Chapter 15: Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan

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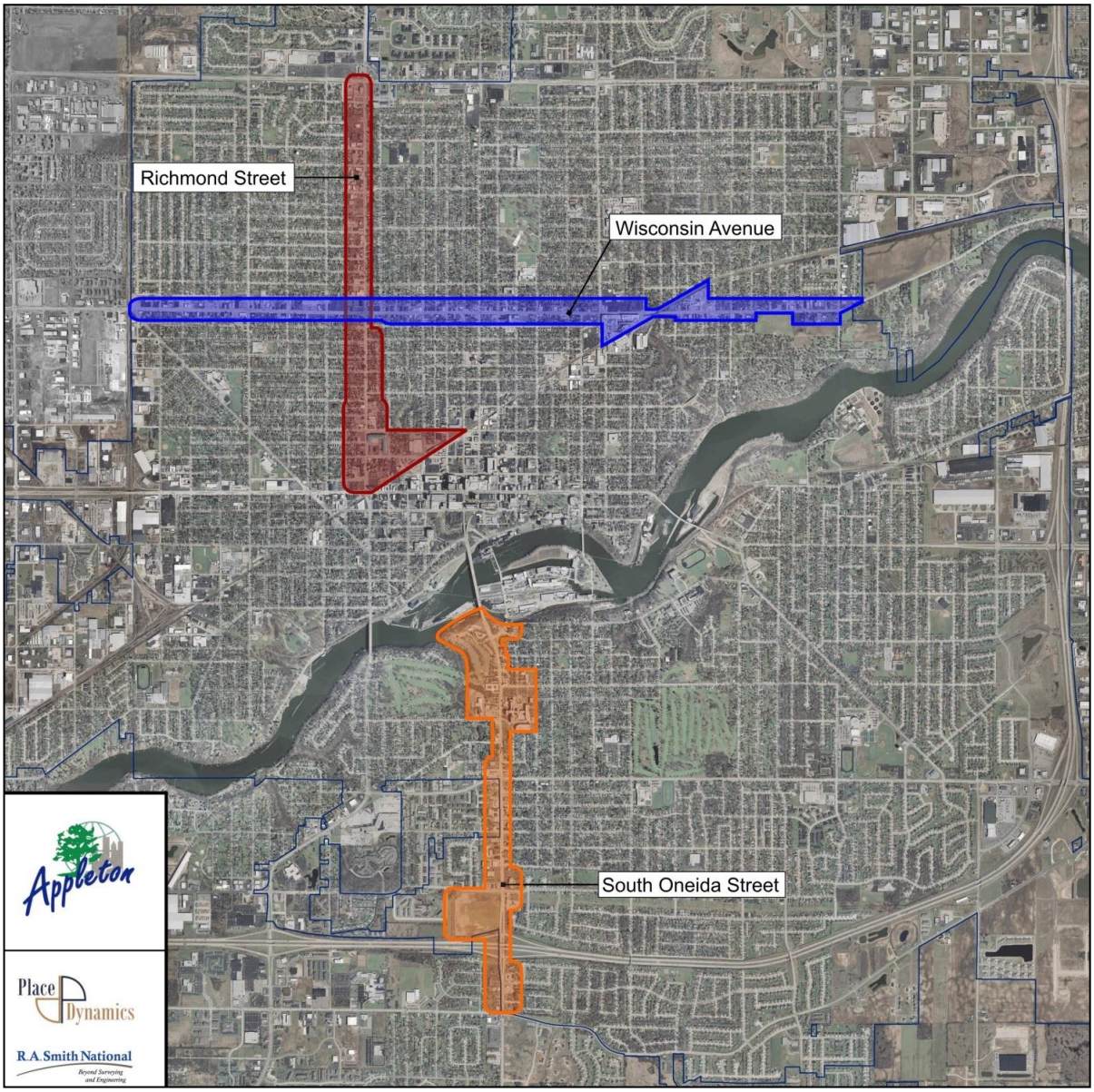


Wisconsin Avenue spans the width of the City of Appleton, connecting to U.S. Highway 41 in the vicinity of the Fox River Mall (in the Town of Grand Chute), and leading to the Village of Little Chute in the east. At the commencement of the comprehensive planning process, Wisconsin Avenue was one of three commercial corridors identified by the City for further study. This ***Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan*** summarizes the results of the more detailed analysis given to the corridor and lays out a plan to encourage restored vitality along the street. This plan was guided by public input obtained through a series of workshops attended by interested business owners and residents of the corridor.

Background Analysis

The 1996 ***Vision 20/20 Comprehensive Plan*** for the City of Appleton contained a chapter dedicated to the needs of the City's commercial corridors, including Wisconsin Avenue. That plan noted many conditions that are still true, including:

- a lack of vegetative landscaping to soften development, leading to impressions of underutilization and vacancy;
- clutter caused by the appearance and placement of signs;
- restricted redevelopment opportunities resulting from the narrow width and shallow depth of most lots;
- closely spaced, individual driveways that contribute to traffic congestion and create a disorganized appearance; and
- lack of pedestrian and bicycle access.

The plan notes two other issues, although their definition as problems may now be disputed. These are the conversion of residential buildings to commercial uses, and "incompatible adjacent land uses." Thinking within the planning profession has evolved over the last several years, so that most planners now recognize that mixed use areas can be highly desirable without causing significant conflicts between different uses.

To address the issues it noted, the plan recommended a number of design approaches including:

- providing additional landscaping on streets and parking lots;
- encouraging shared access and parking;
- retrofitting areas with bicycle and pedestrian access;
- developing shared parking lots, especially where road widening removed on-street parking;
- allowing commercial redevelopment to extend into residential areas to create the depth necessary for modern commercial activity; and
- developing at an appropriate scale (in relation to surrounding uses).

Specific recommendations for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor focused on retaining and redeveloping residential uses, identifying areas for parking, and improving corridor appearance through landscaping and sign control. Generally, the plan recommended primarily residential uses east of Ballard Road, and a mix of residential and commercial uses between the railroad corridor and Ballard Street. Commercial uses tend to predominate more to the west.

The Bell Heights Center is a redevelopment project on Wisconsin Avenue.

Assessing progress on these recommendations, it appears that there has only a limited amount of redevelopment within the corridor, other than the remodeling of some buildings. The most significant of these is the Bell Heights Center, a new commercial strip. While a handful of properties have been improved with landscaping, they are few in number. Little progress has been made on issues such as driveway consolidation or provision of shared parking.

Current Conditions

A variety of uses can be found along Wisconsin Avenue, including retail and service businesses, offices, industry, residential, and institutional uses. Although frequently intermixed, these uses are somewhat clustered. office, retail, and service uses tend to be located west of Meade Street, with industrial and related uses located east of Meade Street. Residential uses can be found throughout, but primarily near the east and west ends of the corridor.

A remodeled building on Wisconsin Avenue

In terms of development character, the segment of the corridor between Richmond Street and Meade Street tends to have been developed as a traditional urban thoroughfare. Most buildings are set near the street and have a pedestrian orientation. They may occupy the full width of the lot and abut adjacent buildings. West of Richmond Street and east of Meade Street, the corridor is more likely to feature sites developed with an orientation to automobiles. More recently developed locations are typical of a suburban commercial strip, while older locations may have been developed to a lesser standard for access, parking, and aesthetics.

Building conditions in the corridor are generally good. There are several newer and remodeled buildings. The older commercial structures are generally well maintained, even if they may appear to have a dated design. Similarly, most of the residential buildings, which tend to be single-unit structures, are in good condition.

There are 139 commercial properties in the corridor, with a total area of 730,284 square feet. This represents about 6.0 percent of all commercial space in the City. A survey of assessor records indicates that the average year of construction is 1960, with a range from 1900 to 2007. About half of the properties (72, or 52 percent) are older than the average.

The typical commercial building on Wisconsin Avenue is about 5,250 square feet. This is a good size to accommodate most modern retail, office, or service businesses, with the potential to house more than one business in the building. Fifty of the corridor's buildings exceed this size. Meanwhile, forty of the corridor's buildings are under 2,500 square feet. Only five buildings are smaller than 1,000 square feet.

Besides area, there are several other considerations that need to be evaluated to determine how well a building may meet modern commercial needs. These include issues such as internal layout, ceiling height, access, parking, lighting, window area, visibility, and signage. Most of the corridor's buildings adequately meet most current standards, although they may need some updating. The problem areas are parking and ceiling height. These two concerns can prove to be more difficult to address.

Typical conditions where there are minimal terraces and development extends to the street.

Platting is perhaps the most significant constraint on redevelopment in the corridor. Typical lot widths are about 60 feet, with a depth from 120 to 150 feet. This is insufficient to allow placement of a building and parking on the lot, unless multiple lots are assembled. Even if multiple lots can be obtained on Wisconsin Avenue frontage, lot depth continues to be a concern. When additional lots are obtained to the north or south of those on Wisconsin Avenue, rezoning is typically required.

As noted in 1996, the street does not present a highly attractive environment. A majority of the properties along the street were developed prior to the City's implementation of landscaping requirements. The lack of landscaping to soften the appearance of the street has only been heightened by widening some segments of the road, with the remainder to follow in the next year. As a result, terraces in some locations are too narrow to provide much room for landscaping in the public realm, and private development may extend up to the street property line. Additionally, small properties, even when having a narrow frontage, are likely to have one or more access drives rather than shared drives that would reduce the number of curb cuts. This impacts more than just aesthetics, as the large number of private drives may contribute to traffic congestion.

In general, there is a great deal of clutter in the street corridor. This can be attributed to public and private signage, including billboards, and utilities, along with frequent curb cuts. This even obscures the City's entrance sign on the western end. At both ends of the corridor, the entry is nothing more than a standard green metal sign, making a poor impression for the entry to Appleton along a major transportation corridor.

Few provisions are made for bicycle and pedestrian transportation in the corridor, although there is a sidewalk on both sides of the street for nearly its entire length. Crosswalks are poorly marked and most of the intersections do not provide signals or other mechanisms to make crossing the street easier or safer. There are no bike lanes on Wisconsin Avenue.

Overhead utilities, frequent private access, public and private signage, and billboards contribute to clutter. Appleton's "gateway" entrance sign is hidden behind other signage.

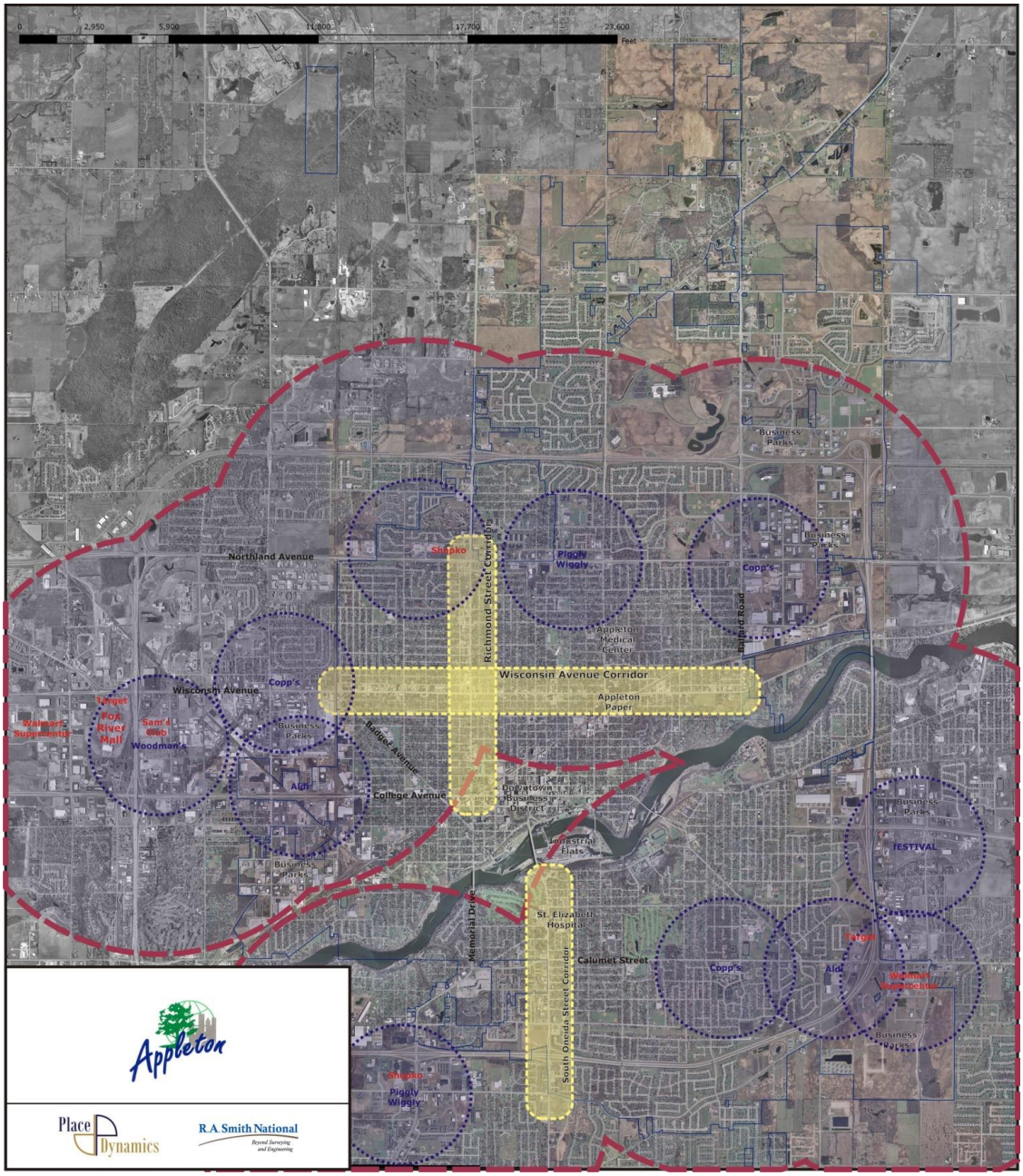
Significant portions of Wisconsin Avenue will be reconstructed in 2010. The street will be reconstructed with two traffic lanes in each direction, removing most on-street parking from the entire length of the street. Some indent on-street parking will be provided between Superior Street and Appleton Street, and between Morrison Street and Durkee Street. Left turn lanes will be added at Division Street, Oneida Street, Drew Street, and Meade Street. Access drives to private property may closed or reconfigured to right-in, right-out access only. Some streetscape elements will be included in the reconstruction project, consisting of decorative lighting, stamped concrete terraces, and street trees.

Market Assessment

Commercial activity on Wisconsin Avenue is struggling due to shifts in the locations of retail anchors in the metropolitan area. When the corridor developed it contained uses such as grocery stores that served the north side of Appleton. There are no longer any full-line grocery stores on Wisconsin Avenue. Just like the market's discount stores, the grocery stores have moved or developed at the fringe of the community, along Highways 41 and 441, and on Northland Avenue. Without the drawing power of anchor stores, the corridor has mostly attracted secondary retail and service uses.

Wisconsin Avenue appears to have a greater vacancy rate than do the City's other commercial corridors. It is likely that this is in part due to concerns about the upcoming road reconstruction, which will have the street closed to traffic for several months. Most of the remaining on-street parking will be removed, which may impair the viability some of the commercial properties in the corridor. As of August of 2009, an estimated 98,250 square feet, or about 13.5 percent of the commercial space on Wisconsin Avenue was vacant.

The total assessed value of commercial properties in the corridor is $37,488,200. This is 4.6 percent of the assessed value of all commercial property in Appleton. The average commercial property on Wisconsin Avenue is assessed at $269,699, or about $51 per square foot. In contrast, the average value for all of Appleton is $67 per square foot. This is an indication of the relative weakness of the district. Rents will be correspondingly lower than most other locations in the City, with both desirable and undesirable outcomes. Lower rents can lead to increased business formation, but may also attract businesses that are undercapitalized or that do not contribute significantly to creating a destination retail district.



The above image shows the location of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor (along with Richmond Street and South Oneida Street). The locations of grocery stores are shown along with the area in a ½-mile radius in dark blue shading, and a 1½ radius (shaded lighter and outlined in red.

There are currently estimated to be 6,816 households and 15,783 people living within ½ mile of Wisconsin Avenue[1]. These households have a combined market potential of $178,122,528. Based on average sales per square foot for neighborhood centers[2], it is estimated that this market potential will support a demand for 558,378 square feet of commercial space. As noted earlier, there is a total of 730,284 square feet of space existing within the corridor, or 171,906 square feet than the market demand would suggest.

Two factors should be considered. Firstly, Appleton does attract spending from outside of the City, and just like any other corridor, Wisconsin Avenue will attract spending from outside of its primary trade area. This would suggest that the corridor can support more than only the space attributed to demand from within the trade area. On the other hand, it has been observed that the Wisconsin Avenue corridor does not contain any grocery stores or discount stores, at with a significant share of local spending occurs. These and other potential sales are being realized elsewhere, and therefore the space needed to accommodate them should be subtracted from estimates of the supportable space within the corridor.

In addition to retail and service uses, Wisconsin Avenue contains some amount of general office space. As with the other kinds of commercial activity. Appleton and the surrounding region offer several other locations that are better positioned to capture this activity. These competing locations would include the downtown and the business parks on the periphery of the City.

Two non-commercial anchors help to invigorate the corridor. Appleton Memorial Hospital is locate a quarter mile north of Wisconsin Avenue on Meade Street, and Appleton Paper is a significant employer at this same intersection. Recent redevelopment has occurred in this vicinity. Uses that have located in the area, such as a gas station/convenience store and fast food restaurants are those that would be expected to benefit from traffic generated by large employers in the immediate area.

The Economic Development and Housing chapters of the ***Comprehensive Plan*** (Chapters 10 and 5) provide a detailed analysis of the market conditions for commercial and residential development in the City. Based on observations of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, it appears that there may be more commercial space available in the corridor than its market can support. A market assessment for the corridor may be summarized as follows:

- There is an imbalance between the supply and demand for commercial space in the corridor, which has led to a situation in which vacancy rates are higher than the metropolitan average and building values are lower than the average for commercial property in the City.
- Platting and development conditions in some parts of the corridor may make some properties less desirable for some tenants, and can inhibit redevelopment. Loss of on-street parking may exacerbate these conditions.
- The corridor does not contain any strong retail anchors to draw traffic, and neighborhood shopping needs are largely met along Northland Avenue, where grocery stores are located.
- Commercial activity along Wisconsin Avenue is strongest in a handful of locations including intersections with Richmond Street and Meade Street.

[1] 2008 data obtained by R.A. Smith National from ESRI Business Analytics.
[2] Dollars and Cents of Shopping Centers

- General conditions along the corridor, such as an incoherent mix of uses, sign and utility clutter, and landscaping, do not help to promote the corridor as an attractive business location.

General Plan

The general plan for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor is built around three primary objectives addressing both public and private efforts. These are:

- establish strong nodes of commercial activity centered on the intersections of Wisconsin Avenue with Richmond Street and Meade Street, promote the development of high-density residential and mixed-use sites in other areas of the corridor, and support the continued development of service commercial and limited light industrial uses east of Meade Street; and
- address issues in the public realm such as sign and utility clutter, streetscape, gateways, bicycle and pedestrian accommodation, and transit services;
- encourage private renovation and redevelopment that addresses existing limitations of platting and land assembly, site planning issues such as parking and access, and aesthetics.

Land Uses

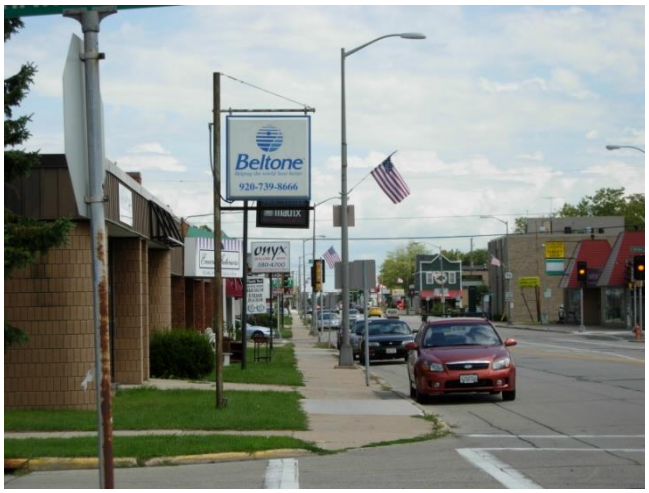
To create a more coherent pattern, enhance the viability of commercial activity in the corridor, and guide property owners toward market-viable uses, the general plan for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor envisions four general types of land use and character:

Example of typical "General Commercial" development character.

- General Commercial - The general commercial areas in the plan may be characterized as typical suburban commercial strips. The primary future land use will be commercial, although existing non-commercial uses may remain within the area. Development may consist of freestanding buildings or multi-tenant buildings. At a minimum, existing design standards with regard to building facades, access, parking, landscaping, lighting, and signage will be enforced. The City may consider revised or additional design standards to enhance the appearance of the district.

  Within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, the general commercial designation is recommended between the western city limits and Richmond Street, and between Drew Street and Meade Street.

- Pedestrian-Oriented Commercial - This use and character is recommended between Richmond Street and Appleton Street, where it already exists to a substantial degree. It is typified by buildings constructed at or near the street right-of-way and oriented to the sidewalk. Ground floor uses are nearly always commercial, and residential uses may be located on upper floors or at the back of the property. This is especially appropriate where the development site extends through to the parallel street, and multifamily residential may present a better transition to lower-density residential than would the back of a commercial building.

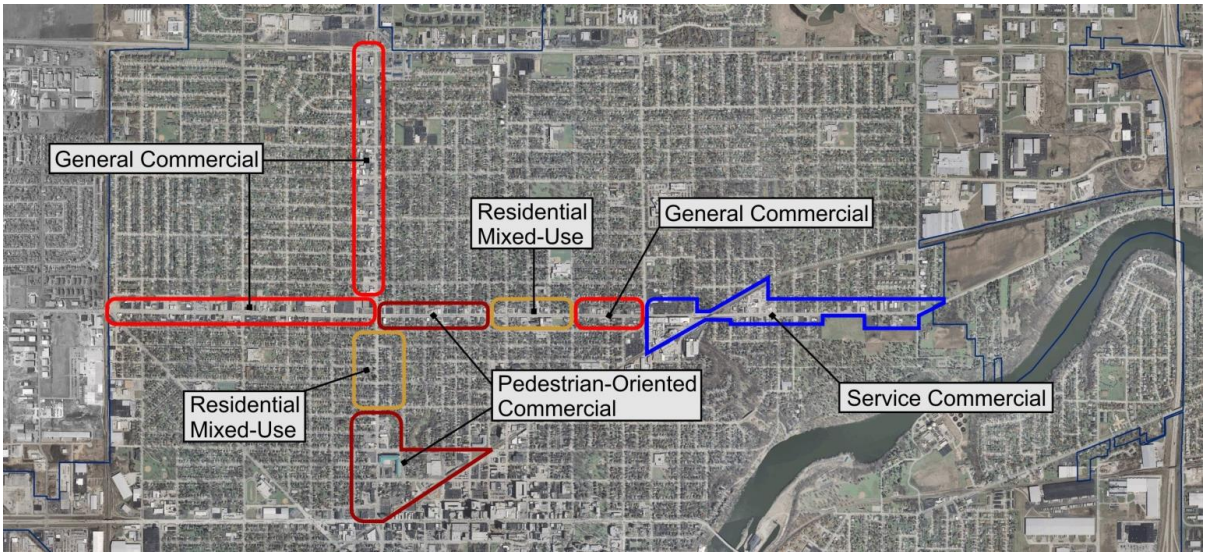


A segment of Wisconsin Avenue that would be designated as "pedestrian-oriented commercial".

- Residential Mixed-Use - As with the pedestrian-oriented commercial category, areas identified for residential mixed-se may contain both commercial and residential uses. Here, however, residential uses should dominate. Buildings may be entirely residential, or incorporate a lesser area of commercial space. The intent of this district is to help to concentrate commercial activity into other areas, where it may cluster and create beneficial relationships between neighboring businesses. The area designated as residential mixed-use is thought to include parts of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor where the demand for commercial space is not very strong. High-density residential uses in these areas can offer property owners the opportunity to profitably redevelop their land and create additional households to support commercial businesses in the corridor.
- Service Commercial - This final use category is recommended for the area extending from Meade Street east to the city limits. It is made up of future uses including commercial, service and repair, and limited light industry, such as might be found in "flex" commercial buildings in a business park. Performance criteria should be established to determine the suitability of proposed uses in this area, which are compatible with the industrial park to the northeast, and to uses planned by the Village of Little Chute further east along Wisconsin Avenue.

  Because of the nature of the activities proposed for this area, an alternate set of design standards should be developed. These will have to establish criteria for outside storage and displays, loading areas and drive-in bays, and other activities that may not be permitted within other commercial areas.

The following image indicates the recommended locations of the various land use categories proposed for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. Implementation of these recommendations will require the City to consider revisions to its zoning code. Rather than restrict land use, these revisions should be designed to offer property owners greater flexibility to redevelop consistent with the intent of the ***Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan*** and the ***Comprehensive Plan*** in general.



Public Realm Initiatives

The City of Appleton can address some of the issues of visual clutter and aesthetics associated with the corridor. These efforts would help to create an appealing street environment that can be beneficial to businesses located there. Ideally, the City's efforts would be matched by private improvements to landscaping, signage, and building facades.

The eastern gateway to Appleton on Wisconsin Avenue.

Gateways

Entering the City of Appleton from either direction on Wisconsin Avenue, the only gateway feature is a standard green population sign. At the east end of the City this sign is visible, but set against a background of utility poles, utility boxes, and billboards. At the west end of the corridor, the sign is obscured by road signage. As on the east side, there is no landscaping and the sign is set against a backdrop of billboards.

The City of Appleton should install professionally designed gateway signage that announces traveler's arrival in the City and helps to create a favorable impression of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. This signage should be designed to compliment recommended streetscape improvements throughout the corridor. Installation should be planned to coincide with reconstruction of the street.

Public Street Signs

Part of the signage clutter on Wisconsin Avenue can be attributed to the large number of public street signs. Efforts should be made to assess the need for so many signs, to remove those that are unnecessary, and to consolidate the remaining signs in a standard and attractive format.

Currently, signs may be found mounted on their own metal poles, utility poles, or elsewhere. Within the segment between Richmond Street and Meade Street, which has developed as a more traditional and pedestrian urban street, the City should consider using decorative sign systems for public signage. In other places, standard poles can be used, or signs may be mounted to light poles.

Utilities

The significant cost of burying or relocating utility lines is a challenge for removing them from the public street. In individual cases, and especially where redevelopment may occur, the City may consider taking this action. At other times the best approach may be to design a streetscape that minimizes visibility of the overhead lines. Utility boxes and similar structures, whether in the right-of-way or located in the front yard of private property, should be screened with berms and evergreens.

Streetscape

Streetscape is often a secondary need in promoting the vitality of a commercial district. In the case of Wisconsin Avenue, the important functions it has to play include creating a more attractive environment and helping to establish an identity for the corridor. Different approaches are warranted in different parts of the corridor.

Streetscape needs are minimal between the western gateway to Appleton and Richmond Street, and from Meade Street to the eastern entrance to the City. In this area the City should install gateway features and address public signage as noted above. The City should also plant street trees within the terrace where sufficient space is available. Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of the street where they are not already in place.

More pedestrian-oriented commercial, mixed-use, and multifamily residential uses are anticipated to dominate the corridor between Richmond Street and Meade Street. A more detailed streetscape is warranted to improve the pedestrian orientation of the area and to make it more appealing for new residential development. As with the other segments of the corridor, the streetscape should address utilities, public signage, and street trees. Trash and recycling receptacles, benches, and other amenities should be provided in primarily commercial areas. The City should seek to introduce color into the streetscape through the use of banners, flower baskets, terrace planting, or other techniques.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian movement east and west along the corridor is made relatively easy by a nearly continuous sidewalk system on both side of the street. Most of the side streets carry a low volume of traffic and do not pose a great challenge to crossing. This is not true for the crossings of Wisconsin Avenue and a small number of intersecting streets that carry a high volume of traffic. Currently, crosswalks are marked, and crosswalk signals are provided at signalized intersections. There are no additional safety improvements such as center refuges, warning signals, or other traffic calming measures.

Crossing challenges may be concentrated within the few blocks west of Richmond Street. This area is more heavily dependent upon on-street parking and limited quantities of private parking, and has more of the character of a pedestrian-oriented commercial district. These characteristics may create the need for more frequent pedestrian crossings of Wisconsin Avenue. Except for Richmond Street, none of the area cross-streets have signalized intersections at Wisconsin Avenue.

The City should evaluate pedestrian behavior and continue to reassess the need for pedestrian crossing improvements, particularly as the area redevelops in the future. In addition to physical improvements such as warning signs and crosswalk signals, the City can consider approaches such as flag programs, which are designed to improve pedestrian visibility. Police enforcement of crosswalk laws can also improve conditions.

No bicycle lanes or facilities are provided on Wisconsin Avenue, or will be following reconstruction of the street. With four 11 or 12-foot driving lanes and no shoulder, Wisconsin Avenue will not be suitable for any but the most experienced bicycle riders. For this reason, it is recommended that the City identify parallel streets as the primary corridor for bicyclists to access Wisconsin Avenue, using side streets to reach their actual destination on the corridor. Larger private commercial developments should be required to provide racks to store bicycles on-site. Within the pedestrian-oriented commercial and mixed-use portions of the corridor, bicycle racks may be provided as part of the public streetscape.

Transit Services

Valley Transit currently provides five bus routes that have stops on Wisconsin Avenue. One additional route crosses Wisconsin Avenue but does not stop. Route 12 has stops on Wisconsin Avenue in the Town of Grand Chute.

Transit services can contribute to the viability of the Wisconsin Avenue commercial areas by providing an alternative means for people to get to and from the area. To encourage transit use, the City should work with Valley Transit to install appropriate amenities at bus stops, including benches, route information signs, and shelters to protect riders from inclement weather. Although advertising is frequently desired by transit services as a means to increase revenue, it is preferable not to have any advertising on these features, where it may contribute to the sign clutter already present.

Private Property and Redevelopment

The City of Appleton seeks to collaborate with private land owners to rehabilitate or redevelop property within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. The City's actions to improve the appearance of the physical environment and to govern land uses and development character are a starting point for this collaboration. It will be furthered through partnerships with businesses and land owners that may include facade assistance, tax incremental financing, or other programs. Chapter 10, Economic Development, contains additional information concerning these programs.

Public Improvements

The public improvements outlined earlier are an initial step in promoting redevelopment within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. These actions will help to improve the appearance of the corridor and develop an identity on which individual properties and businesses can build.

Land Assembly

The obsolete platting of land on Wisconsin Avenue has been one of the biggest hurdles for redevelopment projects. One or two small lots, usually 60 feet wide and 120 feet deep, are too small for most redevelopment projects, especially when parking needs are considered. Often, several parcels with several different owners are needed in order to assemble a site large enough to redevelop.

The Land Use chapter of the ***Comprehensive Plan*** (Chapter 10) is consistent with the ***Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan*** in recommending mixed uses for roughly one block on either side of Wisconsin Avenue between Richmond Street and Meade Street. This may be accomplished by amending the City's zoning to establish one or more mixed-use districts that reflect the uses and character desired in this area. Establishing these zones will aid in the land assembly process by eliminating the need to seek rezoning, where presently, the properties needing to be assembled may have one of several different zoning classifications (ex., commercial, residential, institutional, or parking).

On occasion, properties that may be ideal for redevelopment may come on the market. Unfortunately, these properties are not always acquired by an individual intending to redevelop the property, or to put it into a use that the City would consider to be beneficial to the district and to the surrounding land values. In other communities an economic development organization, redevelopment authority, or other entity may create a land bank for such situations, or to proactively engage in land assembly that promotes redevelopment. Although Appleton does not currently have this, the City may evaluate the need and desirability of creating a land bank. One possibility would be to use the City's Housing Authority for this purpose.

Land Use and Design

The land use and character recommendations in this plan will help to steer potential uses to parts of the corridor in which market conditions are most favorable, to cluster commercial activity into nodes rather than a continuous strip, and to establish distinct sub-areas within the corridor in which there is a coherency to uses and design. While this plan contains broad recommendations concerning land use, the City will need to follow up in the implementation stage by amending its zoning ordinance and map to be consistent with the recommendations in the plan. Design recommendations, such as those contained in this plan, may be adopted as part of the district zoning or as a stand-along design guide or ordinance.

Redevelopment or Business Assistance

Appleton does have a history of partnering with developers to redevelop properties in the urban core. The City has access to resources such as redevelopment bonding authority and tax incremental financing that can be used to assist various needs in the redevelopment project. Additionally, the City may establish programs to assist in renovation of existing structures, such as facade renovation loans or grants, sign grants, and historic designations providing access to state and federal tax credits.

Indirectly, assistance to corridor businesses benefits the area by helping to attract businesses or to ensure that the business already in the corridor remain viable and grow. Business assistance programs typically provide either financial or technical assistance. Financial assistance, usually in the form of loans, is typically used to aid in the acquisition, expansion, or renovation of physical space, to purchase fixtures and equipment, or less frequently, to purchase inventory or provide working capital. Tax increment district or Community Development Block Grant funds are often used to capitalize revolving loan funds for these purposes. Other strategies that may be considered including providing assistance to tap state or federal loan pools or loan guarantees.

Technical assistance to businesses has tended to focus more on the start-up phase, and include activities such as developing a business plan or marketing plan, or on securing financing. Within the downtown revitalization community and in a growing number of entrepreneurial and small business programs, new directions are being explored to address the continuing needs of small businesses, such as those found in the corridor. These include providing networking opportunities,

collaborative marketing programs, shared resources (such as administrative staff and office equipment), and assistance or training in specific areas such as visual merchandising or human resources management.

With regard to both technical and financial assistance, Appleton should work collaboratively with business owners and organizations such as the Northside Business Association to identify potential needs of businesses in the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor and other commercial corridors. The City can then determine where its resources may be best employed, either alone or in partnership with others, to promote business growth in the corridor. It should be expected that the needs identified will change over time in response to evolving conditions in the area and in the economy in general.

Private Improvements

Redevelopment should enhance the aesthetics as well as the functionality of commercial property on Wisconsin Avenue. To that end, financial or technical assistance should only be offered to projects that meet the City's design criteria. Design recommendations for the corridor are included within this plan. Additionally, it is expected that they will be formally adopted through inclusion in the City's Zoning Code or through adoption of a design guideline for the corridor.

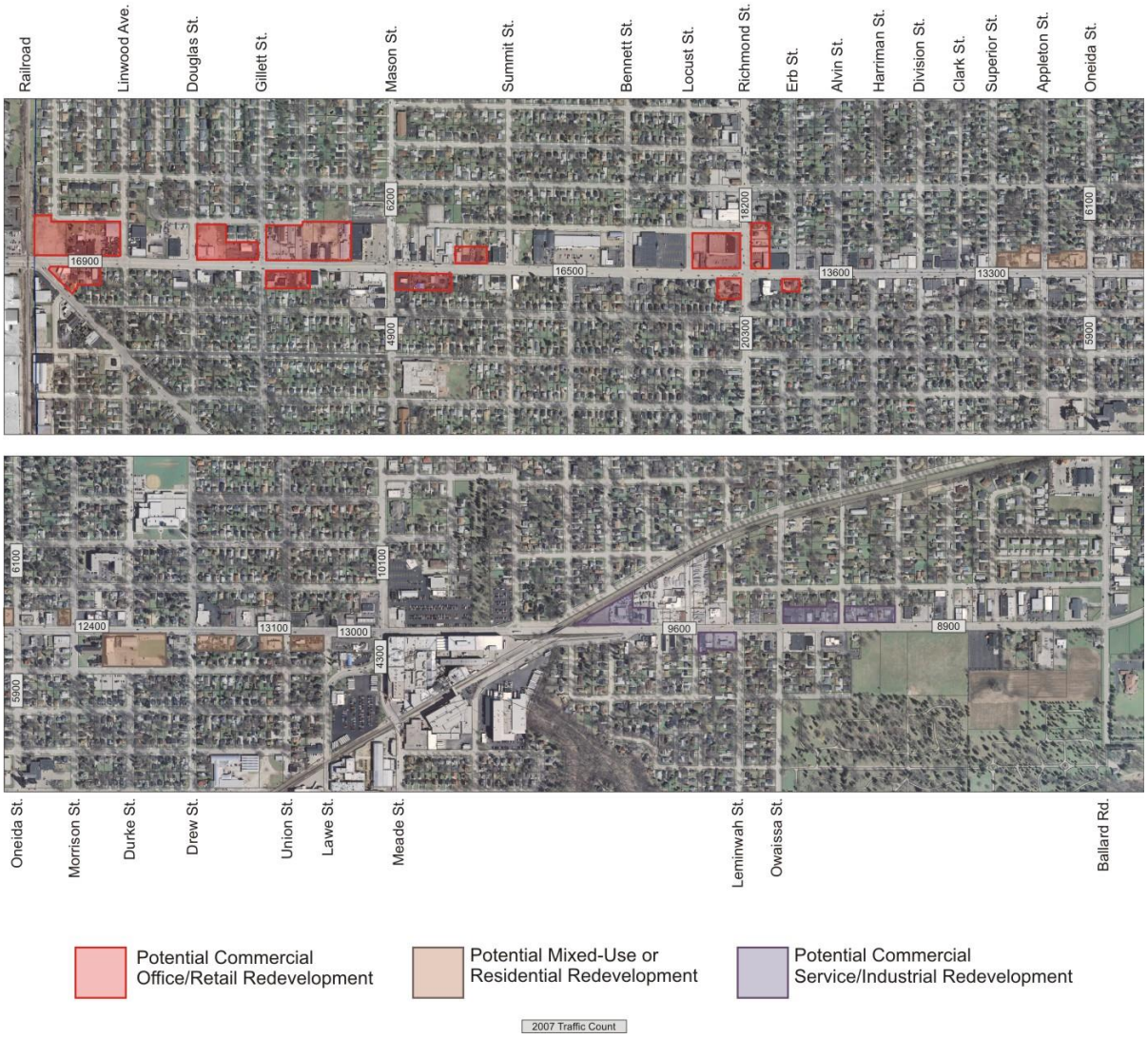
Private landscaping at the street edge contributes to creating an attractive streetscape. Prior to the adoption of the landscaping requirements now in place, many properties were developed with little or no landscaping at the property line. Public sidewalk may transition to nothing more than asphalt. As properties redevelop the City should be vigilant in requiring the installation and maintenance of landscaping. Additionally, the City can use grants and recognition programs to induce owners to install landscaping where there currently is none.

Several billboards are located within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. These detract significantly from the appearance of the corridor. Other Wisconsin communities have sought to eliminate existing billboards by purchasing them or by adopting ordinances that require their eventual removal. Appleton may consider a similar approach.

Redevelopment Opportunities

Redevelopment within the corridor will result in improved economic vitality of individual businesses and the commercial district as a whole, lower vacancy rates, increased property values, new housing and businesses, and a more attractive environment. Redevelopment may consist of the renovation of existing structures or complete redevelopment of sites. Some of the most likely locations for redevelopment are indicated on the following map of the corridor. Some of these are discussed here in greater detail.

Potential Redevelopment Sites in the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor



- Intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Richmond Street

  Significant traffic makes this the most important intersection in the corridor, a status that is reinforced by the fact that Richmond Street provides a direct connection to downtown, and by the transition in the character of Wisconsin Avenue to a more traditional urban commercial district to the west of the intersection. Small buildings at both the southwest and the northeast corners of the intersection, and additional properties extending north and south, are candidates for redevelopment. Other buildings in the area may be considered for renovation and/or facade improvements.

New buildings, placed toward the corner, could help to create a strong identity and sense of entrance to the more pedestrian-oriented part of the corridor. New buildings should be two stories in height, consistent with most others in the area.

Northeast corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Richmond Street

- Appleton Christian School site, south side of Wisconsin Avenue between Morrison Street and Drew Street

  This is the largest redevelopment site on the corridor under single ownership. The existing building formerly housed the Appleton Christian School and is currently being marketed for redevelopment or reuse. Given the age and constraints of the existing structure, it may be preferable to clear the site and build new. While many uses may be acceptable, the most likely use would be high density residential, potentially as a retirement housing community. Because the site is presently public/institutional, and tax exempt, a tax incremental financing district might be considered to spur redevelopment.

- North side of Wisconsin Avenue between the railroad and Mason Street

  Commercial lots in this area are larger, wider, and deeper than most in the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. Several of the lots are under-developed, having large areas of parking or undeveloped land. Buildings in this area are typically metal or block and might easily be torn down or redeveloped. Bell Heights Center would be an excellent model for redevelopment in this area.


The Appleton Christian School redevelopment site, behind the church, as seen from further west on Wisconsin Avenue

- Wisconsin Avenue east of Meade Street

  Structures in this area tend to be simple metal sided or block buildings without any significant aesthetic value. Sites tend to be under-developed with many asphalt or gravel surfaces. A few small houses are located in the area. Redevelopment is expected to continue to support the same kinds of uses, but to offer a higher design standard. This

would encompass building facades, site layout, screening of outdoor storage, and landscaping along the street frontage.

Design Recommendations

A number of design concepts should govern development, redevelopment, and renovation within the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. These design recommendations are consistent with recommendations for the Richmond Street and South Oneida Street corridors.

General Principles

- Development should be designed to be distinctive, yet to blend with the character of the surrounding neighborhood, providing transitions in scale, massing, landscaping, and other project elements.
- Development should establish a clear relationship between buildings, streets, pedestrian facilities, parking areas, and public and private open space.
- Development should be oriented to Wisconsin Avenue, and provide a high-quality appearance including building facades and landscaping.
- Renovation or expansion of existing buildings should respect the original character of the building, or of nearby buildings in the corridor.
- No single architectural style is appropriate for the area. Original and interesting building designs are encouraged.
- Buildings should present a variety of forms and styles, avoiding the repetition of a single style or identical patterns (rooflines, fenestrations etc.) across multiple buildings.

General Commercial Areas

- Site planning should seek to provide a logical progression from the street to the building entrance.
- Buildings should be attractively designed, and the City may require the alteration of chain design to more closely blend in with other buildings in the corridor. Buildings should feature a prominent entrance that is oriented to Wisconsin Avenue.
- Facades should use only high-quality building materials such as brick, stone, architectural metal, and similar products. Materials such as vinyl or EIFS should be used sparingly if at all.
- All on-site utilities should be buried. All outdoor mechanical equipment should be fully screened from view from any public street or abutting residential property.
- Areas for centralized trash container storage and recycling bins should be located inside of buildings or to the rear of the buildings, and screened with materials identical to those used on the building facade.
- Adequate on-site parking should be provided to meet City standards. Internal parking lot landscaping should be provided on lots with more than 20 parking stalls.
- Landscaping should be provided across the site and concentrated in the street yard. Landscaping should be used to screen parking, to break up the mass of blank walls, and to create an attractive entry to the building.
- A continuous pedestrian walkway should be provided from the public sidewalk to the primary building entrance.
- Bicycle racks and lockers may be required as part of all commercial development projects.

- Signage should be limited in size and quantity, and include only building-mounted or monument signs to reduce the cluttered appearance of the corridor.

Pedestrian-Oriented Commercial Areas

- Site planning should seek to maximize the built-up area along the street and create a cohesive sense of place across multiple development sites. Side setbacks should not be required, to allow buildings to share a common wall and create a sense of enclosure on the street.
- Buildings should be attractively designed, and the City may require the alteration of chain design to more closely blend in with other buildings in the corridor. Buildings should feature a prominent entrance that is oriented to Wisconsin Avenue.
- Building height should generally be two stories. Height should usually not exceed one additional floor than neighboring buildings, unless upper floors are stepped back to create the appearance of a street wall of more or less uniform height.
- Ground floor commercial facades will be largely transparent with usable entrances oriented to the public street. Blank walls should not face the street.
- Facades should use only high-quality building materials such as brick, stone, architectural metal, and similar products. Materials such as vinyl or EIFS should be used sparingly if at all.
- On-site utilities, mechanical equipment, and service areas should not be located on the front of the building or in the street yard. When located elsewhere on the lot, they should be screened from the view of abutting residential uses.
- Areas for centralized trash container storage and recycling bins should be located inside of buildings or to the rear of the buildings, and screened with materials identical to those used on the building facade.
- Due to the difficulty of land assembly and the pedestrian orientation of this area, the City may consider relaxing its requirements to provide on-site parking. Parking areas should usually be located to the rear of the structure, although parking to the side may be allowed if it will not create an excessive “gap” in the street wall. Parking areas should be screened along the street side and from abutting residential areas.

Example of pedestrian-scaled pole signs.

- Buildings may be placed up to the street right-of-way in locations where neighboring buildings are similarly placed. If a street yard is provided, it should be attractively landscaped. Use of the street yard for outdoor patio dining or similar activities may be permitted.
- Building-mounted signage is preferred in this area. The City may consider allowing small monument or pole-mounted signs that are scaled to a pedestrian environment.

Residential Mixed-Use Areas

- Site planning should seek to create a cohesive sense of place with surrounding structures, often serving to create a transition from commercial to lower-density residential uses.
- Buildings should be attractively designed with a prominent entrance that is oriented to Wisconsin Avenue. Multifamily residential and mixed-use buildings should feature protruding bays, gables, dormers, porches, balconies, and other features consistent with residential building design, to break up the facade and create visual interest.
- Building height should generally be two or three stories.
- Facades should use only high-quality building materials such as brick, stone, architectural metal, and similar products. Materials such as vinyl or EIFS should be used sparingly if at all.
- Ground floor commercial facades will be largely transparent with usable entrances oriented to the public street. Blank walls should not face the street.
- On-site utilities, mechanical equipment, and service areas should not be located on the front of the building or in any street yard. When located elsewhere on the lot, they should be screened from the view of abutting residential uses.
- Areas for centralized trash container storage and recycling bins should be located inside of buildings or to the rear of the buildings, and screened with materials identical to those used on the building facade.
- Flexibility should be provided to address the need for on-site parking, however, adequate parking for residential uses must be provided. Some of this may take the form of spaces shared with commercial activities in mixed-use buildings.
- In keeping with a residential or mixed-use character, an attractively landscaped front yard should be provided. The space in front of commercial uses may be used outdoor seating or patio dining, or similar activities.
- Building-mounted signage is preferred in this area. The City may consider allowing small monument or pole-mounted signs that are scaled to a pedestrian environment.

Service Commercial Areas

- Site planning should seek to provide a logical progression from the street to the building entrance.
- Buildings should be attractively designed, and the City may require the alteration of chain design to more closely blend in with other buildings in the corridor. Buildings should feature a prominent entrance that is oriented to Wisconsin Avenue.
- Facades should use only high-quality building materials such as brick, stone, architectural metal, and similar products. Materials such as vinyl or EIFS should be used sparingly if at all.
- All on-site utilities should be buried. All outdoor mechanical equipment should be fully screened from view from any public street or abutting residential property.
- Outdoor storage and displays may be permitted in this area. These storage and display areas will typically be located to the rear or side of the primary building on the site. Storage areas will be screened from view. Display areas may be required to provide landscaping or decorative fencing to soften their appearance.

- Areas for centralized trash container storage and recycling bins should be located inside of buildings or to the rear of the buildings, and screened with materials identical to those used on the building facade.
- Adequate on-site parking should be provided to meet City standards. Internal parking lot landscaping should be provided on lots with more than 20 parking stalls.
- Landscaping should be provided across the site and concentrated in the street yard. It should be used to screen parking, to break up the mass of blank walls, and to create an attractive entry to the building.
- A continuous pedestrian walkway should be provided from the public sidewalk to the primary building entrance.
- Bicycle racks and lockers may be required as part of all commercial development projects.
- Signage should be limited in size and quantity, and include only building-mounted or monument signs to reduce the cluttered appearance of the corridor.

Lighting

- Lighting should be provided at different illumination levels to reinforce the circulation hierarchy of public streets, parking areas, and pedestrian walkways. The height of the light poles should be appropriate to human scale, with no more than 12 feet to 16 feet recommended.
- All exterior lighting should be unobtrusive and designed to avoid glare into neighboring buildings or public spaces. Up-lighting of building elements and trees will not be permitted. All illumination should be directed downward.
- All building entrances and pedestrian areas, such as walkways and stairways, should be adequately lit to provide safety and security.

Signage

- Signs should be designed to be unobtrusive and blend with the character of the building.
- Use of movable copy and LED signs should be prohibited.
- Indirect lighting is preferred over back-lit signs.

Design for Sustainability

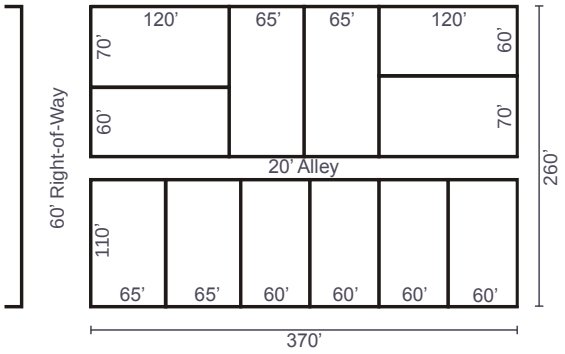
The following are some measures that can be considered to promote sustainability within the river area.

- Encourage development of buildings to green standards.
- Orient and design buildings to improve energy conservation.
- Consider renovation of existing structures or the recycling of building materials from structures on the site, whenever possible.
- Using building materials with low life cycle costs, high-recycled content and low toxicity reduces environmental impacts.
- Minimize the need for parking areas by providing facilities for pedestrian and bicycle transportation, and for transit-served development.
- Utilize low-impact design and other stormwater management techniques to improve water quality from runoff from redeveloped sites.
- Adopt green practices in designing infrastructure and selecting fixtures.

- Design landscape plantings, soils and sub-soils for infiltration and evapo-transpiration of rainwater.
- Specify native plant and tree species for a majority of the site. Naturalized planting areas are encouraged at appropriate locations in the river area, especially along the river's edge.
- Use integrated pest management practices and appropriate plantings to eliminate the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers.
- Provide receptacles for collection and storage of trash and recyclables.

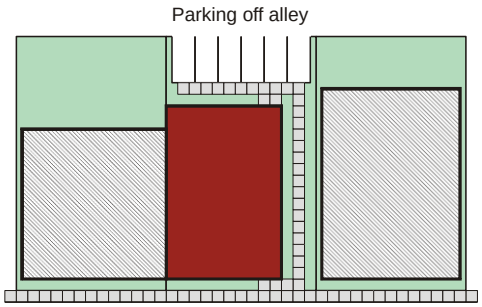
Site Design Examples

The following site design concepts are meant to illustrate alternative approaches to building siting and site development that may be adopted in the corridor. These designs are meant to work within a typical redevelopment site. The following image represents a typical pattern of lots in the corridor.

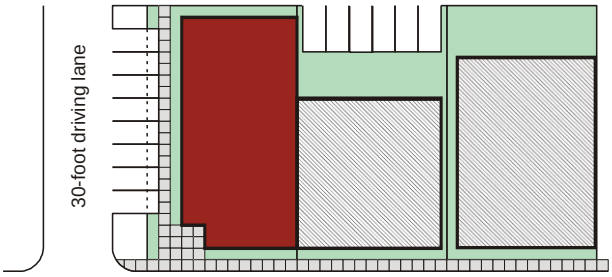


The following images represent concepts for the placement of commercial buildings in the pedestrian-oriented commercial zone. In the image at left, the new building is placed mid-block. Parking is provided to the rear and is accessed from the alley. A walkway on one side of the building provides a connection to the street. The primary entrance is oriented to the street, although a rear entrance may also be provided.

The building is placed on a corner in the second image. Again, the building is placed at or near the street right-of-way and the primary entrance is oriented to the street (in this case, the corner). Parking is located at the rear of the building. This image shows on-street parking on the side street. On a case-by-case basis, the City may consider allowing angled parking on the side street. Traffic volumes, right-of-way, and other considerations should be taken into account when making a decision.

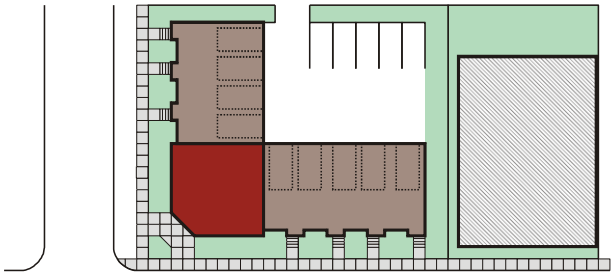


Mid-block infill of a 3000' square foot building in a Pedestrian-Oriented District



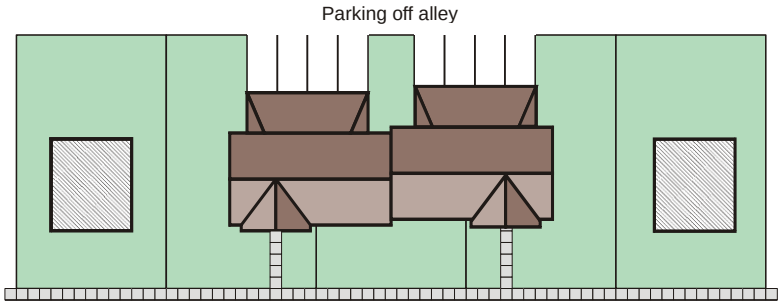
Corner lot with a 5000 square foot building and on-street parking on the side street in a Pedestrian-Oriented District

This next image is meant to illustrate a possible development pattern for a mixed-use building in the residential mixed-use area. The building is set close to the street, although a street yard is provided for privacy and buffering for the residential uses. In this example, most units are provided a private entry from the street. Garage parking is provided in addition to some surface parking, all of which is accessed from the alley. Garage doors do not face the street. The commercial part of the building is located at the corner.



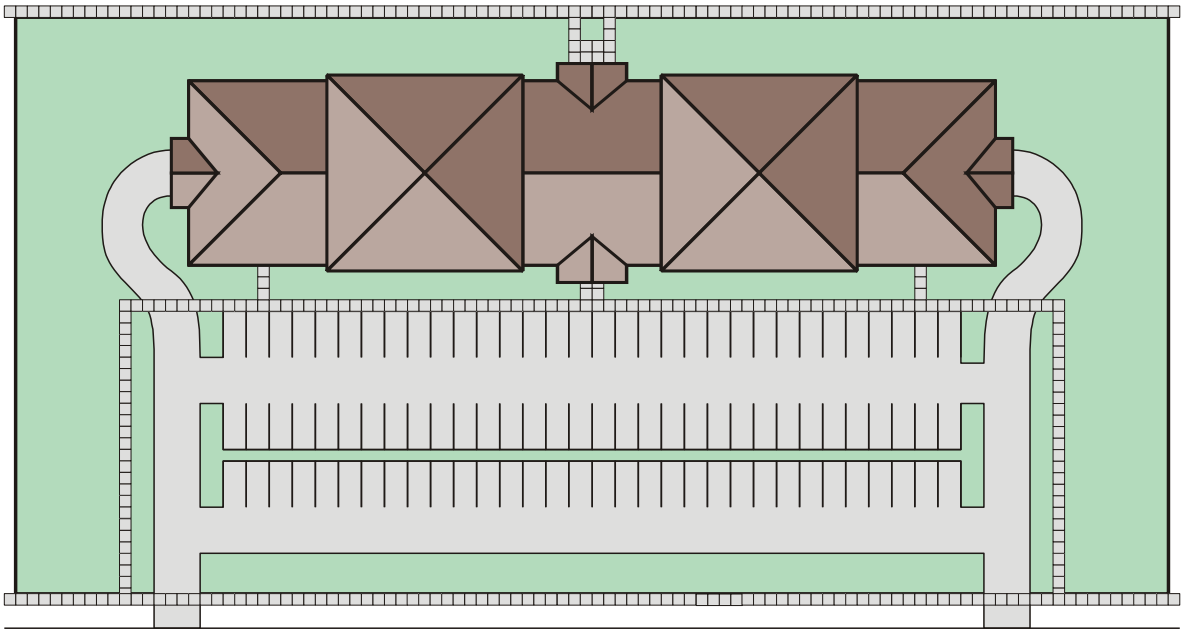
Corner lots with a mixed-use building (1600 sq. ft. commercial and nine apartments) in a Residential Mixed-Use District

The following example is of a residential multifamily building constructed on three lots, perhaps between existing single family homes. Setbacks are similar to surrounding structures. The building is staggered to break up its mass and gables are used to create a more residential appearance. Parking is provided in garages accessed from the alley.



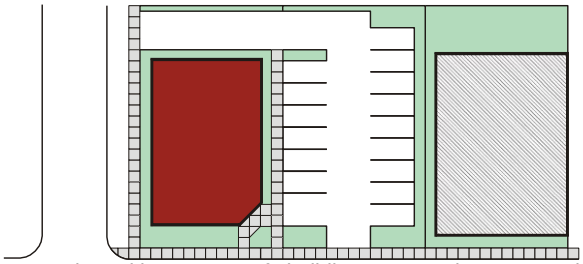
Mid-block infill of an eight-unit residential building, with parking in the rear and rear-loaded garages, in a Residential Mixed-Use area

The building shown here is meant to illustrate a potential redevelopment concept for the Appleton Christian School site. The foot print is an approximation for the area needed to create 60 units in approximately three floors, with underground parking. Including potential areas of surface parking, this development would provide 2.5 parking stalls for every unit. If less parking is required the building might be expanded or additional greenspace could be provided. As with the other examples, the building is set back from the street. The roofline and exterior are varied to break up the building's mass.

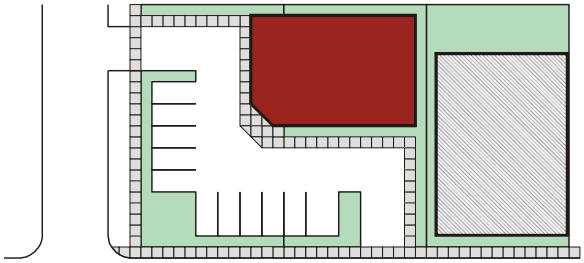


Sixty-unit, three-story residential building on a large redevelopment site, with underground parking and 2.5 stalls per unit, in a Residential Mixed-Use Area (Appleton Christian School site)

The last set of images reflect potential site layouts within the general commercial area. These are alternative approaches for a small redevelopment site. The first example sets the building close to the corner and places parking to the side. This allows for a more efficient use of the limited site area, as less of the parking area is required for access lanes. In the second example there is not enough depth to double-load parking stalls on the driving lanes. As a result, fewer parking stalls can be placed on-site.



Corner lots with a 5000 sq. ft. building set near the street and parking to the interior side, in a General Commercial area



Corner lots with a 5000 sq. ft. building set back from the street with parking in front, in a General Commercial area

Implementation Framework

Redevelopment will occur at a pace determined by the owners of redevelopment sites in the corridor. The City's role will largely be to establish the framework under which that redevelopment may occur and to partner with the private sector to support individual redevelopment projects.

The following matrix outlines the specific actions that the City will take to promote revitalization of the corridor.

Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Implementation Matrix

Recommended Action	Stakeholders	Time Frame	Measurement
Amend the City's zoning map and ordinance to accommodate the recommended land uses and patterns of redevelopment in the plan.	City of Appleton (Community Development)	Immediate	Zoning is amended in accordance with the plan
Adopt design standards consistent with recommendations in the plan, either through the zoning ordinance, or as a design guideline.	City of Appleton (Community Development)	Immediate	Design guidelines are adopted
Design and install gateway features at either end of Wisconsin Avenue.	City of Appleton (Community Development and Public Works)	Coinciding with construction on Wisconsin Avenue	Gateway features are installed
Conduct a public sign audit to determine where signage may be eliminated or consolidated to reduce clutter.	City of Appleton (Community Development and Public Works)	Coinciding with construction on Wisconsin Avenue	Sign audit is completed and signage is reduced
Consider burial or relocation of utilities in the public right-of-way.	City of Appleton, utility providers	Case-by-case as development occurs	Review of need for relocation or burial
Design and install streetscape elements as recommended in the plan.	City of Appleton (Community Development and Public Works)	Coinciding with construction on Wisconsin Avenue	Installation of streetscape improvements
Assess the need for crosswalk improvements and other pedestrian safety improvements.	City of Appleton (Community Development and Public Works)	Ongoing	Improvements made as need is identified
Provide enhanced accommodations for transit in the corridor.	City of Appleton (Public Works) and Valley Transit	Following construction on Wisconsin Avenue	New transit facilities are installed
Make financial and technical assistance resources available to support redevelopment (such as tax incremental financing districts, and grants from the State of Wisconsin)	City of Appleton (Community Development)	Driven by property owners	Resources are adequate to enable redevelopment