

Downtown Fond du Lac Public Space Stewardship Guide

Fond du Lac, WI

Draft Report as of February 5, 2019



Prepared for:

The City of Fond du Lac, WI

Prepared by:

Cunningham Group Architecture, Inc.

Table of Contents

1. **Public Space Stewardship**
2. **A Framework for Successful Public Spaces Downtown**
3. **Recommendations for Three Public Spaces Downtown**
4. **Implementation**

Acknowledgements

Steering Committee

to be completed



1. Public Space Stewardship

Why Lively Public Spaces are Important

Downtown Fond du Lac is the Heart of the community

A successful Fond du Lac relies heavily on a successful Downtown. A successful Downtown relies heavily on the quality of its public spaces - its streets, parks, and plazas and sidewalks.

High quality public spaces are a critical component to overall livability of a community because they provide opportunities for socializing, gathering, leisure, and play in ways that private space cannot.

Successful public spaces create value, trust, emotional attachment and positive memories. They contribute to the overall livability of a community while at the same time they create public value that is shared by individuals and property owners alike.

***A successful
Downtown relies on
the comfort of its
streets, sidewalks,
parks, and plazas.***

Lively Public Spaces are a Crucial Piece of Livability and Economic Development

In our increasingly mobile and technologically dominated society, the quality of a physical space is increasingly important. As technology grants us access to information, entertainment and communication at our fingertips, it is important for cities to continue improving the quality of place and the comfort of people who are in the Downtown. Without high quality places that are comfortable, engaging, entertaining, and animated, cities will lose customers, visitors, investors, and businesses. With high quality places that people like to be in, cities can offer sociability, spontaneity, authenticity - the elements of society and life that are not delivered through technology.

Fond du Lac has an historic downtown with a rich inventory of public spaces. However the public spaces are not all utilized, designed, managed, or programmed in ways that promote social mixing, local character, joy, or positive civic behaviors.

The purpose of this project is to examine three of Downtown's prominent public spaces and to provide recommendations for how they can be improved.

Assumptions and Approaches

People Attract People

The basic premise of this report is simple: People are attracted to places where they see people. Positive behavior attracts people and encourages further positive behaviors. The goal, therefore, is to create spaces that encourage positive and joyful behaviors. In the context of Downtown Fond du Lac and this project, the definition of positive behavior is broadly defined to include positive behaviors for all residents and visitors of the City. It is not enough to encourage and promote positive behaviors for a select slice of Fond du Lac residents. For Downtown to thrive and be as welcoming, pleasant, comfortable, and enjoyable as possible, it must do so for everyone in Fond du Lac. Not just its daytime employees, or weekend visitors.

Places that Create Value

High quality places create collective, individual, and commercial/investor value. Place value starts with individuals having positive experiences in a specific place. Repeated positive experiences are more likely to be shared. With repeated positive experiences by an ever growing number of people, habits and attachments are formed between people and that place. That relationship between people and place become precious and valuable, and most importantly it is not portable or transferrable.

The Holy Trinity of Successful Places

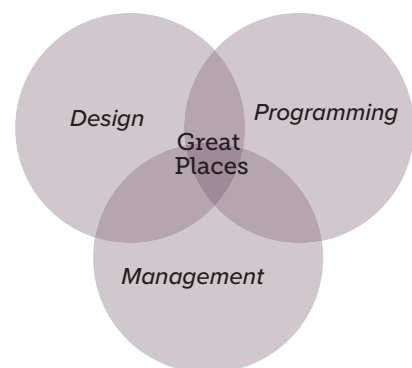
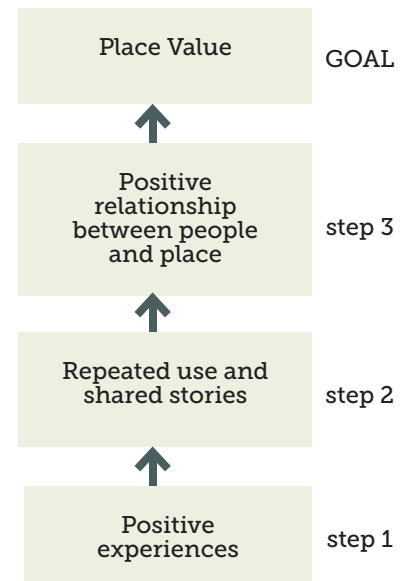
Successful places that attract people and offer positive experiences require equal parts design, management, and programming. It is not enough to simply design a great space, nor it is effective to program activities in spaces that physically do not accommodate the planned or intended activities.

Design consists of the physical dimensions and elements of any given place. The size, proportion, and arrangement of elements within any space impact the individual and collective use of the space. The edges of spaces and the ways in which spaces are accessed also have an impact on how the space is used. The best spaces are comfortable to be in throughout the day and week, when both empty and filled.

Programming consists of the ephemeral events and activities that are either planned or spontaneously occur in any given space. Programming has a direct impact on who uses spaces and how that space is perceived. The best public spaces have a wide array of inclusive (planned and unplanned) programming and events.

Management and Stewardship consists of the organization and structure that oversees the programming and design of the space. Management is crucial because successful spaces need to be cared for and continuously improved. When a space is well cared for, people feel more comfortable in it.

People are attracted to places where they see people



Assumptions and Approach

What Makes a Place Great?

We all know when we are in a great space. It feels comfortable and safe. We enjoy our time while in that space because it engages our senses. We would like to stay longer. We tell others about our experiences in the space and we look forward to returning in the near future. Public spaces are more than simply spaces that are public. They are integral and crucial to a functioning democracy. In addition to being publicly accessible, when well designed, public spaces have the ability to be welcoming, positively perceived, well used, and an expression of local culture and identity.

More than descriptors or adjectives, these qualities are all measurable. By measuring the performance of a public space, we can make enlightened adjustments and improvements to the design, management and programming of it.

Is it well used and lively?

Is the space busy only at lunch or on the weekends? How long are people using the space - 5 minutes or an hour? Are they using the space repeatedly?

Spaces that are busy throughout the day, week, and year are more likely to create collective and public value.

Does it draw users from the local community?

Who is using the space? How many are from within a mile? How many from within a few blocks? Are they all young? Elderly? Or is there a mix? Spaces that are used heavily by the local community tend to be well cared for and supported. They also tend to take on a local flavor through personalization and individualization.

Does it support various uses?

How many activities is the space being used? Do those activities change over time? Are people sitting, sleeping, playing, or watching? Are they doing multiple activities at any given time?

Is it perceived positively by the users?

Do people have positive experiences and do they share those positive experiences with others? Does the space have a reputation - what is that based on?

Is there social mixing?

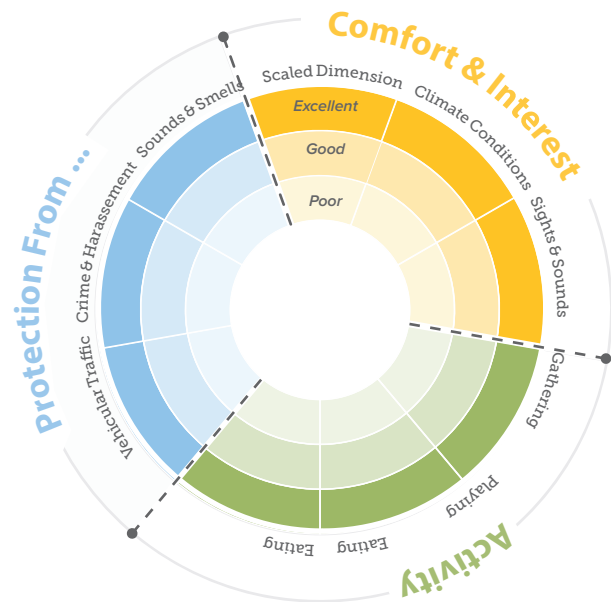
Do strangers talk with each other? Do they simply recognize each other and co-exist peacefully in space with other? Are there opportunities for people to interact in an unplanned and spontaneous way?



Assumptions and Approach

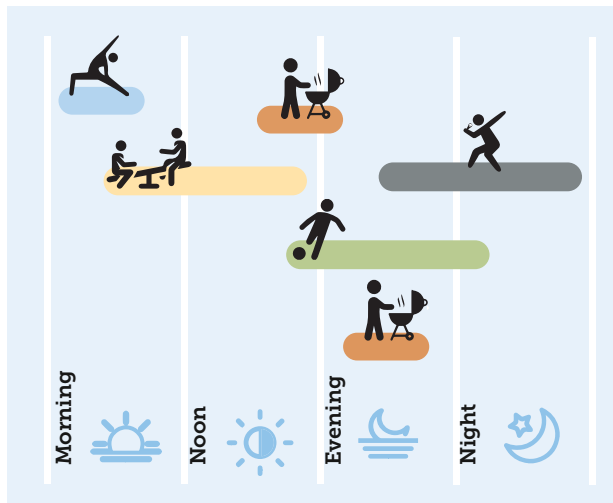
Measuring the Perception of a Public Space

Successful spaces are safe, comfortable, inviting, and stimulating to the senses (eyes, ears, nose, etc). The image to the right is adapted from Jan Gehl, urban designer, who analyzes the human physical and sensory components of public spaces with an emphasis on how the space is used and perceived by people who use it. This diagram is used later in this report to identify where the space is strong and where it is lacking. These observations are used to formulate recommendations.



Measuring the Activity Level of Public Spaces

Public spaces, especially larger ones, need to be active throughout the day and week to feel alive. They should be deliberately designed to invite a variety of activities that overlap, but don't conflict. Overlapping uses and users also create opportunities for positive chance encounters, coincidental meetings and unplanned social mixing - all positive byproducts of well-designed and arranged public spaces.



Assumption and Approach

The Importance of Edges

Successful places have edges that are well defined, active and inviting. Edges create the dimensions and proportions of the spaces - determining whether they are human scaled. Edges also determine how you enter a space. The entry experience can be welcoming and well defined or it can be nebulous and uncomfortable. The entry experience also creates the beginning and end of a circulation pattern which typically defines the spaces within a larger area.

Edges can be defined many ways. Buildings, natural features, or walls are all strong edges. Depending on how the edges are designed and where they are located, the edges can add life to a space or they can create “dead zones” that are uncomfortable and uninviting.

Urban spaces are best defined by building walls with active and transparent ground floor uses. Restaurants, and retail uses that have a lot of people coming and

going and have the potential to spill out to the sidewalk tend to be the best possible edges. Edges such as these tend to provide natural circulation patterns, and sights and smells that are appealing to the space adjacent to it.

Office uses or residential uses that require privacy on the ground floor can be less active. However, if they are transparent, they can still add interest to the adjacent spaces.

Buildings with no doors or windows tend to be the least active. While they physically define their spaces, since they are not porous, they can have a negative impact on the space.

Parking lots, streets, and similar elements can also have a negative impact on urban spaces if they are not well designed.



Incremental Improvements

Simple improvements to the edges of spaces will help the quality of the space as a whole. Hostile edges can be easily improved with buffering and benches. Plain edges can be easily improved with artwork or murals.

Assumption and Approach

Activities

Successful places have a variety of activities for a variety of users. The activities don't happen on their own, however. They need support and encouragement in the form of programming and design. Kids want to play; they need something to play on. Adults enjoy entertainment; they need music, dance, or performance to be entertained.



Social Mixing

The purpose and value of public space goes beyond simply creating places to enjoy. It is also important that these places promote social mixing, chance encounters and unplanned meetings. Larger spaces that are programmed and designed for a series of activities should also have places within them where various users come together. This may be a plaza, an area around the water fountain, or a large tree to sit under. We need to rub shoulders with other people in the community even if our individual activities and use patterns are separate.





2. Framework for Successful Public Spaces Downtown

A Framework for Creating a Downtown with Lively Public Spaces

1. Provide a series of experiences throughout Downtown.

Fond du Lac is a diverse community - the offerings of Downtown should reflect that diversity. A variety of experiences downtown will attract a variety and range of users. With more things to experience, more people will be attracted to downtown. Doing so will help create a lively downtown throughout the day, week, and year.



Recommendations:

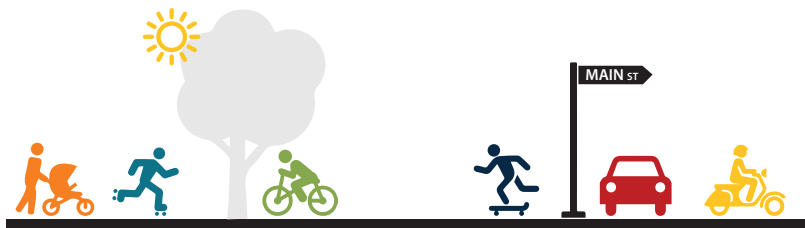
- Promote different character areas throughout Downtown (the River, Main Street, Hamilton Park, etc)
- Create a variety of experiences throughout the day, week, and year.

2. Create a *Downtown that is easy to get to and comfortable to get around.*

A balanced transportation system that invites pedestrians, bicyclists, scooters, and transit riders as much as automobiles is critical to creating a lively downtown. A balanced transport system will invite more people into downtown by adding choice and convenience.

Equally important to getting downtown is the way in which people move about Downtown from one space to another. Since these distances tend to be short, this is typically done on foot, along sidewalks, through alleys, and between buildings. Special attention should be given to the ease, clarity, and simplicity of moving throughout Downtown.

One of the most significant benefits of having a safe, comfortable, and balanced transportation system is the presence of more people on the streets. As noted earlier...people like to be where they see people. Therefore, a downtown that is easy to get to and comfortable to get around will attract more people.



Recommendations:

- Offer superior biking, pedestrian and transit accommodations throughout all of Downtown and connecting to the nearby neighborhoods.
- Fill the immediate gaps in the bike and ped system downtown
- Look for opportunities to create additional pedestrian / bike spaces on excessively wide streets.

3. Create more invitations for people to spend time outdoors throughout the year.

Programmed spaces where people are invited to spend time in public spaces tend to perform better because they attract newcomers to spaces. Programming spaces create sticky spaces as they lure passerbys into the space with events, games, play objects, books, music, food or other offerings. Programming offers the opportunity to constantly change the flavor and makeup of a space - thereby offering new reasons to come to a space every day, week, month or season.

Programming throughout the year, even in the winter, is particularly important as it allows the City to redefine the purpose and use of spaces across the seasons. A calm space in the warm seasons can become an active space in the cold seasons.



Recommendations

- Consider an ambassador or public space manager program that oversees the programming and management of public spaces.
- Creatively brand Downtown public spaces and promote them and their programming efforts with an ongoing and coordinated social media campaign.
- Focus on evening events throughout the week to encourage people to stay downtown after work.
- Leverage the existing events and Farmers Markets to begin diversifying the Downtown event offerings.

4. Invite all to participate in making Downtown the heart of the city.

Downtown should not be just a shopping district or a place to go to work. It should be many things for many people across the city - young and old, residents and visitors. It is the heart of the city and it should be the place where all are welcome.

The City cannot be solely responsible for the design, management, and programming of its public spaces. For the Downtown to be more welcoming and more inclusive the City's network of stakeholders (businesses, institutions, neighborhoods, and non-profits) must participate equally in putting their mark on Downtown. With more hands on deck committed to making Downtown Fond du Lac a fun and lively place, change will happen more quickly and more effectively.



Recommendations

- Consider an adopt-a-park or adopt-a-street program
- Make it easy to initiate placemaking efforts by creating an easy to use on-line one stop shop for local placemaking.