

# 2015 RIPON COMMUNITY VISIONING RESULTS



In October of 2015, Ripon Main Street conducted a number of activities designed to uncover perceptions about downtown Ripon, identify strengths and weaknesses within the economy and function of the downtown, and determine what type of future activities and initiatives are most supported by Ripon citizens and stakeholders.

## PROCESS & BACKGROUND

The 2015 strategic planning process included several components, including a review of economic indicators and past economic and program success, a review of past planning efforts and outcomes, and a community-wide online survey to identify community priorities and perceptions.

The long-term mission and vision of Ripon Main Street over its 25 years includes:

**Vision:** Ripon – with a downtown rich in historic architecture – was among the first communities in Wisconsin selected to participate in the Wisconsin Main Street Program – advocating historic downtown restoration and pursuing economic development through marketing, business recruitment and retention, real estate development and market analysis.

**Mission:** Ripon Main Street, which supports the interests of Ripon downtown property and business owners, guides a business improvement district that oversees the revitalization of Ripon’s central business district.

### *Summary of Previous Planning*

Specific objectives and initiatives recommended as part of the 2007 (and most recent) downtown strategic plan are highlighted below. Combined efforts of the City, Main Street, the Chamber and other partners have made significant efforts in a number of these areas.

- 2007 Strategic Plan Recommendations
  - Renovate second floor apartments along Watson
  - Add gateway & wayfinding signage
  - Encouraged mixed-density housing in Brewery Creek development
  - Create historic B&B
  - Enhance Highway 23 intersections
  - Enhance Seward & E Fond du Lac Streetscapes
  - Improve visual and pedestrian connections between Square & Library
  - Coordinate regular merchant hours of operation and one evening
  - Add outdoor dining
  - Provided guided historical tours and install interpretive signage
  - Develop incubator for hand-crafted food products

- Enhance Little White Schoolhouse

### ***Summary of Program Accomplishments***

As a result of coordinated and dedicated effort to improving the economic health and vitality of downtown Ripon, the program has had significant and marked successes, including;

- Attracted \$85 million in private investment
- Leveraged \$31 for every \$1 of public investment
- Added/rehabbed 125 residential units
- 136 building improvement projects
- Recruited 240 volunteer hours annually downtown
- Won more than 30 Wisconsin Main Street Awards

In addition to these measurable results, the community was also rated as one of the Coolest Small Towns in American in 2011, enhanced the Village Green with a new bandstand and ice rink, installed (and soon to be revamped) skyline lights, as well as assisted numerous business and property owners with renovation, expansion and relocation projects.



## **OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES**

Although Ripon Main Street has been tremendously successful in building on local opportunities and addressing previously defined challenges, the economic, demographic and physical environment of downtown has changed substantially since the 2007 planning effort. This is both a result of the previously described achievements of Ripon MainStreet and its partners, but also to broader economic trends, shifts in local property ownership and employment, etc. To explore the opportunities and challenges facing Ripon today, an updated market study was completed and public survey conducted to identify market realities and public perceptions which will impact the Ripon market in the future.

### ***Market Analysis Summary***

Ripon businesses cater to a variety of business and residential customers. The estimated annual potential customer demand for each major customer group is illustrated in the chart at right. Keep in mind that potential demand does not necessarily reflect actual spending, and that individual customers may choose to travel elsewhere for certain types of purchases, or forgo

spending in a category if no suitable options are available (for instance, an employee bringing a lunch if no restaurants are located in proximity).

The pool of customers most readily available to downtown merchants includes; (downtown totals include counts for entities within ¼ mile of the downtown core)

- Employees
  - 152 downtown businesses
  - 5,518 employees in the City
  - 174 individuals working from home in the City
- Residents
  - 316 downtown residents
  - 3 109 City residents
  - 21,339 trade area residents
- Visitors
  - 32,900 annual event visitors

### **Retail Trade Area Demand**

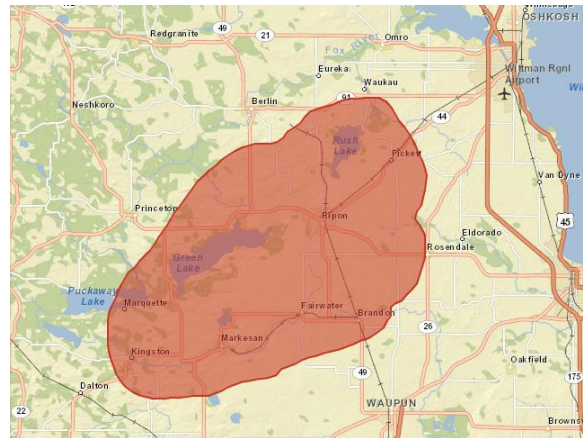
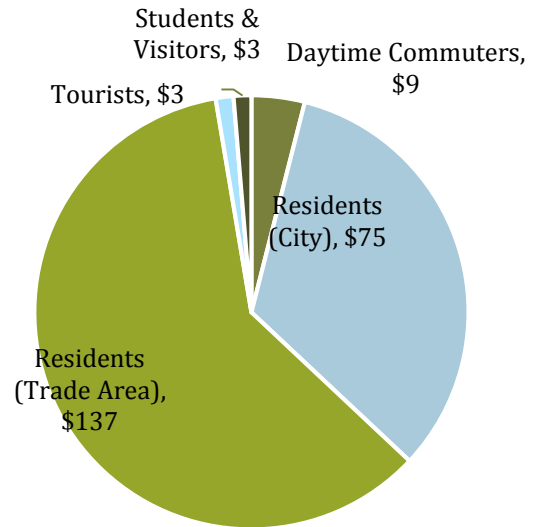
A survey of local businesses determined that Ripon serves a regional trade area of 21,000 residents, extending largely to the south and west of the City as shown in the map. Residents of this area are more likely to travel to Ripon for goods and services than other retail centers, provided that businesses are available offering the necessary items. Items which were identified as being under-served (none or fewer than demanded offerings in a category) include;

- clothing,
- general merchandise,
- gas stations,
- health and personal care,
- sporting goods and hobby, and
- limited service restaurants.

### **Survey Summary**

Of the 123 individuals that participated in the survey, a vast majority are very familiar with downtown (70% visit at least once per week). More than 47 different businesses were listed as top destinations, including all downtown restaurants and Ripon Drug, which were the top vote-getters. Nearly all respondents have attended all or virtually all of the community events held downtown, and respondents were proud of the perception of safety, well-maintained stock of historic buildings, and the high level of walkability and bikeability enjoyed by downtown visitors. Top priorities for future improvements included;

### **Buying Power (\$ Millions)**



- More restored and renovated buildings
- More shopping choices, and
- More activities/amenities for families and children

Priorities of course varied along demographic lines, as indicated in the table below.

	25 & Under	26-35 Years	36-45 Years	46-55 Years	56-65 Years	66 and Over
Priority 1	More Restaurants	More Family Friendly Amenities	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Restored / Renovated Buildings
Priority 2	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Restored / Renovated Buildings	More Shopping	More Shopping	Cleaner & More Beautiful	Cleaner & More Beautiful
Priority 3	More Information & Marketing	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Family Friendly Amenities	More Jobs & Businesses	More Shopping	More Shopping



## COMMUNITY VISIONING RESULTS

Using the previously provided information as a frame of reference, a group of more than 50 community members participated in three interactive exercises designed to identify and priorities opportunities and initiatives for downtown in the next five years. Small group activities included; brainstorming strengths and challenges facing downtown, exploring spatial relationships, destinations, travel and pedestrian safety throughout downtown, and selecting and placing desired amenities to enhance the sense of place downtown. The outcomes from these activities are profiled in this section.

### ***Strengths & Challenges***

The committee asked to collectively brainstorm strengths and challenges of PWMS as an organization, and downtown PWMS as a whole which should be considered when setting a vision and identifying initiatives for the next 20 years of downtown Port Washington Main Street activities.

#### Strengths:

- Community-owned businesses, friendly owners
- Great arts community
- Parking
- Theatre
- Big pots
- Proximity to college
- Strong events (concerts, dickens, car show)
- History/architecture (Carnegie)
- Pedestrian friendly
- Green space
- The loop
- Farmers market
- Community of believers
- Dining/brewing
- Shops
- Engagement with college

#### Challenges:

- Downtown is noisy at night
- Need more window decorations/character
- No funding for events
- Not enough family events
- Need more regularly occurring events (easy for people to remember)
- Attracting new businesses with current building conditions
- Attracting quality businesses/supporting businesses to stay open past a year (plan assistance, capital)
- Better market information/assistance that is available. People don't ask for help.
- Poor wayfinding signage (autos)
- Need for consistent hours of operation/evening hours
- Dingy/dark/unsafe parking lots, limit night time traffic

- Lack of connections/corridors to encourage walking/biking to downtown from surrounding neighborhood/region
- Regulation/ordinances (i.e. tiny houses)
- Need to overcome the past/reputation/attitudes
- No major media market coverage
- Need façade program/business capitalization source
- Empty buildings
- Need to improve connection to college

### ***Destinations & Connections***

Participants in this session were asked to first define downtown in terms of its geographic area, and then to identify major destinations which should be well-connected and signed for visitors. Major destinations identified include:

- Restaurants (all of them)
- Banks
- Ripon Drug
- City Hall
- Post Office
- Campus Theatre
- Carnegie Library
- Ripon College
- Library
- Little White Schoolhouse

Participants were then asked to identify the places that they most enjoy spending time in downtown, which resulted in a unanimous vote for;

- Village Green
- Watson Street (especially 100 and 300 blocks)
- Ripon College

The third task was then to identify areas where they do NOT feel comfortable walking or lingering downtown, or areas where they feel that pedestrian and/or vehicular interactions are unsafe. A summary and map of these locations is below.

Areas of Concern/Unpleasant Surroundings: Reds, Blackburn between Jackson & Scott, Parking Lots, Alleys, Blackburn between Scott & W Fond du Lac, Area near burned out buildings, Area on Scott where façade was falling down, Jackson Street by City Hall, Mill pond at night, Watson is very dark at night (college is brighter)

Difficult Connections: Wayfinding from the East, Signage/function of one way streets on Scott & W Fond du Lac, Library to downtown (visibility, signage, streetscape), ADA Accessibility to businesses on 200 block of Watson (east) – improved rear entrance opportunity?

- Pedestrian Crossings Needing Improvement: Blackburn at Scott, Seward at Watson, Jackson at Watson, East Fond du Lac and Blackburn (school traffic)
- Auto Crossings Needing Improvement: Fond du Lac/Watson Scott Intersection, W Fond du Lac at Ransom (blind intersection, especially with pedestrians)
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Areas of concern or potentially unsafe crossings



The fourth and final exercise in this station was to identify individual buildings or sites that are currently underutilized and which should be redeveloped or enhanced either through a façade enhancement project or the introduction of a new market supported tenant. The list on the following page identifies the location of each property identified as potentially needing improvement, along with a list of uses which were identified as desirable. In some cases the uses were assigned to individual properties, while in others no individual property was perceived to be a good fit at present. By and large, sites identified for improvement in the streetscape exercise were the same ones identified for redevelopment or other improvements in this exercise.

## Redevelopment Sites & Property Improvement Suggestions:

- New tenants for vacant/underutilized buildings include:
  - o Bakery
  - o Meat Market
  - o College Shop
  - o Antiques in American House
  - o Outdoor store
  - o Workout/tanning
  - o Business incubator (especially local foods)
  - o Coop grocery
  - o Wine tasting room
  
- Redevelopment Sites:
  - o American House – Antiques shop, hotel, destination restaurant/event center
  - o Forensic League and adjacent parking –employer/office
  - o Benkosky building
  - o Vacant Lot by Main Street
  
- New Development or Infill Use:
  - o Outdoor eatery in the vacant lot
  - o Camping around Mill Pond like Grantsburg (increase safety, income, customers)
  - o Urban garden/kids park/pocket park by mural (model after playground in Oshkosh outlet mall)

## Streetscape & Amenities

In the final session, participants were given \$10 in Ripon bucks and asked to select from a variety of potential streetscape elements that could improve downtown Ripon's appearance for visitors. Items were priced according to their real-life values, for instance a façade renovation cost \$10, while additional flowers on one block cost only \$1. Participants were allowed to purchase any combination of amenities with their dollars, and then were provided with dots to 'place' their purchased items on a map of downtown Ripon.

### Purchased Items:

Street Trees: (\$2 each) 28 trees purchased, \$56 spent  
Façade Makeover: (\$10 each), 22 facades rehabbed, \$220 spent  
Flowers/Planters: (\$1 each), 21 blocks of planters, \$21 spent  
Street Furniture: (\$3 each), 17 blocks furnished, \$56 spent  
Pedestrian Lighting (\$5 each), 15 blocks installed, \$65 spent

### Placement:

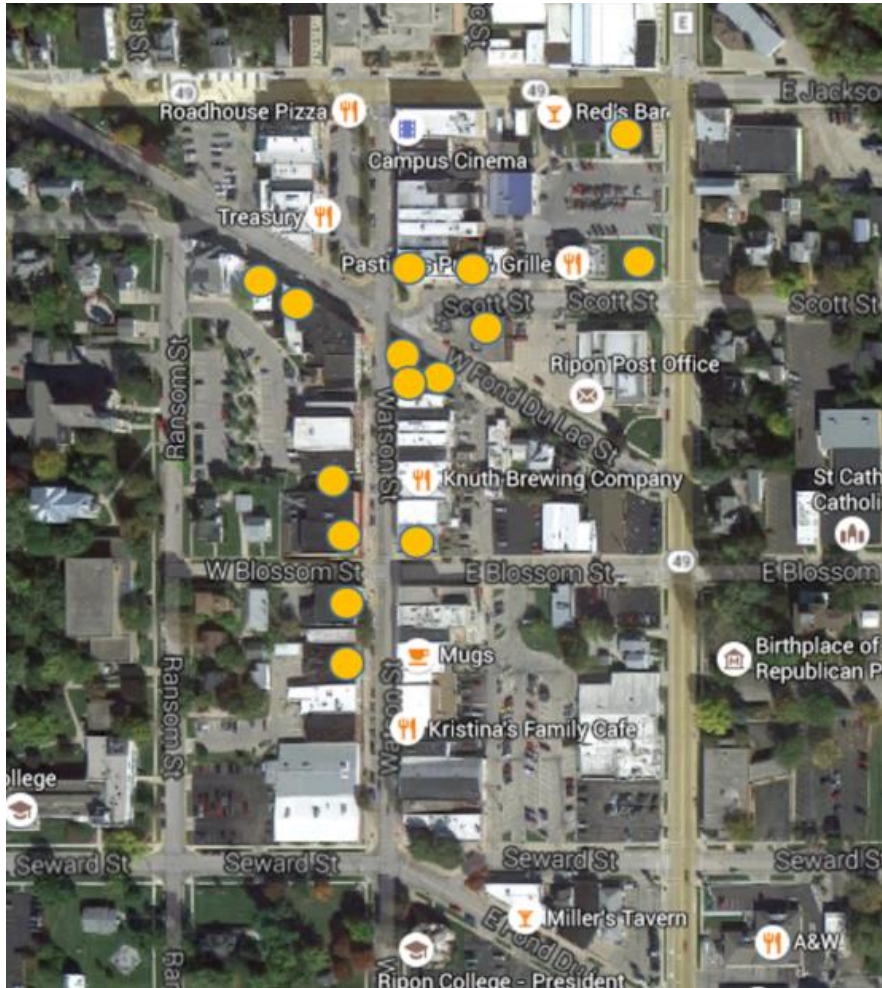
- Street trees: trees were installed the length of Watson Street, with the addition of a few on Seward and Fond du Lac, and on the site of the building fire
- Flowers/Planters: Corners and mid-block on Watson street, along Fond du Lac, Scott Street and Blackburn Street
- Street Furniture: along Watson Street, Seward Street, E & W Fond du Lac





- Lighting: Watson Street, Village Green, City Parking Lots, Blackburn Street

Facades/Sites Improved:



## Implementation Planning

Based on the input generated at the meeting, there are a number of potential strategies that could be employed successfully in downtown Ripon which are likely to be supported by citizens and constituents. Some of these represent relatively quick and low-cost improvements while others may take several years to plan and implement. Some takeaway ideas and potential strategies and/or references and case studies from comparable projects elsewhere are highlighted in the following section.

### Goal: Increase Exposure/Awareness

- Need to draw more traffic off of 23 into downtown – make them aware
  - Improve signage on Fond du Lac – install a billboard, change existing ‘historic downtown’ to ‘dining, shops’, create mural similar to Princeton’s that advertises Watson Street Shops.
- Need more publicity/awareness of empty or underutilized buildings
  - Host an open house or tour of vacant spaces (Eagle River and Rhinelander have done this successfully)
  - Use vacant spaces as pop-up, co-working or other temporary uses to activate spaces and support entrepreneurial efforts (Viroqua has been very effective at this)
  - Display old photos in building (La Farge did a month-long installment of historic photo reproduction and property history panel in each storefront window to help people stop at properties they don’t typically notice)
  - Once buildings become available, host business plan contest to generate interest in and demand for space (Red Wing Restaurant Challenge, Silver City Business Plan Competition).
- Additional marketing to increase regional draw and draw for other demographic groups
  - Increased online marketing
  - Add family-friendly recurring event to create recurring traffic. Maybe close the street for vendors on Friday evenings or other off-peak business period to encourage people to wander)
  - Shopping event (or, potentially partner with charitable cause, art walk, etc)
  - Scoop the loop
  - Tour bus itineraries
  - Increase engagement of parents and alumni during college events (De Pere parent marketing was very effective – hosted various ‘selfie spots’ around downtown as part of a larger orientation tour. Hosted coordinated events around college schedule to keep parents and students in town.

#### Sample St. Norbert College Day Events

##### **Downtown Scavenger Hunt**

10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Pick up your SNC Passport at the information tents. Travel to participating locations to have your passport stamped for a special prize. Make the Kress Inn your last stop and turn in your completed passport for a chance to win a free night’s stay at this Ascend Collection premier hotel.

##### **Yoga (featuring downtown studio)**

1-2 p.m.

Main Hall Lawn

Learn more about this energizing and relaxing form of exercise and meditation.

### Goal: Improve space function

- Add a natural playspace into downtown to increase duration of stay for families and provide additional child-friendly activities

- As an exercise, use the Power of 10 rule to identify 10 things that parents of younger children can now/could possibly do in and around downtown (i.e. Library, Ice cream, pocket park...) Potentially market this itinerary to visiting families.



- Work to improve maintenance and upkeep of back alleys/parking lots. Many of the safety concerns were due to dark or unmaintained areas.
  - Platteville has a successful back alley improvement project
  - Host additional cleanup/maintenance days focused particularly on parking lots or alleys
  - Install additional pedestrian scale lighting on paths/parking lots to improve visibility and sense of safety.

Goal: Support local economy

- Coordinate support for entrepreneurs – consider creating a step by step guide to opening a business in downtown Ripon, instituting a business mentor system, or provide liaison services for City processes to help small businesses more effectively and efficiently open and grow in Ripon.
- Business assistance task force – create local pool of professional services relevant to small businesses (i.e. accounting, legal, marketing). Offer free half hour consultation with a new business by a team of these experts, followed by a one-page summary of potential items to consider that would enhance their business or avoid future challenges. Any follow-up services with a member of the assistance task force would be 20% off, keeping business local. Rhinelander’s BusinessWorks team has successfully implemented this strategy.
- Consider crowdfunding as a strategy for some physical or event-related initiatives. Successful crowdfunding projects might include text-to-donate for out of town visitors to events, the Ironwood Artpark crowd-funded pocket park, and numerous cooperatively owned or crowd-funded local businesses which may present options to engage stakeholders on multiple levels in order to achieve common objectives.