

Pine Street Corridor: Downtown Mainstreet Economic Vitality Committee

Composed by Sam Bachmeier, Chair, 5/15/23

Who:

Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. is a non-profit membership-driven organization that seeks to oversee, coordinate, and facilitate the revitalization of La Crosse's central business district.

The Economic Vitality subcommittee (DMI EVC) is a group made of volunteer private and public industry representatives with a desire to see downtown business and property owners thrive.

Mission: The Downtown Mainstreet Economic Vitality Committee will work to strengthen the existing economic assets of Downtown La Crosse while diversifying its economic base.

What:

The Pine Street Corridor is first addressed in the Imagine 2040 plan on page 62, and subsequently addressed throughout the plan. The Corridor is an east-west pedestrian corridor that starts at UW-La Crosse and connects with the Downtown Business District and ultimately Riverside Park.

The public improvements would include improved pedestrian transportation infrastructure (improved sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting, etc.). It would also include street improvements to encourage low motorized traffic volumes and speeds, designated and designed to give bicycle and pedestrian travel priority. Improvements would include signs, pavement markings, green infrastructure, and speed and volume management measures.



Yellow line = area that needs improvements. Green lines = Private properties (Western TC and La Crosse County Courthouse)

When:

The DMI EVC is actively pursuing this project. A survey among UW-La Crosse and Western Technical College students has been completed, with roughly 1,800 responses. Results are addressed in the "Why" section of this summary.

The City of La Crosse Planning Department has submitted a \$75,000 City of La Crosse Capital Improvement Projects request to fund an engineering study. The project will be on-going.

Why:

Economic Impact:

- Every year roughly 14,000 students attend UW-La Crosse and Western Technical College. Those students bring with them a need to support their lifestyles. They need to grocery shop, buy from retail shops, spend money on experiences, visit bars and restaurants, watch live music, etc. They also host visitors (relatives and friends) who bring an added dollar value to the area. The more those students can be encouraged to spend their time and dollars in the Downtown business district the better off our downtown will be.
- These 14,000 students also need places to live. Those students will be more inclined to live Downtown if access to the universities is seamless and suited for alternative modes of transportation (biking, walking, etc.).
- Workforce retention/recruitment: Many of our downtown businesses rely on students and young professionals to fulfil their workforce needs. Exposing students to the opportunities for work and recreation in the Downtown area stands a chance to positively impact our area's ability to recruit workers and retain them post-graduation.

Student Survey: At the beginning of the 2nd semester of the 2022/2023 school year, the DMI EVC worked with our partners at UW-La Crosse and Western Technical College to survey students about their experience in traveling downtown. Roughly 1,800 students participated in the survey, with 95% of responses from UW-L students and 5% from Western Technical College students. Below are a few of the key results:

1. Demographics:
 - a. First Year Students: 30%
 - b. Second Year: 24%
 - c. Third Year: 21%
 - d. Fourth Year: 18%
 - e. Fifth Year: 3%
 - f. Graduate: 4%
2. How often are they visiting downtown?:
 - a. Twice or more per week: 25%
 - b. Once per week: 33%
 - c. Once or twice per month: 30%
 - d. Rarely: 11%
 - e. Never: 0.51%
3. How do they get downtown?:
 - a. Walk: 39%
 - b. Bike: 1%
 - c. Drive: 47%
 - d. Bus: 10%
 - e. Other (ex: rollerblade): 2%
4. How easy is traveling downtown?:
 - a. Very convenient: 12%
 - b. Somewhat convenient: 59%
 - c. Not very convenient: 27%
 - d. Very difficult: 2%
5. What are they going downtown for?:
 - a. Study: 13%
 - b. Socialize: 29%
 - c. Shop: 17%
 - d. Eat: 30%
 - e. Grocery Shop: 4%
 - f. Exercise: 3%
 - g. Other: 5%
6. Do they work downtown?:
 - a. Yes: 9%
 - b. No: 91%
7. When do they go downtown?:
 - a. Morning: 8%
 - b. Day: 28%
 - c. Evening: 35%
 - d. Night: 29%

8. Do they feel safe while traveling downtown?:
 - a. Completely safe: 15%
 - b. Somewhat safe: 65%
 - c. Somewhat unsafe: 18%
 - d. Completely unsafe: 2%
9. They would go downtown more if:
 - a. It was easier: 41%
 - b. It was safe: 26%
 - c. It had more to offer: 25%
 - d. It provided more accessibility features: 5%
 - e. Other: 4%
 - i. Other responses:
 1. Safe/secure places to park bikes
 2. **More parking (over 200 comments)**
 3. Easier walk, better sidewalks (holes and uneven pavers)
 4. Ridesharing
 5. **Bike/skateboard/rollerblading lanes – students feel unsafe, might get hit by a car (over 150 comments)**
 6. Homelessness is a deterrent

Two items stood out:

- 1.) Need for more parking downtown – As addressed a number of times in the Imagine 2040, there is an over-abundance of public parking in downtown La Crosse. More parking is not the investment that needs to be made. Instead, people, particularly students who live so close to the Downtown area, should be encouraged to utilize alternative transportation methods (walking, biking, rollerblading, public bus system, etc.). We cannot encourage students to do this unless they are provided with safe routes that are easily identified and provide quality surfaces (no uneven sidewalks, confusing intersections, poorly-lit streets and intersections, etc.) This becomes especially important in the wintertime. These paths need to be plowed and salted at all times.
- 2.) Students are concerned about battling traffic as they use alternative transportation to travel downtown. Biking, skateboarding, rollerblading, etc., can be very uncomfortable when there is not a designated lane where you can be reasonably sure you are not going to be hit by a car. Intersections also pose challenges to non-motorized transportation. Designing the Pine Street to include designated bike lanes and motorized vehicle volume and speed control elements is key to encouraging students to travel downtown via alternative transportation methods.

Next Steps:

- 1.) Complete and engineering study and develop plans and phases for capital improvements.
- 2.) Engage private industry members develop supporting infrastructure (Xcel Energy for lighting, contractors for benches, etc.)