

II. Background

The City of Pequot Lakes was originally built with a “grid” style of development. Throughout the Midwest, railroad companies would plat out towns along the rail line, and then sell the land to help defray their construction costs. The grid created a dense, walkable pattern that allowed for easy access to the local businesses.

Cities of this era were served well using the grid approach. As the city grew and matured, the grid provided the framework for mixed-use neighborhoods to expand around the commercial district.

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”.

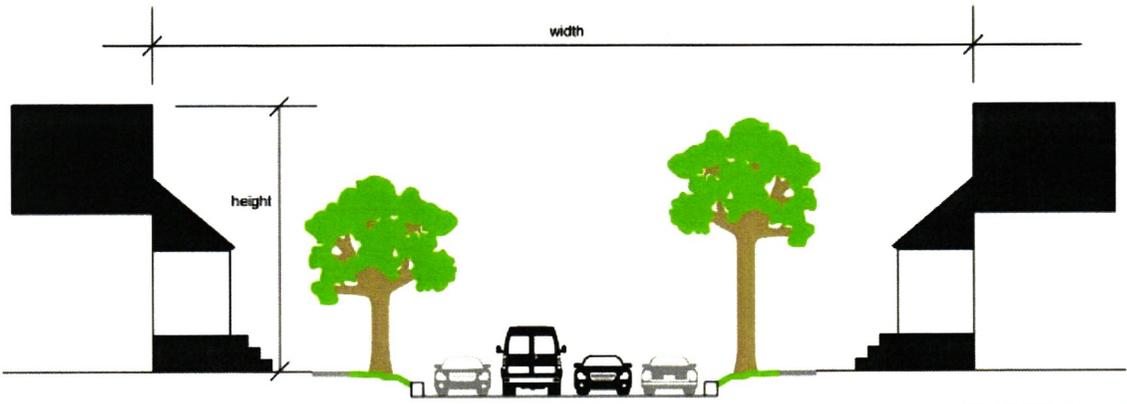
So it is with the public realm. When the buildings on either side of the public space line up and form walls, the public space feels like a room and there is a sense-of-place. The primary design element is to make sure that buildings are properly spaced. If the public space is too narrow because the 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.

Public Realm

Residential Section

The ratio of $\frac{\text{width}}{\text{height}}$ should not be less than ③ nor greater than ⑥ to maintain a strong sense of place within the public realm.

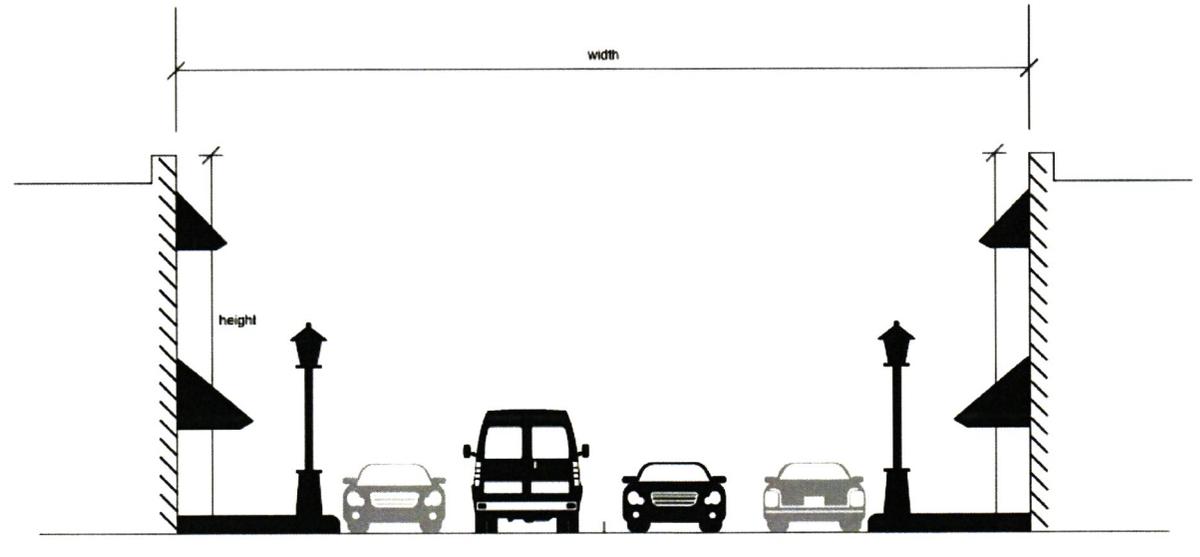


This is how the ratio is applied in a predominantly commercial neighborhood.

Public Realm

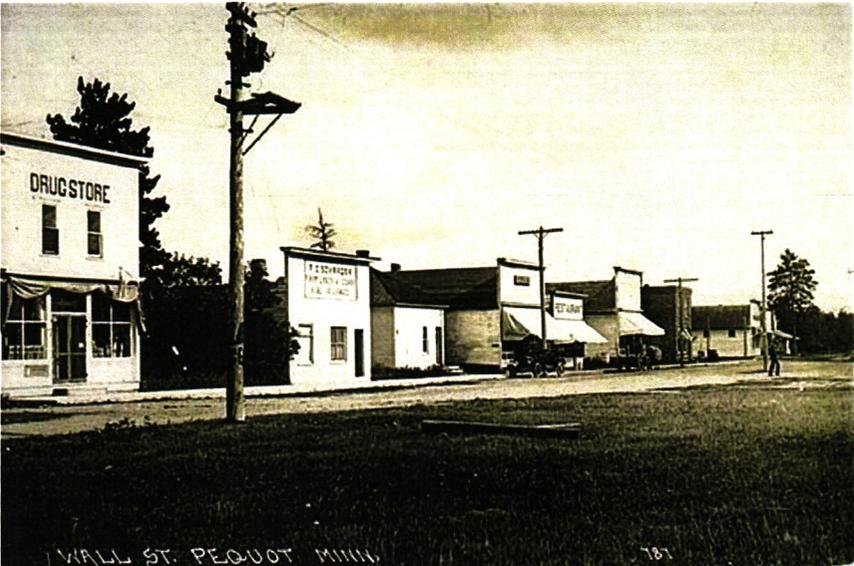
Commercial Section

The ratio of $\frac{\text{width}}{\text{height}}$ should not be less than ③ nor greater than ⑥ to maintain a strong sense of place within the public realm.



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.

Pequot Lakes should strive to reactivate the natural evolutionary process that will allow these neighborhoods to grow and mature over time on its historic framework. Pequot Lake’s goal is to achieve a stable and/or growing economy.

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 evolving over time as human needs, available technologies, and aesthetic styles play out.

There is a strong desire to maintain the high quality of the investments made in downtown Pequot Lakes. The buildings have a charm and seem to belong in their surroundings. There has been some resistance to any type of uniform standard 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.

The volume of quality businesses in Pequot Lakes has created a “destination effect”. Due to the number of businesses, retail shoppers tend to park and then visit all of the businesses available to them. Each time a new quality business is added, the overall draw of the downtown expands. 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 should be inviting to pedestrians. Shops should be pedestrian-oriented and scaled, creating an atmosphere 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.

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.

Businesses in Pequot Lakes are most competitive when offering a unique experience 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 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.

The Baxter “big-box” retailers are highly accessible to the residents of Pequot Lakes. The close proximity of these retailers creates a headwind for 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 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 for bikeability and walkability.

In a tourism-based economy, the strong summer months can sometimes be augmented with Holiday shopping and an occasional winter festival. Promoting some offerings that would cater to local needs, creates a supply/demand relationship that will generate more opportunity for growth in the downtown.

Key #5: Understand that the highest return of 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.

Key #6: Provide a wide array of housing types, with some areas of moderate or high density, at both market rate and affordable levels.

Key #7: Successful parks usually have five elements associated with them. They are engaging, adaptable, authentic, connected, and iconic. They should be designed to provide comfort, convenience and enjoyment, fostering social interactions and physical connectivity.