

# PEARL STREET

A PROSPECTIVE  
PAST + PRESENT + FUTURE



August 2020

Hello,

When it was announced that the La Crosse Center was planning a major expansion, I started working on ideas for what we could do as property owners and merchants to compliment the project. I started by standing at the front door of the Center and tried to imagine a first impression. The ideas presented here are a combination of conversations with neighbors, city officials and research. I offer this prospective proposal to you during the most difficult business and social climate we have ever had... but it will end. When it does, we should move forward with confidence and a plan to make Pearl St. revitalized in a way that draws La Crosse Center guests into our street and our downtown.

I want to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I feel we all share the same goal: a more beautiful Pearl Street and a greater downtown La Crosse.

Tj Peterslie  
Pearl Street Advocate  
Since 1972



# HISTORIC PEARL STREET

## OBJECTIVE

*Our objective is to create a transformed vision and identity for Pearl Street, while maintaining the historic integrity of the Street. This is a fiscally conservative, high impact plan for making important improvements to Historic Downtown's oldest commercial Street. This can be accomplished in conjunction with the opening of the La Crosse Center expansion with minimal funds and maximum effect. Preserving the historic integrity of Pearl Street is imperative to recreating the atmosphere of an era that marked our rich, river-town history.*

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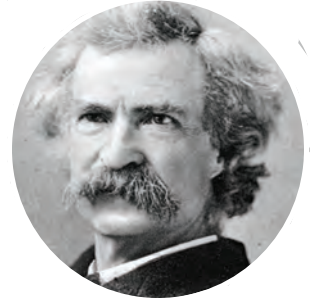
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# THE HISTORY

*"La Crosse. Here is a town...with electric lighted streets, and blocks of buildings, which are stately enough and also architecturally fine enough to command respect in any city. It is a choice town."*

*-Mark Twain*



*The future of Pearl Street should be planned with a respect for the past and a regard for La Crosse's architecturally vital and rich river town history.*



## PEARL STREET

*In the late 1800's, during the turn of the century, La Crosse was the busiest port on the Mississippi River*

*Pearl Street is La Crosse's oldest, most historically preserved street in the Downtown.*



PEARL ST BETWEEN 3RD AND 4TH ST

- *In December 1916, the Union Train Depot was proposed and later built on the corner of Second and Pearl Streets, where the Holiday Inn is located today*
- *From the beginning, this cobblestone street stretched three blocks long and served as a vital connection from the Mississippi River levee's early steamboat commerce to central downtown with both pedestrian and street traffic.*



# TRANSFORMATION

*Pearl Street was a focal point of transportation from the river to the heart of downtown. It has survived depressions, recessions, and transformations-- and continues to evolve. Once regarded as an unsavory part of downtown, today it is a destination location.*



*As downtown La Crosse's oldest and shortest street, we need to preserve its historic identity. Contemporary design elements would be out of character for Pearl Street, putting the historic integrity and charm of the street at stake. We need to preserve that identity and further build upon it, not compromise it.*

## Transformation Topics:

### What complements the historic appearance?

- Building restoration & facades
- Angled parking
- Arch concept
- Notable river connection

### What complements the street's appearance?

(without detracting from the historic integrity):

- Flower baskets and greenery (see: planters)
- Wayfinding signs
- Banners on light poles
- String lighting

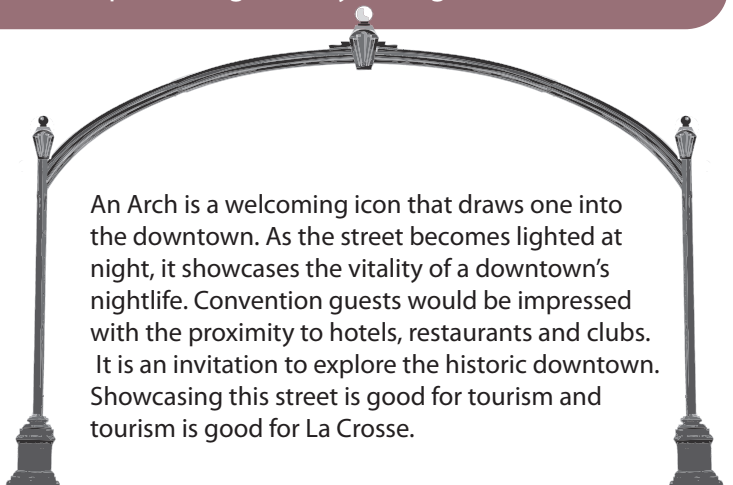


PEARL STREET WEST: 200 BLOCK OF PEARL STREET  
2020

# THE ARCH

The first impression one has when they walk out the front door of the La Crosse Center is of utmost importance. It will be the deciding difference between going to their vehicles to return home or to their hotel, or be drawn into the downtown for the shopping, exploring, great food and nightlife this beautiful city has to offer.

Look at the photo below of the street as it is on the left: Two distinct signs in red and white that say 'DO NOT ENTER'. On the photo below, with lit arches leading into our downtown, a guest is invited to explore. On the following pages are examples of other cities that have featured their historic districts with arches and lighting, and ultimately success. This concept was approved and put in the capital budget two years ago. Let's act now.



An Arch is a welcoming icon that draws one into the downtown. As the street becomes lighted at night, it showcases the vitality of a downtown's nightlife. Convention guests would be impressed with the proximity to hotels, restaurants and clubs. It is an invitation to explore the historic downtown. Showcasing this street is good for tourism and tourism is good for La Crosse.

Examples of potential arch designs  
Mike Martino & TJ Peterslie



*Invitation into Historic Downtown La Crosse  
view from the La Crosse Center.*

Other key elements are a return to angled parking on Pearl Street to achieve a more historic feel to the neighborhood. Also, to extend the curbs at the end of the street to discourage vehicles from entering Pearl Street the wrong way—a daily occurrence for years. Planters or wayfair finding kiosks could be placed on those spaces. This is a low cost solution to a problem and a design element towards reinventing Pearl Street.



## MORE ARCH EXAMPLES



In all of the examples shown from other cities, the area within this highlighted district becomes iconic to their city's downtown. The lighting of these arches draws people into downtowns that offer a vital and energized night-life .

We can enhance the experience of visitors coming to La Crosse for events and conventions by highlighting & showcasing Pearl Street as the start of their exploration, dining, and shopping.

Because Pearl Street is our oldest and most preserved two city blocks, and given it's physical relationship to the entrance of the La Crosse Center and Riverside Park, it becomes a natural gateway to our historic downtown.



### Milwaukee's Historic 3rd Ward

*An article in The Journal described how merchants experienced vitality after the City loosened regulations on outdoor cafe seating. The arch defines an area as special and worth exploring.*

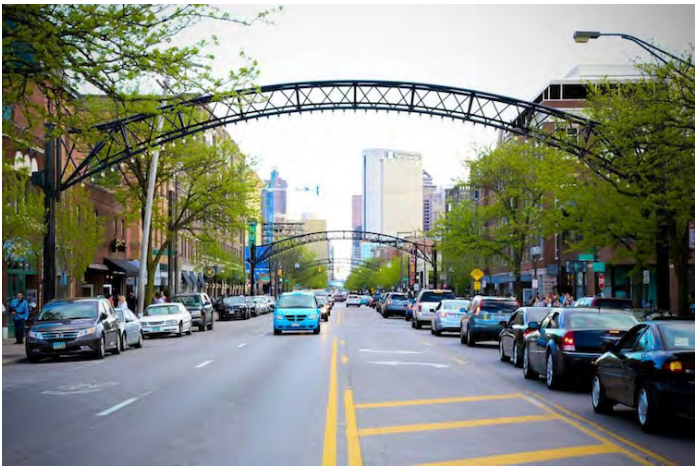




# GATEWAY ARCHES IN OTHER US CITIES

COLUMBUS, OHIO + RENO NEVADA  
GOLDEN COLORADO + FLINT MICHIGAN

## MORE ARCH EXAMPLES





# THE STREET

The city's 2015 transportation plan identified the need to slow traffic, make the street pedestrian friendly & establish shared spaces. We feel the best way to accomplish this immediately with minimal expense is by establishing a new parking design for the street; a return to a combination of parallel and angled parking.



*Galena, Illinois & Wabasha, MN are two of the many historic towns that maintain angled parking without difficulties.*

## ***BENIFITS of ANGLED PARKING***

- *It slows down street traffic*
- *It is easier for drivers to park in angled parking*
- *It is safer to exit a vehicle (driver's side)*
- *It has a historic appearance*
- *The ability to add more parking spaces*
- *It can be converted with minimal expense--can set up as a pilot test*

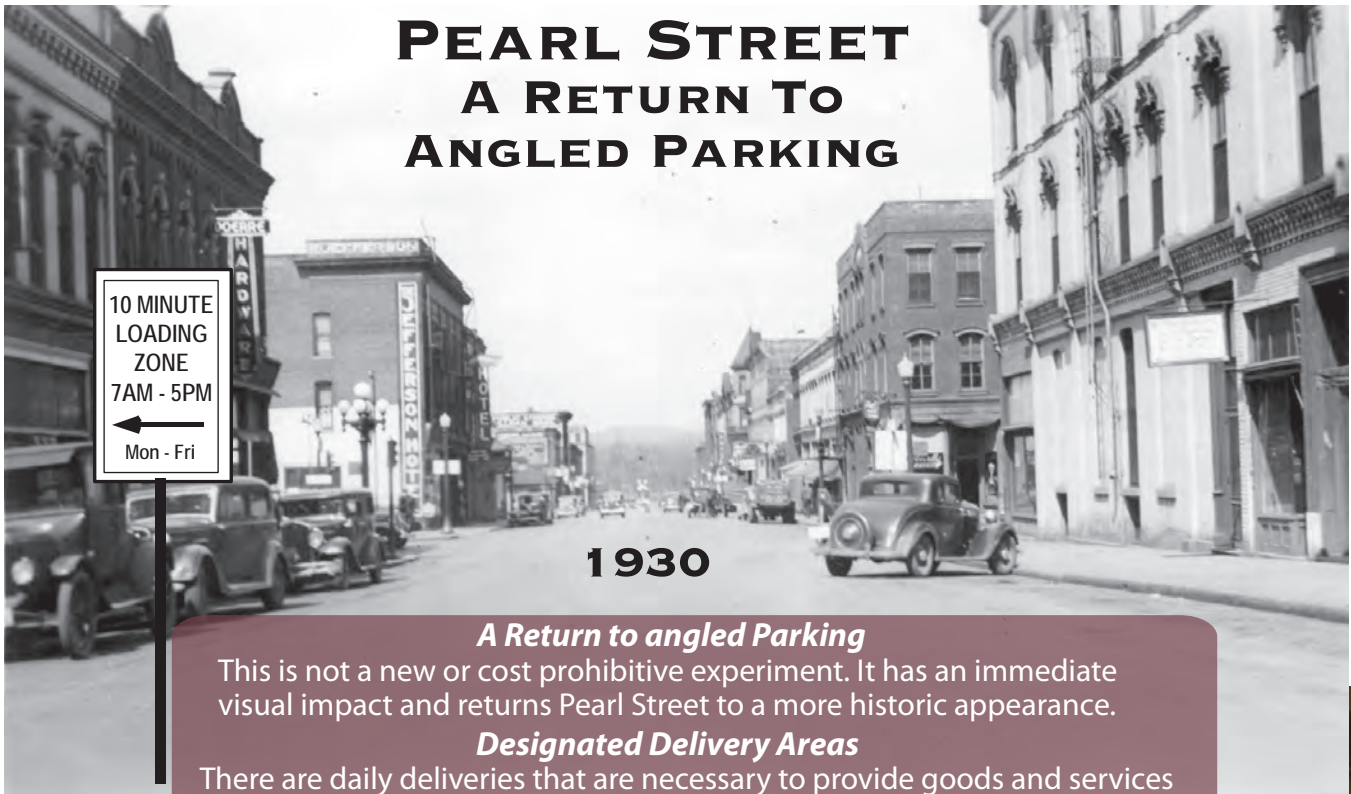
*We can preserve the historic integrity of Pearl Street without the city incurring the expense of an extensive capital improvement project, while further restoring the street back to it's historical state.*



***Pearl Street: 1930's  
Angled and parallel parking as proposed***

# THE STREET + ANGLED PARKING

## PEARL STREET A RETURN TO ANGLED PARKING



### *A Return to angled Parking*

This is not a new or cost prohibitive experiment. It has an immediate visual impact and returns Pearl Street to a more historic appearance.

### *Designated Delivery Areas*

There are daily deliveries that are necessary to provide goods and services to businesses. Most deliveries are done during the time frames on the proposed signage. The parking then becomes available to patrons. Key delivery areas would be designated on the south side of each block.



### WEEKLY DELIVERY AREA ZONES

*Every day there is a challenge to get deliveries on Pearl and keep the street open for traffic flow and parking.*

*This parking solution is effective in other historic downtowns with angled parking across from parallel.*

*These street zones are established so large trucks don't damage buildings by attempting to turn and park in alleys.*



**PROPOSED ANGLED PARKING DIAGRAM**

- 200 block:  
20 spaces = 21 spaces including 3 parklets  
which convert back to 4 spaces  
in off season, or 25: **+5 spaces**
- 300 block:  
24 spaces = 25 spaces including 2 parklets  
which convert back to 6 spaces  
in off season, or 31: **+7 spaces**







## CAFE SEATING

# Sidewalk Extensions for Seasonal Cafe seating



- *Diverts pedestrian traffic around the cafe tables*
- *Reduces the amount of permanent parking lost*
- *Allows for seasonal use and can revert back to parking for the off season months.*

Wayzata Mn sidewalk extension  
Gianni's Steakhouse





# PARKLETS & SIDEWALKS

There is a need for cafe seating on a seasonal, conditional use basis for businesses who apply.

When a restaurant or cafe wants to have outdoor cafe seating, cafe seating can be most effectively used for pedestrian flow and bike parking if the seating area would be located in front of the business, with a temporary sidewalk installed to move the pedestrian flow around the tables and chairs within a designated area. This would be seasonal: Spring-Fall.

This redirection of pedestrian traffic would eliminate customers and employees of a business needing to pass through pedestrian traffic.

## ***Below***

*This is half of a circle installed around a tree on Pearl St. for less than \$100. shared spaces don't have to be expensive and as you can see, they come in all sizes*



ANGLED PARKING • CAFE SEATING • TEMPORARY SIDEWALK

## SEATING



*Additional pedestrian seating can be added without sacrificing more sidewalk or parking spaces by utilizing the area around the many trees and planters downtown. Benches designed to hug the trees can be combined with the shared space concept in the new design for the La Crosse Center entrance.*

# HISTORIC PEARL STREET



200 block



Street poles may be added at the alleys to help with connecting outdoor lighting. They will help guide wires between poles, buildings and arches for the purpose of stringing lights across the street.

## LIGHTING

### Rooftop Lighting

Objective:

To garner support from all property owners on Pearl Street to outline their rooftops with LED lights, and have them set on timers to go on and off at uniform times. The impact of string lighting will create a destination and a flow into the downtown. It could also make the street safer at night. The cost for clips, wire and 9W LED bulbs is approx. \$5.00 per foot. For example, a 20 foot storefront would cost around \$100.00 + outdoor outlet and timer. The lights on this photo have been working for 20+ years with minimal maintenance.

String lights along sidewalks and across Pearl Street's 40' arches.



Commercial LED, Drop Globe String Lights, 48 Ft Black Wire, Warm White

\$150.-\$250



# LIGHTING EXAMPLE



## LARIMER SQUARE DENVER, CO



Larimer Square at night



Larimer Square daytime

*Pearl Street could be lighted at night much in the same way. Major stakeholders on each block of Pearl St. have shown interest in sponsoring the lighting of this project.*

*The City has already approved \$350,000 in it's capital budget for arches but it could be used for one arch and sets of lighting poles.*



*Poles could be used instead of arches and placed on either side of the alleys to anchor wires for stringing lights. They would also serve to display banners.*

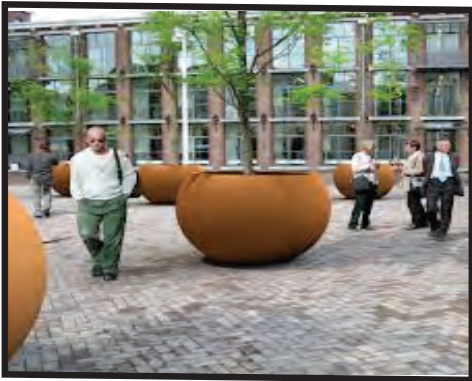


# TREES IN SIDEWALKS

## problems • solutions



The sidewalk tree root that broke the water supply at 211 Pearl was costly to repair. The roots also heave up the brick pavers making the sidewalk unlevel and unsafe.



The average life of our trees planted in the sidewalks is 7 to 10 years. Results: roots damaging or entangling pipes, supply lines, sewer lines and foundations.

- A tree planted in a large receptacle can easily be replaced without taking up the sidewalk which is costly.
- Trees planted in sidewalks require regular paver and curb maintenance.
- Large planters that support trees provide natural beauty, shade and a green space in their commercial district.
- They also serve as flower planters.
- Trees maintained in planters provide a more uniform tree height along a streetscape.
- They can also be designed to include seating, providing the tree a flower planter and a bench seat in one component.



# RIVER CONNECTION

## OUR GREATEST ASSET: THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

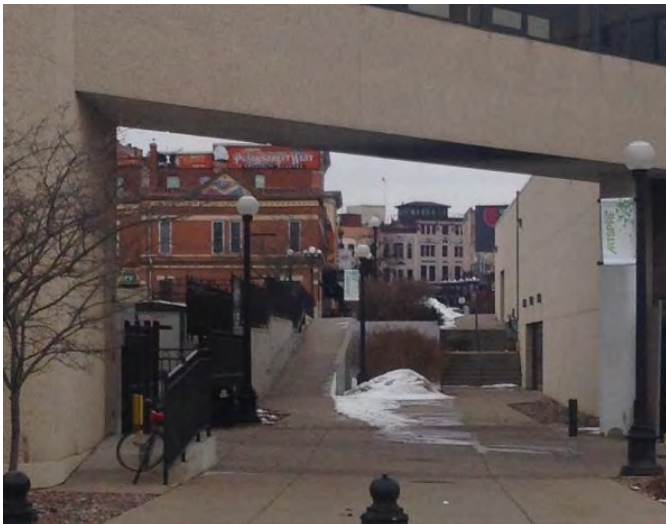
*There are three main access points to the River from downtown. State Street, Main Street. and Pearl Street. Of those, only Pearl Street has been diminished by half.*

## THE PEARL STREET WALKWAY

In designing the Pearl Street walkway, we should remove and redesign any visual and physical obstructions to Riverside Park. The overhead walk-way between The Radisson and the LaCrosse Center blocks the views of Riverside and Pettibone Park. There is a great opportunity to change this to be more open, friendly and inviting view. Too much of the historic connection to the river has already been lost. The current footprint of the Center sits on more than half of the original width of Pearl Street. There is an immediate need to address the aesthetics and the visual and physical connection to the river.



*Change this area to be an open view to the river and public entrance to the park. Shown on the upper right photo with glass in the connecting corridor and arched facade at the bottom.*



This walkway should become a more inviting and defining corridor to the river. It should be well marked, framed and lighted to lead the public to Riverside Park and from the River into the downtown. A welcoming 'The Mississippi River' arch could be added to the Center plaza showing visitors where they can connect to Riverside Park. As retailers, we are often asked the question, "Where is the river?!"



# HISTORIC CONNECTION

## La Crosse's Early Riverfront

*La Crosse Levee circa 1930's*

**Former La Crosse  
County Court House**

**Riverside Park**

**State Street**

*vacated Main Street*

*vacated Pearl Street*

Three city blocks of La Crosse's oldest, commercial buildings were raised in the 1970's for a future Shopping Center/Mall. When Dayton Hudson chose the current Valley View Mall site instead, the overgrown sand lot was then developed into the La Crosse Center, Radisson Hotel, Radisson Center and Heileman's corporate building. Main and Pearl Streets were vacated. These were the original, historic conduits to the Downtown. Main Street was developed into a green space connection to the Park with trees, fountains and Sculptures. Pearl Street was reduced to delivery, dumpster and storage areas for the Center and Radisson Hotel. In the 1980's we petitioned the city to develop the Pearl St Walkway which is smaller than any other connecting street to the River. The opportunity exists today to make the walkway exceptional. It's important to get it right this time.



# 2040 MASTER PLAN

## REINVENTING BY RECREATING

*Preserving the historic integrity of Pearl Street is imperative to any plan*

*The Transportation Study of La Crosse identified Pearl Street as a place to reinvent. This is being discussed and planned as part of the city's 2040 Master plan. There have been proposals and suggestions to transition Pearl Street into a **Pedestrian Mall** and most recently a **Festival Street**.*

### **Pedestrian Malls & Plazas**

Researching the history of Pedestrian Malls and current trends, our research led us to Red Cloud, Minnesota where a similar community had established and later returned to the original street. Pegg Gustafson, the director of their Downtown organization, also directed our research to The International Downtown Association, in Washington, DC. There I spoke with Cole Judge in their research Department. She forwarded a study that showed 89% of these plazas failed and returned to, or were in the process of returning to the original profile of the street. The loss of parking was the key element to it's failure, not to mention Wisconsin winters in our case.

### **Festival Streets**

A Festival Street is a portion of public right-of-way that has been designated by the Dept. of Transportation for recurring temporary closure to vehicle traffic use for the purpose of pedestrian-oriented special activities (SMC 11.14.203). Activities may include music or dance performances, art shows or displays, games or other community events and celebrations. After an event, it reverts back to traffic with on street parking.

The Festival Street permit is a Street Use permit intended for community groups, businesses, or individuals that would like to plan one or more closures of a designated festival street on a pre-approved schedule and for pre-approved activities throughout the year. By requiring only one application and fee payment per year, this permit encourages neighborhoods to make frequent use of these public places. There are some activities that would **not** qualify for a Festival Street permit. These include: any activity or event that meets the threshold for a Special Event permit, anticipated attendance of more than 300 people, or **vending of any kind**.

### **2040 Master Plan Implementation**

Of the two proposals, I would only favor Festival Streets **as defined above**; however, Pearl Street Merchants need to know how this change will impact their business operation and affect their future taxes. Any permanent street closure would be unacceptable and unnecessary. Further, vending would likely negatively affect permanent businesses that would now need to further compete in their location, so this would need to be addressed.

The City can make changes to the infrastructure of the street and sidewalks, but unless they have successful merchants and restaurants filling storefronts, there is no attraction and the street is no longer vital. In researching these concepts, I have found that if parking is permanently removed, business will struggle and fail. The cost of a large scale street project could be millions and would likely be assessed back to the merchants and property owners in some form on the tax bill-- in addition to the minimum Spring/Summer/Fall that would be required to complete the project following an already devastating 2020 season.

I agree that Pearl Street should be transformed now and given attention in the 2040 Master Plan.

The following are viable options to implement as a path to this transformation through my research.

1. Begin Arch project (already has funds allocated in budget) and will take time to bid, build and install. Potential for 1-2 arches with additional street poles for stringing lighting.
2. Implement angled parking pilot-program through the Engineering Dept. Consider areas for “parklets” here with businesses that have a need
3. Focus on Pearl Street to Riverside Park connection with the La Crosse Center Expansion (possibly another arch)
4. Address trees with issues on Pearl Street so building integrity is not compromised-- Look at green space areas to include or build upon
5. Flower baskets and banner project (downtown-wide)

Thank You.

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