



The Good Life project and our hopes for it

...The work of The Good Life project to describe and link all of the various features that contribute to quality of life in Eau Claire is, essentially, city planning at its finest... The Good Life project will help raise awareness of the importance of those features that contribute to “quality of life,” community attachment and economic development. That awareness will help build support for public and private actions that provide access to outdoor recreation, a healthful environment, art, recreation and places to meet... Let’s look for ways to link the recommendations of The Good Life project to City endeavors such as the current Waterways Plan, its neighborhood revitalization plans, its Comprehensive Plan and its capital improvements program.

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Weber Community Planning

In July 2009, the Chippewa Valley Museum (CVM) received a \$93,782 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a federal agency.

For the next two years, the museum worked with community partners to discover what residents thought of cultural life in the City of Eau Claire and Eau Claire County, and what direction residents thought this cultural life could head. These community partners, each with a similar interest in the area’s culture (very broadly defined), include the Eau Claire Regional Arts Center, the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library, the Children’s Museum of Eau Claire, and members of Clear Vision Eau Claire (more on them below).

In taking on culture, arts, history, and heritage, CVM’s IMLS grant neatly dovetails with another large project. Several years ago, a coalition of City, County and other large institutions engaged the National Civic League to facilitate a community visioning and strategic-planning process, called Clear Vision Eau Claire. That process revealed a gap. Although assessments and specific plans support other important aspects of area life — such as the park system, social services, and transportation — no comprehensive plan exists for the cultural sector. And those plans on other important aspects of area life can, and should, more fully incorporate citizens’ thoughts and hopes about their cultural life. **Those thoughts and hopes should infuse all planning in Eau Claire County.**

Such thinking will surely help. Cultural planning helps local governments think strategically about cultural institutions as resources for human and community development. It helps cultural institutions by identifying them and naming them as assets. An inclusive planning process encourages more thoughtful integration of cultural resources into general community plans and, in turn, create a more vibrant cultural life for Eau Claire.

The planning team worked with Lisa Mount, Director of Artistic Logistics in Sautee Nacoochee, Ga., and a nationally recognized independent arts management consultant. Mount trained CVM staff in strategic and collaborative planning, which included interviews, surveys and community forums — many kinds of conversations that led us forward. The resulting study, of which this document is a part, can provide a tool for decision-making and direction-setting for local government, for funders, and for cultural organizations.

Definitions

Cultural Plan

A cultural plan considers community characteristics (past and present) and resources in the broadest sense. Cultural planning is a way of looking at all aspects of community cultural life as community assets. Understanding culture and cultural activity as resources for human and community development, rather than merely as cultural “products” to be subsidized because they are good for us, unlocks stunning possibilities.

Creative Economy

Rather than being exclusively driven by companies, economic growth is occurring in places that are tolerant, diverse and open to creativity, mainly because these are the places where creative people of all types want to live. Urban development policies need to be aware of the benefits of **creating such an environment**. The creative economy approach **links the arts and the creative process to a much wider range of economic activities** including technological innovation and local and regional marketing. The understanding that people, quality of place, and innovation are central to economic development has led to a new focus on cultural resources as a key element in regional economic development. **Creative economy approaches also typically emphasize intra-regional cooperation rather than on local or inter-jurisdictional competition**. Making places livable and attractive will be an important task for urban planners and economic developers. To ensure livability, **policymakers also need to support arts, culture, and heri-tage, in both rural and urban areas**.

Creative City

The Creative City idea posits that **conditions need to be created for people to think, plan and act with imagination** in harnessing opportunities or solving seemingly intractable urban problems. It requires a combination of both hard and soft infrastructures. Soft infrastructure includes **paying attention to how people can meet, exchange ideas, and network**. It ... encourages physical developments and place-making or urban design that foster communication between people. Being creative does not mean that someone is only concerned with the new. At times, one needs the courage to either change things if required or to have the sound judgment to keep things as they are after reconsidering things only. Therefore, **history and creative can be great partners**: often, great achievements are combinations of the old and new.

Creative Placemaking

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

In turn, these **creative locales foster entrepreneurs and cultural industries that generate jobs and income**, spin off new products and services, and attract and retain unrelated businesses and skilled workers. Instead of a single arts center or a cluster of large arts and cultural institutions, **contemporary creative placemaking envisions a more decentralized portfolio of spaces acting as creative crucibles**.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism means traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes irreplaceable historic, cultural and natural resources. **Perhaps the biggest benefits of cultural heritage tourism are diversification of local economies and preservation of a community’s unique character**.

Findings

Outdoors and Waterways

- Both commerce and culture in Eau Claire County are tied to the outdoors and our waterways, and always have been.
- Tremendous work has been done for decades on many aspects of county and city waterways, both environmental and recreational. Much more discussion and work is explicitly planned.
- If we can make one improvement to this aspect of our cultural life, it should be to brand our county waterways. This will help us better inform the public of the work already being done, allow us to emphasize the cultural interests of tourists and residents, and spur development of river- and waterway-centered events and river-facing development.

Strategies

Brand our county waterways.

Implement one river-centered event annually. Foster development of seasonal river-centered events.

Assure that all waterways, parks, and outdoor recreation plans incorporate the cultural interests of residents and visitors.

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There is nothing better than lying on the lush grass of Phoenix Park, licking a melting ice cream cone while listening to an amazing local band...

”

Economic Development

- Attracting and keeping a highly educated, creative workforce in Eau Claire County is necessary for knowledge-based industries.
- The creative economy needs a positive environment with spaces and places where its people want to live and work. Many Eau Claire County residents understand this need and understand that we've made progress towards it.
- A creative environment takes creative thinking. If we want to succeed in this, we will make a place that creative people want to be, and we will encourage interest and enterprises based on our arts and culture strengths.

“

Our city's design and urban plan seems to encourage separation rather than comingling, though there are some positive signs in terms of the bike paths and downtown renewal.

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Strategies

Support places where creative individuals want to be and can interact.

- Start with Cultural Mapping so we know what we have now.

- Revisit public support for cultural venues and programming.

- Create opportunities for professionals, artists and cultural workers to interact, network, and/or work together

Encourage enterprises based on our arts and cultural strengths.

Downtown

- Eau Claire County has more than one downtown, as Augusta and Fall Creek are proud to report. But for more than 130 years, through its ups and downs, downtown Eau Claire has seemed to both County and City residents as the main engine of Eau Claire County’s governmental and commercial life, and as the heart of the county’s cultural identity.
- People like downtown Eau Claire, and they think it has problems. This has long been true.
- As we move forward, we should capitalize on the unique identity of downtown Eau Claire, built on the confluence of two scenic and historically interesting rivers, to bring about social and economic change – the change residents are still clamoring for over three decades after the downtown revitalization efforts began in Eau Claire.

Strategies

Use our unique community identity to...

increase public awareness of and participation in downtown revitalization efforts.

continue efforts to improve downtown’s infrastructure and economy. Support downtown Eau Claire as a center of cultural life for the City and County.

Tourism

- Eau Claire County can enhance tourism by becoming a destination for Cultural and Heritage Tourism. To do this, Eau Claire County must represent Eau Claire County and not just someplace beautiful and nice.
- Highlighting key aspects of local culture helps tourism to broaden the local economic base and build community pride. But to succeed, we must define culture very broadly, including what would have been termed in the past as “high” and “low” culture.
- Preparing Eau Claire County to take advantage of cultural tourism is straightforward enough. Create broad community understanding of cultural and heritage tourism. Understand what we have. Understand our “Quality of Place.” Develop a Partnership for Cultural and Heritage Tourism. Develop Eau Claire County as a cultural and heritage tourism destination.

“
Small town feel, strong community,
familiar faces — summer in Eau Claire
is pretty epic. This is an opportunity for
tourism.
”

Strategies

Understand what we have.

Understand our “Quality of Place.” Articulate what is distinctive about Eau Claire County culture/heritage. From this, develop a vision for the visitor experience.

Develop a partnership for cultural and heritage tourism.

Develop Eau Claire County as a cultural and heritage tourism destination.

Then, and only then, develop plans and specific activities based on the resources and skills available, and understanding of gaps.

Education

- In order to have a strong cultural sector and community, both formal and informal opportunities for cultural, history, heritage, and arts learning must be available for all ages.
- Although Eau Claire County has opportunities in these areas, there is need for greater diversity and integration throughout the community.
- This can be accomplished by not just providing more educational opportunities, but also by infusing arts, history and heritage content into all educational experiences, and by building stronger connections between local schools, organizations, and cultural representatives.

Strategies

Infuse arts, history and heritage content into all educational experiences.

Provide more educational opportunities for culture, arts, history and heritage.

Build stronger connections between local schools, organizations and cultural representatives.

Create a network of culture, arts, history, and heritage based youth programs

Better communicate the range of history, heritage, arts, and culture learning experiences and resources available for children in school

Increase opportunities for youth to showcase their talents and knowledge

Bridge the gap between UWEC and the community

Aesthetics and Character

- A 2010 Knight Foundation survey found that “social offerings, openness, aesthetics, and education are, in that order, most likely to influence residents’ attachment to their communities.”
- Good Life survey respondents were outspoken in their appreciation of — or disappointment with — area aesthetics.
- We can improve our rivers, parks, city entrances, and wayfinding. We can respect historic buildings and neighborhoods. An excellent and first step would be for all Eau Claire County municipalities to be as specific about historic preservation and aesthetics in their comprehensive plans as they are about recreational resources.

Strategies

Value and enhance the aesthetics of the rivers.

Incorporate aesthetic elements, cultural activities and gathering spots into all parks and commercial areas.

Improve entrances and way-finding.

Respect and protect historic buildings and neighborhood character.

Encourage neighborhood-based programs and events.

Encourage all EC County municipalities to be as specific about historic preservation and aesthetic components as they are about recreational resources.

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It’s important to maintain city and neighborhood parks to provide a space for cultural activities - and a place to meet neighbors.
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Access

- It is not enough to simply offer cultural opportunities to residents. Residents have to be made aware of them. Opportunities must be offered at varying times, venues, and admission charges. And residents must be able to get there.
- While Eau Claire has a good start on many of these access issues, there is room to improve and offer opportunities better suited to meet residents' needs and wants.
- Residents' needs and wants can be met by listening for patterns in what they say.

Issues

Transportation: Can I get there?

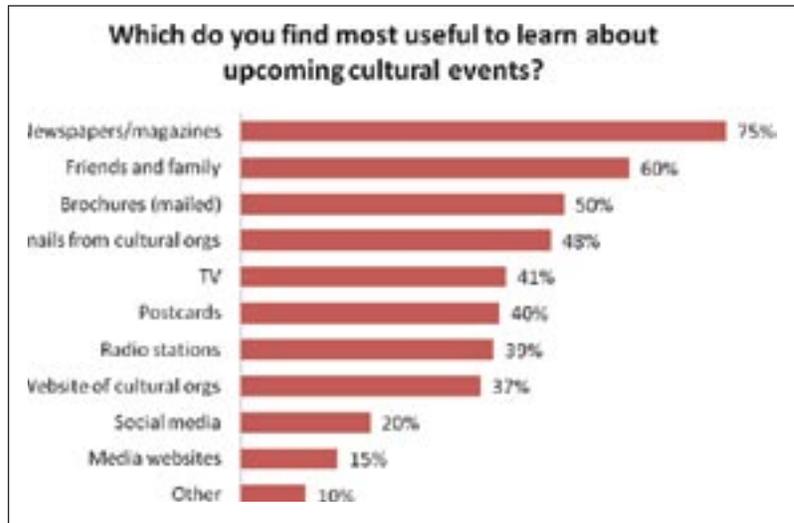
Cost: Can I afford it?

Barriers: Have they thought about me?

Schedules: Sorry I can't make it.

Awareness: How come I didn't know?

Variety: There's something for others...



First Steps

- Establish mechanisms for sharing information, addressing issues, and fostering collaboration within and without the cultural sector.
 - Create an on-going campaign so that all county residents know about their cultural resources.
 - Create a planning calendar so that organizations can post dates as soon as internal planning begins (long before the usual posting date for promotion to audiences).
 - Study the use of cultural districts in the US and then consider a City Center Cultural District from the Eau Claire Children's Theater to Barstow Street to Banbury Place to the University to Water Street to Carson Park.
- Work with the Eau Claire Community Foundation on a Giving Circle or other methods of mobilizing more philanthropic support for the cultural sector.
- Create vehicles for working with local governments not only to stabilize support for the cultural sector but also to incorporate cultural resources into solutions for community problems.



Left: Lincoln Avenue in Fall Creek, Christmastime, 1949. Courtesy of the Fall Creek Historical Society.
Right: Lincoln Street in Augusta, October 2007. Courtesy of Dennis Knuth, www.augustawi.com

Value Statements

Between 706 and 720 Eau Claire County residents answered each of the questions below in the Good Life Survey. The survey was distributed in three ways: a random mailed survey to 1,000 county residents, an online survey, and to targeted audiences under-represented in the mailed or online survey.

Total percentage of **respondents who either agree or strongly agree** with the following statements:

- **97%** “It is important to preserve and celebrate our history.” (1% didn’t know)
- **96%** “Residents of all ages should have the opportunity to participate in creative endeavors.” (2% didn’t know)
- **96%** “I want young people to have creative opportunities in their lives here.” (2% didn’t know)
- **96%** “Arts, culture and heritage are important to our quality of life.” (1% didn’t know)
- **95%** “Arts and music education in our schools is important.” (1% didn’t know)
- **92%** “Arts, culture and heritage are important to me.” (2% didn’t know)
- **86%** “A vibrant arts district in the downtown city of Eau Claire is important.” (5% didn’t know)
- **83%** “We need more affordable arts and culture for residents to enjoy.” (6% didn’t know)
- **76%** “We need more family-oriented arts, cultural and heritage programs here.” (11% didn’t know)
- **74%** “The streets and neighborhoods where I live are pretty and welcoming.” (2% didn’t know)
- **74%** “Quality of local arts, cultural, and heritage offerings is high.” (8% didn’t know)
- **73%** “Information about local arts, cultural and heritage offerings is easy for me to find.” (4% didn’t know)
- **71%** “I am very aware of the local arts, cultural and heritage offerings.” (4% didn’t know)
- **68%** “The City of Eau Claire or Eau Claire County should create a fund to support arts, culture, and heritage.” (13% didn’t know)
- **54%** “We need more accommodation for non-native English speakers at arts, cultural, and heritage offerings.” (23% didn’t know)
- **29%** “Entrances into the city or town where I live are beautifully designed.” (7% didn’t know)
- **25%** “There is a lack of accessibility for people with physical disabilities at arts, cultural, and heritage offerings.” (48% didn’t know)

