

## **V. Downtown Placemaking**

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### **Trailside Park**

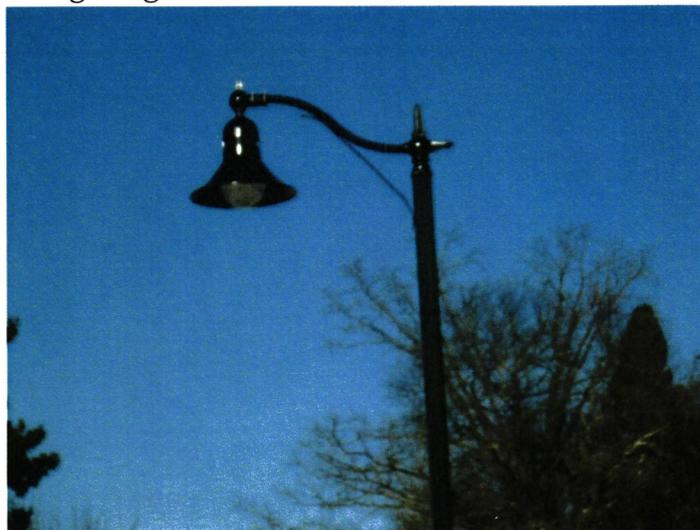
Trailside Park is situated in the heart of the downtown and serves as the centerpiece of the community. The park is utilized by residents and visitors as both a social gathering area and recreational space. Paul Bunyan trail users are also often found relaxing in the park. Trailside Park serves as the perfect setting for the city and other local organizations to host community-building events throughout the year. After the State Highway 371 realignment in 2018, community leaders identified an opportunity to unite the city through a series of park improvements. These include construction of a flag display (2019), installation a splash pad (2020), improvements to the Bean Hole Pit area (2020), new and updated holiday decorations (2020) and a potential redesign and reconfiguration of the park in the future. As these improvements are made- the park will continue to bring together the community for generations to come.

### **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.

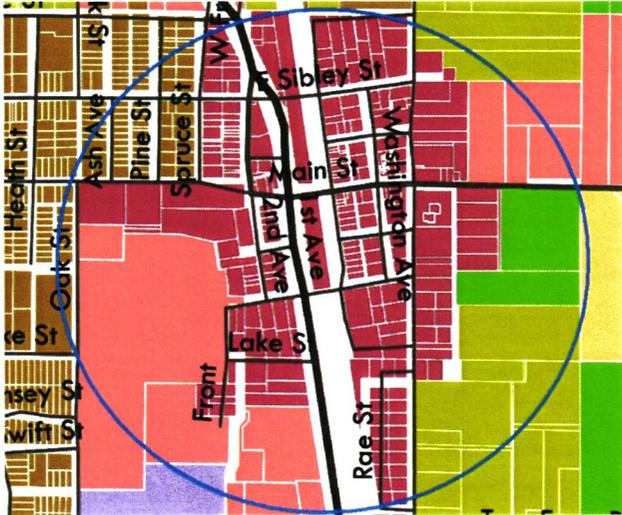
The City should be prudent in determining when and where it installs street lighting. The most logical time to install it is when a street is being reconstructed. Street lighting within the City should be uniform and properly scaled.

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 used throughout the city as lighting is installed.



Street lighting should be installed along the streets within the “Downtown Mixed Use” zone as they are reconstructed. This area of the city is zoned for high density residential and commercial development which relies on multiple modes of transportation including walking, biking, and automobiles.

***Downtown Mixed Use Zone:***



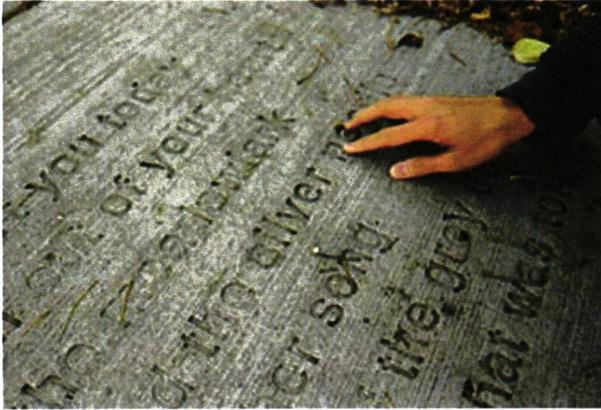
Public Art/Aesthetics/Entertainment:

While a strong collection of shops will be the draw that creates the desired “destination” effect, there are other improvements that could be made that would help define or brand Pequot Lakes.

The location of the park and the traditional development pattern of the downtown area of Pequot Lakes provide an excellent opportunity to create a “sense of place.” This can be accomplished through public art, aesthetics, and entertainment.

During the process of updating this plan in 2014, the following methods of place-making were discussed as potential ways to create a sense of place in downtown Pequot Lakes.

1. Create sidewalk art.



2. Install additional bike racks.



*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**

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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**

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### **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.