

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Heritage Preservation and Cultural Stewardship

For centuries, La Crosse has been home for people between the gallant bluffs of the Coulee Region. La Crosse's unique history and culture are central to the city's identity and set it apart from other communities as a special place to live, work, and play.

VISION

La Crosse will prioritize heritage preservation, cultural resources, and the stewardship of local culture as key means of appreciating the community's past, celebrating the present, and envisioning the city's future based on the distinctive places and resources at the heart of the city.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this section is to identify the foundation of La Crosse's cultural identity and guide the future of heritage preservation and cultural stewardship in the city. This section identifies opportunities for growth based on an evaluation of past and present preservation efforts in the city, as well as sharing input from community members and pertinent stakeholders. This section also includes a discussion of the importance of recognizing and celebrating the perspectives and traditions of the diverse residents and visitors that give the City life. Lastly, this section makes recommendations regarding specific actions that can be taken by the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and city officials to seize those opportunities and ensure that La Crosse's rich history is celebrated and memorialized for decades to come.

A City's Culture: The Heart of La Crosse

If the majestic bluffs and Mississippi River form the backbone and lifeblood of La Crosse, then its rich culture surely forms the heart of this distinctive city. It's what longtime and new residents enjoy about living in the city, and what draws thousands of tourists each year to the shores of Riverside Park and beyond. From the picturesque trails, parks, and natural areas to the historic built environment with characteristic architecture to the countless festivals and social offerings, La Crosse is commonly recognized as a thriving arts scene, a hub for active outdoor enthusiasts, and a not-to-be-missed landmark on Wisconsin's western border.

The characteristics of La Crosse, from the scenic natural setting to the cultural offerings and neighborhood appeal, all contribute to its unique 'sense of place': the feeling of belonging that comes from connection to a particular place, its history, people and environment. Longevity and investment in community stem from a strong 'sense of place' and pride in all the details that establish a city identity. La Crosse has many special places and distinct groups which can be supported to build a whole community that includes arts, economic opportunity, social inclusion and enjoyment of nature.

What is Heritage Preservation?

At its most basic level, heritage preservation refers to the act of physically preserving and protecting those special places (historic buildings, landscapes, sites, and archaeological resources) for the enjoyment and education of the public. But preservation is about much more than simply saving old objects. It is an opportunity for a community to engage with its past in order to inform its future and contribute to its defining culture. The history of La Crosse, like that of any community, is complex, has been shaped by a variety of lived experiences, and contains a multitude of meanings that are often

informed by the perspective of a single individual. At its heart, heritage preservation encourages a community to ask itself “What is important about our past?” and transmit the answer to future generations through the built environment.

Key terms related to heritage preservation and cultural stewardship include:

- **Preservation:** the act of preserving a property as it has evolved over time in an attempt to retain as much of its historic character as possible.
- **Cultural Resources:** refers to physical evidence of past human activity. The term covers a variety of resources (sites, objects, landscapes, structures, or buildings), but they're all linked by a relationship to the past.
- **Restoration:** the act of restoring a property to a certain time period, through the removal of some features and the preservation of others.
- **Rehabilitation/Adaptive Reuse:** the strategic renovation and reuse of a pre-existing property for new purposes. This serves to preserve the historic character of a property while providing it with a new and active use.
- **Relocation:** the act of physically moving a historic property to a new location to avoid demolition. This process is not ideal, as it removes the property from its historic context, and should only be undertaken once all other options for preservation have been exhausted.
- **Reconstruction:** the act of recreating a historic property based on documented evidence, typically for the purpose of education or interpretation.

PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

La Crosse benefits from a strong tradition of community events, a robust and active downtown, and a dedication to preservation that can inspire and power local efforts in the years to come. Past preservation initiatives and accomplishments serve as a guide for future efforts, reflect an existing interest in preservation within the community, and provide a solid foundation upon which to build.

One of the earliest and most impactful efforts in La Crosse resulted from the work of Downton Mainstreet, Inc. (DMI). DMI, a private, non-profit organization, was formed in 1990 by local businesses and financial institutions in response to the perceived need to revitalize the city’s downtown core. In coordination with the city and other stakeholders, DMI facilitated an expansive study of downtown La Crosse to inform the City Vision 2000 Downtown Master Plan (completed in 1992). The work of DMI resulted directly in the listing of the Downtown Commercial Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1994. This district, and the historic buildings located within it, is considered a central element of the city’s identity for residents and visitors alike. The establishment of the Downtown Commercial Historic District earned La Crosse the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Great American Main Street Award in 2002 and laid the foundation for future preservation efforts in the city.

In 2002, a Heritage Preservation Plan was developed as part of *Confluence: The La Crosse Comprehensive Plan*. This preservation plan recommended a variety of objectives and strategies to strengthen and expand preservation efforts in La Crosse. The recommendations contained within the 2002 plan ranged from developing a closer working relationship between the HPC and the city’s Planning Department to educating the public about the local preservation process. La Crosse moved quickly to act on the preservation plan and has succeeded in implementing most of its

recommendations as of 2023. Some of the major accomplishments stemming from the 2002 preservation plan include, but are not limited to,

- Assigning a dedicated staff member in the Planning Department to oversee the city's preservation efforts.
- Updating the HPC's local nomination form with more information and clearer instructions
- Reworking existing ordinances to provide the HPC with binding authority, and developing an interactive map on the HPC website to increase public awareness of preservation activities.
- More than doubling the amount of locally designated properties and districts in La Crosse since the publication of the 2002 preservation plan.

Background and Relevant Data

Where Arts & Festivals Thrive

Heritage preservation goes beyond simply protecting physical elements of the built environment and involves uplifting intangible aspects of local culture such as the arts, festivals, and social gatherings. La Crosse features several beloved spaces where community members can learn about and appreciate the City's arts and culture. A prime example is the Pump House Regional Arts Center, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and presents visual arts, performing arts, and a wide variety of educational programming. Other prominent venues include the Capella Performing Arts Center and the Viterbo University Fine Arts Center. Residents and visitors alike may join one of the half-dozen annual stage shows or youth performances of the La Crosse Community Theatre, or one of six symphonic concerts each year by the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra.

La Crosse is also home to the longest continuously running Oktoberfest festival in the Midwest (hosted since 1961). The dedicated festival grounds hug the banks of the La Crosse River and feature space for food, games, shows, merchandise, and more. Beyond serving as a not-to-be-missed annual event, the Gemütlichkeit Foundation gives back to the community via their guiding mission statement: "The Oktoberfest USA Gemütlichkeit Foundation Inc. mission is to encourage greater local pride and enhance the quality of life for the entire community." Furthermore, research conducted by the Economics Department at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater during Oktoberfest in 2014 discovered that the annual fall festival generated a total annual economic impact of \$15 million and provides more than 200 jobs in the region. Festivalgoers stay in local hotels, eat at local restaurants, and patronize local small businesses (in-between sips, of course!). Beyond Oktoberfest, residents and visitors flock to festivals hosted in La Crosse featuring music, storytelling, arts and artists, and beyond.

Existing Legislative Frameworks for Historic Preservation

Heritage preservation activities in La Crosse are governed by a number of federal, state, and local laws. The primary law related to preservation at the federal level is the **National Historic Preservation Act of 1966** (NHPA), as amended. When it was passed, the NHPA was the most comprehensive preservation law in United States history. The law requires federal agencies to consider the effect of their activities on historic properties. An "historic property" can include significant buildings, structures, districts, objects, and archaeological sites. The law established the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Part of the regulations and guidelines require all NRHP listed or eligible resources that are affected by federally funded or permitted projects to be documented according to standards set by the Secretary of the Interior. The law also mandated that each state establish its own historic preservation office and complete an inventory of important sites,

and created the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. While the NRHP provides an invaluable record of physical representations of our nation's history, it places no restrictions on what a private property owner may do with their NRHP-listed property, unless it is involved in a project that receives federal assistance. A property's inclusion on the NRHP is primarily an honorary designation, though it does make the property eligible for certain federal tax credits. Additional federal laws that affect preservation activities include the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended; the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, as amended; the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, as amended; and the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990, as amended.

At the state level, Wisconsin Act 395, adopted in 1987, articulates the state's approach and commitment to historic preservation. The act also created the Wisconsin State Register of Historic Places which, similar to the NRHP, lists historically significant buildings, structures, districts, objects, and archaeological sites. Act 395 also initiated a state tax credit program for the rehabilitation of historic properties. Additionally, Wisconsin Statute 62.23, enacted in 1993, mandates that cities with properties listed in the NRHP or State Register of Historic Places adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance. In order for a local ordinance to be certified, it must contain criteria for the designation of historic properties and districts on a local historic register; provide procedures for designation of historic properties and districts; provide for the exercise of control by the city to achieve the purpose of preserving and rehabilitating historic properties and districts; and create a historic preservation commission.

At the local level, preservation is governed by Chapter 20 of the La Crosse's Municipal Code of Ordinances. The ordinances contained within this chapter establish regulations regarding the designation and management of historic structures and sites, as well as archaeological resources and historic shipwrecks, located within the City of La Crosse. Chapter 20 establishes a Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC), consisting of seven members, with the power to designate historic structures and sites within the city. The establishment of historic districts are subject to approval by the Common Council. Responsibility for determining the boundaries of archaeological districts is also delegated to the Common Council. The chapter also sets designation criteria used to evaluate the significance of historic structures, historic sites, and archaeological districts. These mirror those used to evaluate historic and archaeological resources for the NRHP. Importantly, these local ordinances differ from the federal and state laws in their enforcement mechanisms. Whereas there are no federal provisions regulating the alteration or demolition of historic properties listed in the NRHP, locally listed historic resources are provided with a degree of protection. Property owners whose properties have been locally listed, for example, are given the ability to enter into restrictive covenants prepared in the interest of preserving the historic property. Additionally, anyone seeking a permit to carry out exterior alterations to, or demolition of, a locally designated site or structure is required to receive a certificate of appropriateness from the HPC before any work commences. Similar provisions require monitoring of construction activities within archaeological districts by a qualified archaeologist and mandate that all work be suspended if archaeological resources are uncovered. These provisions provide the HPC and Common Council with legal tools with which to protect historic properties and cultural resources.

The following table lists all NRHP listed historic properties and cultural resources in La Crosse. Most properties are listed on the city website [Heritage Preservation: Building the future, preserving the past. | La Crosse, WI \(cityoflacrosse.org\)](http://cityoflacrosse.org).

NRHP-Listed Buildings and Districts in La Crosse

Name	Address	Date Designated
Adolf Gundersen Cottage	Pettibone Island	01/4/2018
Callahan House	933 Rose Street	03/13/1995
Chambers-Markle Farmstead	6104 St Hwy 35	02/20/1991
Christ Church of La Crosse	831 Main St	05/15/1985
E. R. Barron Building	426 Main St	06/19/1985
Dr. H.H. Chase Bungalow	221 S 11th St	05/08/1983
Freight House	107-109 Vine St	03/02/1982
George Zeisler Building	201 Pearl St	02/25/1993
Gund Brewing Company Bottling Works	2130 Ave S	12/15/2008
Hixon House	429 7th St N	12/30/1974
Henry Wohlhunter Bungalow	223 S 11th St	05/08/1983
James Vincent House	1024 Cass St	10/20/1988
Joseph Funke Candy Co.	101 State St	10/22/2014
La Crosse State Teachers College Training School Building	1615 State St	07/15/1999
La Crosse Plow Company Building	525 2 nd St N	02/2/2016
Laverty-Martindale House	237 10 th St S	11/23/1977
Losey Memorial Arch	1407 La Crosse ST	05/30/2002
Main Hall/La Crosse State Normal School	1724 State St	03/14/1985
Maria Angelorum Chapel	901 Franciscan Way	03/29/2006
Milwaukee Road Passenger Depot	601 St Andrew St	10/16/1997
Mons Anderson House	410 Cass St	05/06/1975
Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel	519 Losey Blvd S	09/11/1986
Physical Education Building/La Crosse State Normal School	Pine St (UW-L Campus)	04/11/1985
Powell Place	200-212 MAIN ST	12/22/1983
U.S. Fish Control Lab	410 E Veterans Memorial Dr	09/17/1981
W. A. Roosevelt Company	230 FRONT ST N	02/16/1984
Waterworks Building	119 King St	07/27/1979
Will Ott House	1532 Madison St	01/15/1980
Wilson School	W5718 Highway 14/61	03/21/1996
Wisconsin Telephone Company Building	125 4 th St N	03/07/1985
10 th and Cass Street Residential District	10th St S and Cass St	12/13/2000
23 rd and 24 th Street Residential District	23rd St and 24th St	11/5/2010

Caledonia Street Commercial Historic District	Both sides of Caledonia St, between Clinton St and St. Paul St	11/14/2022
Cass and King Street Residential District	Cass St and King St	11/07/1997
Downtown Commercial District	Jay St to State St; 2nd St to 5th Ave	09/02/1994
Edgewood Residential District	Edgewood Pl	2009

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Locally Listed Buildings and Districts in La Crosse

Name	Address	Date Designated
Adam/Minnie Kroner House	947 Division St	12/18/2003
Albert Sanford House	119 17th St S	01/29/1993
Anderson (Dr. Wendell A.) Home	924 Cass St	09/20/2007
August L. Grams House	1429 Main St	08/21/2014
Batavian Bank Building	319 Main St	02/15/1996
Bentley-Wheeler House	950 Cass St	12/16/2004
Boathouses	Mississippi and Black River	Various Dates
Bodega Brew Pub	122 4th St S	12/21/1995
Brick Streets	20th St S between Main St and Cass St	06/23/1992
Brick Streets	17TH Pl S between Main St and Cass St	06/23/1992
Burgermeister Building	323-325 Pearl St	04/15/1999
Burton House	1018 Cass St	07/21/1998
Callahan House	933 Rose St	06/22/1995
Calvin Manuel/George Metzger House	1025 Main St	11/19/2015
Chambers-Markle Farmstead	6104 State Rd 35	11/19/2015
Charles Segelke House	504 5th Ave	03/29/1998
Christ Episcopal Church	831 Main St	06/22/1995
City Cast Iron Drinking Fountains	Throughout the City	? (not listed on website)
Colman-Skaff House	207 West Ave S	09/20/2007
Concordia Ballroom Hall	1129 La Crosse St	06/22/1995
Cyphus Martindale House	714 Cass St	12/18/2003
Dr. H.H. Chase Bungalow	221 S 11th St	11/20/2003
Dr. R.M.I. Kinnear House	222 S 10th St	02/19/2004
Easton/Copeland House	1327 Cass St	03/31/1997
Erik Rynning House	1418 Charles St	06/12/2001
Fall-Lamb House	122 10 th St S	Unknown
Frank P Hixon Home	1431 King St	01/31/1997
Frank/Alice Kendhammer House (Lustron Home)	751 22nd St N	01/31/1997
Fred Kroner Hardware Company	300 3rd St S	08/26/2002

Fred Kroner House	923 Cameron St	07/20/2006
George and Belle Burton House	1428 Main St	07/20/2001
George H. Ray House	928 King St	11/19/2004
George Zeisler Building	201 Pearl St	06/22/1995
German Reformed Church	901 4th St S	06/20/1996
Grand Crossing Tower/Railroad Car	Copeland Park	02/15/1996
Grand Hotel Commercial Block	205-209 Pearl St	06/22/1995
Heideman House	823 Adams St	08/22/2003
Heileman City Brewery Beer Stube	1000 3rd St S	05/20/1999
Heileman House	925 3rd St S	05/20/1999
Henry & Elenora Gund House	1304 Cass St	Unknown
Henry Esperson House	1414 Cass St	Unknown
Henry Salzer Home	1634 King St	03/31/1997
Henry Wohlhunter Bungalow	223 11th St S	12/18/2003
Hixon House	429 7th St N	06/22/1995
Holley House	230 8th St N	06/22/1995
Hollywood Theatre	123 5th Ave S	02/15/1996
Holway House	1419 Cass St	06/22/1995
Isaac Tuteur-Steinam-Powell House	101 9th St S	Unknown
J.B. Canterbury Building	531-535 Main St	04/16/2015
Jacobus House	608 6th St N	06/02/1995
James Foundry	100 King St	06/22/1995
John Torrance House	726 Cameron Ave	Unknown
Joseph P Funke Candy Co	101 State St	11/13/1997
JP Strasser's Tavern	1310 Denton St	12/21/1995
L.E. Meason House	208 9th St S	09/17/2006
La Crosse Fire Station #4	906 Gillette St	Unknown
La Crosse Normal School	1725 State St	11/13/1997
Leo Schroeder House	930 6th St S	05/22/2008
Levi Strauss/Merrick P. Wing House	1004-1006 Main St	07/19/2007
Losey Memorial Arch	1407 La Crosse St	01/29/2002
Magill Brothers Building	800 Rose St	04/15/1999
Masonic Temple	724 Main St	05/16/1996
McMillan Building	401 Main St	08/04/1995
Milford E. Mosher House	1028 7th St S	10/18/2012
Milwaukee Road Passenger Depot	601 St Andrews St	11/16/1995
Mons Anderson House	410 Cass St	12/21/1995
Myrick Park	2001 La Crosse St	11/17/2005
N. Withee House	112-114 10th St S	02/19/2004
North Community Public Library	1552 Kane St	04/19/2001
Northern States Power Building	122 5 th Ave N	Unknown
Original Bishop's House	608 11th St S	03/21/1996
Original YMCA Building	629 Main St	08/26/2002
Ott Pure Oil Station	4th St S and Cass St	07/25/2000

Pamperin Cigar Company Building	113 2nd St S	06/22/1995
Percley Bentley House	938 Cass St	12/16/2004
Pettibone Beach House	1002 Pettibone Dr N	11/16/1995
Pettibone Gazebo	1006 Pettibone Dr S	11/16/1995
Pettibone House	143 8th St S	09/21/1995
Waterworks Building	119 King St	06/22/1995
Ranum-Nelson House	1132 Rose St	11/19/2009
Rediske Cobble Shop	6th St N and Badger St	08/04/1995
Riverside Park and Structures	Levee Park	05/22/2008
Rivoli Theater	117 4th St N	12/21/1995
Rubber Mills Building	1407 St Andrews St	11/18/2004
S.S. Burton House	929 King St	02/19/2004
Salzer Memorial Church	525 7th St S	01/19/2006
Schintgen Building	225-227 3rd St N	03/21/1996
Scott House	1721 King St	12/21/1995
St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church	716 Copeland Ave	06/27/2001
St. Johns Reformed Church	630 West Ave S	Unknown
Stephen Gantert House	1304 Main St	06/16/2005
T.H. Spence House	920 King St	12/21/1995
Torrance House	214/216 8th St S	01/29/2002
U.S. Fish Control Lab	410 E Veteran Memorial Dr	Unknown
U.S. Weather Bureau	432 Cass St	07/16/1998
Uhl Row Houses (Not Extant)	609-615 Main St	Unknown
Veterans Memorial Municipal Pool	11 Campbell Rd	04/21/2016
Vincent Taushe House	1202 Madison St	02/21/2019
W.W. Crosby House	221 10th St S	Unknown
W.W. Withee House	1434 Cass St	04/16/2015
Washburn House	612 Ferry St	11/21/1995
Wesley United Methodist Church	721 King St	12/21/1995
William E Potter Building (facade only)	107-109 3rd St S	03/05/1997
Wilson School House	W5718 Highway 14/61	11/18/2004
YWCA/John Refhuss Building	418 Main St	08/21/2014
10 th and Cass Residential District	10th St S and Cass St	12/13/2000
Downtown Commercial District	Jay St to State St; 2nd St to 5th Ave	09/02/1994

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

An online Community Survey was conducted from April to December 2022 to capture insights and feedback from La Crosse stakeholders regarding various aspects of the community, including preferences for urban design and connecting, cultural resources and assets, and what makes La Crosse a great place to live. Between August and December 2022, an online survey for city residents specifically regarding heritage preservation was also conducted. The intent of this survey was to gauge public awareness of current preservation activities in La Crosse, as well as understand what community members hope to see in terms of heritage preservation efforts moving forward.

Key Themes

Analyzing the responses to the above-mentioned surveys revealed key themes to consider when developing historic preservation and cultural stewardship strategies for La Crosse.

Identity

For heritage preservation, the most consistent sentiment expressed by respondents was that historic buildings are central to La Crosse's identity. They imbue La Crosse with a unique sense of place, generate pride among residents regarding where they live, provide incentive for new residents to choose to live in La Crosse over other locations in the region, and impress tourists who visit the city. Many respondents felt this is particularly true of the Downtown Historic Commercial District, where there is a high concentration of unique historic properties. Following is a sample of responses:

"Historic buildings are what make La Crosse unique. Without them, the city would be just another metro area by the river."

"[Historic architecture] is one of the things I love about La Crosse and show my friends when they come to visit."

Perceived Cost

When it comes to obstacles to preservation in La Crosse, the perceived cost of rehabilitating and maintaining historic properties was by far the most common answer provided by respondents. Many believe that preserving a historic property is simply too expensive or impractical to be worthwhile for the majority of homeowners and small businesses. Multiple respondents also believed weak local ordinances and a lack of enforcement on the part of the city hinders preservation. Following is a sample of responses:

"Cost of preservation is a big hinderance. Where to get information for programs that can provide guidance and loans/grants is confusing."

"Lack of enforcement of ordinances...we have lost historic buildings because of owner neglect..."

Under-represented Resources

With regard to historic and cultural resources that are currently under-represented among the city's locally designated properties, it is clear that there is ample room to expand the scope of the local register. Many respondents expressed the sentiment that the history currently represented by locally listed properties is too narrowly focused on Euro-Americans. Recognition of Native American history was the most commonly suggested area for expansion, but respondents also expressed a desire to see more representation of La Crosse's immigrant communities, particularly the city's Hmong population. Multiple respondents also expressed a desire to see diversity amongst the types of properties represented in the local register. They suggested that an effort be made to designate properties other than buildings, such as parks and landscapes. Following is a sample of responses:

"I would like to see recognition of indigenous...contributions."

“I think there should be a cultural marker in the downtown representing the Hmong...population who migrated here and made lasting impacts on the community.”

Moving Forward

Respondents expressed a variety of ideas regarding what they hoped to see prioritized by the HPC moving forward. Their thoughts can generally be placed under two broad categories: 1) increasing public engagement in the preservation process and 2) being proactive in preserving historic properties. Respondents desired opportunities to provide input regarding what types of resources were preserved and wanted greater access to preservation-related resources. At the same time, they wanted to see that the city was making an effort to save historic properties before it was too late. Following is a sample of responses:

“Work with property owners [to understand] options that make maintenance/restoration approachable.”

“Make sure buildings do not deteriorate too much so that it becomes too late and too costly to preserve them.”

Enhanced Public Realm

When asked about new design and amenities, respondents preferred options for the built environment that enhanced the street as a public space and maintained a harmonious relationship to historic architecture. Many comments highlight the need for walkable streets and public spaces. When asked which priorities the city should focus on to improve and maintain the city’s transportation system, the most frequent choice was “Make walking safer and more pleasant.” Choices for architecture favored facades featuring architecture details, ample windows, porches and stoops with proximity to sidewalks and smaller front yards that promote walking and social interaction. In the most popular images chosen for La Crosse’s urban neighborhoods, for example, respondents generally indicated preferences for a mix of living environments emphasizing walkability, space for nature and greenery, with historic and more modern architecture seamlessly mixed.

Desire for Events and Art

In terms of cultural spaces and events, residents expressed interest in seeing more outdoor events and public gathering spaces in the downtown area of La Crosse. This, along with pedestrian facilities and more greenery, were the top three desires for downtown amenities. Preferences focused on public spaces that are inviting and welcoming, that incorporate more greenery (especially grass and mature shade trees) and less man-made elements, that incorporate art and varied elements of creativity, and that allow space for individuals or small gatherings. Respondents indicated a preference for public art that features local artists and inclusive and diverse perspectives and history.

OPPORTUNITIES & STRATEGIES

Based on the community engagement process outlined above, as well as research into the current state of cultural assets and heritage preservation efforts in La Crosse and in cities of similar size, opportunities to strengthen the sense of place and unique character of the city, as described in this section, have been identified. These opportunities are best understood when organized by the following categories:

1. Increase public understanding of historic preservation
2. Diversify historic preservation efforts
3. Strengthen city capacity
4. Protect defining landscapes
5. Create inviting places through design of the public realm
6. Incorporate diverse perspectives via public art and landmarks
7. Expand partnerships to promote arts and human connections

1. Increase public understanding of heritage preservation

Heritage preservation should not be the responsibility of a single group. Beyond protecting unique architecture or cultural sites, preservation can meaningfully impact a variety of La Crosse's priorities, ranging from economic development to environmental sustainability. Broader participation can be made when community members understand why preservation is important and how their investments of time, money and talent can make a difference. Therefore, it is essential that the purpose, benefits, and process of preservation are understood by all relevant stakeholders. La Crosse should focus its efforts on increasing understanding of the heritage preservation process among three primary groups: 1) the general public, 2) historic property owners, and 3) developers.

The General Public

Heritage preservation is ultimately a celebration of the individuals who have made, and continue to make, La Crosse a vibrant community. It strengthens civic identity, fosters pride among current residents, and leaves a lasting impact on visitors. Efforts should be made to promote the accomplishments that the city has already achieved while increasing public engagement in the preservation process to broaden community support. La Crosse has taken steps in this direction through the annual publication of its list of 10 Most Endangered Public Properties, developing walking tour brochures for historic districts, and posting an [interactive map](#) of locally and nationally designated properties on the Heritage Preservation page of the city's website, but there are opportunities to make a greater impact.

Publicizing the past and present efforts to preserve the city's historic and culturally significant sites tells the community that La Crosse recognizes its history as central to its identity and is committed to being good stewards of its heritage. The city can Increase Public Understanding by continuing to support the initiatives mentioned above while taking additional steps to expand awareness. Information regarding the city's preservation activities, priorities, and process should be circulated regularly through a singular, accessible channel to demonstrate La Crosse's continual work to protect and celebrate its heritage. According to responses to the stakeholder survey, the top two channels through which the public would like to receive preservation-related information are an emailed newsletter (selected by 66% of respondents) and social media (selected by 44% of respondents).

Efforts should also be made to expand the reach of this information by meeting people where they are. While the above-mentioned channels will be valuable resources for those who are already interested in heritage preservation, they may be missed by members of the public who do not actively seek them out. Establishing a presence at community events, such as the La Crosse Riverfest, the La Crosse Storytelling Festival, and the Art Fair on the Green. These venues provide opportunities to raise public visibility of heritage preservation in La Crosse while reaching a wider audience.

It is also important to bring the story of La Crosse to the foreground. The purpose of heritage preservation is not simply to protect physical sites or buildings, but to highlight the human stories that they represent. The development and installation of interpretive signage at significant sites and places, sometimes referred to as ‘captioning the landscape,’ is an effective way of communicating these stories to the public and affirming a unique sense of place in La Crosse. The same information can be made more dynamic and accessible through self-guided walking tours developed using a mobile app such as [PocketSights](#). These could go beyond the currently available historic district walking tour brochures by providing a wider range of self-guided tours that cover La Crosse’s architectural, social, and cultural history that tell broader stories of place. Imagine a self-guided tour of the city’s Hmong cultural places, or river history, or how La Crosse may have looked before European settlement. Such tours have already been developed by the Wisconsin Historical Society-funded project, [Footsteps of La Crosse](#). Collaborating with Footsteps of La Crosse to develop tours that expand the stories that they currently tell, and which individuals can access through their smartphones, is an opportunity to communicate the city’s history through a unique and engaging means of interpretation.

Property Owners and Developers

The preservation and maintenance of La Crosse’s historic and culturally significant properties cannot be achieved without buy-in from the owners of those properties and local developers. Generally, there is a misconception among both groups that preservation is too complicated, cumbersome, and expensive to be worthwhile. In reality, the preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic properties produces distinct economic and social benefits. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings promotes sustainability and fuels the local economy; the establishment of historic districts retains property values; and the retention of historic properties maintains unique neighborhood character. Tools are also available at the state and federal level to incentivize preservation, such as the [Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit](#), the [Wisconsin Supplemental Historic Preservation Tax Credit for Income-Producing Buildings](#), and the [Wisconsin Supplemental Historic Preservation Tax Credit for Historic Homes](#). Efforts should be made to demystify the process and benefits of preservation for property owners and developers while making information related to available resources readily available.

Some property owners and developers might be interested in preserving or rehabilitating a historic property but may not know where to begin. Others might be dissuaded by the perceived cost. Consider developing a dedicated page on the city website that provides links to relevant information and resources to create a central location from which property owners and developers can begin the preservation process. Additionally, HPC commissioners should engage in ongoing conversations with developers to gain appreciation for the impact of their decisions, and vice versa. This will emphasize the point that preservation and property development are not mutually exclusive pursuits and will minimize the potential for conflict between the development community and the city. Time can be set aside during regular HPC meetings for developers to raise questions, or separate meet and greet events can be facilitated, to foster positive relationships between the HPC and local developers. Public workshops should be held for homeowners that offer information about the benefits of preservation and do-it-yourself training with local tradespeople on preservation techniques to encourage the maintenance of historic residences.

In the long term, the city should undertake a dedicated study of the economic impacts of heritage preservation. Research has increasingly recognized the economic benefits of preservation, including increased property values, the creation of affordable housing options, and the stimulation of building trades. A study that highlights concrete data related to the economic impact of preservation in La Crosse, specifically, will provide tangible reasons for developers and property owners to consider preservation as a worthwhile option. A range of services and resources are available through organizations such as the [National Trust of Historic Preservation](#) and [PlaceEconomics](#) that can guide such a study.

Actions:

- **Action 1.1:** Establish a singular, accessible channel through which to circulate preservation-related news.
- **Action 1.2:** Develop interpretive signage and app-based walking tours to increase public engagement with La Crosse’s history.
- **Action 1.3:** Develop a dedicated page on the city website that provides links to preservation-related resources.
- **Action 1.4:** Foster positive relationships between the HPC and local developers.
- **Action 1.5:** Host public workshops for historic property owners.
- **Action 1.6:** Undertake a dedicated study of the economic impacts of heritage preservation in La Crosse.

2. Diversify historic preservation efforts

The history and culture of La Crosse are rich and diverse. The city’s heritage preservation program should reflect that diversity. Historically, preservation efforts in La Crosse—and throughout the country—have prioritized properties that have unique architectural character or are associated with well-known individuals. But this approach provides only a narrow view of the city’s history. La Crosse’s locally designated and NRHP-listed resources should represent a variety of lived experiences, including those of Indigenous people, historically marginalized groups, and immigrant communities. Not only can broadening the scope of preservation foster a sense of belonging by highlighting tangible representations one’s heritage, but it has the potential to advance equity through improving property values and stimulating economic activity within communities that have been historically denied investment.

Diversify Storytelling

In order to ensure its historic resources reflect a diverse array of stories, La Crosse must actively seek out such stories. The most effective means of doing so is by developing meaningful and sustained relationships with community partners. The city already has such a relationship with the [Preservation Alliance of La Crosse](#), but expanding partnerships beyond groups focused specifically on preservation can provide insight into culturally significant resources that have been historically overlooked during the preservation process. By developing relationships with local organizations such as [Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge \(B.L.A.C.K.\)](#), [The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection](#), and the [Hmoob Cultural and Community Agency](#), the city can engage directly with members of the communities it hopes to better represent through preservation. It is essential that the city build these relationships through long-term engagement as opposed to “parachuting” in with a particular request. This will not only ensure an equitable relationship but will result in the meaningful exchange of knowledge that can only come through sustained dialogue and active trust-building.

Collaborating with these community partners will provide a foundation on which to build a preservation program that tells more diverse stories. The city and its community partners can facilitate oral history sessions centered on underrepresented groups during which community members are invited to share stories about significant events and sites related to La Crosse's past. This grassroots knowledge can help identify historic and cultural resources that have so far gone unrecognized by the city. The city should also develop city-wide thematic contexts related to the history of underrepresented groups, such as women, the LGBTQ community, and Hmong immigrants, to aid in evaluating the significance of cultural resources associated with these groups. Keeping in mind that some of these resources may no longer exist due to historical trends such as highway construction, urban renewal, and generational resource deprivation, the city should consider creative ways of telling the story of what has been lost. Local artists can be commissioned to produce renderings of non-extant buildings that are then displayed in public spaces alongside contextual information. Likewise, historians and digital designers can be engaged to tell these stories through [striking visualizations](#) which can then be shared online or on social media. Such initiatives will ensure the heritage preservation in La Crosse tells a complete and inclusive story.

Diversify Resources Protection

Expanding the property types represented in the city's preservation program goes hand-in-hand with telling more diverse stories. La Crosse has succeeded in adding a range of resources to both its local register and the NRHP, but there are opportunities to do more. Vernacular resources—properties that were built to meet local needs and do not embody a high style of design—are often overlooked because their significance may not be readily apparent, e.g. the city's cast iron drinking fountains. However, such resources can be representative of the everyday lives of La Crosse's residents during a given period of the city's history.

Diversify Decision Making

The city's HPC has considerable power in determining what is protected and preserved. The city should revisit the makeup of the commission to expand the diversity of the HPC and ensure it reflects the variety of perspectives contained within the city. Diversity requires intentional efforts and, as new positions open up, the city should intentionally seek a more diverse commission that includes at least one representative from a local Native tribe and one representative from a recent immigrant community.

Actions:

- **Action 2.1:** Develop meaningful and sustained relationships with community organizations and Tribes to aid in identifying cultural resources.
- **Action 2.2:** Develop city-wide thematic contexts related to the history of underrepresented groups.
- **Action 2.3:** Partner with local artists, historians, and digital designers to develop novel ways of telling the story of resources that have been lost.
- **Action 2.4:** Conduct dedicated surveys to identify cultural sites important to local tribes, vernacular resources, and cultural landscapes.
- **Action 2.5:** Intentionally diversify membership of the HPC as openings become available.

3. Strengthen city capacity

La Crosse has over 100 locally designated and NRHP-listed resources that embody the city's distinct history and culture. The city must ensure that it has the means to act as an effective steward of those resources for future generations as it works to leverage the opportunities described above. La Crosse can leverage its role in the city's heritage preservation efforts by focusing on two main areas: 1) the tools at its disposal and 2) its internal organization.

Provide More Preservation Tools

A major obstacle facing preservation efforts in La Crosse is demolition by neglect. City ordinances currently require the HPC to grant a certificate of appropriateness prior to the planned demolition of any historic property but do not prevent property owners from allowing the material condition of their historic properties to deteriorate to the point where demolition is the only course of action. This loophole both allows for the spirit of the existing preservation ordinances to be circumvented and results in the irreversible loss of historic resources. However, such loss can be prevented. City staff should work together with elected officials to update existing ordinances to prevent demolition by neglect through a system of enforceable penalties. The fees collected through the enforcement of this updated ordinance can be dedicated to a fund used to support preservation related activities.

There are additional tools that the city can leverage to further advance its heritage preservation program, such as encouraging property owners to adopt preservation easements. Local ordinances already allow historic property owners to enter into voluntary restrictive covenants; however, steps can be taken to make this process more accessible for property owners. In addition to providing information and guidance related to easements/covenants on the city website, La Crosse should develop a [sample preservation easement](#) and make it readily available. This will lessen the burden placed on property owners and can increase engagement with this program.

La Crosse can also establish a conservation district program to preserve distinct neighborhood character. Conservation districts are similar to historic districts in that the intent of both is to preserve a neighborhood's physical attributes, but the primary focus of conservation districts is to preserve community character rather than historic fabric. Conservation district programs offer a community-driven means of protecting neighborhoods from development pressures and other threats by allowing residents to establish their own design guidelines and establish review boards to ensure compliance. The city should facilitate the establishment of conservation districts by educating community members about the process and actively assisting residents with the development of design guidelines. Such a program will provide a means of preserving neighborhoods that display distinct architectural character but may not meet the criteria or have the public support for designation as a historic district.

Expand Internal Resources

Strengthening La Crosse's capacity for heritage preservation also means ensuring the city has the appropriate internal organization to support its preservation efforts. Currently, the city has one dedicated staff member tasked with overseeing its preservation program. The reliance on a single staff member limits La Crosse's capacity to drive preservation forward and increases the potential that institutional knowledge is lost due to staff departures. The city should hire additional preservation staff for its Planning & Development Department to increase its ability to support preservation initiatives and mitigate the risk of workflow disruptions. This process can be carried out

incrementally, beginning with the addition of a part-time staff member. The opportunities identified above can inform a job description of priorities for the new person.

The role of the HPC can also be expanded to strengthen the city's preservation program. The HPC should establish a Historic Asset Inventory Committee (HAIC) to develop proactive preservation strategies throughout the city, as has been done in [Cedar Rapids, Iowa](#). These strategies will vary based on La Crosse's particular circumstances but should include compiling an annual list of prioritized properties and engaging in direct owner outreach to facilitate local designation. The HAIC should be composed primarily of HPC members but can also include members of nonprofit organizations and community representatives, particularly of previously underrepresented communities. Ongoing training for HPC members and preservation staff should also be provided. The city has already taken advantage of the HPC training program offered by the Wisconsin Historical Society; however, training can be expanded to include courses provided by national organizations, such as the [National Alliance of Preservation Commissions](#) and the [National Preservation Institute](#). Doing so will ensure HPC members and preservation staff are kept abreast of the most recent trends and strategies related to heritage preservation.

Actions:

- **Action 3.1:** Update existing ordinances to prevent demolition by neglect.
- **Action 3.2:** Develop a sample preservation easement and publicize the program online to encourage use by historic property owners.
- **Action 3.3:** Establish a conservation district program to provide a more flexible means of preserving neighborhood character.
- **Action 3.4:** Hire additional staff for the Planning & Development Department.
- **Action 3.5:** Establish a Historic Asset Inventory Committee to develop and implement proactive preservation strategies.
- **Action 3.6:** Expand ongoing training for HPC members and preservation staff.

4. Protect defining landscapes

The landscapes of La Crosse are valuable not only for their environmental and recreational function; they have important historic and cultural significance as well. A defining landscape is a type of cultural landscape that has significant cultural, historical, and aesthetic value. It is a landscape that has been shaped and modified by human activity over time and is considered to be of historical importance. Defining landscapes can be found in a variety of settings, including urban areas, rural areas, and natural areas. They may include features such as buildings, structures, gardens, parks, streetscapes and other cultural or natural elements that reflect the history and cultural heritage of a La Crosse.

There are many groups of people who have made their home in La Crosse and find meaning in the built and natural landscapes that define their history and culture, including Indigenous people, historically marginalized groups, and immigrant communities. The Ho-Chunk people, also known as the Hoocąągra or Winnebago, have a deep connection to the land and many landscapes are considered sacred and significant to them. Indigenous people have fought and prevailed despite extreme adversity in order to maintain meaningful connections to the Wisconsin landscape, to preserve tribal languages, and to uphold the traditional cultural practices that express distinctly Native relationships to this landscape today. Landscapes such as these are significant not only for

their beauty and cultural value, but also for the insights they provide into the social, cultural, and historical context of their time.

Preserve Views and Sightlines

The scenic value of La Crosse and its location amid bluffs and along the Mississippi are key to the identity of the city. The city can take steps to ensure sightlines are maintained and key vantage points remain publicly accessible. In some cases, such efforts may be performed in conjunction with measures to preserve and create access to natural areas and waterways. The city may wish to perform a viewshed study to inform regulations like height restrictions and scenic easements which would protect the integrity of La Crosse's scenic setting.

Establish Historic Landscape Designation

Historic landscapes are often protected by government agencies or private organizations in order to preserve their cultural and historical significance for future generations. They may be designated as national parks, historic sites, or landmarks, and may be subject to various conservation measures to protect their integrity and value. **Cultural landscapes**—geographic areas that illustrate the interaction between human society and the natural environment over time—are resources that can be representative of a place's heritage that are often hidden in plain sight. Dedicated surveys can be conducted to identify, document, and evaluate the significance of historic and cultural landscapes located within the city. Surveys that specifically target such landscapes will help to broaden the scope of history represented in La Crosse's preservation program while maintaining the city's unique environment.

Actions:

- **Action 4.1:** Ensure sightlines are maintained and key vantage points remain publicly accessible.
- **Action 4.2:** Perform a viewshed study to inform regulations such as height restrictions and scenic easements to help protect the integrity of La Crosse's scenic settings.
- **Action 4.3:** Conduct targeted surveys to identify, document, and evaluate the significance of historic and cultural landscapes located within La Crosse.
- **Action 4.4:** Ensure priorities and restrictions that are developed to protect defining views are consistent with the zoning code.

5. Create inviting places through design of the public realm

The design of the public realm can play a crucial role in creating a sense of community by providing spaces and infrastructure that facilitate social interaction, connectivity, safety, accessibility, and aesthetics. Places to gather and connect with community, both through random encounters and planned events, establish strong social ties. The city can think about development in terms of activity nodes and corridors. These are the ways that people move through the city in their daily activities and structures their experience. The downtown is a dynamic center for the city, but how does it connect to other points of interest and community centers throughout La Crosse? Investing in smaller, connected, points of interest established culture and entertainment close to where people live and draws people to explore more areas of the city.

Human Scale Design

Building at the human scale creates comfortable public spaces by focusing on the physical experience of a space. It focuses on how spaces are used by people rather than the needs of cars or purely aesthetic design gestures. Considerations include distances that are comfortable to see across and that are interesting at human eye level, spaces defined by buildings and landscape features that are proportioned to the human body, and spaces designed for walkability and conversation.

Integrate New Buildings with Existing Architecture

The city can establish design standards to proportionally integrate new construction with existing buildings. Design guidelines can feature criteria such as height, expression lines in the architectural façade, and entrance features. These can be established across architectural styles. This creates a strong relationship to the street and public space by creating visual interest and context sensitive design. New developments should provide public space and a well-designed public realm through streetscapes, walkability and access to public parks.

Actions:

- **Action 5.1:** Encourage building at the human scale to help create comfortable and engaging public spaces
- **Action 5.2:** Establish design standards to proportionally integrate new construction with existing buildings.
- **Action 5.3:** Encourage new developments to provide public spaces and a well-designed public realm through streetscapes, walkability, and access to public parks.

6. Incorporate diverse perspectives via public art, landmarks, and spaces

La Crosse is a unique blend of all the people and cultures that have come together over the course of the city's history. The city can work to create spaces and social outlets for the full spectrum of La Crosse residents, inclusive of many cultures and ages. Underutilized or underinvested spaces can be opportunities for expanding engagement. The city should look to build on existing cultural resources and centers of community life with enhanced public spaces. A center of community life could be as simple as a grocery store catering to a certain type of cuisine or an established resource like a library or cultural center. These are all examples of places where people are likely to engage for daily needs or other resources and can be extended into strong community spaces and landmarks. These types of spaces offer the kind of casual social opportunities that build and connect people to their neighborhood.

Expand Native History and Culture

Native people lived in what we now call La Crosse for generations before the arrival of the first European settlers. Identifying cultural resources and sacred places that are significant to Indigenous people is also an essential aspect of telling a comprehensive history of present day La Crosse and recognizing the diversity of its people. The Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office has data pertaining to all known archaeological sites and the city is currently working to ensure its maps of such resources are up to date. However, to date, none of these resources have been locally designated or listed in the NRHP. More can be done to draw attention to Native American history in the city. La Crosse can support partnerships with local tribes, such as the [Ho-Chunk Nation](#), to develop a survey of cultural sites and places that have tribal significance. In doing so, it is important to keep in mind that, due to the United States' history of Native American removal, there may be Tribes that have ancestral ties to the area but are no longer located in the vicinity of La Crosse. It is recommended that the city

conduct further research to identify those Tribes so they can be included in decisions about preservation and storytelling of Native culture and history.

Actions:

- **Action 6.1:** Identify underutilized or underinvested spaces (e.g. festival grounds, parking lots, vacant lots, and other public, quasi-public, or private spaces) that can be used as opportunities for expanding public gathering spaces.
- **Action 6.2:** Expand offerings of casual social opportunities that build and connect people to their neighborhoods.
- **Action 6.3:** Explore opportunities to provide space and social outlets for marginalized and underrepresented groups, especially those that provide connections across ages (e.g. between students and older adults).

7. Expand partnerships to promote arts & human connections

Placemaking through art creates ownership of public spaces, responds to changing needs and varied interests, and keeps residents engaged and thinking about their space and community. The city can work to continue and expand support of community partners to implement arts activities. Public art of all kinds can be explored from performance, dance, sculpture, interactive trips and environmental installations.

Collaboration could transform into direct city design and placemaking by integrating the creative community in design of public infrastructure and furniture such as benches, light fixtures and wayfinding. Arts bring people together and partnering with artists from the community represents local issues and experiences. Placemaking activities offer economic opportunities and tie in with neighborhood business organizations and local businesses. There are many opportunities for partnering with local businesses, whether through one-site installations like murals or through cultural events and pop-up markets.

Actions:

- **Action 7.1:** Continue and expand support of and coordination with community partners to implement arts activities that are consistent with and help promote city character.
- **Action 7.2:** Pursue partnerships and activities that offer economic opportunities and tie in with local businesses and artists.
- **Action 7.3:** Ensure a balance of cultural and entertainment venues between the downtown and other areas of the city.
- **Action 7.4:** Partner with local higher education arts students to beautify neighborhoods with a high concentration of student residents (e.g. crosswalk art, murals, sculpture).
- **Action 7.5:** Engage community members and neighborhood associations via surveys, events, and meetings to determine the types of public art that are most desired and harmonious with neighborhood character.