

The Plan

Major Findings

1. The City of Fond du Lac has been actively involved in the transition of Downtown Fond du Lac from predominantly a retail center in the 1960's to a mixed-use downtown in 2009.
2. The City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership collaboratively provide the organizational and financial structure needed to promote the continued redevelopment of the downtown. The creation of the Business Improvement District was a major step forward in providing a consistent revenue source for downtown projects. The technical assistance that is available from the Main Street Program provides a structure for the management and marketing of the downtown.
3. In recognition of the fact that Downtown Fond du Lac has historical architecture, the City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership collaboratively developed design guidelines for building owners to use in renovating their buildings. The guidelines include storefront design, use of materials, doorways/entries, signage, and awning and canopies.
4. A series of studies in the first half of this decade have provided both the City and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership with data, information, and recommendations that can be used in planning for public improvements and developing work programs and budgets.
5. Several common themes were identified from interviews with stakeholders in the downtown:
 - a. While the functional classification of Main Street between Merrill Avenue and Western Avenue/4th Street is a "Local Connecting Street" that provides direct access to downtown businesses versus being a "through" street, the stakeholders indicated it is still being used as a "through" street
 - b. There are opportunities for the redevelopment of the 2nd and 3rd floors of many of the buildings downtown, but there are also some significant challenges.
 - c. There is a historic element to the downtown as demonstrated by the designation of two historic districts. Some building owners have emphasized the historic architecture; others have not.
 - d. There are land uses in the downtown that are not optimal. An effort should be made to retain and attract a complementary mix of land uses.
 - e. Parking remains an issue for business owners and customers.
 - f. There are concerns about what would be the best allocation and location of the three primary land use categories of residential, services/civic, and entertainment/cultural.
 - g. The Fond du Lac River is not currently viewed as an asset, but it could become one.
 - h. The difficulty in regulating signage is the need to maintain a balance between it being visible enough so people can easily find what they are looking for (a business or parking lot), and yet not being so visible that it dominates the streetscape.
 - i. In general, there is a lack of consistency in the urban design for downtown.
 - j. The concept of developing clusters of similar uses in the downtown received support.
 - k. The new YMCA will be an asset in the downtown.
6. The boundaries of Downtown Fond du Lac are generally viewed as between Johnson Street and Merrill Avenue on the north; Marr Street on the east, between 4th and 9th streets on the south and the east branch of the Fond du Lac River on the west.
7. Incompatible land uses are not an issue in the downtown area.
8. There are several areas where the existing land use is not the highest and best use.
9. Parking has been, and will remain, an issue. Based on observation of the usage of the off-street surface parking lots and the parking ramps, there appears to be a sufficient number of spaces. The issue, however, is primarily one of perception. If people cannot park on the

street in the block where the store or office is that they are going to, they will think there is a parking problem. This issue is not unique to the City of Fond du Lac.

Recommendations

1. The City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should work collaboratively to retain and attract the mix of niches and clusters identified in the *CommunityFutures* study that will ensure the downtown remains economically viable. In some cases the mix of land uses can occur on a building by building basis. In other situations, there will be a benefit in developing a critical mass of like businesses in a particular section of the downtown.
2. The City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should work collaboratively on the continued use of the Business Improvement District as a means to financially assist in the redevelopment of the downtown.
3. The City of Fond du Lac should take steps to make it clear that the function of Main Street between Merrill Avenue and Western Avenue/4th Street is to provide customer access to the businesses in the downtown, not to facilitate the movement of through traffic.
4. It is very important that a consensus be reached on the “look and feel” of the downtown from a design perspective. The City of Fond du Lac should develop a consistent urban design theme in the downtown that addresses buildings, signage, and streetscape elements. A decision will need to be made on an architectural theme.
5. The City of Fond du Lac should review codes and ordinances relating to the construction of residential units on the upper floors of buildings in the downtown.
6. The City of Fond du Lac should continue to be a financial partner in the development and redevelopment of the downtown.
7. The City of Fond du Lac should continue to work on providing convenient public parking with signage that clearly directs downtown customers to the parking.

Goals, Objectives, Policies, and Programs

Goal

1. Promote the continued evolution of Downtown Fond du Lac as the cultural and economic hub of the city offering a healthy and unique mix of residential living, government services, and business services that includes retail, professional, dining, arts and entertainment.

Objectives

1. Work collaboratively with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, especially in developing cluster or niche areas in the downtown.
2. Work collaboratively with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership in reviewing and identifying potential changes to the boundary of the Business Improvement District.
3. Consider developing and adopting an Urban Design Standards ordinance that would include public sector improvements, such as street reconstruction and streetscape plans, and private sector improvements like façade renovations and signage.
4. Determine if changes need to be made to the ordinances and codes that would facilitate the development of upper story residential uses in retail and commercial buildings.
5. Develop a financial incentive program to encourage the redevelopment of underutilized properties and the upper floors of commercial buildings for residential and other uses.
6. Monitor the impact of the recently revised City sign ordinance to determine if changes are needed to allow improved signage in the downtown.

7. Identify within the City's Capital Improvements Program the projects needed to implement the Downtown Plan.
8. Review the City's Zoning Ordinance to determine how it can be used to encourage desired businesses and discourage businesses that are not a good fit for the downtown.
9. Consider developing a "highest and best use" approach where the City would initiate the redevelopment of a building when the City, in collaboration with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, has determined that the private sector is either unwilling or unable to acquire and renovate the property; and there is a clear public purpose for the City's involvement. Examples of potential properties could include the Fond du Lac Reporter building, the former Walgreens building, and several churches.
9. Continue to monitor the use of and signage for public parking on the streets and in off-street lots, and improve the signage for the public parking ramps in order to provide and direct people to the parking needed in the downtown.
10. Design and install signage directing people to the major destinations in the downtown.
11. The City of Fond du Lac will look to acquire land to increase the amount of public parking within one block of Main Street.

Policies

1. The City of Fond du Lac, through the Downtown Plan, is stating its intention that Downtown Fond du Lac will be a mixed-use downtown.
2. The City of Fond du Lac will provide assistance, which may include financial incentives, to projects that will result in the implementation of the recommendations and concepts of the Downtown Plan.
3. The City of Fond du Lac will not approve zoning changes for development and redevelopment projects that are not consistent with the recommendations and concepts of the Downtown Plan.

Programs

1. Continue to work with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership in the administration of the Business Improvement District.
2. The City and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should work together to establish an architectural review board. The existing guidelines that were developed by the City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should be used as a basis for new guidelines, which would become part of the City's Zoning Ordinance. The architectural review board should be officially created by the City Council as a City board. The appointments to the board would be made by the City Council and should include representation from the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership. The Department of Community Development would staff the board. Enforcement of the guidelines would be provided by the Inspections Division of the Department of Community Development.

Downtown Development Plan

Downtown Land Use Plan

See the Downtown Land Use Plan map on page 9.

The Land Use Plan for Downtown Fond du Lac shows relatively few changes in existing land uses. The areas where a change in land use is mapped are areas where the Downtown Concepts (see below) require a change in land use. The Downtown Fond du Lac Land Use Plan

has been incorporated into the Land Use Plan in the City's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Downtown Development Concepts

See the Downtown Development Concepts map on page 11.

Concept #1 – North Entrance to the Downtown

The purpose of this concept is to visually identify an entrance to Downtown Fond du Lac, reduce through traffic on Main Street in the downtown, and allow for vehicle and pedestrian traffic to have equal importance. One alternative approach to achieving this purpose is to make Main Street a one lane street in each direction with parking lanes and a landscaped median beginning mid-block between Johnson Street and Rees Street and continuing south to Merrill Avenue.

This concept continues with the construction of a roundabout at the intersection of Main Street and Merrill Avenue. The purpose of the roundabout would be to discourage the use of Main Street as a through street, particularly by truck traffic. The design of the roundabout would encourage through traffic going south on Main Street to follow Merrill Avenue west to Macy Street, which was designed as a one-way street to move traffic smoothly through the downtown. The City and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation are currently planning for the reconstruction of Main Street in this area in the next several years. This concept should be made part of the reconstruction plans.

The existing streetscape elements – lighting, sidewalk design, planters, and trash containers – would be extended into this corridor. An additional element could include an archway or other feature just south of the intersection of Johnson Street and Main Street that would draw attention to the north entrance of the downtown.

The final aspect of this concept is the redevelopment of higher value buildings between Johnson Street and Merrill Avenue to create a “lobby” to the downtown. The desired type of business is a high-traffic, free-standing service business. Parking would be prohibited between the front of the building and the sidewalk. All parking would be behind the front of the building in the side and rear areas of the lot.

Concept #2 – Mixed Use Redevelopment

The block of Main Street between Merrill Avenue and Division Street is redeveloping as a niche retail and services district. Further to the west of this block is the Fond du Lac River, the RiverWalk Trail, and the St. Paul Cathedral property. This concept takes advantage of the amenities offered on Main Street and to the west of Macy Street by recommending the redevelopment of the northwest quarter of the block bounded by Main Street on the east, Merrill Avenue on the north, Macy Street on the west, and Division Street on the south. This concept could involve increasing the utilization of existing buildings or the replacement of the existing buildings with new buildings. Potential uses could include commercial, residential, and green space.

The City of Fond du Lac would not initiate this project; rather, it would be undertaken in response to the current owners indicating an interest in selling and/or a developer proposing a new development in the downtown.

Concept #3 – Arts, Education, and Entertainment District

The Ramada Hotel and Conference Center, plus The Windhover Center for the Arts, plus The Retlaw Theater and Entertainment Complex, plus the City of Fond du Lac Public Library equals an Arts, Education, and Entertainment District. While in close proximity to each other, they are not connected. This concept recommends that a physical connection be made to increase the ability of pedestrians who patronize these facilities to travel from one to the other through interior or element protected walkways.

The portion of the block at the southwest corner of Division and Portland Streets could be redeveloped to provide additional conference and meeting space for the Ramada and a public corridor between the Ramada and the Retlaw Theater. The north half of the block bounded by Division, Portland, Sheboygan, and Marr could be redeveloped to create space for the expansion of the Windhover Center and other businesses or organizations that would benefit from being located in this district. Consideration should also be given to providing additional parking.

Concept #4 – Mixed Use Redevelopment

The northwest corner of Main Street and Forest Avenue is currently underutilized as a parking lot. This site has potential for redevelopment with the construction of a mixed-use building consisting of underground parking, first floor commercial, second and/or third floor office and apartments or condominiums on the floors above the office. In addition to the underground parking, the design of the building should consider indoor access to the Macy Street Parking Ramp.

The City of Fond du Lac would not initiate this project; rather, it would be undertaken in response to the property owners indicating an interest in selling and/or a developer proposing a new development in the downtown. Of particular importance is a need to preserve existing parking capacity and to maintain permanent dedicated parking.

Concept #5 – Residential Redevelopment

The land uses in this area are a wholesale bakery and a bar. With Hamilton Park to the north, the YMCA to the south, and the retail, services, and entertainment opportunities just a few blocks away in the downtown, the City should consider supporting proposals from the private sector in redeveloping this area for high-density residential land uses.

Concept #6 – Community Services Area

The City/County Government Center, the Post Office and the newly expanded and remodeled YMCA provide a community services anchor in the downtown. These services will help attract additional residential and commercial development and redevelopment.

Concept #7 – South Entrance to the Downtown

This concept calls for the construction of a roundabout at the intersection of Main Street and Western Avenue/4th Street. It would be considered for implementation when a decision is made to reconstruct the intersection. The purpose of the roundabout would be to discourage the use of Main Street as a through street, particularly by truck traffic. The design of the roundabout would encourage through traffic going north on Main Street to follow 4th Street, then east to Marr Street, which was designed as a one-way street to move traffic smoothly through the downtown.

As with the north entrance to the downtown, the purpose of this concept is to visually identify an entrance to Downtown Fond du Lac, reduce through traffic on Main Street in the downtown, and allow for vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic to have equal importance.

Concept #8 – Mixed Use Redevelopment

This area is currently home to the St. Joseph Church and School. The church building is no longer being used and is actively being marketed for sale or redevelopment. The entire property is suited for redevelopment. Multi-family housing would be one option with certain commercial uses being suitable for the property on which the church building is situated.

This area is part of Tax Increment District Number Twelve, which also includes the St. Peter's church and school redevelopment immediately to the west. It may be possible for the City of Fond du Lac to offer financial assistance to a developer wishing to redevelop the St. Joseph's church and school in the same way that the City assisted with St. Peter's. That assistance, however, would be undertaken in response to the current owners selling and a developer proposing a new development or developments.

Concept #9 – Traffic and Parking Improvements

This concept involves turning Sheboygan and 3rd Streets into one-way streets going east from Main Street to Marr Street. These improvements will help to add diagonal on-street parking in two areas where additional parking is needed. The change to 3rd Street will not occur until the transportation needs and patterns of businesses located in this area change to the point where a one-way pattern would not have a negative impact.

Concept #10 – RiverWalk Trail

This concept addresses the perception that the Fond du Lac River is not currently an asset to the downtown, but it could become one. Currently the RiverWalk Trail is used primarily as a walking and exercise trail for employees in the downtown. The RiverWalk Trail is also part of the City's network of walking and biking trails. It connects the downtown to Lakeside Park via the Brooke Street Trail. From Lakeside Park, users can go east on the Peebles Trail to the Prairie Trail that runs along USH 151. It also connects the Downtown via the Brooke Street Trail to the Wild Goose Trail in the southwestern portion of the city. The RiverWalk trail also functions as a safer north-south alternative route to Main Street, Macy Street, or Marr Street.

The City will be building two stormwater management ponds along the RiverWalk Trail. The north pond will be west of Macy Street near the Marine Credit Union. The south pond will be west of Oak Street south of Western Avenue. The plans for these ponds should include a loop around them to provide a natural and scenic turnaround area for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The RiverWalk Trail can be enhanced aesthetically and functionally with additional lighting, landscaping, bicycle racks, and seating areas. In doing so, the trail will also function as a lineal park in the Downtown. Signage should be added that directs trail uses to the major destinations in the Downtown like the YMCA, the City-County Government Center, the City of Fond du Lac Public Library, the Windhover Center for the Arts, and the Ramada Hotel and Conference Center.

Implementation Strategy

There are four aspects to the implementation strategy for the Downtown Development Plan.

Timing

This plan has not set specific timelines for the implementation of the concepts. Each concept will be driven by different factors. Concept #1 – North Entrance to Downtown, for example, will be driven by the schedule established for the reconstruction of Main Street from Johnson Street

to Merrill Avenue. With respect to Concept #3 – Arts, Education, and Entertainment District, activity has already begun because of the availability of funding to support further study of the concept, including physical design and the financing of physical improvements.

The implementation of development/redevelopment concepts will be based on the private sector taking the lead and, if needed, asking the City and/or the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership to become involved. When the involvement of the City is requested, the City Council will need to review the details for that specific concept, and make a decision on the City's level of involvement.

Amendments

The inclusion of the ten concepts does not mean these are the only concepts that can be part of the ongoing development and redevelopment of the downtown. Additional concepts may be brought forward. Some of the concepts contained in this plan may, at some point in the future, be removed.

The Department of Community Development will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Plan, and for recommending or facilitating amendments to the Plan from time to time as appropriate. Such amendments could be initiated with input from the City Council, staff, or the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership.

Integration

The Department of Community Development should be responsible for working with the other City Departments in integrating the Plan into the City's activities. Likewise, the Board of Directors of the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should be responsible for ensuring that the Plan's recommendations, goals, objectives, policies, and programs are integrated into the work programs for the Partnership's committees.

Communication

There needs to be strong communication between the City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership. Staff from the Department of Community Development should continue to be involved with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership as an ex-officio representative on the Board of Directors and as a committee member.

The Department of Community Development, along with representatives from the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, should report on progress being made in the Downtown as part of the City's budget development process.

The Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership should report at the Partnership's Annual Meeting on progress being made in the Downtown.

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Background Information

Introduction

Existing Situation

The City of Fond du Lac adopted the City's 2010-2030 Comprehensive Plan on October 14, 2009. In designing the planning process for the update of the comprehensive plan, the decision was made to prepare a separate Downtown Development Plan. The Downtown Development Plan complements the City's Comprehensive Plan and provides guidance to the City of Fond du Lac and the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership as they work collaboratively to make Downtown Fond du Lac a vibrant and thriving downtown.

Objectives of the Planning Process

The objectives for the Downtown Development Plan are:

- To develop a land use plan for the downtown.
- To identify specific actions the City of Fond du Lac should take in initiating and supporting development and redevelopment in the downtown.
- To provide the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership with a plan that the organization can refer to in developing its work program and marketing efforts.

Prior Plans and Studies

In order to gain an understanding of the downtown, a review was conducted of past and current downtown development planning efforts, keeping in mind the following:

- Have the goals and objectives been realized? Are they still relevant?
- Have there been changes in the framework of the downtown?
- Have the strategies been realized? Are they still relevant?
- Why do people want to be in the Downtown?
- A listing of the actions that have successfully been implemented.

Below are summaries of past and current efforts.

City of Fond du Lac 1995 Comprehensive Plan

The City's 1995 Comprehensive Plan includes a review of the steps taken by the City in the 1980's to improve the downtown, a list of needed improvements, and the policies that have guided the City's involvement in public and private investment in the downtown.

The improvements and policies focused on the following areas:

- The change in downtown from a primarily retail base to a mixed-use downtown.
- The need for physical improvements, external and internal, to the buildings in the downtown.
- The need for an organization through which downtown business owners can work together to improve the downtown.

The Land Use Plan for the downtown refers to the area as the Central Business District, which does not distinguish between the different land uses that are in the downtown.

Here are some of the actions the City has taken to implement the recommendations from the 1995 Comprehensive Plan:

- ❑ The City has worked with the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, the Fond du Lac Area Association of Commerce, and the Fond du Lac County Economic Development Corporation in recruiting new businesses to the downtown.
- ❑ The City has encouraged new development and redevelopment of existing properties. Some of the projects are:
 - The former Kohl's site adjacent to Hamilton Park.
 - The clearance and cleanup of the Quick-Freeze property at Oak Street south of Western Avenue.
 - The adaptive re-use of the St. Peter's Church and School site at the northwest corner of Marr and 2nd Streets for senior housing.
 - The redevelopment of the northwest corner of Johnson and Main Street.
 - The clearance and cleanup of the Rueping property on the north side of the east branch of the Fond du Lac River between Doty and Macy Streets.
 - The construction of the Marine Credit Union facility on the north half of the Rueping property.
 - The construction of the Hometown Bank building on Sheboygan Street that involved renovating a portion of the former Fond du Lac Clinic.
 - The new Fox Valley Savings and Loan building on 1st Street.
 - The addition to the City of Fond du Lac Public Library.
 - The renovation of the Masonic Temple on the northwest corner of Marr and Sheboygan streets as the Windhover Center for the Arts and the Children's Museum of Fond du Lac.
- ❑ The City continually evaluates and improves public parking lots and areas in the downtown.
- ❑ The City worked with the Central Business Council and the Association of Commerce in creating a Business Improvement District (BID).
- ❑ The City provided encouragement and technical assistance for the restoration of older building facades through the Design Guidelines Façade Renovation Program.
- ❑ The City provided planning, design, and technical assistance to the Central Business Council and its successor, the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership.
 - Community Development staff members serve on the Board of Directors for the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership and on several of its committees.
 - In addition, the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership has technical assistance available from the Main Street Program.
- ❑ The RiverWalk Trail along the east branch of the Fond du Lac River has been expanded south to Brush Street and north to Brooke Street.
- ❑ The City has supported high density housing, most recently the senior living project on the St. Peter's Church site.

Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership

The promotion of the downtown in the 1990's was led by the Central Business Council, which worked in partnership with the Fond du Lac Area Association of Commerce. In 1999, the City of Fond du Lac, with the support of the Central Business Council and the Association of Commerce, created a Business Improvement District (BID). A nine-member Board of Directors was formed to manage the BID (see the Downtown Fond du Lac Land Use Plan map for the boundary of the BID). For promotional purposes, the Board took on the name of the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership. For management purposes, the Board entered into a contract with the Association of Commerce. The Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership created an organizational chart based on the Four Point Approach of the Main Street Program.

Since its formation, the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership has undertaken studies and surveys to assist it in its efforts to market downtown Fond du Lac. Below are summaries of the studies.

CommunityFutures Economic/Market Analysis

In 2001 *CommunityFutures* completed an extensive study that included an analysis of the downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; market and business surveys; an inventory of the downtown's market characteristics; and an analysis of retail sales and niches.

The study can be found at <http://www.downtownfdl.com/dfp/businessresources.html>

Existing Niches

- Service Businesses
- Government
- Bridal/Wedding
- Music/Hobby/Sporting Goods
- Evening Entertainment

Growth Niches

- Restaurants
- Apparel and Accessories
- Hearth and Home
- Family-Oriented Activities
- Bridal/Wedding
- Entertainment
- Miscellaneous Retail

The study concluded with findings and recommendations and an action plan for the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership.

While most of the findings and recommendations are targeted toward the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership, there are two areas – public infrastructure and parking/transit/circulation – that are primarily the responsibility of the City of Fond du Lac. The former includes streetscape and pedestrian and bicycle connections. The latter is dominated by suggestions for improved parking.

The *CommunityFutures* study recommended the following actions for the City of Fond du Lac: Several of these actions have already been implemented.

Short Term (less than one year)

- Review the regulatory environment
- Determine phasing and area for streetscape improvements
- Work on relocating the bus staging/transfer area off of Main Street

Medium Term (one to two years)

- Implement parking, transit, and circulation improvements
- Implement additional streetscape improvements

Long Term (two years or more)

- Work to develop better linkages between downtown and the riverfront

Fond du Lac Business Owner Survey

In 2005 a survey was conducted of the downtown business owners with the objective of learning about the needs and opportunities in the downtown and developing data on the businesses, the workforce and the market.

The survey can be found at www.downtownfdl.com/dfp/businessresources.html

According to the business owners who responded to the survey, the primary challenges were insufficient parking, both in-town and out-of-town competition, expensive employee wages or benefits, and vandalism. Parking and assistance with building improvements are two areas where the City of Fond du Lac's role could be expanded.

Wisconsin Main Street – Resource Team Visit

Because the City of Fond du Lac received designation as a Main Street Community, a team of downtown development professionals visited Fond du Lac in 2005. Their report was structured on the Four Point Approach advocated by the Main Street Program:

- Organization
- Economic Restructuring
- Promotion
- Design

Recommendations for Downtown Fond du Lac included the following:

- Providing financial incentives and assistance
- Parking inventory
- Parking management plan
- Parking ramp and lot signage
- Parking security
- Design improvements of public spaces

In addition, the report also includes a section on “*Responsible Hospitality*”, which the report defines as, “...a term used by leaders in the hotel, restaurant, tavern, entertainment, and club industries to describe the optimum management strategy for the 24/7 downtown.” Downtown Fond du Lac has had and continues to have problems with the behavior of some of the people who choose to come to downtown Fond du Lac for entertainment. This section outlines what can be done to decrease the number of negative incidents and increase the safety and attractiveness of the downtown in the evening and at night.

Clusters – Existing and Potential

Identifying clusters of existing and potential land uses in the downtown serves two purposes:

- ❑ The first is to confirm that the downtown has, and will continue to have, the mix of land uses that will attract the residents of the City of Fond du Lac and visitors to the downtown.
- ❑ The second is to confirm there is the critical mass in market niches that will result in additional community and economic development growth in the downtown.

Existing Niches

- ❑ The *CommunityFutures* study of Downtown Fond du Lac included an analysis of the downtown's existing niches.
- ❑ A business niche in the downtown with a critical mass is service businesses (financial, legal, information/computer, and professional). Government has a strong presence in the downtown with both city and county offices.
- ❑ The study noted there is a "bridal/wedding" niche that consists of wedding and formal wear, floral, photography, invitations, catering, reception facilities, and jewelers. Other retail niches include a music/hobby/sporting goods niche and a quilting and fabric arts niche.
- ❑ While evening entertainment has meant bars and taverns in the past, the study noted that fine arts and cultural events are gaining in presence.

Potential Niches

- ❑ The *CommunityFutures* study also identified niches that can be expanded or created. The study noted that the niches with the most potential are restaurants, apparel, and home furnishings. Here is the complete list of niches from the study.

Restaurants

Eating and drinking places are an enormous opportunity for downtown Fond du Lac, and would act as a destination and anchor for the downtown area. A desirable mix should include both chains and independents, as these two types complement each other and provide both options and the security of known brands for customers.

Apparel and Accessories

This niche should capture apparel dollars that are leaving the community. The objective is to target niches that are not directly competitive with typical mall retailers and discounters.

Hearth and Home

This niche is focused on capturing home furnishings dollars. There are both "high end" and "low end" niche opportunities presented by new upscale housing and the college market. The focus should be on "soft" goods.

Family-Oriented Activities

This niche includes both goods and services. The objective is to provide establishments that capitalize on multigenerational activities.

Bridal/Wedding Goods and Services

A critical mass of these businesses exists and should be marketed.

Entertainment

Entertainment opportunities can be both occasional and recurring in nature. For example, an entertainment venue could schedule different types of music on different nights. A restaurant could add live entertainment in the evening. A bookstore could schedule readings and “meet the author” events throughout the week. All of these are creative ways to diversify entertainment and add evening activities in the downtown.

Miscellaneous Retail

These store types complement the identified niches. They could also be captured by existing businesses to expand and diversify.

Discussion of Clusters and Niches

- ❑ One of the themes that came out of the interviews with the downtown stakeholders was what the primary perception should be of the downtown. Is it retail? Is it service businesses? Or is it entertainment?
 - The answer, of course, is yes. Downtown Fond du Lac should be the location of all three and others as can be seen from the niches confirmed and identified by the *CommunityFutures* study.
- ❑ In fact, the concept of niches helps clarify how the mixed uses can co-exist in the downtown.
 - A horizontal or street level view of the downtown confirms there are clusters of like uses along with areas of mixed uses.
 - A vertical view of the downtown has retail, services, and entertainment in the first and second floors of the buildings and residential uses on the second, third and higher floors.
- ❑ The concept of clusters and the mixed-use perception of Downtown Fond du Lac will help make the whole larger than the sum of the parts. In Downtown Fond du Lac, one plus one plus one does not equal three; it equals four or maybe even five or six.

Impact on Land Use

- ❑ While the identification of clusters and niches is important in supporting and attracting businesses that provide an economic benefit to the community, it is not critical from a land use perspective that the downtown be segregated by any specific cluster or niche.
- ❑ The desired mixed-use nature of the downtown’s land use pattern will happen naturally as buildings become available for sale or rent and business owners make decisions on where would be the best location for their businesses based on what other businesses are in the block or down the street.
- ❑ The mixed-use nature, however, does not mean that an area in the downtown may be known for a specific cluster or niche.
 - An example is the area of the downtown where the Ramada Hotel and Conference Center, the Windhover Center for the Arts, the Retlaw Theater and Entertainment Complex, and the City of Fond du Lac Public Library are located.
 - Businesses that would appeal to the customers and users of these facilities should be located in this area.

Public Participation

Visioning Workshops

Two visioning workshops were held on March 10 and 11, 2008 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Downtown Fond du Lac. The participants were asked what they would like to keep, change or add in Downtown Fond du Lac. They then took the answers to the questions and drafted vision sentences, which were combined into one vision. That vision is:

“Downtown Fond du Lac will be a local and regional destination that will serve as the cultural and economic hub of the city and surrounding areas. The financially successful downtown will present a clean, safe and friendly environment that is easily accessible and attractive to residents, visitors, business travelers, and convention goers.

Downtown Fond du Lac will have an atmosphere that is welcoming, comfortable and enjoyable through its attractive blend of historic preservation and restoration with new development. It will offer a healthy and unique mix of residential living and businesses that includes retail, professional, services, dining, arts and entertainment. The downtown’s streetscape will be modern and well cared for, while at the same time paying homage to its heritage.

A successful public-private partnership featuring economic districts and job-creation incentives will create wealth for residents and the community. The public will have great awareness of all that downtown has to offer and the community will support efforts to maintain a high quality of life for residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Downtown is a great place to come together.”

Stakeholder Interviews

In May 2008, a combination of in-person and phone interviews was conducted with fifteen people that are stakeholders in downtown Fond du Lac.

Key Issues and Opportunities

After analyzing the responses from the stakeholder interviews, several key issues and opportunities were identified.

- ❑ The primary purpose of Main Street in the downtown.
 - Provide a north/south route from the north side of Fond du Lac to the south side **OR**
 - Provide access to the businesses located along Main Street in the downtown?
- ❑ Vacant/underutilized upper story space
 - There are opportunities for the redevelopment of the 2nd and 3rd floors of many of the buildings downtown, but there are also some significant challenges.
- ❑ Residential Development
 - While the redevelopment of upper floors is generally associated with residential, there are opportunities for the development of residential only buildings.

- ❑ Historic or not historic?
 - The City, in successfully nominating two districts for the National Register of Historic Places, has supported the historic element in the downtown. Some building owners have emphasized the historic architecture; others have not.
- ❑ Retail versus Service/Civic versus Entertainment/Cultural.
 - All three of these three primary land use categories are present in the downtown today, but there are concerns about what would be the best allocation and location of them.
 - There are several land uses in the downtown that do not belong to any of these land use categories.
- ❑ Mixed-Use Nature of the Downtown
 - While Downtown Fond du Lac is characterized by mixed-uses, there are land uses that are not optimal. An effort should be made to retain and attract a complementary mix of land uses.
- ❑ Parking
 - Parking remains an issue in the eyes of business owners and customers. The availability of, and signage for, parking will continue to be an issue that must be addressed.
- ❑ The Fond du Lac River
 - It currently is not viewed as an asset but it could become one.
- ❑ Public and private signage.
 - The difficulty in regulating signage is the need to maintain a balance between it being visible enough so people can easily find what they are looking for (a business or parking lot), and yet not being so visible that it dominates the streetscape.
- ❑ Urban design and downtown aesthetics.
 - In general, there is a lack of consistency in the urban design for downtown.
- ❑ Cluster development.
 - The concept of developing clusters of similar uses in the downtown received support.
- ❑ New developments.
 - The new YMCA will have a positive impact on the downtown.
- ❑ The stakeholders were asked to define the boundaries of Downtown Fond du Lac.
 - Most of them agreed that Marr Street is the eastern boundary of downtown with a few stating it is Portland Street.
 - Responses for the southern boundary were evenly divided between 9th Street and Western Avenue/4th Street with a few for 6th Street.
 - The western boundary showed the most variation ranging from 9th and Military to Western and Military to the east branch of the Fond du Lac River to Macy Street.
 - Johnson Street was viewed as the northern boundary by a majority of the stakeholders followed closely by Merrill Avenue.