



GO RIPON! Draft Downtown Ripon Strategic Plan

November 26, 2007



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Introduction and Summary

In 1988 Vandewalle & Associates completed the *Ripon Downtown Revitalization Plan* in partnership with Schreiber/Anderson Associates and R.A. Smith & Associates, Inc. During the intervening nineteen years, Ripon implemented many of the ideas included in this plan such as the creation of a downtown Tax Increment Financing District, a Business Improvement District, and a Main Street Organization. As the result of these and other efforts, Downtown Ripon experienced significant improvement in its economic vitality and physical condition, and currently has a solid retail and service base within its intact historic core.

The purpose of this Plan is to build on the existing foundation and provide strategies and recommendations that will bring Ripon's downtown to a higher level of strength and vitality without compromising its current success or its historic character. This Plan is organized into three sections:

Section I: Opportunities Analysis

Planning for downtown Ripon's future requires an understanding of how the area relates to its larger regional economy and how the downtown fits into the Ripon community as a whole. The Opportunities Analysis identifies key regional, local, and existing downtown assets that can be leveraged to enhance the historic downtown. Identifying these assets led to four broadly defined opportunities to translate existing assets and emerging trends into economic progress within the downtown and a vision statement for the future of the downtown. The four primary opportunities are:

- A Place of Ideas and Entrepreneurship
- A Shopping, Dining, Entertainment, and Recreation Destination
- A Local Food Economy and Culture
- Establishment of Niche Housing Opportunities

Vision for Historic Downtown Ripon:

Historic Downtown Ripon is the region's premier shopping, dining, and entertainment destination for locals and visitors alike. Firmly planted in the heart of central Wisconsin's agricultural lands, the City is the home to Ripon College, and leaders of national political and social movements making it a showcase of Wisconsin's heritage of small town architecture, progressive ideals, and local foods and food products. Whether it's your first visit, or merely your first this week, downtown Ripon is full of new ideas to meet your daily needs, find that unique gift, or to stimulate your palate or intellect

Section II: Urban Design Framework and Components

Examining the current physical layout and aesthetics of Ripon's downtown led to an Urban Design Framework built on four themes or components. These components are driven by the broad types of needed improvements that were identified for different locations and corridors within the downtown. The four components are:

- Enhance Downtown Gateways
- Create Connections between Downtown Focal Points
- Enhance Downtown Places
- Leverage Areas of Opportunity to Expand and Support the Downtown

These four components of the Design Framework apply to different sections of the downtown in different ways. After the overall Design Framework map, detailed graphics provide recommendations for applying the four components to specific locations within the downtown.

Section III: Implementation Strategy

The best plan has little value without an effective strategy for implementation. In order to bring the recommendations within this Plan to fruition, Ripon first needs a clear structure and delineation of responsibilities over downtown

projects. Ripon has numerous community organizations that have a stake in the development of the downtown and must play a role in implementing this Plan. These organizations include the City Council and Staff, the Plan Commission, Ripon Main Street, the Ripon Community Development Corporation (RCDC), The Community Development Corporation (CDA), the Chamber of Commerce, and Ripon College. To improve the coordination between these entities and to truly leverage the expertise and resources each have to offer, this Plan proposes the creation of the Ripon Economic Action and Development Implementation (READI) Team consisting of representatives from these groups as the first implementation step. The READI Team will channel communications, assign tasks, and delineate responsibilities to its member organizations. The READI Team will be the management team responsible for guiding downtown implementation projects from concept to completion.

The Implementation Strategy also organizes over eighty specific projects into categories and the READI Team will determine which groups are responsible for each of these categories. The strategy further identifies seven priority projects for short term action based on their feasibility and potential catalytic effects. These projects are:

1. The Development of a Mixed-Use Project at the North End of the Downtown (Brewery Creek Project)
2. Develop Niche Housing Targeted to Ripon College Alumni
3. Install New Gateway and Wayfinding Signage
4. Launch New Cultural and Continuing Education Programs through Ripon College
5. Enhance the Little White Schoolhouse Attraction as a Tribute to Ripon's History as a Place of Ideas
6. Create a Local Foods Themed Visitor Center and Retail Shop
7. Create a Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance in Partnership with the College

Section I: Opportunities Analysis

Multi-Level Approach



Creating and implementing new ideas for downtown Ripon requires an understanding of the larger context and of how downtown Ripon fits into the economy and landscape of its surroundings. This Opportunities Analysis looks at downtown Ripon from three distinct levels that together lead to key assets and opportunities that will form the foundation for the downtown plan. First, the analysis looks broadly at Ripon's larger regional economy, then the focus zooms to the unique assets of the City itself, and finally, the physical environment of the downtown is examined. The multi-layer approach helps identify the key assets of the region and community that drive the local economy, give Ripon its unique identity, and create new economic and site development opportunities for the downtown.

Regional Context

Ripon is located in east central Wisconsin and is well-positioned relative to several key regional focal points. Ripon is within a 45-minute drive time of the Appleton, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac urban areas, and the residential growth of the Fox Valley region is moving westward toward Ripon. Ripon is also close to Green Lake and is on the main thoroughfare most visitors take to Green Lake from Chicago or Milwaukee. Many of the region's primary recreational trails and regional parks are also located near Ripon.



Key Assets

- Gateway to Green Lake Resort and Vacation Area
- Westward Expansion of Fox Valley Residential Growth
- Regional Trails and Recreational Areas

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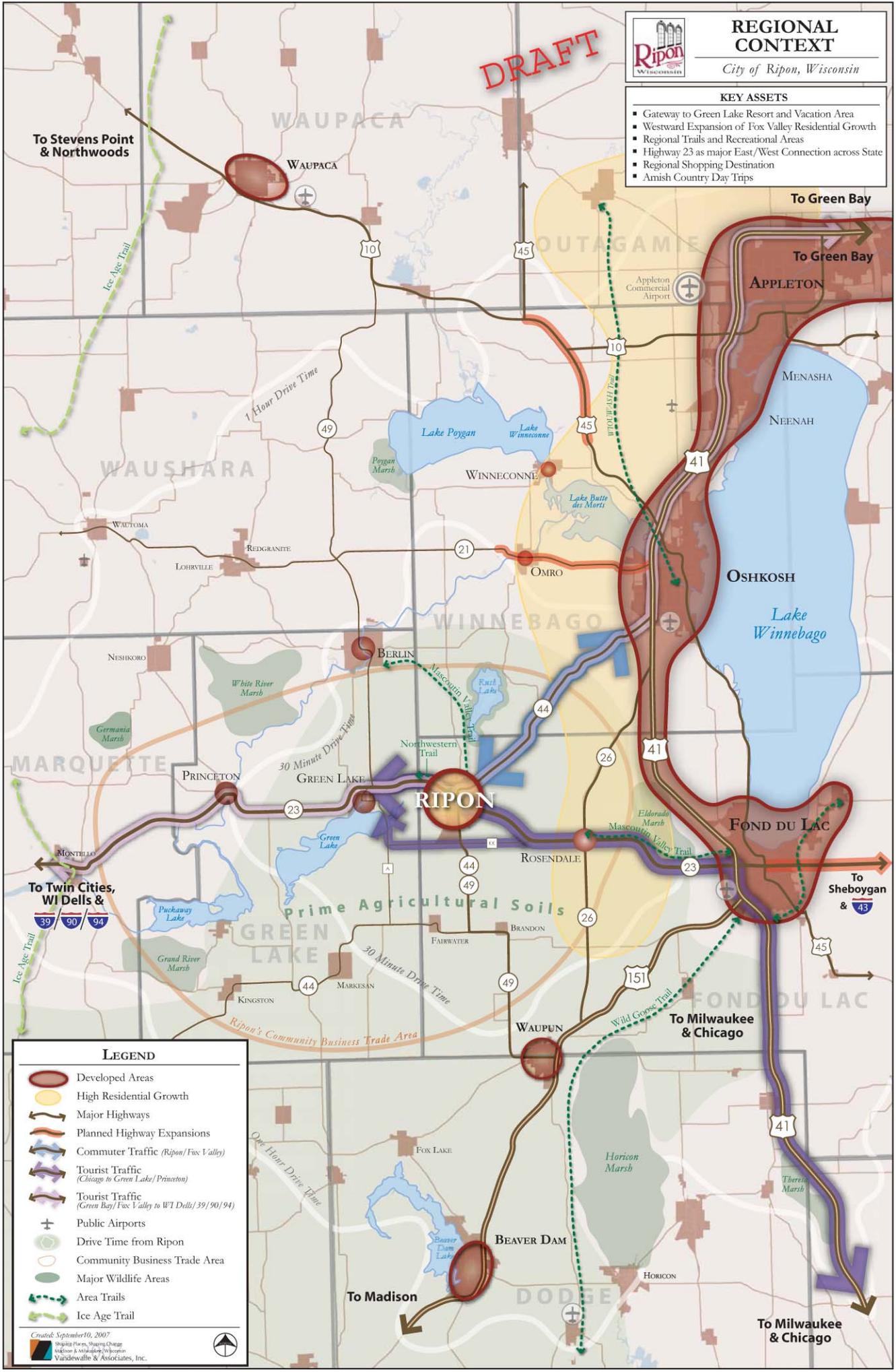


REGIONAL CONTEXT

City of Ripon, Wisconsin

KEY ASSETS

- Gateway to Green Lake Resort and Vacation Area
- Westward Expansion of Fox Valley Residential Growth
- Regional Trails and Recreational Areas
- Highway 23 as major East/West Connection across State
- Regional Shopping Destination
- Amish Country Day Trips



LEGEND

- Developed Areas
- High Residential Growth
- Major Highways
- Planned Highway Expansions
- Commuter Traffic (Ripon/Fox Valley)
- Tourist Traffic (Chicago to Green Lake/Princeton)
- Tourist Traffic (Green Bay/Fox Valley to WI Dells/39/90/94)
- Public Airports
- Drive Time from Ripon
- Community Business Trade Area
- Major Wildlife Areas
- Area Trails
- Ice Age Trail

Created: September 10, 2007
 Shingleton Planners, Shaping Change
 Madison & Milwaukee, Wisconsin
 Vandewalle & Associates, Inc.



Local Setting

The physical and economic landscape of the City of Ripon is multi-faceted. In addition to an active downtown, the City includes a historic and well-regarded private college, high-employment industrial areas, a 25-bed regional medical center, a large pond with adjacent parkland, and several additional parks and trails. Highway's 23 and 44 are the main thoroughfares in Ripon and both carry significant daily traffic into and through the City.

Key Assets

- Home of Ripon College
- Strong Employment and Several Large Local Companies
- Intact Historic Downtown
- Community Parks, Trails, and Mill Pond
- Ripon Medical Center
- Regional Commercial Center on West Fond du Lac



- KEY ASSETS**
- Home of Ripon College
 - Several Large Local Companies
 - Community Parks, Trails, and Mill Pond
 - Intact Historic Downtown
 - Regional Commercial Center on West Fond du Lac St
 - Downtown at convergence of high traffic roads

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HIGHWAY 23/49 COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

- Regional auto oriented big box commercial, retail & fast food
- Community entrance from the west & Green Lake

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

- Central business core & historic downtown
- Activity Center
- Civic center of Ripon (City Hall, Police Station, Library, Post Office & Movie Theater)

RIPON COLLEGE

- College founded in 1851
- Private Liberal Arts & Sciences College of 1000 students offering 31 majors
- Arts Center
- Ceresco Conservancy provides 130 acres of restored prairie, oak savanna & wetlands

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS

- Employment Center
- Planned Industrial Park Expansion

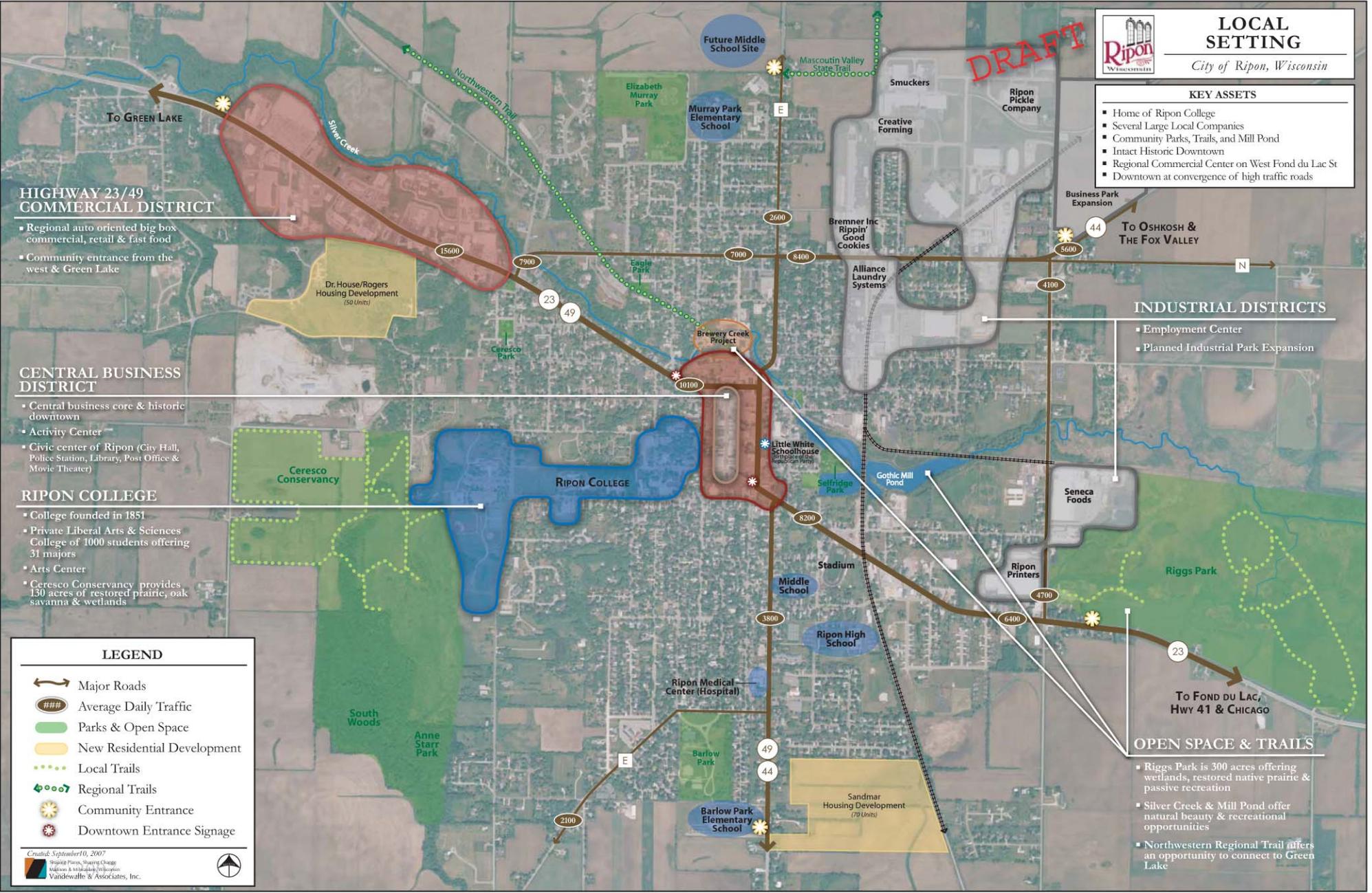
OPEN SPACE & TRAILS

- Riggs Park is 300 acres offering wetlands, restored native prairie & passive recreation
- Silver Creek & Mill Pond offer natural beauty & recreational opportunities
- Northwestern Regional Trail offers an opportunity to connect to Green Lake

LEGEND

- Major Roads
- Average Daily Traffic
- Parks & Open Space
- New Residential Development
- Local Trails
- Regional Trails
- Community Entrance
- Downtown Entrance Signage

Created: September 10, 2007
Original Plan, Shading & Design
Adrian & Mikalukowski Wisconsin
Vandewalle & Associates, Inc.





Downtown Opportunities

The centerpiece of downtown Ripon is the Watson Street corridor extending from Fond du Lac Street on the south to Jackson Street on the North. Watson Street is the primary, “Main Street” style retail area and includes an array of locally owned and operated shops and restaurants located in well-maintained historic buildings. The Mill Pond area and the College flank the downtown to the east and west and the Civic Campus (City Hall, Police Station, and Library) and the Ripon College President’s Office create bookends that define the downtown’s north and south termini.



Key Assets

- Prominent downtown and campus gateways on main traffic routes
- Immediate adjacency of college campus
- Mill Pond and Silver Creek within walking distance of the downtown
- Historic Watson Street shopping and dining corridor
- Rotary Square facing City Hall and other civic buildings
- Planned Brewery Creek Redevelopment concept
- Extensive on and off-street parking areas
- Campus Movie Theater (Marcus Corporation)

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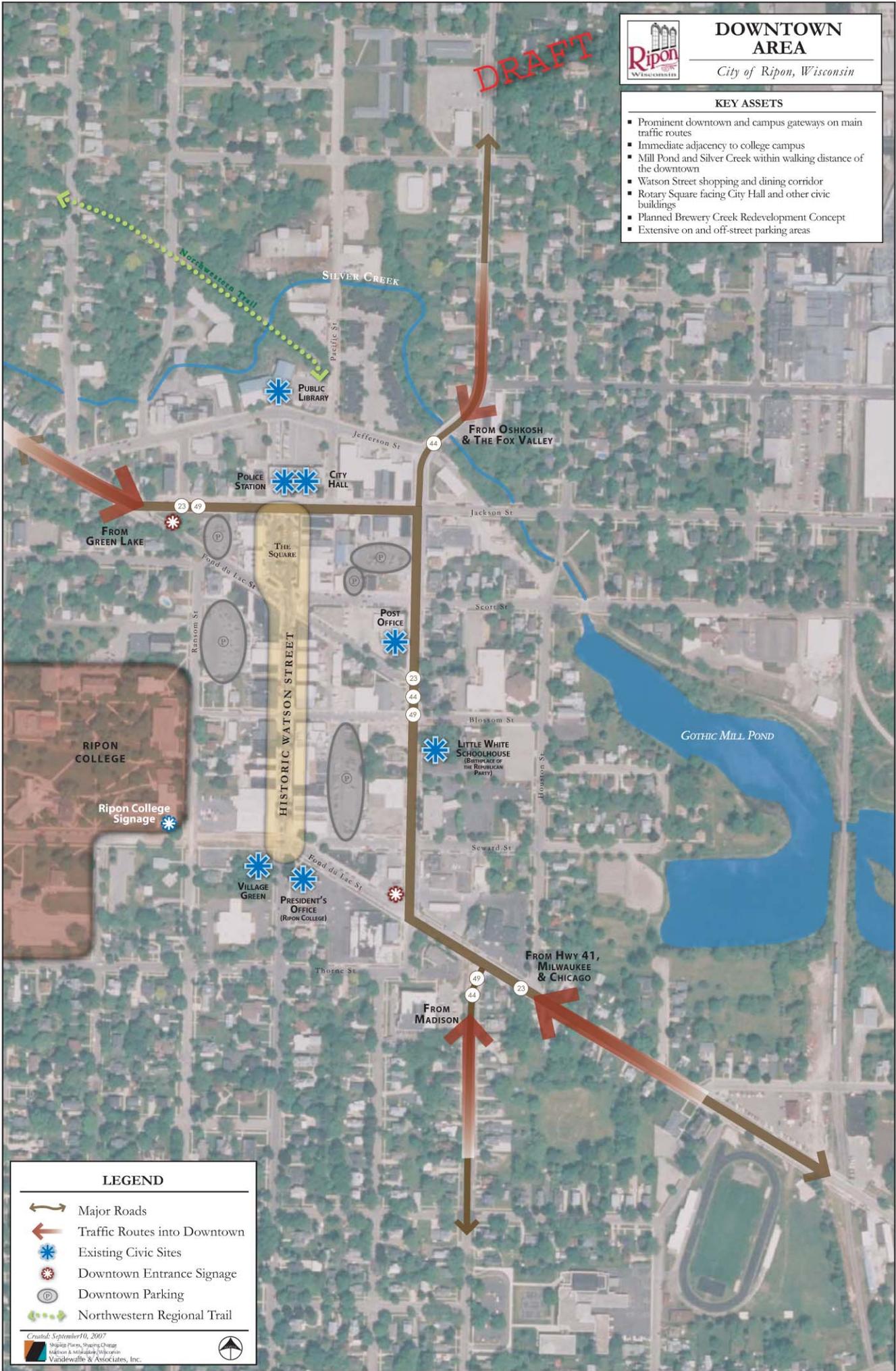


DOWNTOWN AREA

City of Ripon, Wisconsin

KEY ASSETS

- Prominent downtown and campus gateways on main traffic routes
- Immediate adjacency to college campus
- Mill Pond and Silver Creek within walking distance of the downtown
- Watson Street shopping and dining corridor
- Rotary Square facing City Hall and other civic buildings
- Planned Brewery Creek Redevelopment Concept
- Extensive on and off-street parking areas



LEGEND

- ↔ Major Roads
- ← Traffic Routes into Downtown
- ★ Existing Civic Sites
- ⊛ Downtown Entrance Signage
- Ⓟ Downtown Parking
- ⋯ Northwestern Regional Trail

Created: September 10, 2007

Mapdata Plans, Shaping Change
Mapdata & Associates, Inc.
Vandewalle & Associates, Inc.



Demographic and Economic Profile

Ripon's demographic profile and local economy provides further insight into the community and its key assets that can drive the downtown planning process. Overall, Ripon is a small city with a stable population, a large workforce relative to the size of the community, and a strong retail sector.



Population - Ripon's current population is approximately 7,000 and has remained relatively stable over the last several years with only modest growth. Fond du Lac County's current population is 102,000 and is similarly stable. However, the Appleton/Oshkosh metropolitan area is growing more rapidly and most of this growth is occurring west of the cities.

Age - Ripon's median age is above average compared with state and county benchmarks, in spite of the downward influence of the college. Similar to national trends, the most rapidly growing age group in Ripon, Fond du Lac County, and surrounding areas is the 45 to 65 year old cohort.

Income - Ripon's median household income is below average compared with the County but it is growing more rapidly and is higher than the medians for several nearby communities. Although Ripon's average income is lower than surrounding areas, the City is located close to more affluent areas that are increasingly becoming wealthier. Within the area bounded by a 50-mile ring around Ripon, the number of households with incomes above \$100,000 per year between is expected to increase by over 40,000 between 2007 and 2012.



Local Job Market - Ripon is a net importer of commuters with many more people coming into Ripon for work than driving out of Ripon to work in other cities. Approximately 7,000 people work in Ripon daily giving the City an unusually high, one-to-one ratio of total population to total workforce.

Top Industries - Most of Ripon's workforce is employed in manufacturing, retail, or service industries. Approximately 28% of Ripon workers work in manufacturing which is above the state average and reflects the City's base of large manufacturing companies. About 30% of Ripon's workforce is in retail and 22% is in service industries which include health and education.

Top Employers - Ripon is fortunate to have a strong manufacturing sector and several large, stable employers. In terms of the number of jobs provided, the top manufacturing employers in Ripon include Alliance Laundry, Bremner-Ripon Foods, Creative Forming, and Smuckers. In addition to these large manufacturing operations, the Ripon Medical Center and Ripon College are also responsible for large shares of the City's employment base.

Retail Trade - Ripon is a strong retail magnet that attracts many shoppers from outside the City. The City generates about three times to the retail sales as would be expected for a city with Ripon's population and incomes.

Tapestry Profile - Community Tapestry is a household segmentation system created by ESRI that classifies households based a variety of demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics. Every U.S. household is assigned to a particular segment corresponding to who they are and where they live. Tapestry data can identify consumer behavior, lifestyles, housing preferences, and other attributes that help provide an overall understanding of a

community's residents. The following lists and describes the most prominent tapestry segments in Ripon:

- **Rustbelt Traditions (29%)**

This group is the mainstay of older, industrial cities bordering the Great Lakes. Most employed residents work in service, manufacturing, and retail trade industries. Households are primarily a mix of married-couple families, single-parent families, and singles living alone. The median age of these residents is 35.9 years. The median income for these households is \$42,000 per year and most have high school diplomas and some have attended college. The group primarily lives in modest single-family homes. Most of these households generally spend their adult lives in their hometowns.

- **Midlife Junction (20%)**

Midlife Junction residents live quiet, settled lives, phasing out of their child-rearing years. Approximately half of the households are composed of married-couple families; 31 percent are singles who live alone. The median age is 40.5 years; the median household income is \$43,600. One-third of the households receive Social Security benefits. Nearly two-thirds of the households are single-family structures; most of the remaining dwellings are in apartment buildings. They spend their money prudently and prefer to shop from catalog retailers.

- **Simple Living (15%)**

These mixed-age neighborhoods are on urban outskirts and in suburban areas. The median age is 40.1 years; one-third of householders are at least 65. Half the households consist of singles living alone or with others and one-third of households consist of married-couple families. Housing includes single-family, multiunit, and congregate senior housing and 55 percent of households are rented. Residents are often active in church and school groups, and stay fit through team sports. Households often do not own a computer, cell phone, or DVD player, and 40 percent receive Social Security.

- **Retirement Communities (13%)**

Retirement Communities neighborhoods are found mostly in cities. A majority of households are multiunit dwellings; congregate housing dominated by singles living alone is common. This educated market has a median age of 50.7 years, with one-third of residents aged 65 years or older. Although the median household income is a modest \$45,100, the median net worth is \$172,000. Good health and doctors visits are priorities. In addition to solitary leisure activities, spending time with grandchildren, gambling, and traveling overseas are common activities. Home remodeling is usually in the works.

- **Salt of the Earth (11%)**

These rural or small-town homeowners are settled, hardworking, and self-reliant. The median age is 40.4 years and labor force participation is higher than the U.S. level, with unemployment lower. This group is employed at above-average rates in manufacturing, construction, mining, and agricultural industries. Households are dominated by married-couple families with a median income of \$48,800. Homeownership is of single-family dwellings and is at 86 percent. 28 percent of households own three or more vehicles, most including a truck and/or motorcycle.

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

As part of the data gathering process, Vandewalle & Associates conducted interviews with over 50 individuals representing seven different stakeholder groups with interest in the downtown and ideas for its future. The groups interviewed were the Ripon Main Street Board, downtown business owners, area realtors, Ripon College personnel, Chamber of Commerce members, the Ripon Economic Development Corporation, the real estate development community, and City staff and elected officials. Each of these interviews lasted about one hour. Each group provided unique insight into the downtown, but many of the topics that were discussed in the interviews overlapped and many of the stakeholders agree on the key issues facing the downtown and the community. The following lists the topics that were discussed and ideas that were shared.



Parking

- Local employees and residents misuse the free 2-hour parking which is intended to be available for retail customers and visitors to the area. Although this is a problem, it appears to be a small number of habitual offenders causing it.
- Parking lots flanking Watson to the east and west are in poor conditions, poorly lit, and signage does not effectively direct people to them.
- Overall, there is probably an adequate supply of parking but it is not properly maintained, is underused, and lacks signage.

Building Condition/Architectural Quality

- There are a small number of properties that need improving but overall, the quality of the Watson Street buildings is good.
- The owners of the poorly maintained properties are unlikely to take an interest in improvements, and targeting these buildings in the plan would not be an effective strategy.
- Rents are low making property maintenance and upgrades difficult. A façade improvement program and other assistance would help.

Traffic Control

- Highway 23 has inadequate signage. Oftentimes, trucks passing through Ripon end up on Watson Street rather than staying on 23.
- Conversely, tourists often stay on 23 and completely miss Watson.
- Signage and traffic adjustment should be used to make sure visitors are aware of the downtown and see Watson Street and to make sure that trucks stay on proper truck routes.

Retail Issues

- The downtown still has a traditional retail base with many locally-oriented stores catering to residents as well as visitors.
- Green Lake produces significant retail activity in town, particularly the conference center.
- Retail changed after 9/11 with a decrease in galleries and gift shops
- The hours of stores are inconsistent. This is largely because they are mostly one-person operations and many of the owners do not have employees and do not want to go through the hassle and expense of hiring and payroll.

- The current list of festivals and events is good, but there is a need for more.
- Retail operators work together on some things (avoid duplicating merchandise) but could coordinate more on other issues.
- The things that are missing from the downtown retail mix include: a shoe store, stores and activities for children and teenagers, clothing stores for college students, and the area needs more nightlife and possibly more restaurants.
- Retail trade area tends to extend farther west than east, although the downtown does pull some day-trip traffic from the east now that there are better establishments

Relationship between the Downtown and the College

- The community and college rank in the top 5 percent nationally for town/gown relations.
- Seward Street should be the key connection bridging the downtown and the college. The College currently is visually disconnected from the downtown.
- Both City and College officials would like to see greater cooperation. The City officials believe the City is not fully taking advantage of the College and the College would like to see the downtown provide more for students in terms of retail and things to do.
- Students typically do not spend significant amounts of money downtown and are an untapped resource. They generally go to the mall in Oshkosh.
- The alumni are organized and active with regional committees, planned trips, reunion weekends. The annual Alumni reunion draws 500 to 600 people.
- The college is recruiting 30-60 faculty over the next few years due to retirements. Most of these recruits are likely to come from larger cities and will want more urban amenities. Also, finding jobs for spouses is a key issue.
- Ripon's students are primarily from Wisconsin and desire more urban amenities.
- Many of the old hang-outs frequented by students are gone and need replacements
- The College is hosting more summer weddings, and drawing more visitors.

Green Lake and Princeton

- Green Lake has strong ties to Chicago and has traditionally been a summer get-away for wealthy Chicagoans, particularly people affiliated with the Chicago Board of Trade. CBOT people represent approximately 45% of lakefront property owners.
- The downtowns of Princeton and Green Lake both have had suffered from problems that have hampered their ability to advance as a retail area.
- Ripon is the primary center for retail and services for seasonal visitors to Green Lake but needs to provide more "rainy day" entertainment opportunities and activities for children
- Although the Green Lake lakefront properties are extremely pricy, most of the city is similar to Ripon and the city has recently seen a growing number of foreclosures of off-lake properties. The whole housing market has cooled off considerably.

- The recent renovations to the Heidel House have made the establishment unfriendly to locals and exclusively a destination for visitors. In addition to resort accommodations, the Heidel House has a convention space, hosts weddings, and provides spa services.
- The recent rapid increases in real estate values on Green Lake put upward pressure on other parts of the community including Green Lake's downtown. As a result, the downtown has become too expensive for most local retailers and the downtown is very inactive. The City's liquor license restrictions limit restaurant development.
- The area lacks a convenient executive airport.
- A trolley to Green Lake should be explored, along with extending the bicycle path to connect Ripon to Green Lake.

Influence of proximity to the Fox Valley and Fond du Lac

- Oshkosh is considered psychologically closer than Fond du Lac and there is greater cross-commuting between Oshkosh and Ripon than Fond du Lac and Ripon. Additionally, residents of Ripon are more likely to travel to Oshkosh for shopping and entertainment.
- The cities in the Valley tend to have weak downtowns but are growing areas overall. The growth is largely spreading west.

Employment and Economic Development

- Ripon still has a larger number of industrial workers and solid local employers and is a net importer of commuters with employees coming in from the Valley. Many people consider Ripon to be a blue-collar town where most residents work in manufacturing because the management and executives of Ripon's companies tend to live outside of the city, many in Oshkosh.
- The City and the RCDC are in the process of developing a new, 58-acre business park.
- There is increasing competition in health care that is threatening the local health care providers.
- The Ripon Chamber of Commerce is exclusively focused on Ripon businesses but is a partner in the "Communities of Green Lake" consortium.
- The Ripon public schools are excellent and the best in the area.
- Employment base has been stable but recent losses of longtime manufacturers have been a wake-up call to the community indicating a need for more proactive business retention strategies.

Housing

- Ripon lacks high-end housing. Given the proximity to the Valley, the company executives commuting to Ripon, Green Lake, and other factors, the market needs more high-end housing development. Potential buyers have been asking for new high-end single-family homes.
- The city has seen limited housing activity recently, but there have been several new projects that are slowly building out.
- Given the low absorption rates of new housing units, new development is not financially feasible without public assistance.
- Very few options are currently available for retirees/empty nesters.

Political and Regulatory Environment

- The City's TIFs are performing well and the City has shown a willingness to support the right projects.
- The current City Council is seen as proactive in terms of development, but this has not always been the case in the past
- The City has been slow in getting utilities extended to new development projects
- City permitting has been slow in the past but seems to be improving.

Other Issues

- The downtown needs more public restrooms, possibly in City Hall
- The City lacks things to do in the evening
- The Little White Schoolhouse was recently renovated but still underused
- Mill Pond and Silver Creek are overgrown and underused assets
- There are three excellent golf courses are within 12 miles of Ripon.
- Ripon College has a 250-acre restored prairie on the west side of town which should be linked to the new county park (Riggs Park) on the east side.
- Overall, the downtown is stable and functional but needs to move to the next level.

Summary of Kick-Off Visioning Questionnaire Responses

As part of the initial data gathering and public participation process, Vandewalle & Associates conducted a kick-off visioning public workshop to gather feedback from Ripon Residents on the downtown. As part of the workshop, attendees were asked to complete a seven-question worksheet to share their initial thoughts on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for the downtown. About 25 people attended the meeting and 20 submitted responses to the questionnaire. For each question below, the answers from the public are noted, and, if more than one person gave the same response, the number indicates how many shared that answer.



Question 1: Why do you go Downtown? What do you do Downtown?

Response	Number of Responses
Restaurants and coffee shops	18
Shopping, specialty stores, book store, jewelry	16
Grocery store or drug store	6
Bank, accountant, or post office	5
Chat with friends and shopkeepers	4
Walking	3
Special events, farmers market, concerts	3
Movies	3
Eye glasses	2
Work/ run business	2
Office supplies	1
Distribute literature	1

Question 2: What are the most appealing things about downtown and what about downtown is getting better?

Response	Number of Responses
Historic Buildings/Historic Atmosphere	10
Variety or quality of restaurants	7
Specialty shops and variety of shops	5
Walkability	4
A friendly place or nice people	3
No parking meters	1
Coffee shop	1
Upgrades to businesses	1
Christmas lights	1
Services	1

Question 3: What are the least appealing things about downtown and what about downtown is getting worse?

Response	Number of Responses
Parking (lot condition, too many lots, time limits, not enough spaces)	5
Limited/inconsistent hours of businesses	3
Empty buildings	3
Unattractive backs of stores, difficulty entering stores from rear	2
Uneven sidewalks	1
Treasury building	1
Tattoo parlor	1
Signage	1
One group owning so much property	1
Need more shopping variety	1
Lack of greenspace	1
Economic challenges	1
Altered storefronts	1
Poorly maintained buildings	1



Question 4: Is there enough parking downtown? If not, where should parking spaces be added? Which parking areas should be removed and reused?

Response	Number of Responses
Yes – enough parking but the public lots are not used efficiently and/or are unattractive and poorly maintained	6
Yes – The blacktop in front of Save-a-Lot should be removed and planted	1
Yes – Enough but need to keep residents from using street parking that should be left for customers	1
Yes – Should have better signage for lots and adjacent parking	1
No – Should advertise off-street parking with rear access	1
No – but that's because the lots are inefficient. Need a well-planned parking structure	1
Not really – poor condition of space behind stores	1
Need better signage to direct people to available spaces	1

Question 5: What is missing downtown? What types of uses (i.e. stores, restaurants, etc.) would you like to see added to the Downtown?



Response	Number of Responses
Shoe store	4
Better grocery store	3
Stores appealing to young people (clothing stores, sporting goods, outfitters)	2
More variety of stores	2
Hardware store	2
Antiques	2
Upscale, owner-occupied residential	1
Upscale restaurant	1
Teen center	1
Striping of crosswalks	1
Signs	1
Quality hotel	1
Public bathrooms	1
Motor coach tours	1
More restaurants	1
More plantings	1
More office space	1
More beautification of downtown	1
Late night relaxing, studying, gathering	1
Ice cream shop with evening hours	1
Hobby shop	1
Flowers	1
Fabric store	1
Ethnic food	1
Downtown directory	1
Deli	1
Bike shop	1
Bakery	1
Art galleries	1
A "real" bookstore	1
Natural foods grocery store (smaller whole foods or cooperative)	1

Question 6: What one thing absolutely SHOULD change downtown?

Response	Number of Responses
Longer parking, abolish 2-hour limit	3
Longer and more consistent hours of stores	3
Backs of stores	2
Storefronts (improve, make consistent)	2
Remove open trash containers	1
More parking	1
Remove overhead utility lines	1
Revamp stores to be environmentally sound	1
Make more use of Little White School House	1
Renovations that are too modern	1
More direction	1
Updated store directory	1
Bulletin boards	1
Better stormwater management	1

Question 7: What one thing absolutely SHOULD NOT change downtown?

Response	Number of Responses
Historic architecture/historic character	5
Hometown/small town atmosphere	4
Quaintness	2
Senior center	1
Keep it in 3.5 block area	1
Never add parking meters	1
Keep the downtown looking good	1

Summary of 2nd Workshop Questionnaire Responses

After completing the initial data gathering, conducting research, and producing the initial draft of the Opportunities Analysis, Vandewalle & Associates returned to Ripon to present the initial findings at a second workshop to gather additional public input on the direction for the Strategic Downtown Plan. Over fifty people attended this workshop which consisted of two presentations intermixed with two individual response questionnaires and a group exercise. The residents who attended the workshop were essentially asked to share their reactions to the ideas presented and the input was incorporated into this document. The following states the questions that were asked at the workshop and summarizes the answers that the individuals and groups provided to each.

Question 1: What are Ripon's most important assets?

In the space below, jot down your thoughts on what Ripon's key assets are. These assets can be directly connected to the downtown or they can be general features of the community. Feel free to note assets we already discussed or to bring up new assets not yet mentioned.

Summary of Responses:

Most Respondents agreed with the original assets included in the draft opportunities analysis and restated many of these ideas. The most commonly restated assets were Ripon College, the local manufacturing base, and the

quality of the existing downtown. In addition, respondents introduced other assets not included in the original Opportunities Analysis graphic such as:

- High quality local schools
- The convergence of major roads in downtown Ripon
- The Medical Center
- Rail access into the city
- Southwoods and the Northwest Trail
- Friendliness and “volunteer spirit” of the community

Question 2: What are the key opportunities for downtown Ripon?

In the space below, share your ideas on the key opportunities for downtown Ripon. Again, you are welcome to restate our ideas or offer new ones.

Summary of Responses:

Many of the responses to this question mentioned specific types of uses that are viewed as potential opportunities such as more restaurants, more downtown housing, tourism-oriented retail, and lodging. Some respondents also pointed to specific places as opportunities such as the Gothic Mill Pond, the Silver Creek area, and the rear entrances to the Watson Street buildings. Other opportunities mentioned include more recreational trails, bicycle rental shops, and a dinner theater. Many answers supported the idea that housing represents a key opportunity for downtown Ripon.

Question 3: What ideas should be included in the downtown Ripon Vision?

In the space below, jot down any thoughts on what you think should be the long-term vision for downtown Ripon. As with the other questions, you are free to reinforce parts of the vision we presented or provide completely new ideas.

Summary of Responses:

Overall, the residents agreed with the ideas presented in the draft vision statement and restated many of these in their answers. Responses reiterated the idea that the vision should be a place that attracts people and provides for the diverse needs of different people including students, seniors, families, and visitors. Many responses agreed that the vision for downtown Ripon should celebrate and enhance the historic assets. Other ideas that residents offered as part of the vision for the downtown include a place where entrepreneurs can succeed, a center of “green” enterprise, and a place with friendly people. One response pointed out that the draft vision did not specifically mention downtown housing which is highlighted as a key opportunity and should be incorporated into the vision.

Question 4:

In the space provided below, jot down your thoughts on the downtown places identified on the map. Share your ideas for any enhancements that you believe should be made in these places and/or discuss whether you strongly agree or disagree with the recommendations indicated on the accompanying map.

Summary of Responses:

Upper Watson Street

- Remove or restructure City hall
- Make an official “town square” on the 100 block of Watson Street
- Improve the central area of the square and consider removing parallel parking to create performance space
- Plant flowers in the Square
- Add public art, sculptures, and fountains

- Create a kiosk directory of downtown businesses
- Remodel Treasury Building
- Create more connection between Watson and the Library
- Create a restaurant/ice cream shop with outdoor seating
- Encourage more retail and restaurant uses and fewer service businesses

Central Blocks of Watson Street

- Add green spaces
- Add informational signage
- Façade improvements on businesses
- Improve sidewalks, add trees and new lighting
- Improve rear entrances to buildings
- More street furniture
- More art galleries and studios showcase local artists
- Increase allotted time for street parking
- Create a “visual framework” for the entire length of Watson that provides a unified aesthetic theme.

Lower Watson/Seward

- Enhance the village green as a location for events, connection between downtown and Ripon College
- Create a welcome to the town and connection to the college
- Add a natural foods grocery store
- Improve entrance into the downtown on Hwy 23
- Improve accessibility for disabled residents

Question 5:

In the space below, please share your ideas for the sites identified on the “Areas of Opportunity” map. Jot down any thoughts on what type of public enhancements should take place in these areas, what type of new development should occur, and how the existing features of each area should relate to the downtown as a whole.

Summary of Responses:

North End/Silver Creek Area

- Create a stronger connection to downtown
- Enhance entry to Northwest Trail
- Connect the Northwest Trail to Green Lake
- Move Industrial companies to business park
- Extend the shopping district into this area

Blackburn Street Corridor

- Redevelopment that compliments the downtown
- Improve parking areas
- Enhance and put more attention into improving the Little White Schoolhouse
- Add a bed and breakfast
- Slow down pass-through traffic

Thorne Street Area

- Create a tree-lined corridor to the college
- Relocated the VFW

- Add multifamily housing

Selfridge Park Area

- Create a swimming area
- Clean the pond
- Remove skate-park
- Build new housing and create a stronger connection to Watson

Final Group Discussion Question:

During your group discussion, use the white flip board and a marker to record the top 3 to 5 issues or ideas that your group wants to share. At the end, your group will be asked to present the key findings that emerged from your discussion. Use the space below to jot down any of your final thoughts on any of the topics we covered this evening.

Summary of Responses:

Many of the responses to this question reinforced ideas from the presentation and many respondents used this question as an opportunity to express agreement with the ideas offered so far or to restate ideas mentioned in their answers to the earlier questions. Several responses also mentioned the challenges of funding and implementation and wanted to know who will be leading downtown improvements that emerge from the plan and how they will be paid for. The additional ideas expressed in answers to this question included:

- Create year-around attractions
- Create a trail connection to Green Lake
- Enhance Silver Creek as a natural attraction
- Add public restrooms on Watson
- Create and maintain access for seniors
- Determine what changes are feasible, who will lead them, and how funding can be generated
- Create more diversity in the downtown
- Make Ripon all model of a “green” city

Assets → Opportunities → Vision

By looking at Ripon's regional economy, local assets, and the downtown landscape, specific assets emerge. Identifying these assets and considering their potential value to the downtown led to four primary opportunity categories that combine to create an overall vision for the future of the downtown. These four opportunities and this vision form the foundation for this Plan and for the site-specific ideas included later in this document.

DRAFT

DOWNTOWN RIPON OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

KEY ASSETS

Community founded as high-minded social experiment and long history of entrepreneurialism and patriotism; birthplace of the Republican Party and several historical thought leaders in Wisconsin

Home of Ripon College providing opportunities for intellectual pursuits, arts and culture; growing trend of retiring baby boomers seeking attractive small towns with active cultural amenities

Downtown is primary shopping, dining, and business destination for local residents, students and day trippers from the Fox Valley; outstanding collection of historically significant buildings

Gateway to Green Lake recreation area; city center for retail, dining and personal and financial services to those living and recreating within 25 miles to the north, south, and west

Local food-based companies including Rippin' Cookies, Ripon Pickle Company, Seneca, and Smuckers, among others; emerging restaurant cluster with diverse options

In the center of one of the most diverse and productive agricultural regions in the Midwest; rapidly growing interest in local and organic foods throughout Wisconsin

Strong and diverse local labor market that exceeds existing residential base; on the edge of westward expansion of Fox Valley residential growth

Retiring Ripon College alumni concentrated in nearby Midwestern cities; growing number of soon-to-be retirees and empty-nesters in the region

PRIMARY OPPORTUNITIES

A Place of Ideas & Entrepreneurialism

Strengthen the community's image as a place of ideas, patriotism and commerce with a range of arts, cultural, educational, and historic venues, offering events, activities, and opportunities for business development and growth

Shopping, Dining, Entertainment & Recreation Destination

Fully position the downtown as the region's premier shopping, dining, entertainment and recreation destination for local residents, students, seasonal tourists, residents of the Fox Valley, and surrounding rural areas

A Local Food Economy and Culture

Showcase the region's local food-based economy by offering fresh, and locally prepared agricultural products and food

Niche Housing

Capitalize on a market that is ready for new and diverse types of housing that are responsive to emerging local and national trends and that favor Ripon's location and existing assets

VISION:



Historic Downtown Ripon is the region's premier shopping, dining, and entertainment destination for locals and visitors alike.

Firmly planted in the heart of central Wisconsin's agricultural lands, the City is home to Ripon College, and leaders of national political and social movements - making it a showcase of Wisconsin's heritage of small town architecture, progressive ideals, local foods, and downtown living.

Whether it's your first visit, or merely your first this week, downtown Ripon is full of new ideas to meet your daily needs, find that unique gift, clothing, or piece of art, and to stimulate your palate or intellect.

A Place of Ideas and Entrepreneurship

Enhance the community's image as a place of ideas with a range of arts, cultural, educational, and historic venues, offering events and activities and build on the community's strength as a place where new ideas lead to new businesses

Key Assets:

Historic Identity and Landmarks



Ripon historically has been a place where people explore new social and political theories and launch new business concepts, and Ripon continues to be a place rooted in intellectual pursuits and the development of new ideas. Ripon was founded as the Ceresco Commune in 1844, which was an early experiment in socialism and communal living. By some reports, Ripon also was a site on the Underground Railroad and escaping slaves may have used hideouts in Ripon provided by local supporters of the anti-slavery cause. In addition, Ripon was the birthplace of Carrie Chapman Catt, who grew up to become a leader in the women's suffrage movement.

Ripon's most famous historic event occurred in 1854 when group of political thinkers who were dismayed by the corruption of the Whig and Democratic Parties met in Ripon to create the Republican Party. Today, the Little White Schoolhouse in downtown Ripon is a physical reminder of the community's historic roots as a place where new ideas are developed and where people are willing to challenge the status quo.

In addition to the political history that occurred in Ripon, the City has also been a place where new business ideas are developed and launched. For example, Ben Marcus opened his first theater in Ripon in 1935 which led to the creation of the Marcus Corporation. More recently, Ripon has sprouted several unique local businesses that have grown into nationally-known companies and many entrepreneurs have recently set up shop in Ripon.



Ripon College

Ripon College was founded in 1851 and the presence of the College today adds to the City's identity as a place of ideas and intellectual pursuits. Ripon is a comprehensive liberal arts and sciences institution. Its Mission is to "prepare students of diverse interests for lives of productive, socially responsible citizenship." Ripon College has the oldest continually published college newspaper in the state and Ripon's debate team created the Phi Kappa Delta society for debaters and orators. In addition, the National Forensics League (NFL) was founded at the college and continues to have its headquarters in Ripon. The NFL is an honor society for high school students involved in debate and forensics and the organization serves as a resource for educators focused on the art of speech and debate.

Primary Downtown Economic and Site Development Opportunities

- Expand on-campus summer programs for adults and alumni by Ripon College
- Expand music, art and literature offerings to the general public by Ripon College
- Consider third-party use of Ripon College facilities during the summer, such as corporate retreats and family reunions

- Offer a visiting lecture series of prominent individuals in state and national social movements
- Host regional, state and national events sponsored by the National Forensic League
- Provide guided historical tours of the downtown and install markers and interpretative signage for self-guided tours
- Create public art program with installations throughout the downtown
- Expand on the Little White Schoolhouse site to develop a Ripon Welcome Center and museum/interpretative center on the history of the Republican Party
- Establish reenactments of the meeting that took place in the Little White Schoolhouse to create the Republican party
- Coordinate with entities that promote “cultural tourism” (i.e. Wisconsin Dept. of Tourism) to insure that Ripon is prominently featured.
- Create programs to appeal to educational tourism groups such as Elderhostel by utilizing the resources of Ripon College and other community members with specific expertise.
- Create a Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance in Partnership with the College. The center should be a partnership that utilizes the resources of the GREATeam, Ripon College Students in Free Enterprise, Main Street, and the RCDC. Locate the center in a visible location.
- Hold a business plan competition for those interested in setting up a business or expanding their business in Ripon with a healthy prize for incentive

Destination for Shopping, Dining, Entertainment, & Recreation

Fully position the downtown as the region’s premier shopping, dining entertainment, and recreation destination for local residents, students, seasonal tourists, and the surrounding rural areas

Key Assets:



Green Lake Seasonal Visitors

Green Lake is a long-established seasonal destination that attracts large numbers of mostly Chicago area residents who own homes on the lake. Although these visitors are coming to the area to spend time on the lake, they nonetheless need places to purchase groceries and other supplies. In addition, on rainy days or on days when they are looking for activities beyond the lake, these visitors look for dining, shopping, and entertainment options.

To some extent, Ripon is already filling the role of the “going into town” location for Green Lake seasonal residents and visitors, but it is well-positioned to do more. Compared to other downtowns near Green Lake, Ripon’s is larger and has a stronger, more intact Main Street. By enhancing its entertainment options (particularly for children) and adding to the diversity of retail and dining opportunities, Ripon can secure its place as the Gateway to Green Lake.

Local and Regional Outdoor Recreational Opportunities

Ripon and the surrounding area include a number of unique places with outdoor recreational opportunities. Rush Lake is a shallow, marshy wetland and lake just north of Ripon that is a long time bird watching and hunting destination. Rush Lake is currently the subject of a comprehensive natural

restoration program that will enhance the area as an ecological and recreational feature. As shown on the regional opportunities map Ripon also has a number of regional recreational trails in the area and a local trail head within the downtown. The wide use of Green Lake for watersports also adds to Ripon's potential as an outdoor sports and recreation center.

Retail Destination Ripon College Students and Staff

It is no coincidence that many of the nation's most successful, vibrant, and interesting downtown retail districts are located in college towns. Colleges cycle new groups of young people into the community every year and these students bring significant spending power as well as particular tastes for certain retail and entertainment opportunities that enliven a downtown district. In addition to students, the presence of faculty and staff also can add to the flavor of a downtown by creating demand for things like book stores, unconventional restaurants, theaters, and boutiques.

Although Ripon College is a small institution, Ripon is a small city so the significance and economic force of the College is large relative to the community as a whole. In addition, because the College is located immediately adjacent to the downtown area, there are unique opportunities for the College to be a key influence on the future of the downtown.

Creating a downtown that appeals to college students and staff will ultimately enhance the downtown for everyone including residents of the City not affiliated with the College and residents of the rural areas surrounding Ripon. Ripon is already a strong retail destination that is generating sales in excess of what the local population would be expected to produce. Although there are larger cities close to Ripon to the east, the area's to the west of Ripon have limited shopping opportunities and therefore, residents of these areas come to Ripon to shop.

Regional Shopping Destination

For many residents of the area west of Ripon, the City is the primary regional center for basic shopping needs as well as entertainment-oriented shopping and dining. Because there are few options in the area, Ripon is a retail center of gravity for an area that stretches well to the west. Additionally, although Appleton, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac are significantly larger cities with their own retail base, many residents of these cities make day trips to Ripon nonetheless to enjoy the city's specialty shopping experience.

Continued Shopping and Services for Local Residents

The most important asset to the downtown as a retail destination is its local market, which provides a steady base of customers and counters the seasonality of Green Lake visitors and students. Downtown Ripon needs to continue to function as the central shopping district for Ripon residents, providing a unique shopping experience different from the auto-oriented commercial area on the west side of the city. Talking with Ripon residents reveals that the downtown provides important services for local residents and is a valued community space for shopping, walking, talking with friends, etc. Any enhancements to the downtown should, first and foremost, maintain the area's value to current residents of the community.

Primary Downtown Economic and Site Development Opportunities

- Promote Ripon as the Gateway to the Green Lake resort area

- Coordinate regular merchant hours of operation and add one extended hours night each week in summer months and the Christmas shopping season
- Add outdoor dining and seating areas along Watson and behind buildings on the east side of Watson
- Consolidate utilities, trash receptacles and service areas to improve appearance and functionality
- Extend the northwest Trail to the west to create a recreational trail linkage through the entire community and a connection to Green Lake
- Maintain vibrant mix of stores appealing to locals and visitors
- Encourage more businesses that appeal to students
- Encourage more businesses that appeal to children
- Encourage more local restaurants offering diverse cuisine
- Encourage more entertainment type uses
- Encourage more outdoor sports and recreation related uses including a downtown bicycle store, and other sporting goods retailers
- Create a pool of trained workers who can fill in for various downtown merchants to cover absences or expanded hours
- Relocate industrial and warehouse uses to the new industrial park but retain office workers in upgraded buildings downtown
- Establish group recycling areas for retailers (primarily needed for cardboard)
- Work with Ripon College Students in Free Enterprise to create business plans for needed retail and services

A Local Food Economy and Culture

Showcase the region's local food-based economy by offering fresh, processed, and prepared agricultural products and food

Key Assets:

Diverse Agricultural Region

Ripon is surrounded by one of the most diverse and productive agricultural region's in the Midwest, with concentrations of dairy, corn, beans, and other produce grown in the rural areas surrounding the city. While most agricultural areas concentrate on a small number of commodities, Ripon has an unusually diverse array of agricultural products produced close by. This diversity of agricultural products creates unique opportunities to enhance the food culture of the area and enhance Ripon by creating a local food destination. Ripon's current farmer's market could help serve as a base for future development of the area's identity and appeal as a place with an interesting food background and culture.



Local Food Companies and Restaurants

Ripin' Good Cookies are probably the City of Ripon's most well-known local product. In addition to Ripin' Good Cookies, Ripon is home to the Ripon Pickle Company and to operations of national food producers including Seneca Foods and Smuckers. Ripin' Good Cookies is already a widely-known food product closely identified with the community and the Cookie Outlet associated with the company is one of the city's visitor destinations. Additionally, downtown Ripon has an emerging local restaurant scene with several quality restaurants featuring exciting cuisine. By broadening Ripon's food identity, Ripon has the potential to create a local food economy

and food-driven visitor experiences that celebrate the unique flavors of the community.

Primary Downtown Economic and Site Development Opportunities

- Enhance the Cookie outlet into visitor center with museum components, gift shop, and plant tours and relocate the visitor center to a downtown storefront.
- Create a food incubator/farm market kitchen in a downtown storefront
- Create a gift shop in the Ripon Welcome Center showcasing locally produced products
- Expand the farmers market with more local growers, inclusion of locally produced food products (such as honey, meats, cheeses, sauces, etc.).
- Relocate the farmers market to Watson Street and establish evening hours on Tuesdays or Thursdays.
- Develop a year-round public market on the Sav-A-Lot site.
- Develop incubator for hand-crafted food products in concert with the public market
- Work with UW-Extension to connect local restaurants with local growers and develop menus featuring locally grown produce and food products
- Work on a RC student operated business that link to some aspect of “food economy” (could relate to “food incubator” concept
- Solicit professional organizations to hold their ag/food related conferences here or hold our own
- Support, reinforce, expand Aneh’s taste lab.

Niche Housing

Capitalize on a market that is ready for new and diverse types of housing that are responsive to emerging local and national trends and that favor Ripon’s location and existing assets

Key Assets:

Area Retirees, Empty-Nesters, and Ripon College Alumni

As shown in the following map, Ripon College Alumni are concentrated in Wisconsin’s largest cities, as well as Chicago and the Twin Cities areas and this network of Alumni creates a base of potential for new downtown housing. Nationwide, there is a growing trend of retirees moving back to their college towns. These retired alums are generally driven by a sense of nostalgia towards these communities and they are seeking the small-town atmosphere, cultural stimulation, and feeling of camaraderie that college towns can offer.

Ripon College is a historic campus in an idyllic setting with base of active alumni who feel a close connection to the college. Many of these alumni are at or nearing retirement age and may be in the market for unique retirement housing options that are still within an easy drive of children and grandchildren. By offering unique opportunities for alumni to live in the community and reconnect with Ripon College through continuing education programs, special events, art exhibits, concerts, lectures, and sporting events, the downtown Ripon area has the opportunity to create new housing communities that attract new, active, largely affluent residents who will enhance the City as a whole.



Creating housing catering to retiring Ripon Alumni is one part of a larger strategy of providing housing designed to meet the needs of a changing population. The larger cities near Ripon include large concentrations of people at or nearing retirement age, and many are beginning to look for new housing opportunities. As their children leave home and their careers slow down, these Baby Boomers are starting to look for smaller, newer housing in communities with a pleasant atmosphere, and with opportunities to remain active, both physically and intellectually. Furthermore, having access to convenient and high quality medical care is increasingly important for these individuals as they age and the Ripon Medical Center adds to the City's potential to attract this market. With the presence of Ripon College and the medical center combined with the quaint small town atmosphere and walkability of the downtown area, Ripon is well-positioned to take advantage of these changing housing preferences by offering unique housing located in and near the downtown.

Strong Labor Market and Base of Local Companies

As shown on the local setting map, Ripon has a number of large employers and its strong job market is one of the City's key strengths. Many of Ripon's largest private-sector employers include both management and administrative functions in Ripon as well as production and distribution facilities. Because of this, Ripon has a balanced labor market that includes low-skilled jobs as well as high-paying professional and management positions.

The quantity and diversity of jobs in Ripon creates opportunities to enhance the City's housing options. Ripon has an unusually high ratio of people who work in the city to people who live in the city. Many people come to Ripon to work but many of these workers choose to live in other communities. Furthermore, Ripon is in the process of developing a new business park that is likely to attract additional employers. With Ripon's healthy job base and growing employment areas, the City has the opportunity to add housing to accommodate its workforce and encourage people who are already working in Ripon to become part of the community.

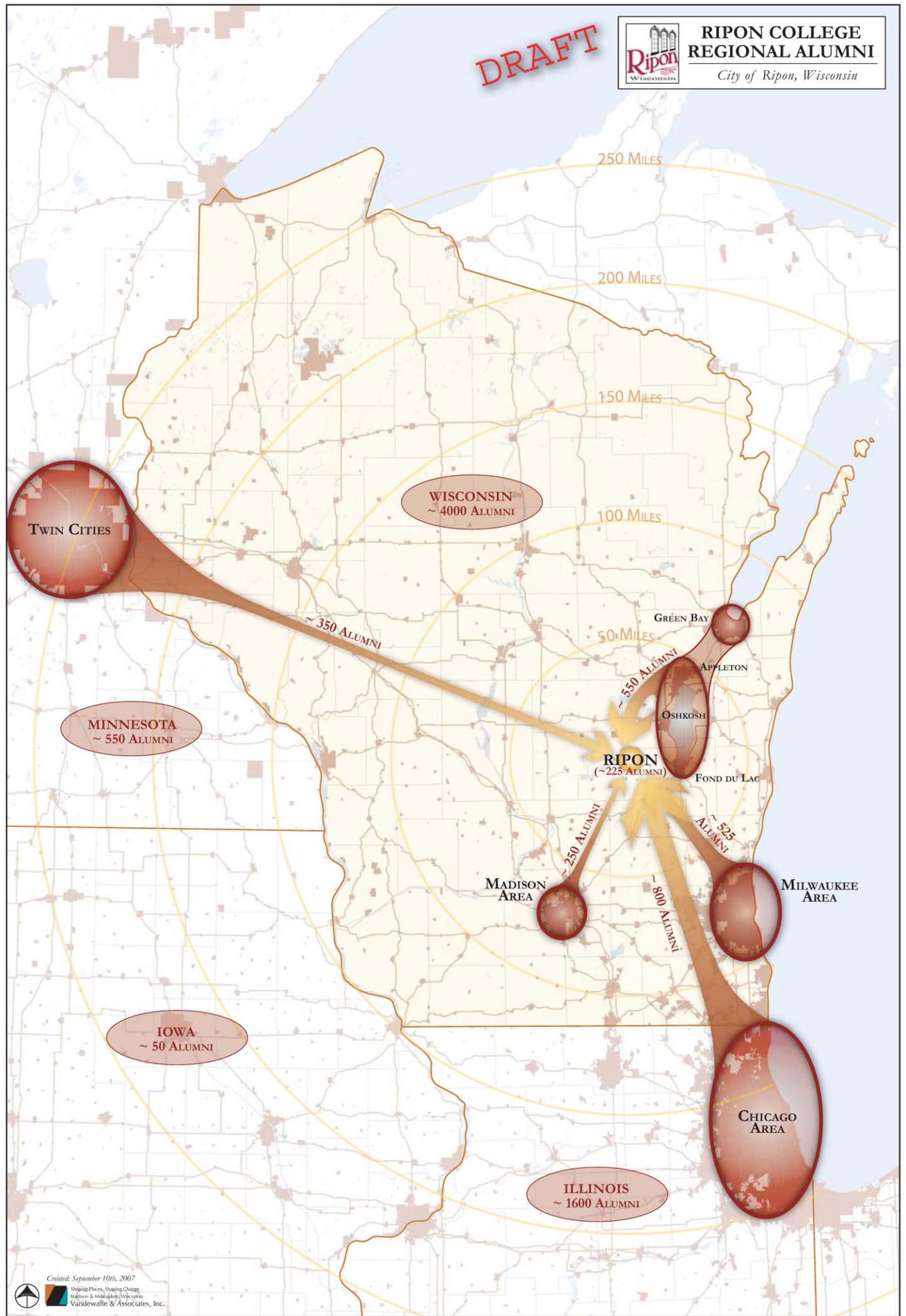
Primary Downtown Economic and Site Development Opportunities

- Renovate second floor apartments and condominiums along Watson Street
- Encourage infill townhome or condominium development along streets on the periphery of the downtown
- Create historic bed and breakfast/hotel on Watson
- Upgrade/replace the Best Western Hotel with boutique hotel
- Develop high-end condominium housing targeted to Ripon alumni with an amenity package closely tied to the college
- Examine need for affordable housing. Develop affordable housing as identified, in order to insure available workforce.
- Enhance the Republican House to become a Republican/Historic themed Bed and Breakfast.

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**RIPON COLLEGE
REGIONAL ALUMNI**
City of Ripon, Wisconsin



Vision for Downtown Ripon

Future planning and development activity in the downtown should be guided by an all-encompassing vision that articulates the community's aspirations for what the downtown is and what it should become. Guided by the key assets and the four opportunities identified, the following is a broad vision for the downtown:

Historic Downtown Ripon is the region's premier shopping, dining, and entertainment destination for locals and visitors alike. Firmly planted in the heart of central Wisconsin's agricultural lands, the City is the home to Ripon College, and leaders of national political and social movements making it a showcase of Wisconsin's heritage of small town architecture, progressive ideals, and local foods and food products. Whether it's your first visit, or merely your first this week, downtown Ripon is full of new ideas to meet your daily needs, find that unique gift, or to stimulate your palate or intellect.

Section II: Urban Design Framework

Introduction and Description

Based on the assets, opportunities and vision statement just described, physical recommendations for the downtown in the form of an “Urban Design Framework” comprise the following sections of this Plan.

This Framework includes four primary strategies, the identification of key areas and connections, and numerous specific recommendations for each.

Primary Strategies

The “Urban Design Framework” identifies four primary strategies for the downtown. These strategies communicate an overall approach to the urban design of the downtown. If the City improves the downtown gateways, strengthens the Watson Street core, realizes opportunities on the periphery of downtown, and successfully connects these activity areas, much can be accomplished.

- **Gateway Corridors** – The Gateway Corridors are segments of highways identified as key entry points into the downtown. Downtown Ripon has clear primary entrances where the area’s major roadways come into the core of the City. These gateway points can be enhanced through improved signage, streetscaping, appropriate land uses, and building orientations that delineate the edges of the downtown and clearly establish the character of the downtown district
- **Downtown Places** - Downtown Places include the historic core of Watson Street and associated public spaces, parking areas, and intersections. The Framework articulates tools to strengthen the assets these places already hold, as well as improve their character and functionality.
- **Areas of Opportunity** - These are areas on the periphery of the downtown that have the potential to be woven into the historic core with complimentary development that can enhance the downtown as a whole. These Areas of Opportunity have the greatest potential for future private redevelopment and new uses.
- **Downtown Connections** – Downtown Ripon and its periphery include key focal points and assets that improve the quality of life in the community. Connecting these assets together and with the core of downtown will improve its image and viability.

Key Areas and Connections

Through the process of applying these primary strategies to the downtown, key areas and connections were identified. They hold potential for future enhancement and redevelopment. The Urban Design Framework Map physically locates these opportunities, lays out a “road map” for implementation, and identifies these areas’ common goals and strategies.

Specific Urban Design Recommendations

Specific urban design recommendations are made for each of these key areas and connections. They include public improvements and private property enhancement and redevelopment opportunities. These recommendations support and implement the vision for the downtown.

On pages following the Urban Design Framework Map and organized by category and location, these recommendations are described in plan, brief strategies, lists of specific physical improvements, and example photographs.

Specific recommendations for these areas and connections provide a checklist for implementation and “talking points” for all entities involved in implementation including City staff, potential developers, property owners, business owners, funding agencies, etc.

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RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

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FRAMEWORK STRATEGIES

- Enhance Downtown Gateway Corridors
- Connect Downtown
- Strengthen Downtown Places
- Areas of Opportunity

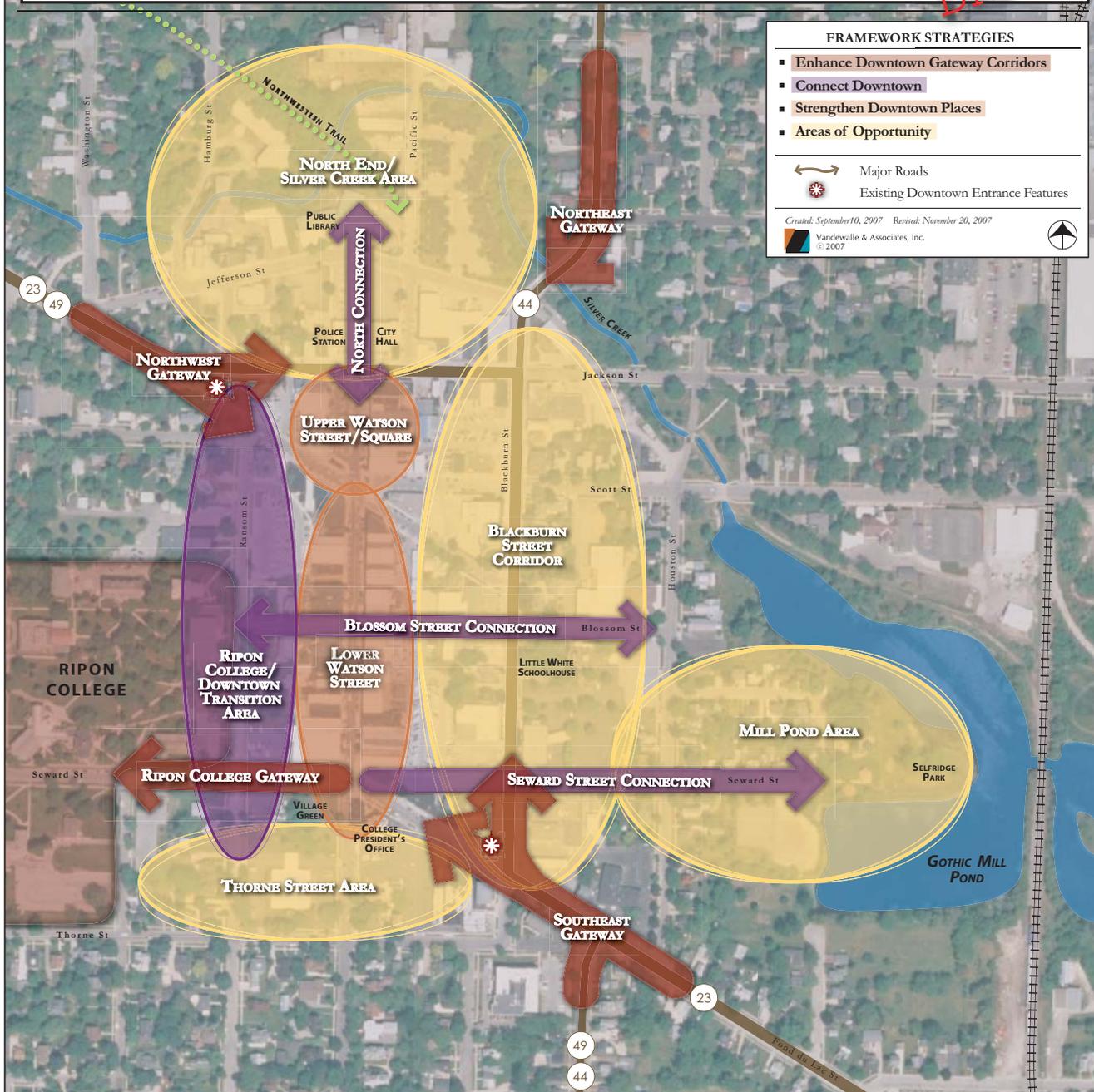
Major Roads



Existing Downtown Entrance Features

Created: September 10, 2007 Revised: November 20, 2007

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NORTHWEST GATEWAY

- Split through traffic from downtown traffic
- Enhance Highway 23 intersections
- Update entry feature
- Add wayfinding signage
- Encourage business exposure

NORTHEAST GATEWAY

- Play up Silver Creek crossing
- Add wayfinding signage
- Enhance rear facades and views entering downtown

SOUTHEAST GATEWAY

- Split through traffic from downtown traffic
- Enhance Highway 23 intersections
- Enhance site appearance
- Update entry feature
- Update streetscape
- Add wayfinding signage
- Encourage hospitality uses

RIPON COLLEGE GATEWAY

- Enhance streetscape
- Enhance property frontage
- Add Ripon College entry feature

NORTH CONNECTION

- Better connect Watson Street and downtown with the library, trail, Silver Creek & potential new uses

RIPON COLLEGE/DOWNTOWN TRANSITION AREA

- Enhance College "presence"
- Add Ripon College wayfinding signage and gateways
- Improve pedestrian connections
- Enhance public parking areas
- Consider reconfiguration of vehicular circulation
- Consider potential housing/hospitality uses

BLOSSOM STREET CONNECTION

- Improve pedestrian connections to Gothic Mill Pond
- Enhance Blossom Street streetscape
- Enhance connection to Little White Schoolhouse Site

SEWARD STREET CONNECTION

- Connect Watson Street and downtown with the Selfridge Park and Gothic Mill Pond

UPPER WATSON STREET/SQUARE

- Consider street enhancement/traffic calming
- Improve access to Square
- Enhance visibility of businesses
- Renovate Square to support activities & events
- Guide treatment of facades on Square

LOWER WATSON STREET

- Enhance Blossom Street/Watson Street intersection
- Continue to restore historic structures
- Continue to update streetscape
- Upgrade alleys & public parking areas
- Improve rear facades and entries
- Encourage outdoor activity areas
- Enhance Seward/Watson Street intersection
- Enhance Village Green

NORTH END/SILVER CREEK AREA

- Develop "Civic Campus"
- Renovate/reconstruct City Hall
- Connect to Watson Street
- Develop a mix of uses (new housing & business sites)
- Preserve historic structures
- Create public parking

BLACKBURN STREET CORRIDOR

- Encourage redevelopment of underutilized sites
- Locate auto-oriented businesses on Blackburn Street
- Coordinate public parking
- Preserve historic structures
- Further develop Little White Schoolhouse Site
- Guide design of properties

MILL POND AREA

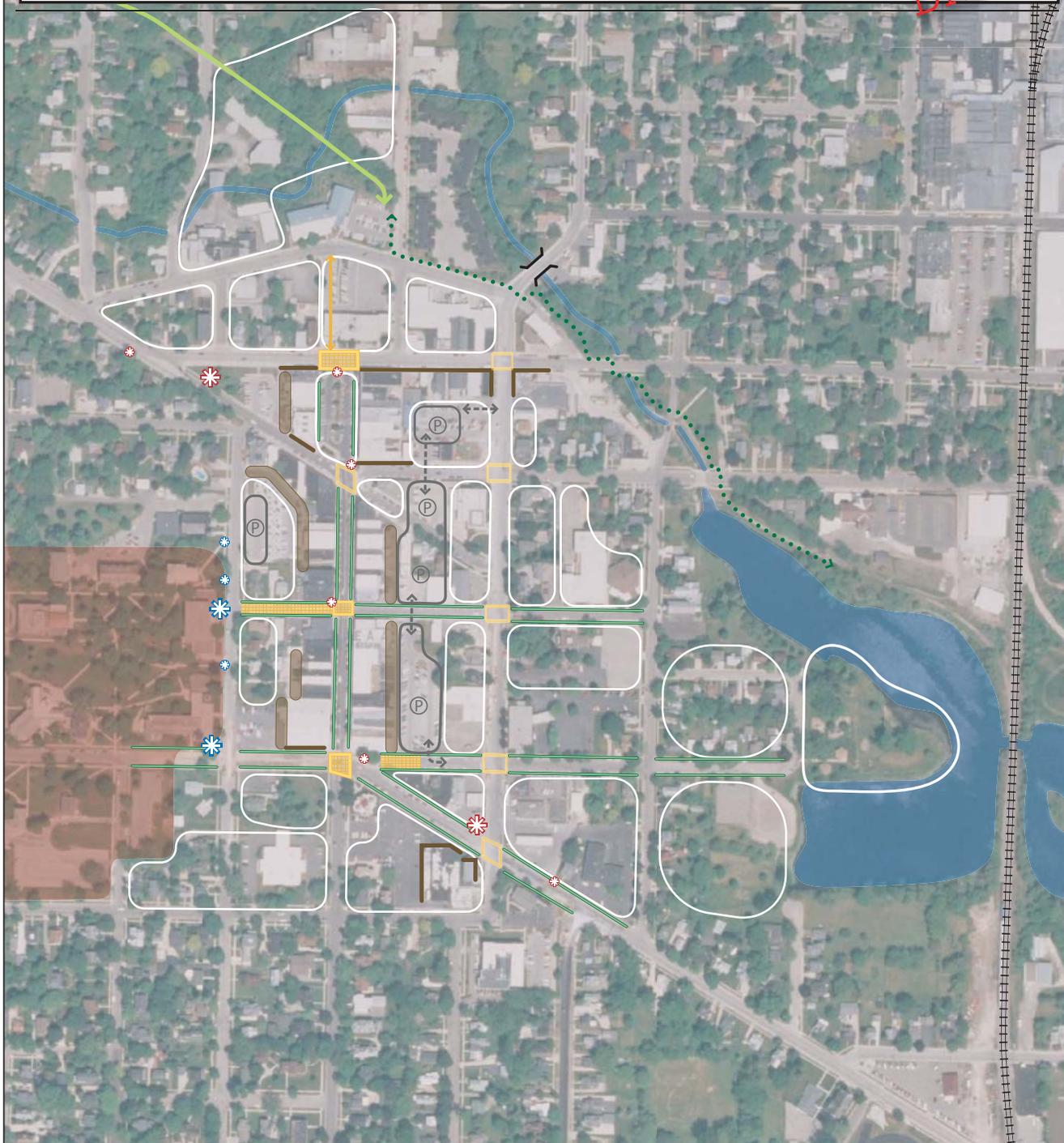
- Enhance public access & parks
- Develop new housing

THORNE STREET AREA

- Develop new housing sites
- Develop new mixed-use sites
- Integrate with Ripon College facilities



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INTRODUCTION

This map is intended to serve as a key for viewing the series of Ripon Downtown Urban Design Framework maps. It is a symbolic representation of the recommendations that are further explained through text and example character photos for each key area or connection.

LEGEND

-  Areas of Recommendation
-  Downtown Entry Features
-  Downtown Wayfinding Signage
-  Ripon College Entry Features
-  Ripon College Pedestrian Entry
-  Facade Improvements
-  Rear Facade Improvements
-  Streetscape Enhancements
-  Public Parking Areas
-  Public Parking Circulation
-  Pedestrian Improvements
-  Enhanced Crosswalks
-  Northwestern Trail
-  Extension of Northwestern Trail
-  Pedestrian Connection
-  Ripon College Campus



Downtown Ripon's "gateways" are key entrances to the area and form the basis for people's initial impressions of the downtown. Clear identification of where the downtown is and how to get there is crucial to the area's viability and image. Improvements to these "gateways" will enhance the experience of entering downtown and the image of the community.

NORTHWEST GATEWAY

- 1 Enhance Highway 23 intersection to improve traffic flow to West Fond du Lac Street
- 2 Update entry feature, making it more visible from the intersection
- 3 Improve wayfinding signage to downtown via West Fond du Lac Street unique to Ripon style
- 4 Enhance side facade to better relate to Jackson Street
- 5 Enhance views entering the downtown with improvement to rear and buffering parking with landscape treatments
- 6 Improve the appearance of highway frontage, consider redevelopment
- 7 Continue maintenance and enhancements of single family residential neighborhood



NORTHEAST GATEWAY

- 1 Continue maintenance and enhancements of single family residential neighborhood
- 2 Emphasize Silver Creek crossing with bridge enhancements, paving details, increased views to the creek and signage
- 3 Enhance views entering downtown. Consider redevelopment/reuse of buildings in this block
- 4 Provide wayfinding signage to downtown and select destinations
- 5 Extend existing Northwestern trail to Gothic Mill Pond



RIPON COLLEGE GATEWAY

- 1 Develop further Ripon College entrance by creating a larger entrance feature and signage package
- 2 Enhance Watson Street and Seward Street intersection with paving details and improved sidewalks
- 3 Enhance streetscape along Seward Street
- 4 Enhance property frontage by improving facades and buffering parking lots with landscape treatments
- 5 Enhance and expand Village Green

SOUTHEAST GATEWAY

- 1 Direct traffic to Watson Street and Blackburn Street commercial corridors
- 2 Update entry feature to make it more visible from the intersection
- 3 Improve the appearance of adjacent blocks through redevelopment and facade enhancements
- 4 Enhance streetscape on East Fond du Lac Street
- 5 Add wayfinding signage to Watson Street and public parking to draw people further into downtown from Hwy 23
- 6 Enhance crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety





Physical and visual connections between key areas within and surrounding the downtown are important. Improvements that create attractive and functional pedestrian-friendly connections between the Watson Street core and surrounding features such as the College, the pond, the Library, and the Brewery Creek site will enhance the downtown and leverage its existing strengths to improve surrounding properties.

NORTH CONNECTION

- 1 Create visual and physical pedestrian connection between The Square, Public Library, Northwestern Trail, Silver Creek & potential new redevelopment uses
- 2 Enhance the relationship between City Hall and The Square through improvements at Watson Street and Jackson Street; utilize paving texture, color and enhanced crosswalk to slow traffic and allow drivers a glimpse into The Square
- 3 Renovate The Square to accommodate a range of activities (i.e. craft markets, parades, political gatherings) and allow for outdoor retail activities (i.e. outdoor dining, sidewalk sales)



Existing Blossom Street
(From Blackburn Street looking west to Ripon College)



BLOSSOM STREET CONNECTION

- 1 Create a strong pedestrian connection between Ripon College, Watson Street and Gothic Mill Pond Area
- 2 Create a visual terminus (i.e. feature, statue, sign, banner) at Ripon College end of Blossom Street to increase campus visibility and strengthen its connection to downtown
- 3 Create a pedestrian oriented connection, restricting vehicular traffic, between Ripon College and Watson Street within Blossom Street rights of way
- 4 Enhance and frame the visual connection along Blossom Street between Watson Street and Little White School House, terminating on historic church
- 5 Provide an informational kiosk for those accessing Watson Street from Ripon College campus via Blossom Street
- 6 Enhance the intersection of Watson Street and Blossom Street with enhanced crosswalks and paving
- 7 Develop further Little White School House site as a tourist destination with a strong relationship to the downtown
- 8 Provide safe pedestrian crossing of Blackburn Street through enhanced crosswalks



SEWARD STREET CONNECTION

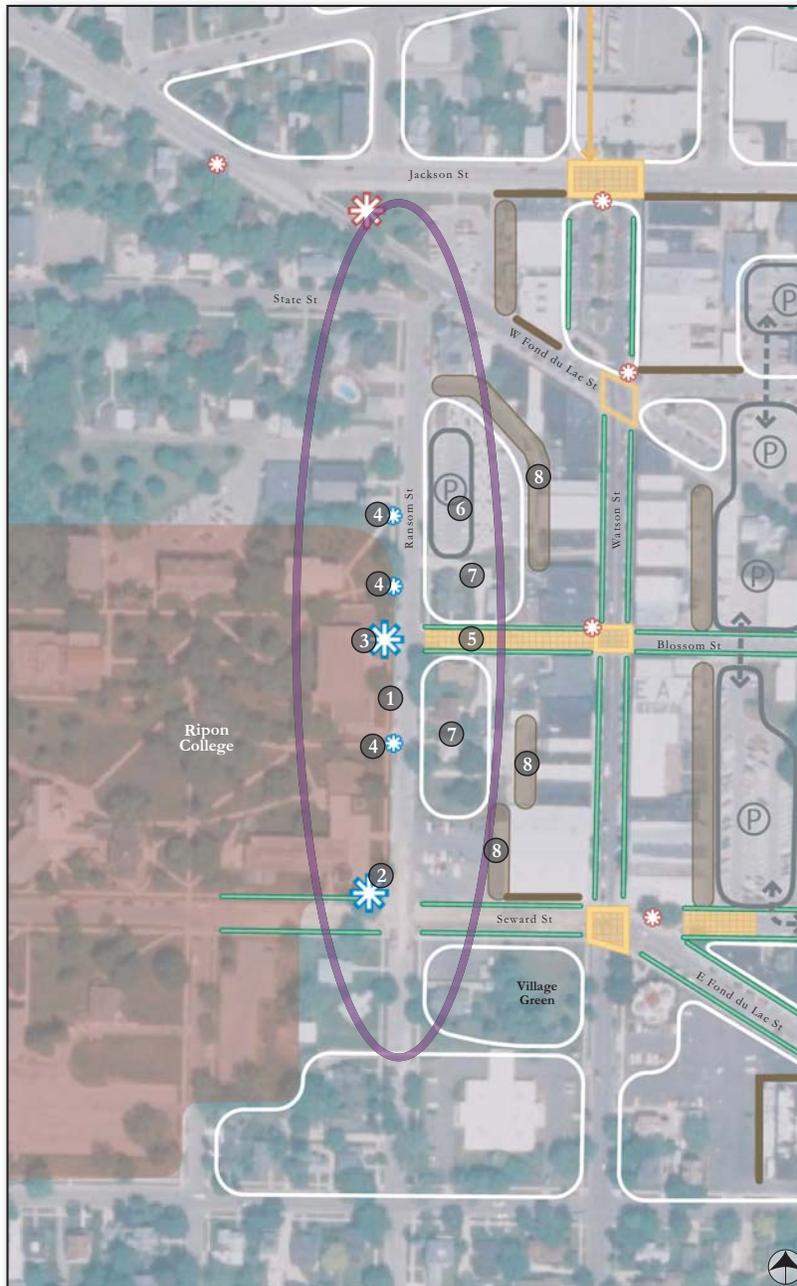
- 1 Connect Ripon College and Watson Street to Selfridge Park and Gothic Mill Pond Area
- 2 Streetscape and pedestrian improvements
- 3 Enhance the intersection of Watson Street and Blossom Street with crosswalks and paving detail
- 4 Provide wayfinding signage including an informational kiosk at the intersection of Watson Street and Seward Street
- 5 Explore closing a portion of Seward Street to vehicular traffic and installing public restrooms in the new pedestrian space
- 6 Provide safe pedestrian crossing of Blackburn Street through improved crosswalks
- 7 Buffer parking areas with landscape treatments





RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK RIPON COLLEGE/DOWNTOWN TRANSITION AREA

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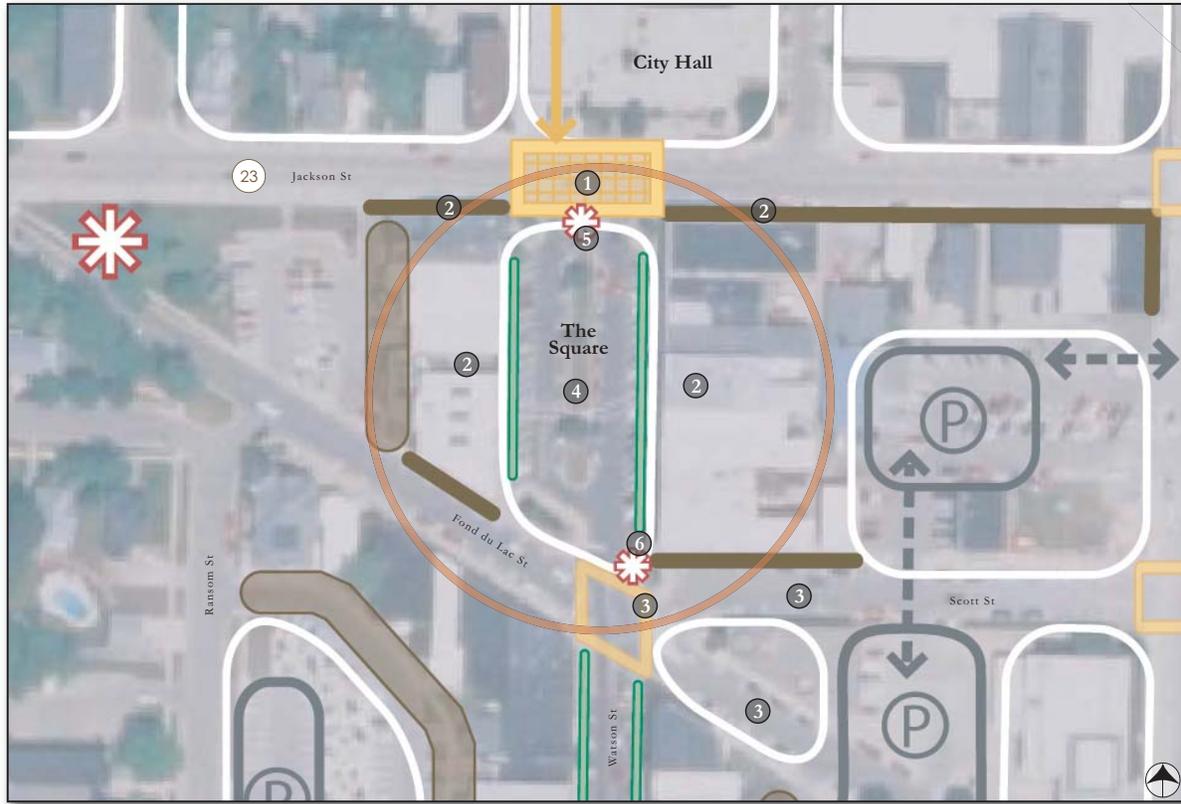


The Ripon College/Downtown Transition Area forms an important juncture between the College and the core of downtown. Making important connections, enhancing Ransom Street, improving traffic circulation and parking, coordinating transitional areas, and redeveloping infill sites will strengthen the connection between city and college.

RIPON COLLEGE/DOWNTOWN TRANSITION AREA

- 1 Enhance Ripon College presence along Ransom Street
- 2 Develop further Ripon College entrance by creating a larger entrance feature as part of a signage package
- 3 Create a visual terminus (i.e. feature, statue, sign, banner) at Ripon College end of Blossom Street to increase campus visibility and strengthen its connection to downtown
- 4 Provide multiple pedestrian gateways to Ripon College to denote the edge of campus
- 5 Create a pedestrian oriented connection, restricting vehicular traffic, between Ripon College and Watson Street within Blossom Street rights of way
- 6 Enhance parking area with vegetation and signage
- 7 Explore redevelopment opportunities along Ransom Street, including higher density housing, preserve/reuse/relocate existing structures
- 8 Improve views from Ransom Street towards Watson Street including rear facade improvements

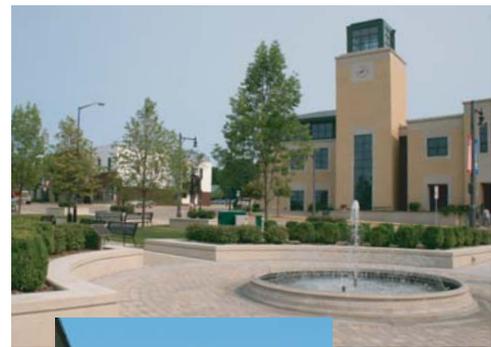




The area including upper Watson Street and The Square is the symbolic and historic heart of the community. Modest reconfiguration of pedestrian walkways, traffic circulation, and enhanced urban amenities will improve the appearance and function of this unique civic space. An enhanced Square will support future community activities and enhance the image of downtown.

UPPER WATSON STREET / THE SQUARE

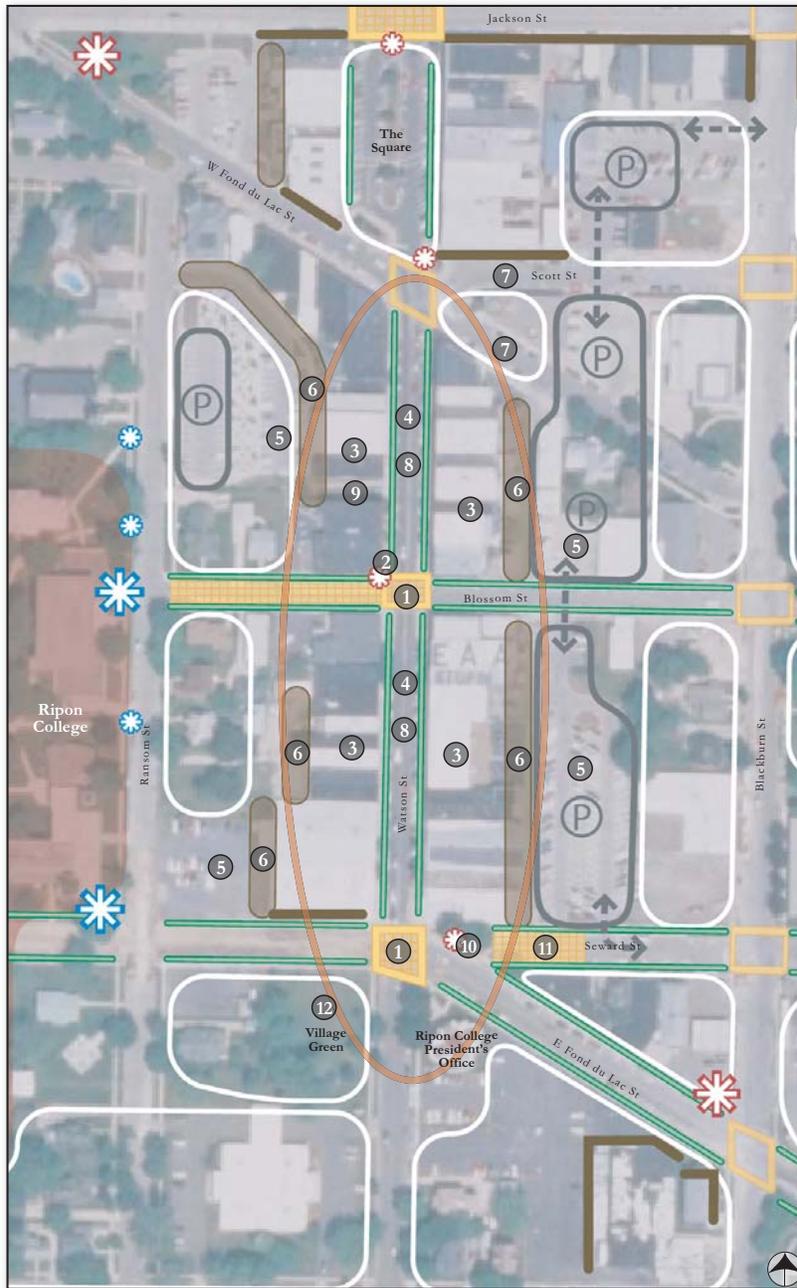
- ① Enhance the relationship between City Hall and The Square through improvements at Watson Street and Jackson Street; utilize paving texture, color and enhanced crosswalk to slow traffic and allow drivers a glimpse into The Square
- ② Continue to renovate/restore historic buildings on The Square, including the frontage along Jackson Street to cue drivers of the activity ahead and increase visibility of businesses
- ③ Explore closing either East Scott Street or Fond du Lac Street between Watson Street and Blackburn Street to vehicular traffic to improve awkward intersections; include enhanced crosswalks in the reconfiguration
- ④ Renovate The Square to accommodate a range of activities (i.e. craft markets, parades, political gatherings) and allow for outdoor retail activities (i.e. outdoor dining, sidewalk sales)
- ⑤ Create a distinctive feature at the north end of The Square visible to those passing on Jackson Street/Hwy 23 and those traveling up Watson Street to indicate that The Square is a destination and center of activity
- ⑥ Include business directory/informational kiosk as part of Square renovations





RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK LOWER WATSON STREET

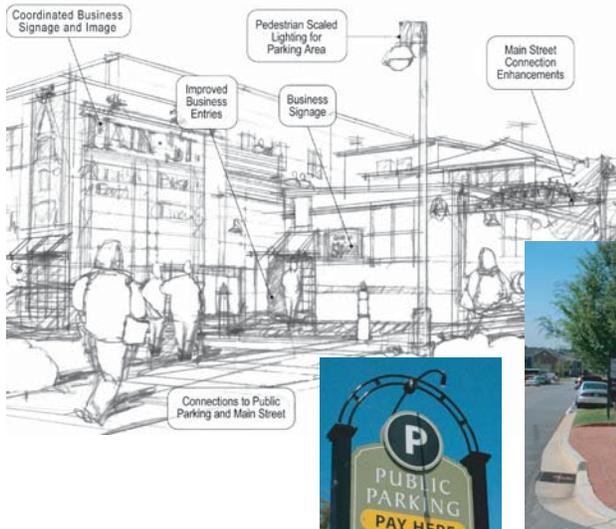
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Lower Watson Street is Ripon's "Main Street." It is the commercial heart of the community and the central spine of activity of the downtown. Continuing the preservation and enhancement of its scale, historic fabric, and activity will ensure its growth as a community asset. Improvements in shared parking and access to the rear of these historic blocks will enhance their viability.

LOWER WATSON STREET

- 1 Enhance Blossom Street and Seward Street intersections with paving details and improved crosswalks
- 2 Provide an informational kiosk for those accessing Watson Street from Ripon College campus via Blossom Street
- 3 Continue to restore/renovate historic buildings
- 4 Continue streetscape improvements including paving details, street trees, and a cohesive pedestrian amenity package (i.e. benches, trash receptacles, planters, pedestrian scale lighting, and signage)
- 5 Upgrade alleys and public/private parking areas by coordinating circulation patterns and driveway alignments, new paving, lighting, landscape treatments and relocating overhead utilities underground
- 6 Improve rear facades and rear entrances from public parking areas, consolidate and screen dumpsters and other back of store operations
- 7 Explore closing either East Scott Street or Fond du Lac Street between Watson Street and Blackburn Street to improve awkward intersections; include enhanced crosswalks in the reconfiguration
- 8 Encourage outdoor activities along Watson Street (i.e. outdoor dining, sidewalk sales)
- 9 Enhance pedestrian connections between Watson Street and public parking areas
- 10 Develop and update business directory/informational kiosk and wayfinding signage
- 11 Explore closing a portion of Seward Street to vehicular traffic and installing public restrooms in the now pedestrian space
- 12 Enhance and expand Village Green





RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK NORTH END/SILVER CREEK AREA

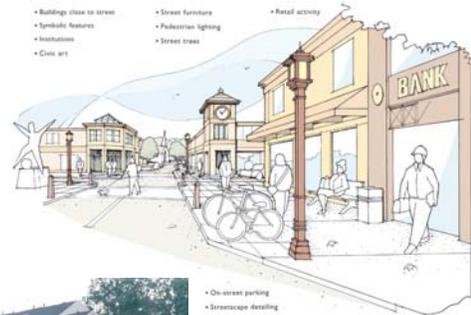
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The North End/Silver Creek Area includes public institutions and opportunities for new uses and redevelopment of underutilized sites. Creating a “civic campus,” improving the presence of City Hall, enhancing pedestrian connections, and redeveloping properties will bring new life to downtown and an improved community image.

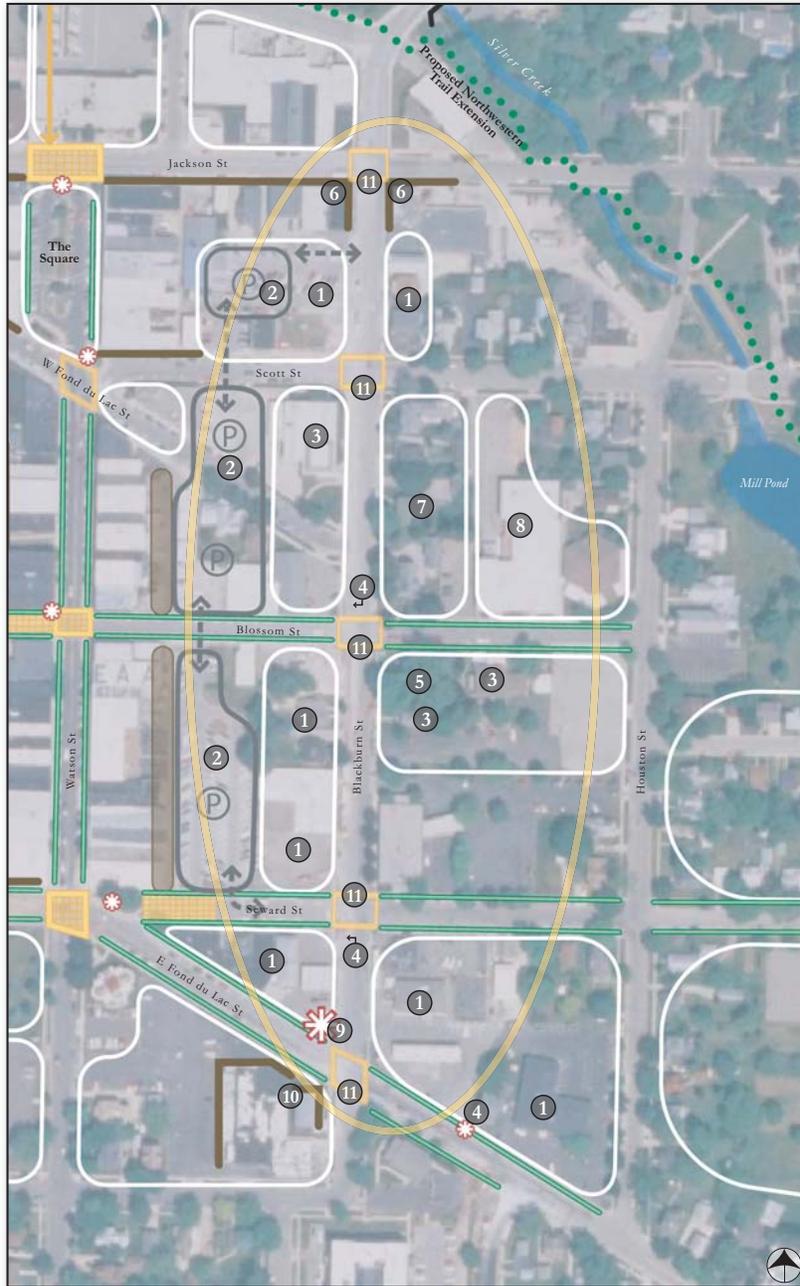
NORTH END/SILVER CREEK AREA

- ① Develop a “Civic Campus” by building upon the presence of a downtown City Hall, Police Station, Chamber of Commerce, and Public Library; include public parking areas.
- ② Consider a ‘facelift’ of City Hall to create a stronger visual terminus of Watson Street
- ③ Relocate police parking, create a more inviting courtyard space in front of City Hall and a stronger pedestrian connection to the north
- ④ Connect City Hall to The Square and Watson Street through intersection improvements including enhanced crosswalks and paving details
- ⑤ Redevelop underutilized sites with a mix of new, higher density housing and commercial sites that relate to Northwestern Trail and Silver Creek
- ⑥ Preserve historic structures within redevelopment projects
- ⑦ Provide a strong pedestrian and visual connection between The Square, City Hall, Public Library, and future redevelopment uses
- ⑧ Promote Northwestern Trail and Silver Creek in future redevelopment, and emphasize their importance in the downtown by extending the trail to Gothic Mill Pond and increasing visibility of the creek





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Blackburn Street is a highly traveled multi-highway corridor in central Ripon where many form their opinion of the downtown and the community. It is crucial to upgrade the appearance of these downtown blocks, connect uses, and encourage new development and businesses that complement and extend the downtown and Watson Street district.

BLACKBURN STREET CORRIDOR

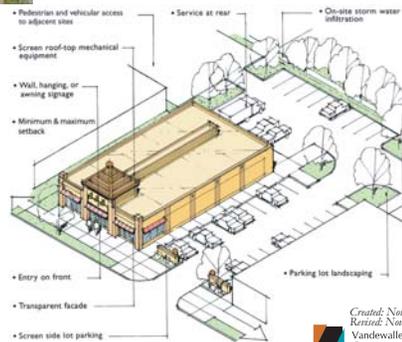
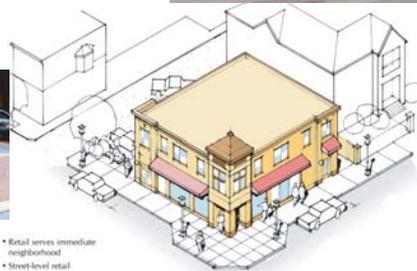
- 1 Encourage redevelopment of underutilized, highly visible sites. Locate auto-oriented businesses along Blackburn Street to complement pedestrian scale businesses along Watson Street
- 2 Upgrade alleys and public parking areas by coordinating circulation patterns and driveway alignments, new paving, lighting, landscape treatments and relocating overhead utilities underground
- 3 Preserve high quality historic structures along the corridor
- 4 Add wayfinding signage to Watson Street and public parking to draw people further into the downtown on Hwy 23
- 5 Develop further Little White School House and Republican House site into a tourist destination. Connect the two structures with formal open space and reuse the Republican House as a visitor center/historic museum/'place of ideas' meeting center
- 6 Improve facades to have a greater presence and relationship to key intersection
- 7 Accommodate transitional commercial uses and the reuse of previously residential structures, with potential opportunity for long term redevelopment
- 8 Explore potential opportunity for long term redevelopment that transitions into and is sensitive to the surrounding neighborhood
- 9 Update entry feature making it more visible from the intersection
- 10 Encourage facade improvements
- 11 Enhance crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety



- On-street and rear parking
- Multi-use parking



- Retail serves immediate neighborhood
- Street-level retail





RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK MILL POND AREA

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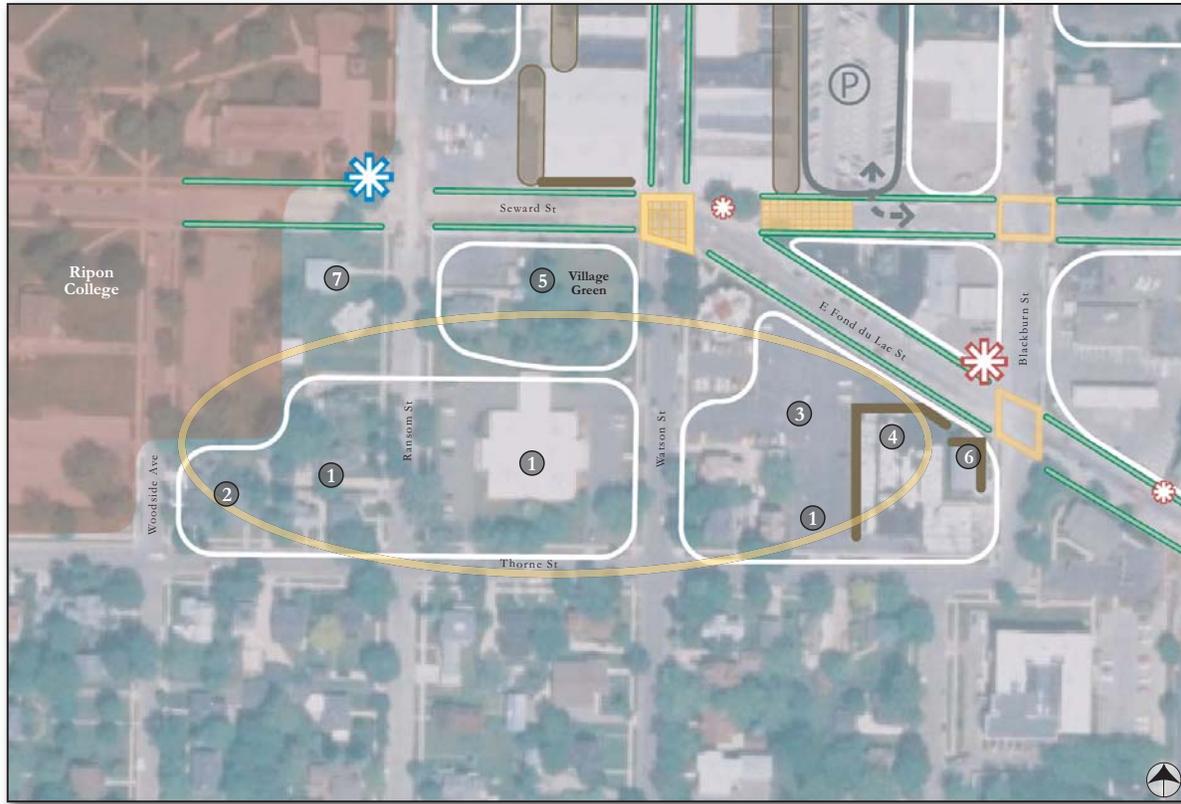


The Mill Pond Area is a valuable asset on the east edge of downtown. Connecting this amenity with the Watson Street core will enhance the image, livability, and investment opportunities of downtown. Potential new housing will bring new residents to downtown and park improvements will enhance the viability of the neighborhood.

MILL POND AREA

- ① Enhance Selfridge Park and public access to Gothic Mill Pond
- ② Strengthen Gothic Mill Pond's connection to downtown via Seward Street through streetscape improvements and wayfinding signage
- ③ Encourage continued residential improvements and residential infill
- ④ Encourage continued residential improvements and explore long-term redevelopment for new housing on Gothic Mill Pond
- ⑤ Encourage Alliant Energy to expedite completion of environmental remediation of pond





The Thorne Street Area is currently a transitional area between the Watson Street core and a cohesive residential neighborhood to the south. Improving underutilized properties with new housing and mixed use development will enhance the image of downtown, add new residents, and provide an improved scale and quality to the Thorne Street neighborhood and downtown entryways.

THORNE STREET AREA

- ① Develop new mixed use and higher density housing that will provide a more sensitive transition between the downtown and existing residential neighborhood
- ② Integrate new housing and redevelopment with Ripon College
- ③ Reduce/share excess parking lot and minimize its impact on Fond du Lac Street with centralized entrance, trees, landscape treatment, and updated lighting.
- ④ Enhance the facade and signage of the grocery to have an improved appearance along Fond du Lac Street; encourage grocery to remain downtown
- ⑤ Enhance and expand Village Green
- ⑥ Renovate American Legion building
- ⑦ Incorporate VFW facilities into the downtown



Section III: Urban Design Character

Introduction and Description

The following images illustrate the desired character of a future downtown Ripon. The locations have been selected for their importance to the image of downtown and their potential for dramatic impact. The images illustrate potential architectural character, streetscape enhancements, amenities, materials, and signage as well as the activity these enhanced places support.

- Blossom Street Pedestrian Connection (Between Watson Street and Ripon College)
- Downtown's Northwest Gateway (Intersection of Fond du Lac and Jackson Streets)
- Blackburn Street (At the Little White Schoolhouse)
- The Square (At Jackson Street and City Hall)



RIPON DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER BLOSSOM STREET PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION

DRAFT



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Section IV: Implementation Strategy

Introduction

The high level vision and the many, many redevelopment opportunities described in this Plan provide Ripon with an almost unlimited potential for spring boarding its downtown into a full-functioning, regional destination. However, achieving these results will require a well-coordinated effort between all of the major community and economic development interests operating in the community. While Ripon is fortunate to have several strong development organizations with records of success, the time is now to bring these entities together to begin working in a more collaborative fashion to truly leverage the expertise and resources that each has to offer.

This Implementation Strategy starts with an outline of the type of organizational structure needed to spearhead the various recommendations within this Plan. Following that, all of the economic and site development opportunities described throughout the Plan are consolidated into six core implementation categories, followed by a discussion of seven priority projects with the greatest short-term feasibility and an outline of a funding strategy.

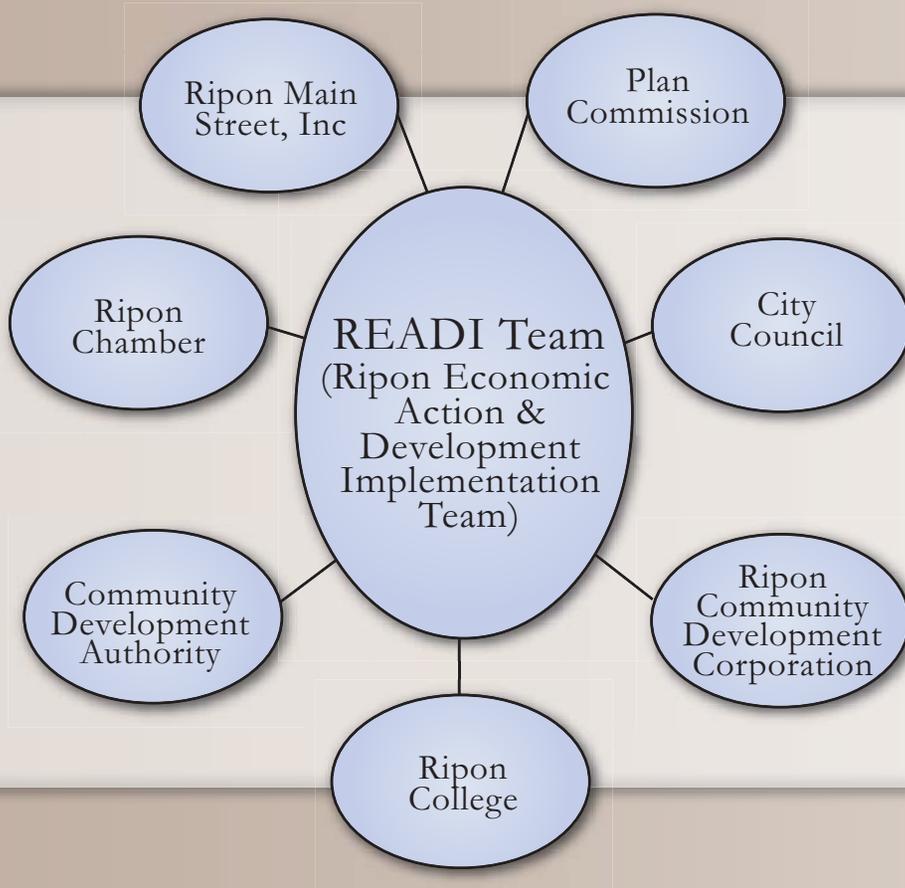
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DOWNTOWN RIPON IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Organizational Structure



READI TEAM PARTICIPANTS



PROJECT CATEGORIES

- Downtown Public Improvements
- Development/Redevelopment
- Housing Development
- Events, Visitor Marketing, Attractions
- Merchant Recruitment, Operations, Management
- Workforce & Industrial Development

PRIORITY PROJECTS

- Gateway & Wayfinding Signage
- North End Redevelopment
- Alumni Housing Concept
- College Cultural Events & Continuing Education Programs
- Little White Schoolhouse Enhancement
- Local Foods Shop & Visitor Center
- Center for Entrepreneurship & Business Assistance

Implementation Structure

Taking action on the ideas and recommendations included in this Plan requires that Ripon have an implementation strategy that organizes the processes for initiating and managing development projects and downtown improvements. In order to initiate projects and respond to development proposals in a manner that advances the vision for the downtown, Ripon first needs an organizational framework with open lines of communication and clear delineation of responsibilities among the various community and economic development entities already at work in the community.

Ripon is fortunate to have a number of active groups in the community with interest in advancing quality development in the downtown and throughout the City. However, each of these organizations has its own unique interests and areas of focus, so it is critical that all of these organizations communicate with one another. In 2002, the Ripon community organized a summit to determine how these entities should be organized and to better coordinate who should be responsible for what. The outcome of this process was a more clear delineation of missions for each group working on development issues in Ripon and an elimination of overlapping responsibilities. However, the community still lacks clear lines of communication, authority between these groups, and a detailed understanding of how specific development and public improvement projects should be managed.

Key Organizations

Ripon Main Street, Inc.

Main Street is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that maintains and improves the downtown by attracting visitors and businesses, enhances the design quality and appearance, and provides service to businesses and property owners. The primary mission of a typical Main Street organization follows four objectives - organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. Ripon's Main Street fits within this model but is more active and takes on more responsibilities than is generally the case. On a day-to-day basis, most of Main Street's work focuses on coordinating, organizing and servicing downtown businesses, assisting with downtown revitalization projects, and doing some promotional and event planning work. Main Street's budget includes income from the City's Business Improvement District and revenue from the Hotel tax. Main Street is led by a 15-member Board of Directors and a full time executive director. Main Street's primary expenses include events, property improvements, and marketing materials.

Ripon Community Development Corporation (RCDC)

The RCDC is a non-profit organization focused on recruiting businesses to locate in Ripon's industrial parks, maintaining existing businesses, and growing a strong and stable workforce in the community. The primary focus of RCDC is the existing and new industrial parks owned by the City where the RCDC markets property to companies and negotiates the early stages of deals. Although the RCDC's focus is primarily outside of downtown, it nonetheless has a strong interest in quality downtown business and housing development. The RCDC is a 501C6 organization funded by the City of Ripon and by contributions from businesses. Principal expenses include the services of a full time executive director and administrative and marketing support materials.

Key Organizations:

- Ripon Main Street
- Ripon Community Development Corporation
- Chamber of Commerce
- Ripon College
- City Council/City Staff
- City Plan Commission
- Community Development Authority

Ripon Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber's mission is to grow and maintain a healthy business community. On a day-to-day basis, the Chamber organizes numerous community events, conducts community visitor marketing and promotions, and operates the Little White Schoolhouse, which is the historic birthplace of the Republican Party. The Chamber is a member-based organization with funding provided by membership dues and a portion of the City's hotel tax. The organization is administered by a member board comprised of its members, a full time executive director, and a full time promotion coordinator.

Ripon College

Located adjacent to the downtown, Ripon College is an active partner in the downtown planning process with a stake in downtown development. The College recently relocated its president's office to the historic Carnegie Library building at the south end of Watson Street as indication of its level of commitment to further cementing the relationship between the College and the downtown. The College is very interested in participating in additional downtown improvements that are integrated with the College and that can enhance the community's and College's profile to potential and existing students and faculty.

City Council/City Staff

The Ripon City Council has no unique authority in the downtown relative to the rest of the City. However, their authority over items such as operating and capital budgets, purchase and sale of city property, and establishment of Tax Increment Finance Districts and Business Improvement Districts, makes them a key partner in all major downtown projects. The City operates under a council-administrator form of government, with the City Administrator serving as the chief operating officer and mayor effectively serving as the president of the council. The mayor and eight-member Council have overlapping, two-year terms and four-year terms respectively.

City Plan Commission

The Plan Commission is responsible for the general physical development of the City as the primary author and keeper of the City's Comprehensive Plan and the primary review and recommending body on significant development requests including conditional uses, planned unit developments, and re-zonings. The seven-member Commission is appointed by the City Council and is comprised of four citizens, the city engineer, a council member and the mayor.

Housing and Community Development Authority

The CDA acts as an agent of the city in planning and carrying out various community development programs and activities. As currently configured, the CDA has no final decision-making or bonding authority (both of which are permitted under state statutes), but makes only recommendations to the City Council and the Planning Commission on specific development projects. The CDA is staffed by the City Administrator and membership consists of seven residents, two of which are members of the city council.

Ripon Economic Action & Development Implementation (READI) Team

In order to coordinate and fully utilize the resources of the groups listed above, Ripon should create the Ripon the Ripon Economic Action and Development Implementation (READI) Team to prioritize and coordinate all implementation efforts, oversee projects, and channel information to participating organizations (see organizational structure graphic). As implementation projects are launched, the READI Team will route information and assign responsibilities for project management to sub teams consisting of representatives of the listed stakeholder groups organized according to areas of interest and expertise.

The proposed structure is not so much based on creating a new entity as is on creating a mechanism to better coordinate the activities of the existing organizations. Although the details of the organization will need more discussion among the participants and within the community at-large, the general concept would be to have the READI Team be a committee consisting of one representative from each of the organizations shown in the Organizational Structure Graphic. Together, the representatives will prioritize community and economic development projects within the downtown and throughout the City, and then divide the related implementation activities among themselves based on the resources, expertise and capacity available within each of the member organizations.

Project Categories

Project Categories:

1. Major Development/ Redevelopment Projects
2. Public Improvements
3. Downtown Merchant Recruitment, Operations, and Management
4. Events and Visitor Marketing
5. Housing Development
6. Business and Workforce Development

The plan identifies over eighty individual potential projects related to both the physical design of the downtown and the broader economic development strategy concepts. The following list classifies each of these potential projects according to six categories. Once the READI Team is established, each of these six categories should have an assigned sub team which would be responsible for managing all projects within their assigned category.

1. Major Development/Redevelopment Projects

These are projects initiated by either the READI Team or private developers. Plans for these projects should be the result of active negotiations between private interests and community interests with the projects managed through a READI sub team consisting of public and private sector representatives. In order to achieve the maximum benefit from redevelopment projects, the community needs to have a unified voice ensuring the project is integrated into the long term vision for the area.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Maintain local and pedestrian-oriented businesses on Watson; direct uses more dependent on higher traffic to Blackburn
- b) Relocate industrial and warehouse uses to the new industrial park but retain office workers in upgraded buildings downtown
- c) Renovate second floor apartments and condominiums along Watson Street
- d) Infill townhome or condominium development along Ransom Street
- e) Infill townhome or condominium between Blackburn and Mill Pond
- f) Encourage mixed-density housing in the Brewery Creek development
- g) Create historic bed and breakfast/hotel on Watson

- h) Upgrade/replace the Best Western Hotel with boutique hotel
- i) Encourage redevelopment of underutilized sites on the west side of Blackburn Street
- j) Locate market driven, auto-oriented businesses to west side of Blackburn Street

2. Public Improvements

These are improvements to public areas such as streets, sidewalks, parking areas, civic buildings, and parks. As such, the City will continue to play a lead role, but it is critical that these be properly coordinated and phased with all other downtown projects through the READI Team. Of the recommended improvements listed below, the first six (a-f) are projects that have already been discussed are in some stage of planning. Because these projects have already been identified as needed and planning is underway, these improvements should be given some priority over other projects.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Enhance Highway 23 intersections at Jefferson and Jackson Street
- b) Enhance Seward Street and East Fond du Lac Street streetscapes
- c) Replace Watson Street light fixtures with energy efficient/residential friendly fixtures, reuse existing light fixtures along side streets and parking areas.
- d) Improve visual and pedestrian connection between the Square and Library
- e) Continue to update Watson streetscape
- f) Enhance Blossom Street streetscape
- g) Redesign the Square into a multi-use public space for hosting high school and college homecoming parades, holiday parades, campaign stops, and special events as well as providing parking on a daily basis
- h) Add streetscape enhancements along Watson consistent with historic buildings
- i) Upgrade public parking areas and alleys between Watson and Blackburn and provide better signage directing visitors to the parking lots
- j) Upgrade rear façades of buildings on the east side of Watson and create secondary entrances facing the parking areas
- k) Consolidate utilities, trash receptacles and service areas to improve appearance and functionality
- l) Clarify drivers' choice between highway and downtown routes through the City
- m) Update downtown entry feature/sign
- n) Add unified wayfinding signage
- o) Encourage business exposure to Jackson Street
- p) Enhance Highway 23 intersections at Metomen and Blackburn Streets
- q) Add Ripon College entry feature/sign
- r) Develop Scott, E. Fond du Lac, Blossom and Seward Streets as connections to Watson Street, directing vehicles to off-street parking areas with signage.
- s) Enhance City Hall façade, site, and streetscape
- t) Create visual terminus of Watson Street with significant architectural element on City Hall
- u) Create a cohesive "Civic Campus" including City Hall/Police/Library
- v) Consider Jackson Street enhancement/traffic calming
- w) Continue to preserve, restore, and reuse historic structures on Watson Street

- x) Upgrade alleys, public parking areas, and parking signage between Watson and Blackburn and improve rear facades and entries from public parking areas
- y) Enhance Blossom Street/Watson Street intersection
- z) Add gateways at pedestrian entries to Ripon College
- aa) Improve pedestrian connections between campus and Watson Street
- bb) Enhance College “presence” at terminus of Blossom Street
- cc) Improve pedestrian connections between Mill Pond and Watson Street
- dd) Enhance connection to Little White Schoolhouse Site

3. Downtown Merchant Recruitment, Operations, and Management

Successful downtown retail districts require coordinated efforts to market empty storefronts to potential business owners, coordinate existing businesses operations, and manage the overall downtown business environment.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Coordinate regular merchant hours of operation and add at least one extended hours night each week, preferably on the day with the strongest retail sales.
- b) Add outdoor dining and seating areas along Watson and behind buildings on the east side of Watson
- c) Enhance Seward Street/Watson Street intersection. Consider the use of interpretive signage oriented towards pedestrians to provide information about the College and downtown.
- d) Encourage more businesses that appeal to college students and children
- e) Encourage more entertainment uses, outdoor sports, and recreational uses
- f) Create a pool of trained workers who can fill in for various downtown merchants to cover absences or expanded hours
- g) Renovate second floor apartments and condominiums along Watson Street
- h) Encourage outdoor seating and activity areas
- i) Enhance the Village Green

4. Creating Events, Visitor Marketing, Developing Visitor Attractions

Attracting visitors requires a sustained and coordinated marketing program consisting of promotional materials, working with state tourism officials, creating and organizing large and small community events, and other activities designed to reach out to several audiences including locals, day trippers, tourists, and business travelers.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Establish regularly scheduled reenactments of the birth of the Republican party
- b) Provide guided historical tours of the downtown and install markers and interpretative signage for self-guided tours
- c) Expand on-campus summer programs for adults and alumni by Ripon College
- d) Expand music, art and literature offerings to the general public by Ripon College
- e) Consider third-party use of Ripon College facilities during the summer, such as corporate retreats and family reunions
- f) Offer a visiting lecture series of prominent individuals in state and national social movements

- g) Host regional, state and national events sponsored by the National Forensic League
- h) Create public art program with installations throughout the downtown
- i) Expand on the Little White Schoolhouse site to develop a Ripon Welcome Center and museum/interpretative center on the history of Ripon. Create displays on all aspects of Ripon's history as a cradle of new ideas including its role in the abolitionist movement, women's suffrage, entrepreneurialism, as well as the Republican Party.
- j) Coordinate with entities that promote "cultural tourism" (i.e. Wisconsin Dept. of Tourism) to insure that Ripon is prominently featured.
- k) Identify educational topical areas that could be appealing to educational tourism groups such as Elderhostel.
- l) Enhance the Cookie Outlet and relocate it to the downtown. Include a visitor center with interpretive elements including media displays providing a virtual tour of the production facility.
- m) Create a gift shop located within a Ripon Welcome Center showcasing locally produced products
- n) Expand the farmers market with more local growers and include locally produced food products (such as honey, meats, cheeses, sauces, etc.) in the market
- o) Work with UW-Extension to connect local restaurants with local growers and develop menus featuring locally grown produce and food products
- p) Solicit professional organizations to hold their ag/food related conferences here or hold our own
- q) Promote Ripon as the Gateway to the Green Lake resort area

5. Housing Development

Housing is a key component of any active downtown and is also a key component of work force development. Given the limited range of housing types within the community, downtown housing development needs to be viewed with a larger lens of improving the City's overall housing options as a means to not only bolster activity within the downtown, but also to grow the work force and expand the City's business development opportunities as well.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Develop high-end condominium housing targeted to Ripon alumni with an amenity package closely tied to the college
- b) Infill townhome or condominium development along Ransom Street
- c) Infill townhome or condominium between Blackburn and Mill Pond
- d) Create upper end GREEN housing along Silver Creek/Mill Pond
- e) Examine need for affordable housing; develop affordable housing as identified in order to ensure available workforce.
- f) Consider potential housing/hospitality uses on Ransom Street

6. Business and Workforce Development

This is the traditional economic development function focused on attracting and retaining high quality employers and on building a strong workforce. Although not directly related to the physical development of the downtown, the condition of the downtown can significantly affect the ability of the community to attract new companies.

Identified Potential Projects:

- a) Create a Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance in Partnership with the College using the GREAT program as a foundation.
- b) Work with Ripon College Students in Free Enterprise to create business plans for needed retail and services
- c) Market potential business ideas/plans to local entrepreneurs
- d) Develop incubator for hand-crafted food products in concert with the public market

High Priority/Impact Projects

The list above identifies over eighty individual project ideas. Starting from this master list of projects, the following seven projects were identified as priorities that should lead off the implementation effort, once an appropriate structure is put into place. These seven projects were drawn out of the master list based on the following criteria:

- **High Visibility** – A project that quickly produces clear “on the ground” results. High visibility projects create a physical manifestation of the plan and show the community that things are being accomplished.
- **High Impact** – These are catalytic projects that can pave the way for additional development. One or two high impact projects can fundamentally change the market in a way that makes a dozen or more additional projects feasible.
- **Limited Cost/Limited Political Resistance** – These are projects that are likely to succeed and can be accomplished without excessive expenditures, major property acquisition, or other potential pitfalls.
- **Already Proposed/Sense of Urgency** – These are projects that the City or a private developer has already proposed or initiated but may need to be refined in the larger context of this Plan. Likewise, these projects have some sense of urgency in that their potential may be lessened or evaporate altogether if action is not taken now.

High Priority/Impact Projects:	
1.	North End Redevelopment (Brewery Creek)
2.	Downtown Alumni Housing Concept
3.	Gateway and Wayfinding Signage
4.	Cultural and Continuing Education Programs at Ripon College
5.	Enhance Little White Schoolhouse
6.	Local Foods Visitor Center and Retail Shop
7.	Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance

Each of the priority projects identified below has at least one of these characteristics and most of them have more than one. These projects also represent a diverse mix of the implementation categories described previously in this section and, therefore, will help to distribute the workload over all of the READI Team member organizations. Although numbered, the following projects are of equal priority and are listed in no particular order:

1. Development of a Mixed-Use Project at the North End of Downtown (Brewery Creek)

The City is currently in the process of negotiating with a developer for the redevelopment of this site as part of a request for proposals the City issued earlier this year. The City’s partial ownership of the site coupled with the site’s obsolete uses and proximity to downtown make it a prime redevelopment target. Accordingly, the City made an excellent choice in selecting the site as one of the first major downtown redevelopment initiatives. In light of the opportunities identified in this Plan, the project needs to be taken to the READI Team immediately to ensure it fulfills as many Plan objectives as possible. Through proper coordination, the value-added nature of the READI Team approach should result in improved project feasibility for the developer as well.



2. Develop Niche Housing Targeted to Ripon College Alumni

One of the development opportunities identified in this Plan is the creation of unique housing catering to Ripon College alumni looking to retire in a pleasant community and to reconnect with their alma mater. Building a moderately-sized community of alumni housing with an extensive amenity package designed to draw on the assets of the College and provide a stimulating living and learning environment could be a catalytic development that would ignite the downtown housing market leading to future projects.

3. Install New Gateway and Wayfinding Signage

Creating gateway and wayfinding signage is a relatively low cost public improvement that can be implemented quickly and can have an immediate impact. Using the plan, the City and the PMT should identify the downtown and community entrance points in need of gateway signage and install attractive, uniform signs. Further, signage should be added to clearly point visitors towards preferred parking areas and to highlight key historic sites or visitor attractions.

4. Launch New Cultural and Continuing Education Programs through Ripon College

The College is one of the community's key assets which can be leveraged to benefit the downtown. Ripon College is a center of culture and knowledge with a wealth of facilities, expertise, and institutions that can add to the cultural and entertainment profile of the community. To the extent possible, the College should assist the downtown by hosting more concerts, creating new lecture programs with community and visitor appeal, and creating new lifetime learning programs that could draw new residents to the community.

5. Enhance the Little White Schoolhouse Attraction as a Tribute to Ripon's History as a Place of Ideas

The Little White Schoolhouse is Ripon's most celebrated historical site and visitor attraction and an integral part of the community's identity. In order to maximize the site as an attraction and as a statement of Ripon's identity, the visitor experience should include more interpretive elements discussing the ideals of the early Republicans, the suffrage movement in Ripon, the Abolitionist and Civil Rights movements, the Ceresco Commune, and Ripon's early entrepreneurs. Rather than simply being the birthplace of the Republican Party, the Little White Schoolhouse and adjoining grounds should be rebranded as a tribute to the ideas that created of the Republican Party and a celebration of Ripon's long history as a place where new ideas are created and tested.

6. Create a Local Foods Themed Visitor Center and Retail Shop

This project combines a regional visitor information center with a "Ripon Flavors" retail shop featuring locally produced specialty foods. The shop should be created in partnership with Bremner-Ripon Foods, Smuckers, Ripon Pickle, Seneca, area farmers, restaurant owners, and Aneh's Fine Foods. The shop and visitors center would be designed to showcase and market Ripon's local food products and introduce people to the unique local food scene in the community. The shop could be managed and operated by Ripon College business students organized through the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)

7. Create a Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance in Partnership with the College

Using the GREAT program as a foundation, create an Entrepreneurship and Small Business Assistance Center to provide business support services for downtown retailers and prospective downtown business owners. Working with Main Street, the Chamber, and the RCDC, SIFE students would provide labor to local businesses as well as business consulting services to existing and prospective business owners. The center also could be used to incubate new businesses in Ripon in targeted niche industries.

When feasible, the READI Team should look for synergies between these and other projects that can generate greater success and community interest and support by integrating/combining them. For example, the priority projects five, six, and seven are all related to celebrating and leveraging Ripon's identity as a place of new ideas, entrepreneurship, and local foods. If possible, co-locating these projects as a single center/integrated development could create an exciting single project with widespread support.

Funding Discussion

Securing funding for projects requiring direct public expenditures is often a challenging component of downtown redevelopment planning. Many of the funding tools often used to finance downtown improvements are already established in Ripon including a downtown Tax Increment Financing district, a Business Improvement District, and a hotel tax. Ripon can continue to use these tools as the base of its redevelopment funding for the downtown.

Minor public improvements such as creating new signage can often be completed at a relatively low cost. However, more extensive improvements, such as resurfacing the public parking lots or doing major streetscape improvements, can be significantly more expensive. These more expensive public improvements in Ripon should be placed on a long-term track so that they are initiated as they become financially feasible. Ripon's current downtown TIF was created in 1988 and the district includes most of the parcels within one block of the Watson Street corridor between Jackson and Seward. Amending the TIF boundaries (or creating a new TIF) to include more of the land north of Jefferson and west of Watson, as well as the parcels between Blackburn and Houston, could add to the potential revenue flowing from the TIF. In addition, encouraging downtown development within the existing TIF and within an expanded TIF that includes more of the periphery of the downtown will add to the value within the district creating funds that can potentially be invested into downtown improvements. Further, negotiations with developers can be used as a way to obtain financing for improvements in the immediate vicinity of projects.