

# Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015

## Summary of Accomplishments and Issues



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

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## **Summary of Accomplishments and Issues**

This chapter of the *Comprehensive Plan* summarizes the major conditions and planning issues that were identified in the analyses of the various subjects. The chapter opens with a description of the major changes or accomplishment since the 2005 Plan.

Issues are defined as questions that should be discussed and debated during the comprehensive planning process and resolved in light of other issues.

Subsequent chapters of this plan present the analyses of conditions and a more detailed discussion of issues for each planning topic. This information will help citizens and officials understand these and other issues and how they are interrelated.

### **Major Changes since the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan***

#### **Land Use and Growth Management**

Agreements have been reached with each of the adjacent Towns that will minimize the platting of land into semi-rural parcels that would disrupt the efficient expansion of City utilities and roads and private, urban land development.

This was a major achievement and the centerpiece of the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan*. It was clearly the most significant planning and development issue facing the City of Eau Claire in 2005. If Eau Claire were to become surrounded by semi-rural lots that are too large to economically serve with sewer and water yet too small to resubdivided into urban-sized lots, there would be great costs to the City and the region. Those costs would include higher property taxes in both the City and the Towns, loss of City tax base, higher private land development costs, loss of productive farmland, reduced regional competitiveness and a blurring of the visual distinction between the city and the country.

Based on the intergovernmental agreements mentioned above, the City developed plans for land use, roads, utilities, neighborhood design and environmental protection in the Urban Sewer Service Area of each of the five adjacent Towns. Those plans apply only to properties that successfully petition for annexation to the City. In developing these plans, the City reaffirmed its long-standing policy that City sewer or water services would be extended only to properties in the City or subject to a municipal boundary agreement.

#### **Demographics**

Eau Claire grew by approximately 2,100 people and 825 households.

Income and wages in Eau Claire have lagged behind those of the Eau Claire metro area, the state and the Twin Cities area, and the gap is growing wider. Although the household, family and per capita incomes of Eau Claire increased slightly during the 2000s, the income gap between the City and the metro area or the state median also grew somewhat during this period.

The population of Eau Claire is slightly more racially diverse than it was in 1980, 1990 or 2000.

The average household size has continued to shrink slowly, while the median age has risen.

The official rate of unemployment has fallen back into a moderate range and the percentage of the population over age 16 that is employed is about the same as it was in year 2000. The economy is less reliant on heavy manufacturing and has diversified into more managerial, professional, technical, retail and financial jobs. However, it is suspected that many people are working at less than their potential and that young adults are not finding local employment at a rate sufficient to maintain their share of the community age profile.

### **The Natural Environment**

Through the *Waterways Plan Update* in 2012, the City built consensus around several important issues that were raised in the 2005 Plan. These include riverfront land use, riverbank stabilization techniques and locations for riverfront open space.

Working with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, major water quality improvements have been achieved in Half Moon Lake. Likewise, the City has adopted new regulations for surface water management and has begun using them to the benefit of the rivers and streams.

### **Transportation**

Many transportation improvements have been made since 2005.

Hastings Way was redesigned to four lanes from six, reconstructed and transferred to the City from the State. This was accomplished in connection with realigning US 53 out of Eau Claire.

New roundabouts were added in locations shown by Figure 5-13 of the Transportation Assessment.

There were several improvements to the bicyclist and pedestrian systems.

Highway 93, Clairemont Avenue, South Barstow Street, and Brackett-Harding Avenues were all improved.

### **Public Utilities**

The 2005 public utilities issues have mostly been resolved. These included how to accomplish extending sewer and water efficiently into perimeter locations annexed from the Towns, how to reduce river flooding, how to stabilize the riverbanks, and how to improve water quality in the streams and Half Moon Lake. A 2015 water system evaluation recommended several major improvements.

## **Parks, Greenways and Trails**

Kyes Park, a 103 acre community park, was acquired. Two special area park sites along the rivers were acquired. Five new sections of off-street, multiple-use paths were built. The locations of existing and planned parks and trails are shown in the Parks, Greenways and Trails Assessment.

## **Economic Competitiveness**

Eau Claire has pulled out of the Great Recession and regained most of the jobs it had lost. However, wages and median household incomes remain stagnant. Downtown is gaining strength as a jobs center, and the recreation, arts and cultural elements of the city seem to be a greater force in attracting and retaining workers and firms.



Domer Park and Dells Pond

## **Neighborhoods**

Since 2005, there has been considerable success at redeveloping and revitalizing Downtown, particularly the North Barstow District. There has been growth around both medical centers, the university and the technical college. Private investments along Water Street have continued, the University has committed to redeveloping the County Materials site and the South Bridge was officially removed from local and state plans. Neighborhood plans for the Eastside Hill, West Riverside, Water Street, and Historic Randall Park were prepared since 2005.

## **Housing**

The annual number of new single-family houses built in Eau Claire fell to approximately one-third of what it was before 2005; new attached housing units fell to about two-thirds of the prior pace. Housing rental assistance from the federal and state governments continued to decline. No new publicly-owned housing units were built. Housing conditions in the older neighborhood continued to decline in general. Housing costs continued to rise but at a slower rate than in the past.

## **Historic and Cultural Resources**

Three new national register districts have been named. The number of individual properties considered locally significant increased by 10 to 76.

The Landmarks Commission prepared a report on the status of opted-out properties in the Third Ward Historic Landmark District with recommendations on ways to reinstate properties that opted-out in 1992.

The Chippewa Valley Museum prepared *The Good Life Project*, a survey of local culture in the broadest sense with recommendations on how to enhance it.

## Downtown

Downtown has continued the success story begun prior to the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan*. Here are the major achievements since then:

- Significant development occurred in the North Barstow District. A total of 215 housing units and 30,000 square feet of commercial space have been built or renovated in the North Barstow District. Three of the six new buildings have either housing or offices above first-floor retail space.
- JAMF Software established its 65,000 square foot headquarters and research-and-development building next to the Royal Credit Union headquarters and Phoenix Park.
- The Mayo Clinic Health System built a 166-bed tower.
- The site plan was approved for the first phase of *The Confluence*. This partnership of a private developer, the University and the City would create 116 units of student housing, a performing arts center with three theaters and 1900 seats, University class rooms, space for retail businesses and restaurants, underground parking, a public plaza and riverfront path improvements.
- The riverfront trail was extended under the Barstow and Farwell Street bridges.
- The Chamber of Commerce building and related trail extension were completed.
- The City rebuilt the Railroad Street parking lot and trail.
- The Chippewa River State Trail was extended east to Hastings Way and north to Chippewa Falls
- The *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan* was adopted in 2010, addressing the area west of the Chippewa River between Fulton and Marshall Streets and west to Ninth Street. .
- The *Waterways Plan* was updated in 2012, addressing many riverfront land use, redevelopment, design, and park or trail issues.
- Barstow Street and Graham Avenue were changed to two-way streets and rebuilt with new sidewalk treatments.
- The US Post Office building and property was purchased by the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority, and the Post Office relocated to one of the new mixed-use buildings along Madison Street in 2014.



Barstow Street was rebuilt in 2014 with new sidewalks

## Sustainable Community Design

The Sustainability Assessment chapter explains how Eau Claire has become an Energy Independent community, an “eco-municipality” and a Green Tier Legacy Community. Sustainability is a new element of the *Comprehensive Plan* since 2005.

## Community Health

The City formed a strategic alliance with the Eau Claire Healthy Communities Council. Greater alignment was achieved with the City-County Community Health Improvement Plan and the hospitals' joint community health assessment. Work was done on the issue of access to nutritious food for low-income residents. A railroad "quiet zone" study was completed and bicycling and walking paths and lanes were added.

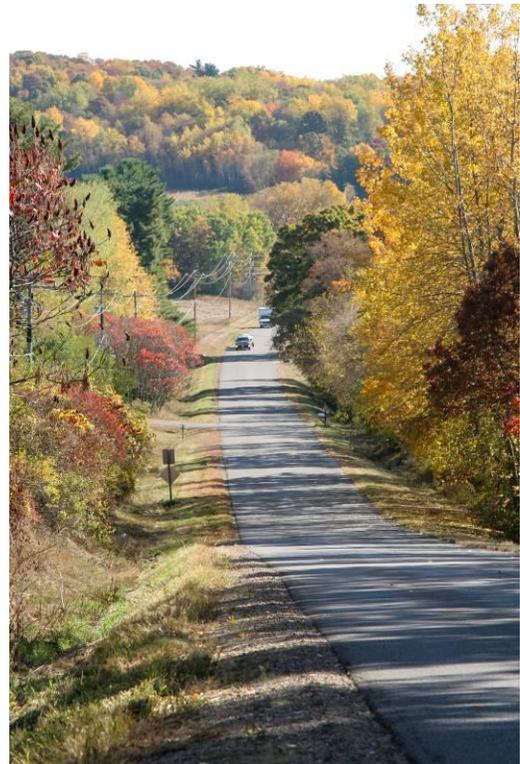
## Intergovernmental Coordination

Much progress has been made since the 2005 Comprehensive Plan in terms of cooperation between the City and its five adjacent Towns with regard to the planning and regulation of land use, utilities and roads on the periphery of the City.

The major planning issue in the 2005 plan was: *What should the City do to ensure that urban expansion is compact, cost-efficient and designed for lasting value?*

In response to that issue, the City proposed and the Towns each accepted subdivision regulations that set the minimum size of new residential lots at 10 acres while providing for exceptions. Each Town subsequently amended its land use plan to conform to a legally binding intergovernmental agreement to that effect; Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties did the same. The City then prepared a plan for land use that would apply to properties that successfully petition for annexation from each of the five Towns, along with general plans for the extension of public utilities and major roads.

These agreements are of historic proportion and demonstrate that governments can work together for the greater good even when it requires bending entrenched practices and convictions.



The agreements with the five adjacent Towns that grew out of the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan* will help protect the growth options of the City.

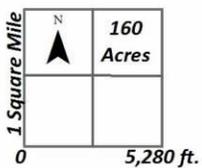
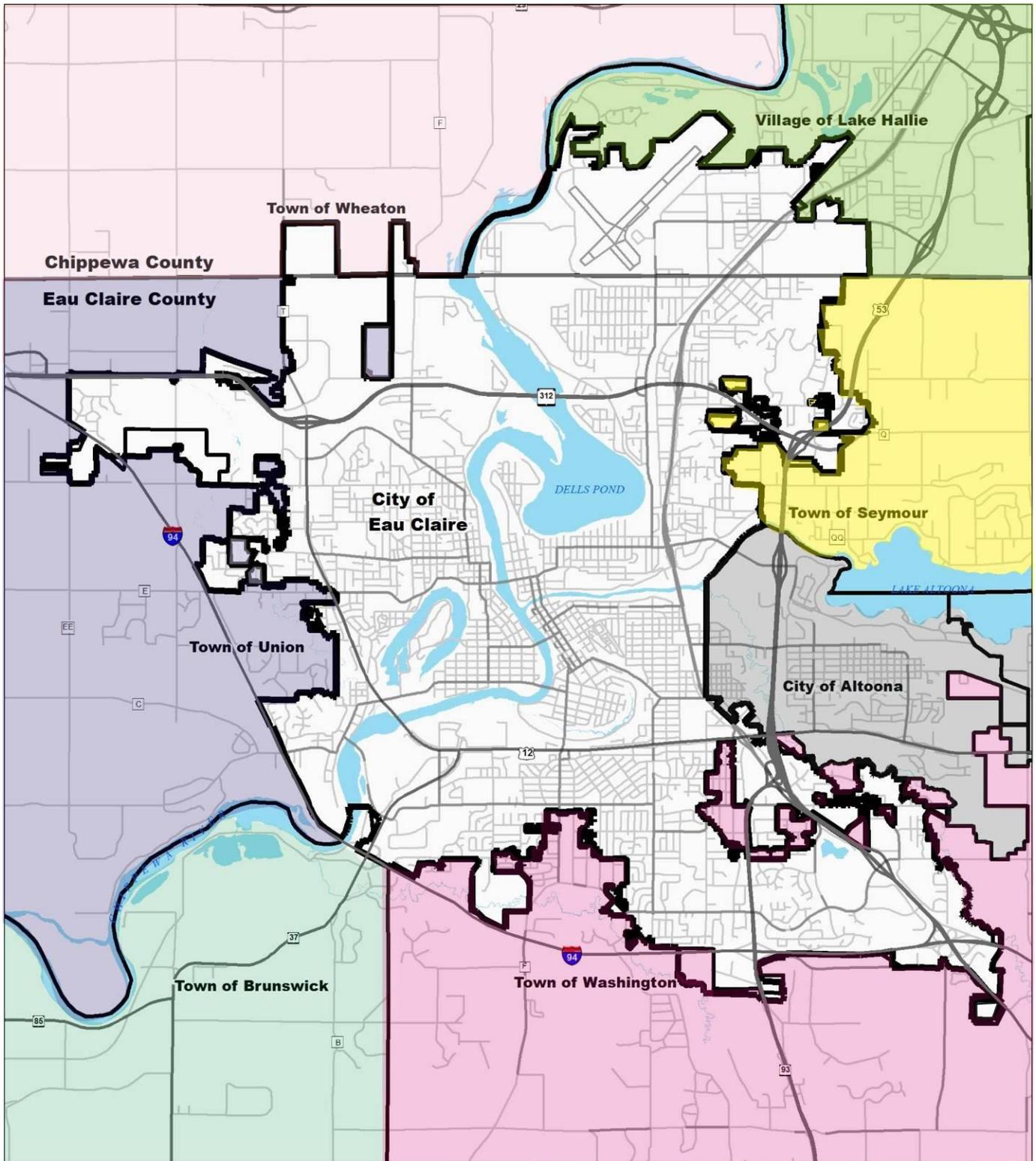


Figure 1-1  
Regional  
Location

## Major Planning Issues

Each of the following issues – and others – are explained in their respective chapters of this Analysis of Conditions.

### Demographics

- 1. Household Income and Employment:** What, if anything, should the City do to promote the growth of living-wage jobs, help raise average incomes and reduce the rate of poverty, unemployment, under-employment and their debilitating personal effects among Eau Claire residents, particularly households with children? This issue was the most highly rated by members of the Citizens Advisory Committee on the *Comprehensive Plan*.
- 2. Age Structure:** What should the City do to attract and retain more people in the 25 to 34 year-old age group, those who are beginning their careers and families?
- 3. Regional and City Growth:** What additional steps should the City take, if any, to attempt to capture a portion of the projected population growth in the region?
- 4. Household Size and Housing Choices:** How should the Land Use Plan respond to the shrinking average size of households and the increased demand for multiple-family housing?
- 5. Population Composition:** How should the City work toward integrating and accommodating growing minority population groups?

### The Natural Environment

- 1. River and Creek Shoreline Land Use:** What is the most appropriate pattern of land use along the rivers and creeks? Where, if anywhere, should additional public access to the rivers and creeks be created?
- 2. River Flooding:** Should the City acquire additional houses from the floodplain in the North Riverfronts Neighborhood and other floodplain areas?
- 3. River and Creek Water Quality:** What actions should the City take to maintain or improve the quality of water entering the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers?

### Land Use and Growth Management

- 1. Neighborhoods:** What land use changes, if any, should be pursued in order to promote continued investment and residency in the older neighborhoods of Eau Claire?
- 2. Downtown:** What should be the next major step forward for Downtown? Should the City participate financially in redevelopment east of North Barstow Street?
- 3. Riverfronts:** How should the remaining major potential changes be handled, such as the Oxford Street corridor, the Menomonie Street corridor and the vicinity of American Boulevard and Short Street?
- 4. Economic Development, Jobs and Income:** What land use, zoning and development policy changes should be made to help promote economic development in Eau Claire?

5. **New Neighborhood Design:** Should the City require that new residential areas be designed with many of the features of the older neighborhoods such as sidewalks, street trees, a mixture of housing types, narrow streets, short front setbacks and garages located to the rear?
6. **Commercial Growth:** How much land should be planned and zoned for retail business development? Should multiple-family housing be allowed in certain commercially-zoned locations?
7. **General Redevelopment:** How proactive should the City be in encouraging redevelopment?
8. **Oakwood Mall and Vicinity:** Should the City promote more intensive development around the shopping mall that may eventually include multi-story office buildings, multiple-family housing, mixed-use development and structured parking?
9. **Jurisdictional Boundary with the City of Altoona:** Where should the future municipal border be located between Eau Claire and Altoona east of US 53?
10. **Annexation of Town Peninsulas:** Should the City act to encourage annexation of properties in the peninsulas of the town of Washington?

### Transportation

1. **Transit Alternatives:** Should the City adopt the changes recommended in the 2014 *Transit Development Plan*?
2. **Circulation and Connectivity:** Should the City continue to request that WisDOT build a new interchange along I-94 at Cameron Street? Should the City pay part of the cost?
3. **Sidewalk Requirements:** Should the City continue to require sidewalks on both sides of new streets or should amendments to this requirement be made?
4. **Trail Connectivity:** To what extent should additional investments be made to construct a connected trail system? Where should future trails be located?
5. **Railroad "Quiet Zones":** Should the City invest in railroad crossing improvements at selected locations so that trains do not sound their whistles?

### Public Utilities

At this time, there are no major planning issues related to the public sanitary sewer and water systems or the surface water drainage system because substantial progress has been made over the past ten to fifteen years.

### Parks, Greenways and Trails

1. **The Number of Full-Service Playgrounds:** Should the City reduce the number of playgrounds at which it provides a full complement of facilities and programs?
2. **New Neighborhood Parks:** Should the City continue to create a 5- to 10-acre playground in each new neighborhood (about 4,000 residents), or should there be fewer but larger playgrounds?

3. **Riverfront Parks:** How aggressive should the City be in acquiring land and/or easements to extend the park system along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers? To what extent should the City strive to provide or require public access to the riverfront during property redevelopment? Should additional riverfront park land be created by acquiring additional properties between the Eau Claire River and East Grand Avenue between Downtown and Boyd Park?
4. **Balance of Park Size and Type in All Areas of the City:** Should newly developed areas have the same number and distribution of small neighborhood parks as older Eau Claire neighborhoods?
5. **System Acquisition and Funding:** Is the present system of acquiring land for future parks adequate? What is the best means to fund trail reconstruction, new play equipment, stadium renovations and life guards at Half Moon Beach?

### Economic Competitiveness

1. **Workforce:** How can the community maintain or improve its attractiveness as a place to live and work? Which community resources and areas should be a priority in a strategy to attract and retain a competitive workforce, including the “Millennials”, those born between approximately 1982 and 2004?
2. **Fringe Sites versus Redevelopment Sites:** What should the City do to promote the use of sites that already have utilities and roads instead of “greenfield” sites?
3. **Downtown:** Should a plan be prepared for redevelopment east of North Barstow Street?

### Urban Design

#### New Residential Neighborhoods

1. **Street Connectivity:** Should streets in new neighborhoods be interconnected or should the pattern be dominated by cul-de-sacs?
2. **Street Design:** Should future minor residential streets be built narrower than they are presently, which is 30 feet between the backs of the curbs?
3. **Sidewalks:** Should future residential streets have sidewalks on both sides?
4. **Development Model:** Which development model is preferred: the traditional neighborhood with its emphasis on the street, sidewalk and front yard, or the more low density “suburban” look? Does Eau Claire wish to design its zoning regulations to promote one or the other, or leave it to the market to decide?

#### Established Residential Neighborhoods

1. **Commercial Activity in Predominately Residential Areas:** Under what conditions, if any, should commercial development be allowed in areas that are predominately residential?
2. **Mixture of Housing Types:** In what instances, if any, would it be appropriate to introduce multiple-family housing into single-family neighborhoods? What conditions should be applied in such instances?

- 3. Mixed-Use Development:** Where might it be appropriate to mix residential with non-residential land uses? When might they be mixed vertically (housing above business) or horizontally (housing next to commercial space)?

#### Commercial Districts and Corridors

- 1. Design Guidelines and Design Review:** Should the site planning and landscaping regulations in the zoning ordinance be made more rigorous?
- 2. Design Guidelines for Commercial Signs:** Should business signs be more limited in size, height and number?
- 3. Major Road Corridor Beautification:** Should the City undertake landscaping and decorative lighting improvement projects along the major roadways of the city such as US 312 (North Crossing), Hendrickson Drive and North Clairemont Avenue?

#### Neighborhoods

- 1. Level of Effort:** What level of municipal effort should be devoted to helping improve the older neighborhoods? Should the City devote an extra measure of effort to the older neighborhoods compared to the newer areas?
- 2. Roles of the City and the Private Sector:** What is the appropriate role for the City in neighborhood revitalization? Should the task of rehabilitation and reinvestment be left to property owners while the City maintains the infrastructure and provides normal City services? The City has been investing in streets, parks and downtown redevelopment, but should there be funds allocated to specifically leverage private reinvestment? To what extent should (or can) the City enlist the assistance of private businesses, foundations and not-for-profit corporations? Should a neighborhood non-profit development corporation be created to assist in neighborhood revitalization?
- 3. Appropriate Changes:** Which, if any, locations would be acceptable for new multiple-family housing? Sometimes, an increase in housing density is necessary to make redevelopment economically feasible. What should be done to preserve the best elements of neighborhood character as change occurs?
- 4. Owner-Occupancy:** What should be done to encourage owner-occupancy of houses, either existing or new?



A tree-lined street in the Third Ward Neighborhood

## Housing

1. **Affordability for Low-Income Households:** Should the City put more of its own money into rent assistance and scattered-site public housing?
2. **Diversity and Design:** To what degree is a diversity of housing types desirable within single neighborhoods? Could design standards help to create a compatible mixture of housing types and densities?
3. **Infill Standards:** Should design standards be developed for new infill housing in existing older neighborhoods?
4. **Preservation of Existing Housing:** How can the city's existing housing stock best be preserved and upgraded? How can Eau Claire's large stock of 1950s and 1960s single-family houses best be updated to meet current market needs and ensure the continued viability of their neighborhoods.
5. **"Upper-Bracket" Housing:** Should the City make special efforts to attract new housing with sale prices over \$300,000?
6. **Zoning Flexibility:** Should the city's zoning code be made more flexible to accommodate a greater variety of housing types and site designs?

## Historic and Cultural Resources

1. **Preservation Incentives:** Should additional incentives be made available to encourage the preservation and restoration of significant buildings, and should such incentives be made available to older "non-significant" buildings?
2. **Opted-Out Properties:** How should the City address the current status of the districts and individual properties that opted out of their historic designation in 1992?
3. **Downtown:** Do the buildings downtown need some level of additional recognition, designation or protection?

## Downtown

1. **City Support:** What degree of financial and other support will the City be willing to provide for Downtown redevelopment?
2. **West Riverside Redevelopment:** How should the riverfront property north of Madison Street along both sides of Oxford Street be developed, and what should be the role of the public sector?
3. **North Barstow Redevelopment:** What should be the next step in the redevelopment of the North Barstow District?
4. **South Barstow Redevelopment:** What should be the next step in the revitalization of the south Barstow District?
5. **Public Access to the Riverfront:** To what extent should there be public access to the riverfront in Downtown? Should such access be provided strictly through public parks or should there be a combination of parks and easements across private property?
6. **Parking:** What should the City do to create a more favorable parking environment?

### Community Facilities

1. **Airport Master Plan:** Should the City incorporate the Airport Master Plan into the City's *Comprehensive Plan* and adjust its zoning ordinance?
2. **University Master Plan:** How should the City incorporate the University's Master Plan into the City's *Comprehensive Plan*?

### Sustainable Community Design

1. **Environmental Conservation:** What should the City do to safeguard our trees, soil and water resources?
2. **Atmosphere:** What should the City do to reduce our contribution to global warming and minimize air pollution?
3. **Sustainable Development:** How should the City guide and promote development so that buildings and neighborhoods incorporate sustainable features?
4. **Balanced Transportation:** How can transportation infrastructure be designed with the environment in mind?

### Community Health

1. **Promoting Well-Being:** What should the City do to promote health among its population, defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity?



Bicycling is becoming more comfortable, safe and practical in Eau Claire, a trend that supports better transportation, recreation and health.