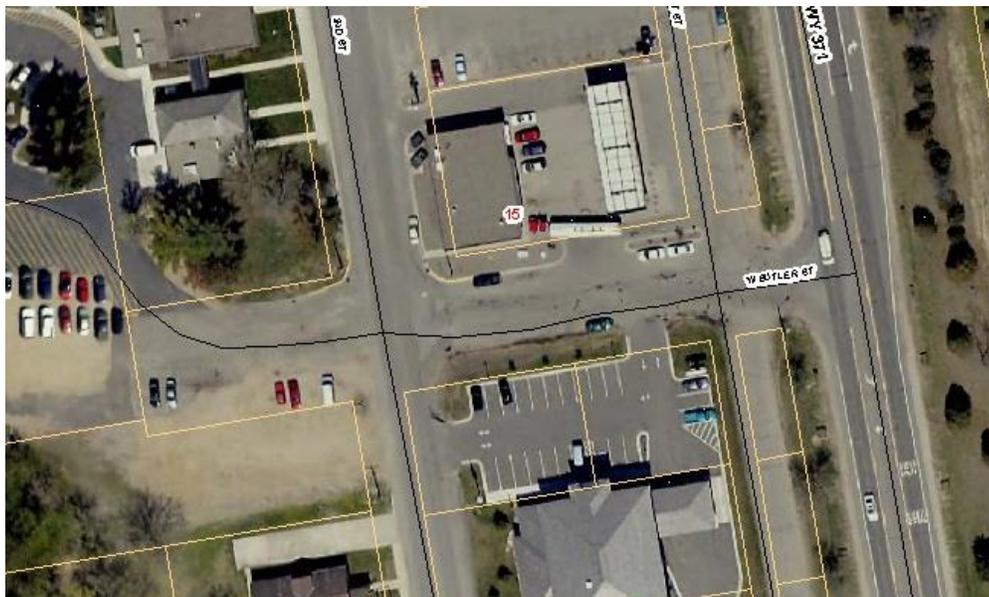
Walkability Score: Moderate

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair:

- Mark cross walks to the other side of Front Street.
- Plant natural vegetation for screening of parking lots.
- Striping for parallel parking along both sides of the street.

West Butler Street



Neighborhood Composition

West Butler Street is approximately 400 feet in length and is adjacent to Highway 371. It is a commercial street abutting mostly parking areas. The street is difficult and uncomfortable for pedestrians to utilize due to the gaps created by the parking spaces, the lack of sidewalks and lack of striping as well as the structures on the street which do not frame the public realm.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary Sewer
- Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$27,067

Street Maintenance Cost: \$72,000

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 38%

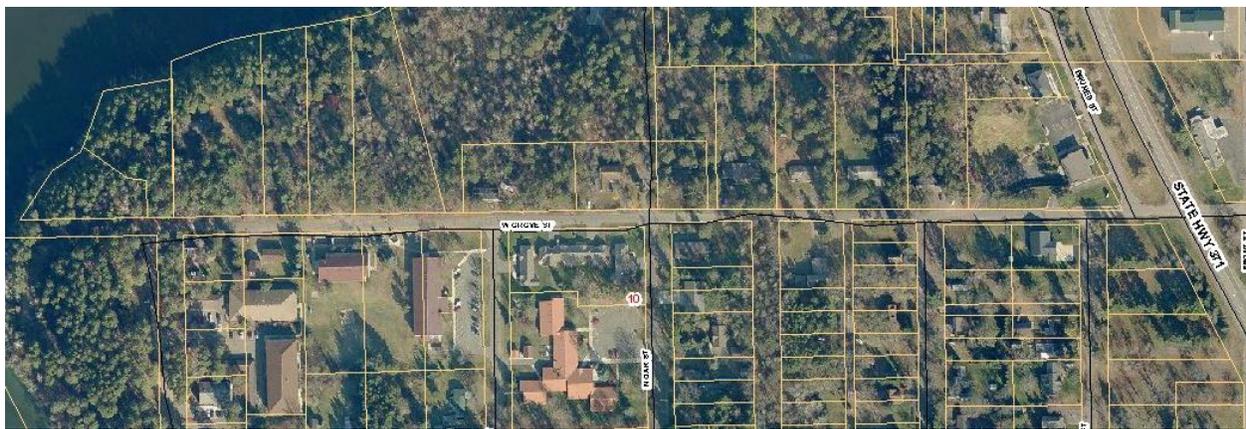
Walkability Score: Very Poor

Redevelopment Potential: High

Incremental Repair

- Striping for parallel parking along both sides of the street.
- Placement of hedges or other natural screening on the south side of the street to shield the view of the bank parking lot.
- Screening along the back side of the gas station to hide the view of the dumpster.
- Pedestrian crosswalks at all intersections.

West Grove Street



Neighborhood Composition

In the current classification system, West Grove Street is considered a neighborhood collector street. The street serves a mixture of single family homes and multi-unit apartment complexes. The exclusive mode of transportation West Grove Street is designed for is the automobile. There are no sidewalks or other pedestrian features on the street. The fast moving traffic along with the lack of sidewalks makes West Grove Street difficult for pedestrians to traverse.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$46,862

Street Maintenance Cost: \$268,750

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 17%

Walkability Score: Very Poor

Redevelopment Potential: Low

Incremental Repair

- Slow the traffic by narrowing driving lanes. Stripe center line and edges.
- Signage for the park and public access for Sibley Lake.

West Lake Street



Neighborhood Composition

West Lake Street serves as one of the two main linkages between the highway and the public high school. Other than the School District property, the adjacent property is commercial. West Lake Street has a sidewalk for the entire length of the south side of the street and for approximately a quarter of the length on the north side of the street.

Utility Overview

- Sanitary sewer
- City water
- Storm sewer

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$16,844

Street Maintenance Cost: \$116,100

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 15%

Walkability Score: Poor

Redevelopment Potential: Medium

Incremental Repair

- Striping for parallel parking along both sides of the street.
- Pedestrian crosswalks at all intersections.
- Screen the propane tank storage area owned by the gas company.

West Sibley Street



Neighborhood Composition

West Sibley Street is a neighborhood collector street that funnels traffic from surrounding neighborhood streets to the downtown area and the highway. The street consists mostly of single family residential properties along both sides of the street. There are no sidewalks for the entire length of the street.

Utility Overview

- City Sanitary Sewer
- City Water

Street Maintenance Revenue: \$28,132

Street Maintenance Cost: \$234,200

Percent of Cost Covered by Adjacent Property Tax: 12%

Walkability Score: Very Poor

Redevelopment Potential: Medium

Incremental Repair:

- Construct a safe pedestrian crossing to the other side of the highway thereby connecting the two neighborhoods.
- Remove the “no parking” signs along the street. There is ample room for the parking of cars along either side of the street.

V. Downtown Placemaking

Trailside Park

There are various initiatives that the City can undertake to improve the value of Trailside Park. Those include the following:

1. Install signage near the north parking lot indicating the parking area is intended for park users. The parking area is not to be used as a “park and ride” lot.
2. At the north end of the park, trees have been planted between the trail and the diagonal parking area on Government Drive. These trees should be allowed to mature so there is a perceived barrier between the trail and the street. Some sightlines should remain open between the park and Government Drive businesses so trail users can clearly see what Pequot Lakes has to offer.



3. Ensure that once the playground is constructed (west of the pavilion) a decorative fence, as opposed to chain link, be installed around the playground area.
4. Construct a public restroom for the convenience of both park and trail users. A possible location for the restrooms is near the existing wastewater manhole south of Dru’s Garden. It is important to create buffer (e.g. vegetative or fence) between the restroom and Dru’s Garden. The building material of the restroom must be aesthetically pleasing.

Potential location of a future public restroom:



5. Dru's Garden is a reflective area of solitude. It is considered a gem of the City and it honors the life of a very important individual. The garden has an abundance of beautiful flowers and plants which are cared for on an ongoing basis. One minor improvement which could improve the garden's overall "place" in the park would be rearranging the benches so they are symmetrical to the axis of the garden. Consideration should also be given to install additional signage that would inform trails users of the garden.



6. The topography in this area provides a natural overlook to the garden below. Trimming up the trees will enhance this view. There should be a vegetative buffer created along the south side of the picnic shelter (and all trash containers and other unsightly items need to be moved to the north or west side) to not distract from this area. The benches should be placed at the top of the hill in a pattern slightly askew from the trail yet clearly focusing on the garden below. Vegetation should be added on the south side of this area to further frame the view on the garden area.

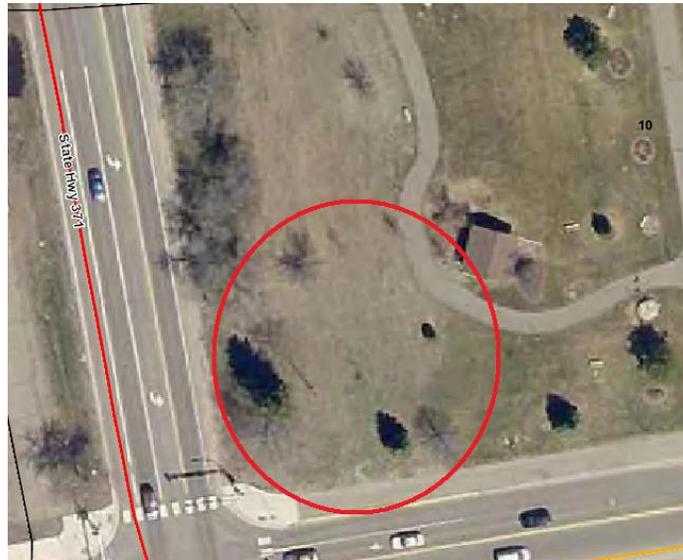


7. The Veteran's Memorial is considered one of cornerstones of the park. It is a place of majesty and importance as it memorializes the lives of those who have fought for our country. The memorial is centrally located within the north side of the park. This is an excellent location due to the nature and purpose of the memorial. It presents an excellent opportunity to be the centerpiece of the park.

Most veteran's monuments across the country are symmetrical. They consist of straight lines and sharp edges that create a sense of grandeur. The city may want to consider working with the local veterans to discuss how the memorial could be rearranged to better fit in with the park and emit more of a sense of grandeur. The American Legion has indicated there will be additions made to the memorial in the future.



8. The area located at the northeast corner of the State Highway 371 and County State Aide Highway 11 is a potential location for another sign to identify Trailside Park. It is also a potential location for the existing community sign due to better visibility.



9. The area directly north of the band shell should continue to be a free and open space. Concert-goers should be allowed to freely wonder between the concert area and other areas of the park.



10. The crossing of Main Street (CSAH 11) by the Paul Bunyan Trail should be enhanced. It is the busiest pedestrian crossing in the City and it should be designed to protect pedestrians to the fullest extent possible. The crossing currently has a painted crosswalk and a temporary sign which notifies motorists to look for pedestrians. Once County Road 11 is turned back to the City, the crossing should be further studied to determine if a change in street or crosswalk design is necessary.



11. A sidewalk should be constructed along the south side of CSAH 11, connecting Government Drive to State Highway 371. This location currently has a "desire path" (dirt trail created over time by pedestrian use) which indicates that it is a popular pedestrian corridor.



Location of proposed sidewalk:



12. This is the only viable place for events and public gatherings within the downtown. We should look at this area as the “town square” and configure it as such. The surface should be graded to be relatively flat. Thought should be given as to how to make ongoing, seasonal use of this space to maximize its value to the community. Structures for Beanhole Days should be formalized to have value year-round, with a more appealing structure, quality fence, potted plants and an informative kiosk. The grass in this area should also be improved to “park quality.”



Street Lighting

Street lighting can add an immense amount of value to a place. Not only is lighting functional by providing illumination for sidewalks and streets; it can also contribute to the overall character of a place. The City should be prudent in determining when and where it installs street lighting. The most logical time to install it is when a street is being reconstructed. Street lighting within the City should be uniform and properly scaled.

With the reconstruction of North Washington Avenue and installation of street lights in 2014, the City selected a decorative street lighting fixture and pole design that will be used throughout the city as lighting is installed.





Photo: Duluth, Minnesota.

3. Paint additional murals.



4. Build fountain and gathering area.



5. Continue to host outdoor entertainment.



6. Create public gathering spaces.



7. Amend the ordinances to allow for more flexibility for food trucks and solicit them.



8. Install public games.



9. Start a community garden.



VI. Proposed Improvements

The committees set up to discuss downtown improvements assisted in creating an overall plan for making improvements to the downtown. The components of the plan are discussed in the following.

Gateway Enhancements

The intersection of Highway 371 and County Road 11 will be the principle entrance to the Downtown. There will be an enticement to simply provide for standard commercial development at this intersection. While that may be appropriate, great care should be taken to ensure that this intersection, and of equal importance the boulevard into the downtown, is a unique gateway to the City.

The road, and the development that lines it, should frame the City, both physically by providing a straight and picturesque drive into the downtown and thematically giving drivers and pedestrians a taste of the character they will experience in the Downtown. This needs to be offset and designed so as to be visible and appealing from the highway clearly indicating to the driver that a unique place is waiting down this short corridor. The bobber water tower, which should be able to be seen from the intersection, should remain unobstructed as it is a unique curiosity that will draw people's attention.

The roadway improvements needed to create a memorable boulevard and gateway to the City may be beyond what would be provided for or allowed by Crow Wing County in their maintenance and potential reconstruction of this corridor. The City may need to assume responsibility for this short stretch of road if it becomes necessary to create this critical element of the Downtown gateway.

In addition to these improvements, the City must regulate construction along the highway corridor to ensure that it does not detract from creating the sense of destination. This stretch will be unique as most of the highway from Baxter north will be lined with development while this area will be largely forested. The forested gateway, as described in the Comprehensive Plan, helps to give context to Pequot's destination downtown. It is essential that this be maintained.

Parking Strategy

Pequot Lakes currently has roughly 390 public parking spaces in the downtown area. On street parking represents 334 of the spaces. The public off street parking is located in three lots: the Pequot Visitors Center (27 spaces), the Cole Memorial Building (14 spaces) and the lot south of Sibley Street on Front Street (12 spaces).

The proposed parking plan offers a significant increase in the amount of parking spaces in the downtown area. Many of the proposed spaces will be on street public parking spaces, with a bulk of the spaces coming from defining parking spaces along Sibley, Butler, and Oriole Streets and making more efficient use of current parking spaces.

The proposed parking increases will only satisfy the current demand in downtown and as the number of downtown businesses increase so will the demand for parking. The City will need to explore methods to provide additional parking in an efficient manner. The following strategies are offered:

Utilize unused parking lots that can be used for overflow parking during peak times: The parking lots of public buildings such as City Hall and the Pequot Lakes School sit relatively unused on Saturdays and Sundays, especially during the summer. Using these lots as well as other parking lots that are not used on weekends would help accommodate increased traffic without having to develop new parking lots that are costly to acquire and construct and will often sit vacant in non-peak times. As the plan is implemented and pedestrian infrastructure installed this will become a more viable option.

Construct new parking lots: The proposed plan identifies the potential location of more parking. Locating and developing parking lots within the downtown need to be considered carefully. Placing parking close to the center of downtown can provide much needed parking, but it can also occupy valuable land that might have a better use. It also creates voids in activity that will affect pedestrian traffic. Locating parking off the main streets of downtown will help reduce this affect. However, when locating parking off the main street it often pushes it back along the borders of the downtown area where it could have negative effects on surrounding residential uses. Landscaping and design can be used to minimize these impacts.

Pedestrian Improvements

Increasing the profile of downtown and improving the parking situation are keys to increasing the activity in downtown, but the real success will be in how welcoming downtown is to people once they arrive. The following improvements will ensure that downtown is safe and welcoming to all.

Crosswalks: Stamped and colored concrete or bituminous materials should be used to define crosswalks. This creates a more pedestrian friendly environment by defining pedestrian areas from automobile areas.

Bump outs: Bumping out the curb at intersections creates larger sidewalk and pedestrian areas and limits the amount of roadway pedestrians are required to cross. This creates a safer perceived pedestrian environment without compromising drive lane width. The added space created by bump outs can be used for kiosks, benches or landscaping.

Benches: Creating nodes for pedestrians to sit not only provide a utilitarian use of sitting to relax during a day shopping, they also add to more street activity.

Kiosks: As Downtown expands and increases the number of businesses it is important to let visitors know what business are in downtown and where they are located.

Lighting: Removing the wooden power poles and their overhead amber street lights and replacing them with ornamental lighting will help dress up the streetscape and provide a more inviting experience once night falls. Locating the light between the sidewalk and the street will help define the pedestrian space, especially in areas where on-street parking has been removed, such as Main Street.

Infrastructure Improvements

The infrastructure in nearly the entire project area is due for some type of rehabilitation project. This creates an excellent opportunity to modify what is in place to enhance the downtown environment.

One of the key infrastructure improvements that need to be made is to provide storm sewer throughout the downtown. The style and intensity of the development needed in this area demands that there be a mechanism for managing stormwater. While some localized systems, such as a rain

garden, can be utilized, the scope of the issue will require curb and gutter, pipe and an outlet. The curb and gutter will also assist with the aesthetics and function of the downtown, neatly defining the border between the pedestrian and auto spaces.

It is also going to be critical to the overall aesthetic that the utility lines are buried throughout the downtown and that utility boxes are in alleys or otherwise not visible to the casual visitor. All of the committee members that walked the streets identified the overhead utility lines as an unnecessary blight that creates a feel of disorganization throughout the downtown. Burying these lines while the roads are under reconstruction will be simple and will have a significant, if subtle, impact.



Photos taken July 2014 near Trailside Park/Government Drive

Vegetation Enhancements

While the entrance to Pequot Lakes defines it as a forested community, it is important to maintain that connection throughout the downtown. Amazingly, there are some high-quality trees throughout the downtown. These should be protected and augmented with younger trees that will ultimately grow into a prominent position.

There have been a number of landscaping enhancements to the Trail Park in recent years. Additional landscaping in the park combined with landscaping in the medians, bump outs and in planters along the walkways will create an inviting pedestrian feel that will connect people to the surrounding landscape.

Trail Improvements

It was reported a number of times that some visitors have turned down the Paul Bunyan Trail in their cars, mistaking it for Government Drive. While certainly a safety hazard, it also points out the lack of definition of the separate auto and pedestrian spaces in the downtown. The trail pathway needs to be defined as it crosses CSAH 11 (*see item 10 of the "Trailside Park" section of this plan*), and the entrances to the trail at these crossings needs to be marked in a way that gives confidence to bikers and pedestrians and discourages accidental automobile use.

There is also a need to provide more opportunities for trail users to get off the trail and interact with the downtown. Simple bike racks would go a long ways towards facilitating this, as would some well-defined turn off areas that connect to the downtown.

VII. Implementation

Project Team

To move the plan forward once a highway alignment is finalized, a special project team should be assembled. The team should include representatives from the downtown business community, a member of the Park Board, Economic Development Committee, Planning Commission and City Council as well as any other interested and motivated individual. A project point-person from the City Staff should be assigned specifically to working for the committee on moving the project forward, with necessary budget provided to cover that effort.

The project team will be responsible for bringing the project to fruition.

This will include:

- Coordinating with the City's engineer on planned improvement projects in the downtown.
- Coordinating with the City's financial advisor to ensure the proper phasing and bonding amounts for the project.
- Coordinating with Mn/DOT and the City's Highway 371 committee to ensure that the project is done in coordination with the TH 371 improvements, with the input of property owners and the community, making decisions on the types of materials used, the style of municipal signage and other aesthetic choices that will need to be made throughout the project.
- Creating a "pattern book" that can be used to style and brand the downtown while providing for maximum architectural and design flexibility by business owners.
- Searching out alternatives to provide for "destination" attractions.
- Keeping the downtown business owners, elected and appointed officials informed on the project.
- Promoting the project throughout the community.