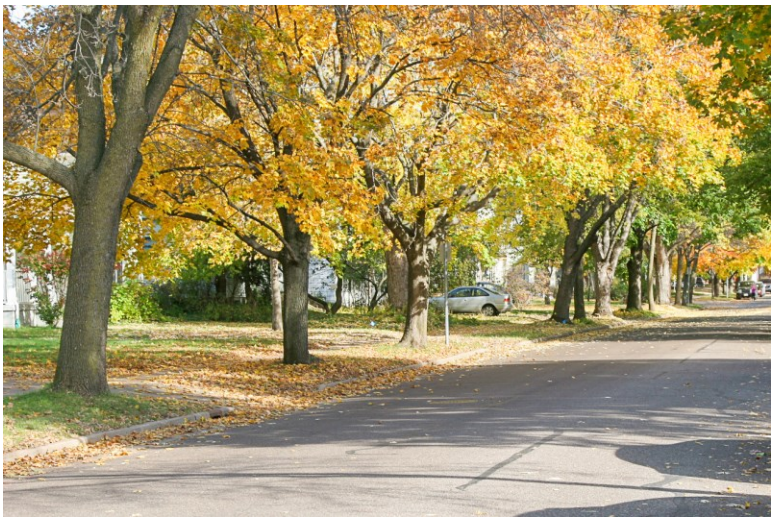
Urban Design Plan

The Eau Claire Community Urban Design Plan is intended to guide public and private investments to create a more attractive community. The goal, objectives and policies of this chapter direct the City in terms of its ordinances, spending and public infrastructure design, especially in regard to streets and parks. Private actions are directed through the City's review of development applications and amendments to the City's zoning ordinance.

Urban design addresses the three-dimensional aspects of city planning – the way the city appears. As such, it touches almost every aspect of the physical form of a city, from land use to housing to transportation, parks and open space. Therefore, many aspects of the Urban Design Plan refer to, or are referenced in, other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, especially under the topics of Land Use, Parks and Downtown. The primary focus of this chapter is on the characteristics that make Eau Claire special, such as its riverfronts, or that cut across many parts of the City.

The intent of the Urban Design Plan is to create a community of distinctive neighborhoods that are supported by green public lands and vital civic and commercial centers. The recommendations direct Eau Claire to take better advantage of its major natural attributes such as the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers, Sherman, Lowes and Otter Creeks, and the wooded hillsides. New neighborhoods should be designed with some of the valued characteristics of the City's traditional neighborhoods. Parks and greenways should be designed and connected to help build lasting neighborhood value. Downtown should continue to become more dense, diverse, walkable and linked to the rivers.



The classic tree-lined street in a traditional Eau Claire neighborhood.

Summary of Issues

The major Urban Design or urban design issues are summarized as:

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?
5. **Small Commercial Nodes:** In what locations, if any, would the older urban model of neighborhood corner store be allowed and encouraged?

Established Residential Neighborhoods

1. **Context-Sensitive Architecture:** To what extent should new infill and redevelopment of existing structures (both single-family and multi-family) follow established site design patterns and be stylistically compatible with the predominant neighborhood aesthetic?
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)?
4. **New Cultural Influences:** What should be the City's urban design response, if any, to new cultural influences resulting from its changing population?
5. **Neighborhood Identification:** Should neighborhoods and districts be identified by signs and banners?

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? Should site planning design guidelines be adopted for commercial development?
2. **Design Guidelines for Commercial Signs:** Should business signs be more limited in size, height and number?
3. **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?
4. **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?
5. **Billboards:** Should the City continue to limit billboards?

Parks and Riverfronts

1. **Mount Tom:** Should communication towers be allowed in parks?
2. **Public Open Space:** Should the City seek to create additional public open space in the older neighborhoods as redevelopment occurs?
3. **Park Design:** Should new neighborhood parks have primarily an aesthetic focus or a utilitarian focus (such as gardens and gazebos versus athletic fields and parking lots)?

Downtown

1. **Town Square:** Should a "town square" be created next to City Hall and along Eau Claire Street?

Places of public worship and other institutional buildings often form visual and cultural landmarks.

Goal and Objectives

Goal

Improve the aesthetics and enhance the identity of the city as a whole and its neighborhoods, major road corridors and waterfronts by building on its traditional urban character, natural amenities and history.

Objective 1 – Overall Urban Character

Design Eau Claire to include the best aspects of both a small town and a major city. Page 5.

Objective 2 – Regional Environment

Use public improvements, public art and land development regulations to preserve, highlight and interpret the major elements and special places that evoke the regional environmental and cultural history of Eau Claire. Page 6.

Objective 3 – Site and Building Design

Improve standards for site planning and design, including building and parking placement, pedestrian connections, signage, landscaping and lighting. Page 8.

Objective 4 – New Neighborhoods

Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Eau Claire. Page 12.

Objective 5 – Established Neighborhoods

Maintain the traditional urban character of these neighborhoods and promote continuous public and private reinvestment to ensure that they remain attractive places to live. Page 17.

Objective 6 – Activity Centers

Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers. Page 19.

Objective 7 –Waterfronts

Improve the visual quality and connections to the waterfronts to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life. Page 21.

Objective 8 – Major Road Corridors

Improve the appearance of the major roadway corridors in Eau Claire through access management, site planning and sign controls. Page 22.

Objective 9 – Parks

Build parks and greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire's cultural heritage and honor civic life. Page 27.

Objective 1 – Overall Urban Character

Design Eau Claire to incorporate the best aspects of a small town and a major city.

Eau Claire wishes to protect and extend the best aspects of its residential neighborhoods while intensifying the urban atmosphere of certain nodes such as the downtown, the Water Street corridor or the area around Oakwood Mall.

Policies

1. Nodes of Urbanity in a Small Town

Protect and improve the quiet and leafy character of most residential neighborhoods while accentuating the sense of urban diversity and intensity in certain other districts and corridors. Become more urban in some locations, and use that sense of urbanity as a marketing tool for long-term growth and stability for Eau Claire.

2. Downtown and the River

Promote awareness of the Downtown and the rivers as the most interesting and special aspects of the city.

The Chippewa River looking toward the UWEC campus.

3. Greening the City

Create a network of greenways, parks, plazas, promenades, parkways and tree-lined streets to beautify the community, provide recreation, enhance quality of life, boost property values and balance the effects of urban density.

4. Major Road Corridors

Improve the appearance of the major road corridors in the city by continuing to review development applications for private landscaping, public road-edge landscaping, the size and number of signs, parking lot location, and the relationship of building to the street.

5. De-emphasize the Automobile

Accommodate the automobile but do not allow it to dictate all aspects of urban design. Give high priority to the pedestrian and pedestrian-oriented development.

6. Urban versus Rural Distinctions

Preserve and accentuate the difference between the urban landscape and the rural landscape by implementing the fringe growth management strategy described in the Land Use Plan chapter, which promotes keeping housing density in the rural areas extremely low.

A rural scene just beyond the City border

Objective 2 – Regional Setting

Use public improvements, public art and land development regulations to preserve, highlight and interpret the major elements and special places that evoke the regional environmental and cultural history of Eau Claire.

There are certain aspects of and locations in Eau Claire that make it distinctive, and accentuating those through public or private actions will help build a "sense of place."

Policies

1. Cultural and Economic Heritage

Help residents and visitors understand the importance of the early logging industry, the paper milling economy, the tire manufacturing era, and the ethnic and religious heritage of Eau Claire through signs, interpretive monuments, the use of historic place names, and by creating appropriate parks or plazas as described in the Historic Resources Plan.

2. Special Places

Protect, interpret and enhance the qualities of the City's "special places" that offer distinct and valued experiences. Some present opportunities for continued development; others for conservation. A preliminary list includes:

- The waterfronts, especially the confluence and Phoenix Park.
- Historic residential districts -- Randall Park, Third Ward and Eastside Hill.
- The lower Sherman Creek valley
- The West Grand Avenue business district
- The historic central business district
- The baseball stadium in Carson Park
- Banbury Place, its manufacturing history and reincarnation as business and housing.
- Certain tree-lined residential streets
- The logging history of Dell's pond.
- The trail hidden in the Putnam Park valley
- The views of the city from the surface of the Chippewa River.

Banbury Place and the S Bridge

3. Community Entrance Corridors

Design major entries into the City with attractive gateway features such as overstory trees, ground or monument signs and public art. Opportunities for major gateway enhancements exist at:

- Hendrickson Drive, State Highway 37
- West Clairemont Avenue, US Highway 12
- Hastings Way
- Old Wells Road and Third Street
- Birch Street.
- Cameron Street/Madison Street
- Brackett Avenue

Birch Street at the Union Pacific Railroad bridge

4. Views and Landmarks

Strive to preserve and enhance important views and landmarks in order to maintain visual character and reinforce civic identity.

Design for public use, where feasible, locations offering views of the waterfronts or of the City. Use interpretive signs, on-street or off-street parking or pedestrian access, and suitable landscaping. Citizen input will help to determine which views and landmarks are valued by the public and help guide strategies for preservation or enhancement.

The river bridges are important striking landmarks and provide long vistas.

5. Wayfinding Sign System

Extend the existing City's downtown wayfinding sign system to advertise and make more visible Eau Claire's major facilities and attractions.

Objective 3 – Site and Building Design

Improve standards for site planning and design, including building and parking placement, pedestrian connections, signs and landscaping.

The details of private site design, including landscaping, lighting and signs, are critical to the overall appearance of the city. Eau Claire has improved its zoning regulations in this regard but can do more.

Policies

1. Design Guidelines for Commercial Development

Prepare and adopt design guidelines or standards for new commercial development in perimeter, corridor and downtown locations.

The guidelines may address the subjects described under this Objective as well as these points:

- Placement of buildings and building entrances close to the sidewalk to enhance visibility and pedestrian access
- Locating parking lots to the side and rear of buildings, not in front
- Screening of parking lots from the street using plantings, low walls or decorative fences; increasing and enhancing parking lot landscaping
- Providing many front windows to provide both natural surveillance and visual interest
- Building architecture that respects the neighborhood context, with building heights and massing that are compatible with adjacent residential areas
- Pedestrian-scale lighting
- Other streetscape elements such as street trees, benches and public art that help create a distinct identity for the neighborhood center.

Public and private landscaping combine to soften the appearance of commercial buildings along an arterial road despite some of the parking between the building and the road. The free-standing sign is in scale with the building and road. The business is still visible and identifiable.

2. Connections

Maximize visual and physical linkages between adjoining land uses that are similar or can coexist compatibly, such as offices and retail or high-density housing. Encourage pedestrian movement between adjacent sites rather than multiple trips by car.

Where uses are less compatible (such as industrial and residential uses), provide adequate landscape buffers and screens to soften the transition between them.

3. Efficiency

Continue to encourage sites to share functional site design elements such as access, parking, landscaping, open space and surface water ponds when such elements support a more efficient and attractive development pattern.

4. Landscaping

Continue to require high-quality planting plans for all new multi-family residential, commercial and industrial developments. Apply the guidelines of the *Eau Claire Landscaping Guidelines Manual,* which has been adopted into the zoning ordinance.

5. Sensitivity to Context

Design new development to respect surrounding development, whether this includes quiet low-density residential neighborhoods, traditional storefronts or major institutions such as the hospitals. New development should emulate the desirable qualities of traditional urban settings, while protecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods.

6. Multiple-Family Housing Design

Continue to follow the guidelines of the City's updated *Multi-Family Housing Design Manual*, which addresses:

- Location and context
- Access, traffic, private drives, parking, curb cuts and sidewalks
- Relationship of building to street; façade design, doors and windows; materials
- Garage design, fenestration and setback
- Density, open space and lot coverage
- Landscaping, screening, fencing, lighting and trash handling
- Surface water management
- Affordability and mixed-income
- Mixed Use Residential Model.

These two-family residential buildings present an attractive face to the public street because their garages are turned. Facing the attached garages of multiple-family housing onto a shared private street or drive is a beneficial technique second only to locating the garage in the rear.

7. Parking Design

Locate parking lots behind or to the side of buildings or in block interiors wherever possible in order to reduce the visual impact of surface parking. Landscape and screen all parking lots and parking structures in order to improve their appearance from surrounding streets and properties.

8. Environmental Protection

Continue to protect natural features such as major wooded areas, steep wooded slopes, streams, wetlands and stream edges in new developments.

The City's zoning and subdivision regulations both include regulations for protecting natural features, including water, steep slopes and trees.

9. Open Space and Land Development

Preserve open space in new developments through the use of planned unit developments, conservation easements, parkland acquisition or dedication and other techniques.

A nice example of open space preservation is the wooded ridge line located in southeastern Eau Claire approximately between Skeels Avenue and Lehman Street.

Once again propose an ordinance that would require land developers to give the City a certain percentage of the subdivision if the Parks Plan shows the need for a park in that location, or money in place of land.

10. Coordinated Signs

Continue to administer its sign code regulations (Section 16.16), which addresses sign placement, spacing, height, design, coordination, colors, lighting and movement. Periodically review the regulations and update them as needed. The regulations call for "integrating" individual signs within a single visual frame.

11. Transit-Oriented Design

Ensure that new developments along bus routes support ridership by placing building entrances close to the street and making provisions for locating bus stops or shelters in convenient and visible locations.

12. Incentives

Encourage innovative development and redevelopment through the use of incentives and appropriate regulations, to achieve desired residential and non-residential development patterns that are also environmentally responsible. Provide incentives for developments that protect natural areas or environmentally sensitive areas through land trusts, open space zoning or other techniques such as density bonuses for open space development.

13. Outdoor Lighting

Regulate outdoor lighting to reduce off-site glare and nuisances using City Code Sections 16.26 and 18.45.050. Sign lighting is regulated by Section 16.16.070, which should be reviewed and updated. A pamphlet from the Department of Community Development summarizes the practical considerations.

Outdoor lighting is potentially either one of the most attractive or disturbing elements of urban design. While it is a necessity in many locations, outdoor illumination is often overdone or poorly controlled, resulting in off-site glare.

- Exterior lighting should be controlled so it is not a nuisance to nearby property, is not a traffic hazard and preserves the dark night sky.
- Lighting in parking lots should be shielded to contain glare on the site. Near residential areas, cut-off fixtures will be used and pole heights will be reduced. Building lighting should be controlled to keep glare on site and not allow buildings to be lit-up for excessive display (e.g., lighting the entire façade).
- Lights under gasoline station canopies will be required to be recessed into the ceiling or otherwise designed so that the light source is not visible from the side and all light is directed downward.
- The City will begin a long-term program of installing streetlights with cut-off fixtures.

A convenience store with recessed canopy lights over the gasoline pump islands.

Objective 4 – New Neighborhoods

Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Eau Claire.

The most desirable aspects of the City's traditional neighborhoods should be carried forward and adapted to the design of new neighborhoods. These include relatively narrow lots (deeper than they are wide), and shorter front yard setbacks, continuous sidewalks, street trees and recessed garages (set back further than the principal façade). These are also the characteristics common to pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, in which compact development patterns and interconnected streets encourage socializing, walking and bicycling.

Policies

1. Local Street Design

Create a totally interconnected system with future minor or local residential streets and build them appropriately narrow. Provide public street access in each cardinal direction unless impractical because of natural, environmental or similar conditions.

The street design presented in Figure 8-1 provides 30-feet between the backs of curbs and allows for two-side parking and two-way traffic. This is the City's current practice.

Table 8-1 lists design options for new residential streets.

Figure 8-2 presents an **alternative** local street design that can be accomplished with only **28 feet** between the back of curbs; however, this design provides for parking on only one side of the street.

While the City's customary local residential street design calls for new local streets to be designed for a 30-foot width with two-side parking, the **City Council may approve narrower designs** in low-traffic situations at the request of the land developer.

Table 8-1 includes a **minor collector street** listed as an alternative to the local street design where proposed neighborhood development is anticipated to produce more than 1,000 vehicles per day on a local street and/or have high on-street parking demand.

Cul-de-sac streets should only be allowed where topography limits access to properties from the interconnected street system.

The street system is a fundamental element of the neighborhood design. The street pattern controls traffic flow, determines the ease of pedestrian and bicyclist movement, defines views and vistas, orients the user, unites the community, and creates a physical framework into which houses and other buildings are placed.

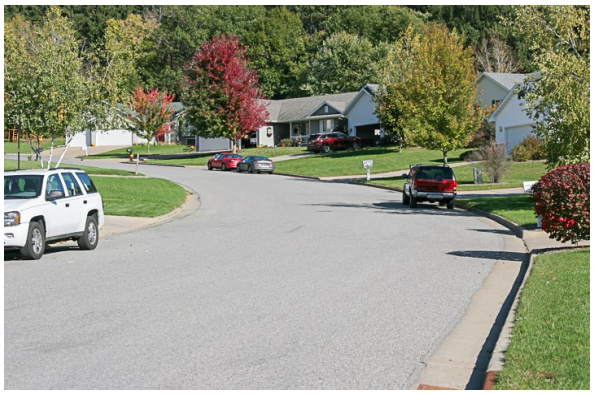
The function of minor residential streets should not be to move as much auto traffic as fast as possible but rather to move autos at appropriately slow speeds to and from the home while also encouraging bicycling and walking and creating an attractive forecourt for the housing.

Refer to the Transportation Plan chapter for further direction on the design of future local residential streets. Specifically, see Policy 1 of Objective 5, Neighborhood Streets, and Policy 4 of Objective 3, Thoroughfare System.

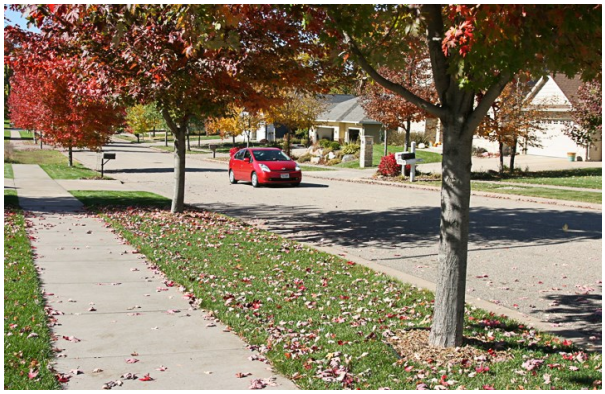
Table 8-1: Design Characteristics of New Residential Streets

Type of Street	Street Width *	Right-of-Way Width	Parking	Boulevard / Planting Strip	Sidewalk	Utilities
Local	28 to 32	60	One or both sides	6 to 9 with trees	2 @ 5	ROW and easement behind the sidewalk for electricity, telephone, cable TV. Sewer and water under the street.
Collector (Minor)	32	66 to 76	Both sides	6 to 9 with trees	2 @ 5	
Collector (Major)	36 to 46**	Up to 80	Both sides	6 to 9 with trees	2 @ 6	
Minor Arterial	36 to 60 **	Up to 90	Both sides	6 to 9 with trees		
Cul de Sac (< 8 houses)	26	60	One side only	6 minimum with trees	2 @ 5	
Cul de Sac (8+ houses)	28	60	Both sides	6 minimum with trees	2 @ 5	

* All dimensions are in feet. Street width is measured to the back of the curb.
** May include a pair of striped bicycling lanes at 5 feet wide each.



It is important to keep minor streets appropriately narrow. This newer street measures 36 feet between curb faces, which encourages higher speeds and wastes resources. It also lacks sidewalks and trees.

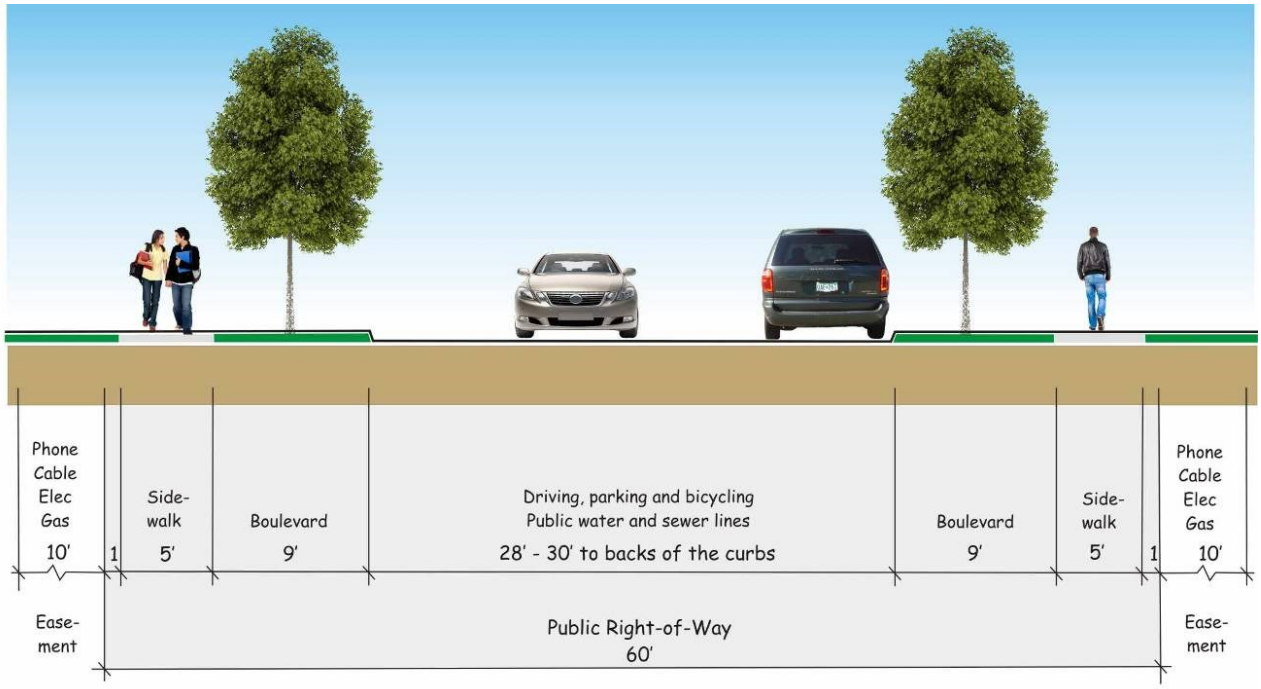


A street 30 feet wide provides sufficient space for parking and movement while leaving space for trees and sidewalks.

Residential streets must include sidewalks and trees on both sides.

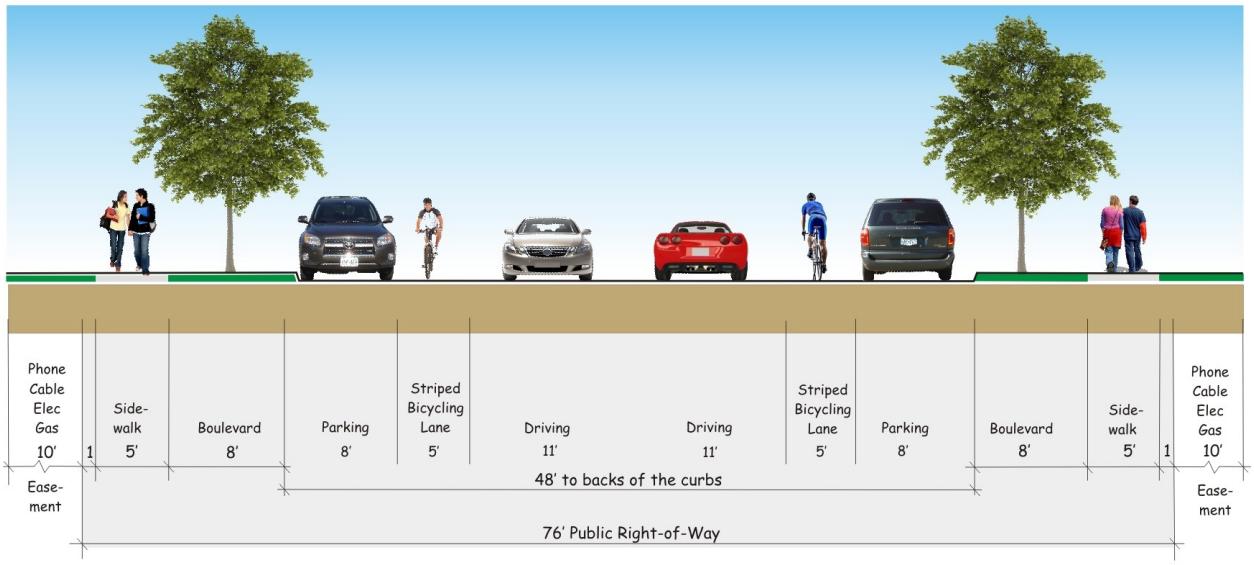
This residential street in another city measures 27 feet to the backs of the curbs with two-way traffic, parking on one side, 10 foot boulevards, and sidewalks on both sides.

Figure 8-1



Local Residential Street Design

Figure 8-2
Minor Arterial Street Design with Parking and Bicycling Lanes



2. Collector or Minor Arterial Street Plans

Plan collector or minor arterial streets for each future neighborhood at the "concept plan" phase. Continue to work with each land developer to plan the general alignment of collector or minor arterial roads beyond the limits of smaller subdivisions to ensure neighborhood-wide continuity.

Always consider including striped on-street bicycling lanes when designing collector streets.

Please refer to Figure 3-1, Future Functional Classification System of Roads, to see the preliminarily planned pattern of these roads. Not every future collector road is shown on that map.

3. Public Sidewalks

Continue to require that residential developers include a five-foot concrete sidewalk on both sides of each new local and collector street. Ensure that this requirement is applied consistently. City Code section 17.12.280 addresses sidewalks.

4. Street Trees

Strengthen the ordinance and practice regarding the planting of trees along public streets and roads. The intention will be to adopt methods that ensure that trees will be planted in the public right-of-way of every residential street and major municipal thoroughfare, including existing and future streets. Emphasize the concept of "the right tree in the right place" and pursue a city-wide tree cover/canopy goal.

Trees regularly spaced along the street are a key ingredient for giving streets a residential character and making them feel more comfortable. Street trees add greenery, provide shade, give a street a lived-in feeling and contribute to neighborhood character.

Future Streets

For future streets, a continuous row of trees should be planted on both sides. The time frame will depend on the chosen method. Options may include:

- The private sector plants the trees at the same time as the sidewalk, which occurs after the lot is built upon:
  - **i.** House builder installs
  - **ii.** City installs using money put into escrow by the land developer.
- The City furnishes and installs the trees at its own cost:
  - **i.** Cost is assessed to the benefiting property owner
  - **ii.** Cost is entirely borne by the City
  - **iii.** Some combination of the two.

Existing Streets

For existing streets that have gaps in the tree pattern, a long-term campaign should be started that will fill those spaces. A method of paying for this public improvement and a realistic time schedule should be adopted.

5. Street Tree City-Wide Planting Plan

Propose for Council consideration a city-wide plan of tree species by location with spacing guidelines and accommodations for driveways, intersections, utilities and other trees.

The City forester will start by preparing a map in GIS of all street trees by species and condition in the City.

Species continuity on at least a block-by-block basis is favored because it would be best for appearances even though complete diversity would be the best way to prevent disease transmission; limited continuity seems like a reasonable balance.

Trees along the street in either residential or commercial districts are an investment that will literally grow and provide annual returns for many decades.

Objective 5 – Established Neighborhoods

Maintain or revive the traditional urban character of the older neighborhoods so that they remain attractive places to live.

The majority of urban development that will exist in Eau Claire by the year 2030 is already in place. These private and public improvements represent a tremendous investment and are essential to the quality of life and financial security of many thousands of people. In addition, the historic fabric of the community provides a sense of place and a physical environment that is nearly irreplaceable.

One of the strengths and beauties of older neighborhoods is the close-knit, compact mixture of different forms of housing, shops, offices, services and employment areas. It is these urban patterns that will help make Eau Claire and its older neighborhoods distinct, livable and competitive with other locations that are designed primarily for the automobile. New building technologies may be appropriate, but many elements of the traditional neighborhood will be respected and emulated.

The Neighborhoods and Districts Plan chapter provides recommendations for protecting and revitalizing older areas with emphasis on the process, responsibilities and tools.

Policies

1. Context-Sensitive Redevelopment and Infill

Encourage but not require that infill development in older, traditional neighborhoods respects the characteristics and prevalent housing styles of each neighborhood. This is particularly true for attached (multiple-family) housing.

- Redevelopment and infill are keys to strengthening older neighborhoods and should respond to and build on the strengths of those neighborhoods.
- This principle does not imply that all housing will be of the same type (i.e., detached or duplex) but that existing and replacement housing will share many design elements.
- It is especially important to regulate the location and orientation of garages in established neighborhoods so as to not introduce a suburban style to a traditional neighborhood.

Infill and replacement housing, particularly attached units, should respect its neighbors, particularly in terms of garage placement.

2. Accommodating Appropriate Non-Conformities

Review zoning regulations that apply to the older neighborhoods so as to accommodate the non-conforming status of dwellings that were caused by setback or area requirements. Current zoning regulations sometimes create difficulties for property owners to properly maintain or upgrade houses.

3. Mixed Use in Neighborhoods

Identify locations for mixed use in established neighborhoods that already have some diversity of uses, proximity to transit or major traffic corridors. The policies of the Urban Design Plan regarding mixed use are applicable in the neighborhood context.

4. Land Use Incompatibilities

Some of Eau Claire's older neighborhoods have been affected by incompatible land uses, such as industrial plants, materials or equipment storage, freight lines or truck routes. There is often no easy way to resolve these incompatibilities in the short term. In general, improved code enforcement, buffering and screening can reduce if not eliminate problems due to incompatibilities.

5. Historic Preservation

Preserve historic or architecturally significant buildings in established neighborhoods because they express the city's heritage and add beauty and charm to their surroundings.

As specified in the Historic Preservation Plan chapter, preservation does not necessarily involve historic designation but can be achieved through tools such as neighborhood conservation zoning.

Fine examples of the community's economic, social or architectural heritage help make it complete and lovable.

Objective 6 -- Activity Centers

Encourage a mixture of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers.

Zoning regulations can be used to promote private investment that is appropriate in size and composition for its location. In particular, some locations should be built with taller and more intensive structures, even mixing housing and shops vertically.

The idea of "activity centers" is also expressed in Objective 5 of the Land Use Plan chapter.

Please also refer to Objective 3, Policy 1, for guidance on commercial site planning.

Policies

1. Neighborhood Center Scale

Prepare and adopt design guidelines to help ensure compatibility among diverse land uses and to encourage walking.

These guidelines should encourage development that combines small-scale retail, services, offices and housing in single buildings or in separate buildings in close proximity. These locations may include neighborhood "nodes" or centers in existing neighborhoods or districts such as Water Street, Madison Street or Brackett Avenue.

The principles for new neighborhood design outlined in this plan call for a pattern of small mixed-use activity centers within a short distance of neighborhoods, linked by interconnected streets and set off by parks.

In neighborhood commercial nodes it is also important to limit the size of individual retail or office uses, to ensure that businesses are designed to serve their immediate surroundings, rather than a regional market.

2. Commercial District Scale

In the larger commercial districts such as Downtown, Hastings Way or the vicinity of Oakwood Mall, encourage mixed uses that combine a variety of compatible housing types with existing commercial and office uses.

The addition of upper-story residential units, nearby townhouses, and other types of attached housing can bring more people into these districts, enhancing their economic viability and urban vitality. The design principles listed above are equally applicable in these districts, although the size of individual business may be larger – a "medium" rather than "big-box" level of retail.

In the city's newer commercial districts, all located along major roads, mixed-use development may also be a viable strategy, but generally requires larger-scale development.

Many Midwestern communities with commercial "strips" are exploring similar strategies for redevelopment, including the use of "liner" buildings oriented to the street along the edges of parking lots, reorienting buildings to new internal streets, and introducing higher-density housing in conjunction with public open space. As the size of these sites and their exposure to regional traffic increases, the size of individual businesses or buildings may also increase.

3. Downtown Scale

Continue to follow zoning regulations and design guidelines that ensure that each new building, including parking structures, enhances the public realm and the totality of Downtown.

Downtown should contain a complete mix of uses, including offices, retail and services, government, arts, entertainment, housing, parks and visitor attractions. To strengthen the downtown's position as the center of both the City and the region, it should increasingly be a place that people can live, work, shop and enjoy cultural and recreational opportunities.

Please refer also to the policies and design guidelines presented in the Downtown Plan chapter, which encourages this continued evolution.

Objective 7 – Waterfronts

Improve the visual quality and connections to the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life.

Waterfront open space, especially with walking and bicycling paths, always adds to quality of life and economic development in any community. Eau Claire is blessed with not one but two fine rivers, and they join in the middle of the community. The City has taken advantage of opportunities to acquire riverfront land for parks, trails and floodplain open space.

An example of riverfront land acquisition is Phoenix Park, located at the rivers' confluence and an essential component of the North Barstow District redevelopment project. Other riverfront open spaces include Owen Park, Domer Park, Mount Simon Park, the University arboretum, the Forest Street Park floodplain, and several open space parcels along the Eau Claire River. There are additional opportunities to add public open space in key locations, such as along the edges of the South Barstow District.

Riverfront views also raise the value of nearby development and can be a powerful catalyst for investment. In some locations, the waterfronts are devoted to parking lots or to industries that do not use the water for either shipping or power and that are unsightly. Thus, there are opportunities to redevelop land to take advantage of views to the river.

The three creeks, Sherman, Lowes and Otter, present similar but less dramatic opportunities for parks and paths, and have floodplains that should be protected in any case.

Policies

1. Downtown Design Plan

Along the Downtown waterfronts, continue to follow the recommendations of the plan chapters on Land Use, Downtown Plan, and Parks and Greenways plus the Waterways Plan.

2. Public Open Space and Walkways

As recommended in the Parks, Greenways and Trails Plan chapter, the City will continue to gradually acquire land to extend its system of linear public open space with walkways along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers except where industry or other development makes it impractical or unsafe. If property cannot be acquired outright, the City will attempt to negotiate public access across the private site along the riverfront when plans show a desire for an extended public walkway.

3. Relationships of Buildings to the Open Space Edge

Private buildings along the riverfront linear parks should provide windows, doors, landscaping, high quality materials, and possibly outdoor private spaces such as dining to complement the public space.

4. River Edge Treatments

"Green" alternatives to rip-rap or sheet pile shoreline stabilization are recommended, including plantings with fast-growing stream bank vegetation in more protected locations (see also the Natural Resources Plan chapter).

Objective 8 – Major Road Corridors

Improve the appearance of the major road corridors in Eau Claire through landscaping, site planning, sign regulation and access management.

Commercial and residential road corridors carry large volumes of traffic but each is in a different setting and, therefore, must respond to different conditions.

Commercial Corridor Policies

Major roadways such as Clairemont, Hastings or Highway 93, which serve many businesses, present the greatest challenge in terms of community image. They are highly developed and contain a variety of businesses and housing. Challenges include expanses of pavement, overhead utility lines, many public and private signs, and an occasional shortage of landscaping. Portions of both Hastings Way and Clairemont Avenue have been improved with better landscaping and lighting.

The following policies could help to greatly improve the image and appearance of the commercial corridors.

1. Commercial Site Landscaping

Continue to require landscaping plans with commercial site plans and follow the *Eau Claire Landscaping Guidelines Manual.*

One of the shortcomings in the commercial corridors is the lack of screening for some parking lots, which results in an almost uninterrupted stretch of pavement between building fronts on opposite sides of the road.

A row of deciduous trees along the roadside, spaced at 30 to 60 feet, can soften the appearance of the any commercial corridor, especially when viewed from an angle down the road.

Likewise, a low landscaping screen, up to three feet tall, along the right-of-way line or at the edge of parking lots can dramatically improve the visual character of the corridors by adding greenery to the streetscapes and by breaking up the large expanses of pavement.

Additional parking lot landscaping can also help to minimize large areas of pavement and identify pedestrian walkways.

Please refer to Objective 3 for further guidance on commercial site landscaping.

2. Priority Corridor Landscaping

Invest in a higher than normal level of tree planting and decorative lighting along certain designated roads as illustrated by Figure 8-3, Priority Streetscape System, and listed below:

- The Primary Downtown Loop: Bellinger, Fifth, Lake, Barstow and Madison
- The Neighborhood Linking Streets: Vine Street; Lake Street; Wisconsin Street
- Hastings Way: Birch Street to Clairemont Avenue
- Clairemont Avenue: State 312 to Hastings Way
- State and Washington Streets: Farwell Street to Clairemont Avenue

- Cameron, Madison and Birch Streets: County Highway EE to Hastings Way
- Old Wells Road, Third and Bellinger Streets
- Harding and Brackett Avenues
- Hendrickson Drive: Hamilton Avenue to Clairemont Avenue.

Thus, the parkway system would form a ring around the central part of the city, link to and through Downtown, announce entrances and extend into a perimeter growth area.

Eau Claire has an opportunity to begin to create a citywide network of highly attractive streets that will bring value and enjoyment to the community for many decades. Because the street system is the spine of the city and the most visible of public expenditures, the priority streetscape system proposed here can have a major visual and economic effect.

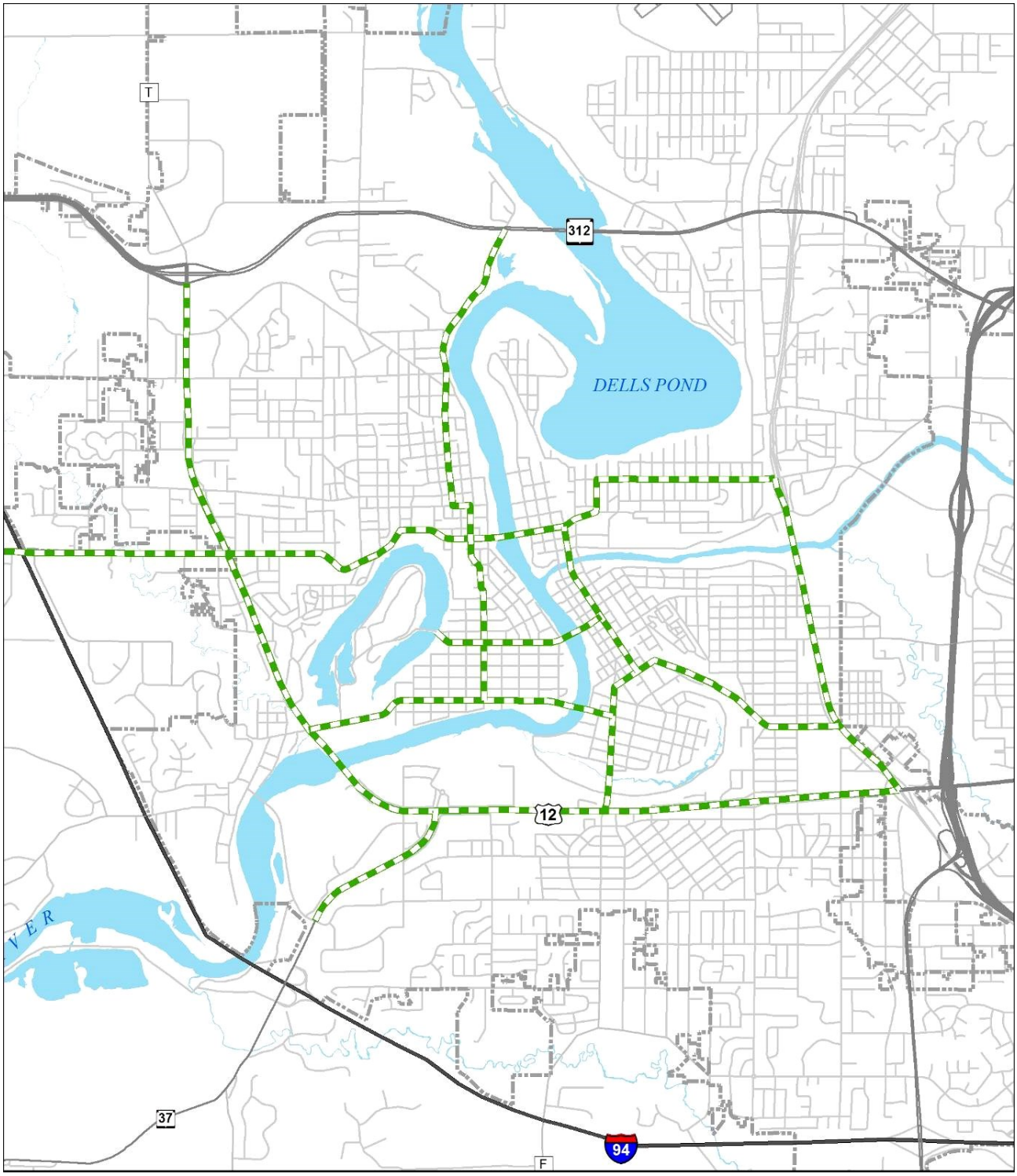
The purposes and benefits of the priority streetscape system are to:

- Improve the overall appearance, identity and quality of life of the community
- Increase and sustain property values
- Create bicyclist and pedestrian links among the neighborhoods, districts, greenways and parks
- Create visual community entry statements
- Provide a ceremonial approach to important locations such as Downtown
- Calm traffic speeds in residential neighborhoods.
- Promote annexation of land by demonstrating the City's commitment to investing in high quality public facilities.

The newly redesigned Hastings Way is a good example of a well-landscaped road corridor.

The arterial or collector roads designated for streetscape emphasis should receive a higher than normal degree of landscaping and decorative lighting. Adjacent private landscaping should generally be improved and coordinated with the public landscaping. Depending on the location, sidewalks, on-road lanes or off-road paths for bicycling may also be included.

In general, the priority streetscape system should be designed to the highest quality in landscaping, signage, lighting, linear public open space and pedestrian or bicyclist transportation. Design may vary across the City because it would be installed in both newly-developing areas where adequate rights-of-way are available as well as more constrained locations.



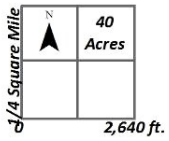


Figure 8-3

Priority Streetscape System

3. Access Points

During site plan review, apply the access management guidelines presented in the Transportation Plan chapter to limit the number of access points, regulate their spacing and consolidate existing points.

Multiple access points in the commercial corridors create a sense of clutter, require more pavement and reduce the opportunities for landscaping. Although it may not always be feasible to totally remove some of the access points, there may be opportunities to reduce or combine multiple access points to a single property or to adjoining properties.

4. Business Signs

Continue to administer its sign code regulations (Section 16.16), which addresses sign placement, spacing, height, design, coordination, colors, lighting and movement. Require coordinated sign plans with commercial development applications. Review the present ordinance and consider improving it.

5. Billboards

Continue to strictly administer the regulations on billboards found in Section 16.18 of the City Code.

Billboards (also known as off-premise signs or poster panel signs) are allowed only in the Community Commercial (C-3) and Industrial zoning districts upon approval of a Conditional Use Permit. Billboards must be separated along the same side of the street by 1,000 feet along State Highway or Hastings Way, or by 500 feet along all other roads. Non-conforming billboards may not be rebuilt or replaced if they are removed or damaged by more than 50 percent of their value.

Off-premise advertising (commonly known as billboard signs) can be a major community image issue. While some billboards can be reasonably attractive, they essentially represent visual pollution and can have a severe negative impact on a community's visual environment and are inconsistent with the objectives of this chapter.

6. Relocate Utility Lines

Consider paying to relocate private utility lines underground or to less visible alignments in special instances such as when engaging in streetscape improvements, road widening and/or area revitalization projects.

The City currently requires in City Code section 17.24.060 that new private utilities be located underground.

Overhead utility lines can be a visual impact along arterial roads. Tall, wooden poles and the pattern of lines create a chaotic view, sometimes resulting in the decapitation of street trees. The poles occupy valuable space in already-constricted rights-of-way, and in some cases are close to the traffic lanes.

Ideally, all overhead utility lines (except the major trunks) should be relocated underground, or, if that is not feasible, relocated to a less visible corridor. However, some overhead utilities, such as high-voltage lines, may be too expensive or impractical to locate underground. In that case, solutions should be explored to minimize the visual

impact of the lines by designing special, less obtrusive utility poles and by combining as many of the lines in as few locations as possible.

7. Housing Abutting High-Volume Roads

In situations where housing abuts high volume roads, either facing or backing up to the road, require landscaping to mitigate the effect of the traffic on the housing.

Such screening should consist of earth berms or of screen walls. Landscaping treatments should be used for the berms and the screen walls, and the screen walls should be designed to complement the adjoining residential developments.

Residential Corridor Policies

Major roads that abut housing, such as portions of State, Birch, or Main Streets are different from the open roadway corridors in that they are much more densely developed and have a more urban appearance.

Continuous landscaping treatments in the residential road corridors provide a prime opportunity to enhance and green the city. Since there is no need to maintain views of businesses, as there is in commercial corridors, extensive use of shrubbery and/or closely spaced canopy street trees could be used to enhance these corridors.

8. Public Improvements

Include extra landscaping and berming along residential neighborhoods when installing public landscaping along major roads or when building new arterial roads.

9. Street Trees

Continue to require that new residential developments include trees in the boulevard along all streets, following the species plan adopted by the City. Please refer also to Objective 4, Policy 4, for additional guidance on street trees.

State Street, which runs through a residential area and along the University campus, is enclosed by a well-landscaped edge despite the fact that the boulevard has been narrowed by street

Objective 9 – Parks

Build parks and interconnected greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire's cultural heritage and honor civic life.

It is appropriate to address parks as an element of urban design in Eau Claire. Parks are a source of outdoor recreation as well as beauty. They soften the feel of urban development, add greenery to neighborhoods and protect some environmental features. Properly planned and designed, parks can and should be the visual focus of a neighborhood or commercial district while greenways can connect parts of the city. Like streets and parkways, parks and greenways are major determinants of the appearance of a community and can contribute mightily to its quality of life, while also enhancing property values. Parks should be viewed as one element of a larger system of civic spaces that are interconnected and complementary.

The policies that realize this objective are included in the Parks, Greenways and Trails Plan chapter of this comprehensive plan.

Policies

1. A Network of Green Spaces

Continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads.

2. A System of Civic Spaces

Regard the park and greenway system as one element of a larger system of civic spaces. Through a high quality of design and stewardship, these civic features will sustain the quality of life, private investment and economic competitiveness of Eau Claire.

Design the system elements to complement one another visually and functionally and to interconnect for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Other elements of this system include:

- Parks of all types
- Plazas
- Public schools
- Civic buildings such as City Hall
- Local residential streets, sidewalks and street trees
- Minor arterial or collector roads
- Bridges
- Off-street and on-street bicycle lanes
- Wetlands and ponds
- Rivers and streams
- Wooded areas

3. Neighborhood Quality

In addition to providing amenities for residents, use greenway and parkways to improve the level of private investment in nearby housing and create lasting value in neighborhoods. These public spaces should be regarded as visual assets and designed as such. Each park should:

- Be open to the neighborhood on at least half of its perimeter
- Include generous landscaping to soften and direct views
- Have perimeter and internal walkways
- Have a defined entry and internal circulation paths
- Provide both active spaces and quiet, natural areas
- Use civic buildings such as a gazebo or picnic shelter as a focal point
- In a school-park situation, be designed in coordination with the school facilities
- Include off-street parking designed in careful relation to the topography, plantings and views so as to minimize its visual effect; no more off-street parking should be provided than is reasonable in addition to on-street parking.
- Preserve historic character and the reason why the park was established.

In addition, a large portion of the edge of public linear open space should abut local streets rather than private lots in order to extend the benefits of that open space into the larger neighborhood and community.

4. Waterfront Public Open Space

To the extent feasible, acquire stream edges for public open space and parks, provide walkways and bicycling paths within that green space, protect key environmental features such as wetlands or floodplains, use environmentally-sensitive bank stabilization techniques instead of heavily engineered devices, and create visual and functional linkages between the waterfronts and nearby neighborhoods or districts. Refer also to Objective 7, Waterfronts.

5. Quiet Spaces

Include quiet spaces in parks for strolling or sitting wherever the landscape allows. Manage some locations in the park system to retain their wooded or other natural characteristics to invite exploration and discovery. Such places offer refuge from the bustle of the urban environment and opportunities to connect with nature.

Domer Park offers a wooded setting with a spectacular view of Dells Pond.

6. Civic Pride and Local Heritage

Design and maintain parks and other public spaces as the highest expression of civic pride and local heritage.

Parks should be beautiful as well as functional so that current generations will enjoy their use and future generations will appreciate what they represent. Parks and greenways should be inspiring and represent the best of Eau Claire.

Encourage the display of public art in civic spaces and enhance public buildings and structures with decorative lighting, interpretive signing, etc.

7. Park Buildings

Adopt an architectural theme for its park buildings and related facilities after reflecting on local materials, building practices, cultural heritage and user needs. Buildings should be classic in proportions and materials, adaptable, and long-lasting. If necessary, it is preferable to delay construction than to install a structure that is not of sufficient quality.

8. Associated Furnishings

Take care in selecting associated park furnishings such as benches, fences, signs or trash containers. They should complement the design of the major buildings and require relatively low levels of maintenance.

Plan Action Steps

The City will take the following steps to implement the recommendations of the Urban Design Plan.

Table 8-2
Urban Design Plan Action Steps

Action	Timing
Special Places. Continue to protect, interpret and enhance the qualities of the City's "special places" and examples of its cultural and economic heritage.	Ongoing
City Entrances. Design major entrances to the city with attractive gateway features.	Ongoing
Wayfinding Signs. Extend the Downtown wayfinding sign system.	2016 – 2030
Commercial Design Guidelines. Prepare and adopt design guidelines or standards for new commercial development in perimeter, corridor and downtown locations.	2022
Multiple-Family Design. Continue to follow the guidelines of the City's Multi-Family Housing Design Manual and the Landscaping Manual.	Ongoing
New Streets. Build new streets according to the design standards presented in this plan and in the Transportation System Plan chapter.	Ongoing
Street Tree Practice. Strengthen the ordinance and practice regarding the planting of trees along public streets and roads.	2023
Street Tree Plan. Adopt a city-wide plan for street tree species and spacing.	2023
Sign Ordinance. Review and consider improving the sign ordinance.	2022
Infill Development. Encourage infill development in older, traditional neighborhoods that respects the characteristics and prevalent housing styles of each neighborhood.	Ongoing
Activity Centers. Encourage a mixture of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers.	Ongoing
Priority Streetscape Improvements. Invest in a higher than normal level of tree planting and decorative lighting along certain designated roads as illustrated by Figure 8-3, Priority Streetscape System.	Ongoing
Green Space Pattern. Continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads.	Ongoing