

# 2016 RIPON COMMUNITY VISIONING RESULTS



In November of 2016, Ripon Main Street conducted its second annual survey and visioning session, designed to uncover perceptions about downtown Ripon, identify strengths and weaknesses within the community and downtown, and determine what type of future activities and initiatives are most supported and desired by Ripon citizens and stakeholders.

## PROCESS & BACKGROUND

The 2016 strategic planning process included several components, including a review of economic indicators and past economic and program success, a review of past planning efforts and outcomes, a community-wide online survey and in person visioning session. These efforts are designed to build upon the 2015 activities, determining where the local economy or market perceptions have changed, and what progress has been made toward addressing specific issues identified in prior years.

The long-term mission and vision of Ripon Main Street over its 25 years includes:

**Vision:** Ripon – with a downtown rich in historic architecture – was among the first communities in Wisconsin selected to participate in the Wisconsin Main Street Program – advocating historic downtown restoration and pursuing economic development through marketing, business recruitment and retention, real estate development and market analysis.

**Mission:** Ripon Main Street, which supports the interests of Ripon downtown property and business owners, guides a business improvement district that oversees the revitalization of Ripon's central business district.

### *Summary of Previous Planning*

Specific objectives and initiatives recommended as part of the 2007 (and most recent) downtown strategic plan are highlighted below. Combined efforts of the City, Main Street, the Chamber and other partners have made significant efforts in a number of these areas.

- 2007 Strategic Plan Recommendations (bolded initiatives include those which have been completed or are substantially underway)
  - **Renovate second floor apartments along Watson**
  - **Add gateway & wayfinding signage**
  - **Encouraged mixed-density housing in Brewery Creek development**
  - Create historic B&B
  - Enhance Highway 23 intersections
  - Enhance Seward & E Fond du Lac Streetscapes
  - Improve visual and pedestrian connections between Square & Library
  - Coordinate regular merchant hours of operation and one evening

- Add outdoor dining
  - Provided guided historical tours and install interpretive signage
  - Develop incubator for hand-crafted food products
  - **Enhance Little White Schoolhouse**
- 2015 Visioning Session Goals (bolded initiatives indicate those completed or substantially underway)
- Increase exposure/awareness of downtown opportunities
  - **Business plan contest to fill storefronts**
  - **Add family-friendly recurring events**
  - Increase engagement of alumni/parents
  - Add playspace into downtown
  - Improve upkeep of back alleys/parking lots
  - **Create business startup guide & assistance**
  - **Utilize crowdfunding**

### ***Summary of Program Accomplishments***

As a result of coordinated and dedicated effort to improving the economic health and vitality of downtown Ripon, the program has had significant and marked successes, including;

- Attracted \$88 million in private investment
- Leveraged \$32 for every \$1 of public investment
- Added/rehabbed 126 residential units
- 137 building improvement projects
- Recruited 580 volunteer hours annually downtown
- Won more than 30 Wisconsin Main Street Awards

In addition to these measurable results, the community was also rated as one of the Coolest Small Towns in American in 2011, enhanced the Village Green with a new bandstand and ice rink, installed (and soon to be revamped) skyline lights, as well as assisted numerous business and property owners with renovation, expansion and relocation projects.



## OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

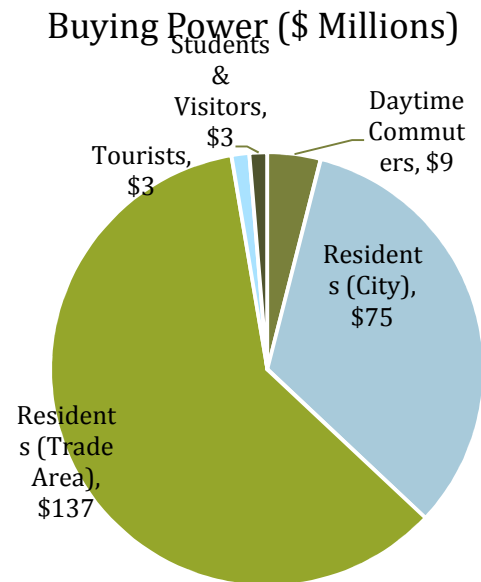
Although Ripon Main Street has been tremendously successful in building on local opportunities and addressing previously defined challenges, the economic, demographic and physical environment of downtown has changed substantially since the 2007 planning effort. This is both a result of the previously described achievements of Ripon MainStreet and its partners, but also to broader economic trends, shifts in local property ownership and employment, etc. To explore the opportunities and challenges facing Ripon today, an updated market study was completed and public survey conducted to identify market realities and public perceptions which will impact the Ripon market in the future.

### Market Analysis Summary

Ripon businesses cater to a variety of business and residential customers. The estimated annual potential customer demand for each major customer group is illustrated in the chart at right. Keep in mind that potential demand does not necessarily reflect actual spending, and that individual customers may choose to travel elsewhere for certain types of purchases, or forgo spending in a category if no suitable options are available (for instance, an employee bringing a lunch if no restaurants are located in proximity).

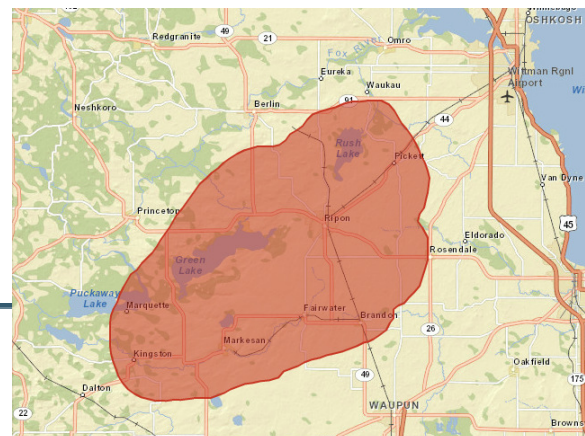
The pool of customers most readily available to downtown merchants includes;(downtown totals include counts for entities within ¼ mile of the downtown core)

- Employees
  - 152 downtown businesses
  - 428 City businesses
  - 8,541 employees in the zip code
  - 174 individuals working from home in Ripon
- Residents
  - 316 downtown residents
  - 3,109 City residents
  - 21,339 trade area residents
- Visitors
  - 32,900 annual event visitors



### Retail Trade Area Demand

A survey of local businesses determined that Ripon serves a regional trade area of 21,000 residents, extending largely to the south and west of the City as shown in the map. Residents of this area are more likely to travel to Ripon for goods and services than other retail centers, provided that businesses are available offering the necessary items. Ripon also has a regional



following for those seeking furnishings, appliances, health and personal care items and restaurant dining. Items which were identified as being under-served (none or fewer than demanded offerings in a category) include;

- general merchandise,
- gas stations,
- health and personal care,
- sporting goods and hobby, and
- limited service restaurants.

Additional demand was identified in 2015 for apartments and clothing, although additional supply of each was added over the past year which is not yet reflected in sales data. Compared to other college communities, Ripon also has fewer than average offerings in the following categories:

- Entertainment/recreation
- Fitness and health
- Restaurants/bars
- Sporting goods/bike
- Used merchandise

### **Survey Summary**

Of the 111 individuals that participated in the survey, a vast majority are very familiar with downtown (67% visit at least once per week). More than 53 different businesses were listed as top destinations, including all downtown restaurants and Ripon Drug, which were the top vote-getters. Respondents were most proud of the safety of the community, easy accessibility of downtown for cars, pedestrians and cyclists, and wide variety of special events that attract visitors to the community. Weaknesses include amenities for multiple age groups, preservation of historic building stock, and the mix/appearance/operating hours of existing businesses. Top priorities for future improvements included;

- More shopping choices
- More restored and renovated buildings
- More nightlife and entertainment options

Priorities of course varied along demographic lines, as indicated in the table below. This represented a shift in priorities among certain groups, with reduced focus on restaurants (identified by 45 and over populations as a priority in 2015) and the overall cleanliness and appearance of downtown and increased desire for expanded information/marketing of downtown (especially by younger and middle-aged audiences). The desire for more entertainment and nightlife options expanded from a primary focus of younger audiences to a desire for all adults under age 65. Family friendly amenities and park spaces were also an area of diminished focus for all audiences.

	25 & Under	26-35 Years	36-45 Years	46-55 Years	56-65 Years	66 and Over
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<b>Priority 1</b>	More Shopping Choices	More Restored/Renovated Buildings	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Restored & Renovated Buildings	More Shopping Choices	More Restored & Renovated Buildings
<b>Priority 2</b>	More Restored/Renovated Buildings	Cleaner & More Beautiful Downtown	More Shopping Choices	More Shopping Choices	More Nightlife & Entertainment	More Shopping Choices
<b>Priority 3</b>	More Information & Marketing	More Parks & Green Spaces	More Information/Marketing	More Restaurants	More Restaurants	More Jobs & Businesses

Compared to last year, there was more agreement among age groups regarding priorities, with restored and renovated buildings and shopping choices almost universally identified as a priority. Changes included an increased interest in information and marketing of downtown offerings, which last year was only expressed by those new to the community. Additionally, the desire for increased nightlife and entertainment options was expressed by a broader cross-section of the population, while last year it was primarily of interest to younger population groups.



## COMMUNITY VISIONING RESULTS

Using the previously provided information as a frame of reference, a small group of community members including natives, new residents, business owners, students and other stakeholders participated in three interactive exercises designed to identify and priorities opportunities and initiatives for downtown in the next five years. These group activities included; a discussion of activities currently available and those lacking in downtown, exploring the comfort and aesthetics of connections between downtown and other key destinations, and prioritizing programmatic and physical improvements that would help enhance the sense of place in downtown Ripon. The outcomes from these activities are profiled in this section.

### ***Current and Desired Activities***

Participants were asked to identify current favorite activities in downtown Ripon, as well as things that they would like to do, but are not able to complete today. A majority of likes were associated with specific businesses that are currently located downtown, and these activities are provided in the list below. However, other non-business activities included summer concerts, hosting/attending meetings, visiting with friends and walking.

#### Business Related Activities:

- Eat at Restaurants
- Visit Coffee Shops
- Shopping – antiques, furniture, clothing, plant shop, florist, gifts, jewelry, appliances
- See a movie
- Get a haircut/massage
- Go to yoga
- Get groceries
- Stop for ice cream/popcorn
- Run errands – drugstore, Pack’n ship, bank, post office, City Hall, professional services
- Visit the library/museum
- Go to church
- Visit the brewery/bars
- Attend events/activities at 314 space, art studio

Similarly, many desired activities are associated with businesses not currently available downtown. However, others are activities that are simply not comfortable, convenient or appealing to partake in downtown currently, such as biking, walking, sightseeing, sitting near water, attending open-air wine events and learning about history.

#### Business Wish List:

- Stay at a hotel/bed and breakfast
- Attend a play
- Shop/service – bikes, shoes, bakery, meat market, Ripon/Made Local store
- Activities – dancing, sit/play in a park, sit and linger/place to sit for those who need to take breaks from walking, outdoor dining

## ***Destinations & Connections***

This session asked participants to identify a number of locations in the community, listed below. Additionally, they were asked to identify areas that they would like to see improved as a pedestrian/bicycle connection. There was significant agreement on this point – participants were interested in a walking trail around the mill pond, and also improved streetscape on a pedestrian route connecting downtown and the mill pond, as well as improved pedestrian amenities along Watson and extending to the trail on Pacific Street. They were also interested in park improvements to the riverfront behind the library, additional activities/amenities on the greenspace at the Village Green and also at the Mill pond and Tygert Street, and the introduction of a dog park in the community.



- Most scenic/iconic views:
  - Looking up Watson Street from South
  - Campus Entrance at Woodside Street
  - Campus looking south from Thorne Street
  - Little White Schoolhouse
- Best spots to meet friends:
  - Village Green
  - Downtown restaurants (all)
- Best spots to take kids:
  - Mugs
  - Library
  - Village Green

## ***Amenities and Programming***

In the final session, participants were given \$10 in Ripon bucks and asked to select from a variety of potential activities or amenities that could improve the appearance and number of activities available in downtown. Items were priced according to their real-life values, for instance a new trail or sidewalk connection cost \$10, while additional park programming cost only \$1. Participants were allowed to purchase any combination of amenities with their dollars, and then were provided with dots to ‘place’ their purchased items on a map of downtown Ripon.

Purchased Items:

Façade Makeover-pink: (\$5 each), 1 facades rehabbed, \$5 spent  
 Trail Connections-green: (\$10 each) 1 purchased, \$10 spent (Mill Pond trail)  
 Public Space Programming-red: (\$1 each), 13 weeks of programming, \$13 spent  
 Outdoor Patios-yellow: (\$2 each), 11 purchased, \$22 spent  
 Business Incentives-blue (\$3 each), 20 storefronts filled, \$60 spent

**Placement:**

- Outdoor seating and dining patios were placed in all public parks as well as infill locations in downtown and a few key locations on sidewalks/parklets for popular restaurants.
- Programming of parks, infill parks and major intersections in downtown.
- Rehab of the property at Fond du Lac and Watson
- New businesses throughout downtown



**Implementation Planning**

Based on the input generated at the meeting, there are a number of potential strategies that could be employed successfully in downtown Ripon which are likely to be supported by citizens and constituents. Some of these represent relatively quick and low-cost improvements while others may take several years to plan and implement. Some takeaway ideas and potential strategies and/or references and case studies from comparable projects elsewhere are highlighted in the following section. Some of these items remain on the list from last year, while others are new, or next steps from previously completed activities.

**Goal: Increase Exposure/Awareness**

- Need to draw more traffic off of 23 into downtown – make them aware
  - Improve signage on Fond du Lac – install a billboard, change existing ‘historic downtown’ to ‘dining, shops’, create mural similar to Princeton’s that advertises Watson Street Shops.
  - Update and modernize downtown entrance signage, include signage from additional directions. Consider arches, banners or other highly visible options.
- Increase publicity/awareness of empty or underutilized buildings
  - Host an open house or tour of vacant spaces (Eagle River and Rhinelander have done this successfully)
  - Host a tour of downtown living to demonstrate what upper units can look like and increase interest in downtown/upper story living/interest in development or renovation of underutilized spaces.



- Use vacant spaces as pop-up, co-working or other temporary uses to activate spaces and support entrepreneurial efforts (Viroqua has been very effective at this)
- Display old photos in building (La Farge did a month-long installment of historic photo reproduction and property history panel in each storefront window to help people stop at properties they don't typically notice)
- Once buildings become available, host business plan contest to generate interest in and demand for space (Red Wing Restaurant Challenge, Silver City Business Plan Competition).
- Additional marketing to increase regional draw and draw for other demographic groups
  - Increased online marketing
  - Continue/Expand Existing/Add family-friendly recurring event to create recurring traffic. Maybe close the street for vendors on Friday evenings or other off-peak business period to encourage people to wander
    - Continue to incorporate businesses into events to introduce consumers to individual businesses.
  - Create suggested itineraries for visitors with various interests (active visitors, families, girls getaways, etc)
  - Increase engagement of parents and alumni during college events (De Pere parent marketing was very effective – hosted various 'selfie spots' around downtown as part of a larger orientation tour. Hosted coordinated events around college schedule to keep parents and students in town.

Sample St. Norbert College Day Events

**Downtown Scavenger Hunt**  
 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Pick up your SNC Passport at the information tents. Travel to participating locations to have your passport stamped for a special prize. Make the Kress Inn your last stop and turn in your completed passport for a chance to win a free night's stay at this Ascend Collection premier hotel.

**Yoga (featuring downtown studio)**  
 1-2 p.m.  
 Main Hall Lawn  
 Learn more about this energizing and relaxing form of exercise and meditation.

Goal: Improve space function

- Add a natural playspace into downtown to increase duration of stay for families and provide additional child-friendly activities
  - As an exercise, use the Power of 10 rule to identify 10 things that parents of younger children can now/could possibly do in and around downtown (i.e. Library, Ice cream, pocket park...) Potentially market this itinerary to visiting families.

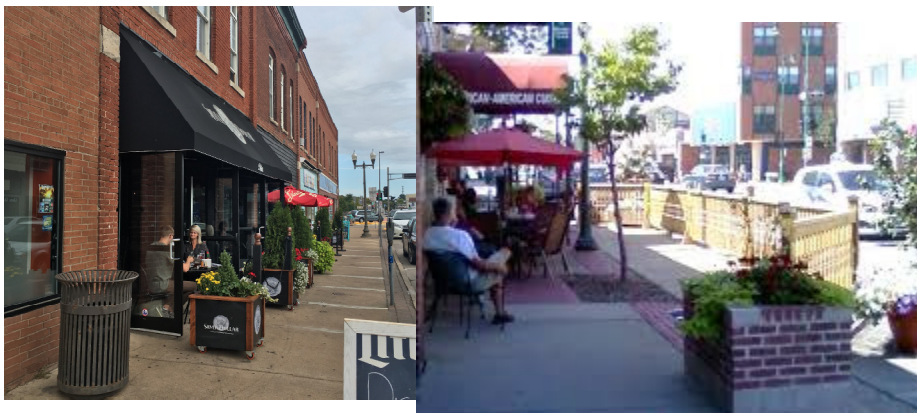


- Work to improve maintenance and upkeep of back alleys/parking lots. Many of the safety concerns were due to dark or unmaintained areas.

- Platteville has a successful back alley improvement project, and makes this an eligible use for façade improvement program dollars.
- Host additional cleanup/maintenance days focused particularly on parking lots or alleys.
- Host an evening walk with representatives from Council, Public Works, Police and other groups. Identify areas which need additional lighting or which are otherwise uncomfortable in the evening.
  - Where appropriate, install additional pedestrian scale lighting on paths/parking lots to improve visibility and sense of safety.

Goal: Expand Local Business Cluster

- Continue entrepreneurship programs to provide necessary education and incentives to help retain/grow/add existing small business community. Consider introducing additional complementary activities such as co-working spaces and/or pop-up shops to create alternative opportunities for businesses to build connections locally.
- Business assistance task force – create local pool of professional services relevant to small businesses (i.e. accounting, legal, marketing). Offer free half hour consultation with a new business by a team of these experts, followed by a one-page summary of potential items to consider that would enhance their business or avoid future challenges. Any follow-up services with a member of the assistance task force would be 20% off, keeping business local. Rhinelander’s BusinessWorks team has successfully implemented this strategy.
- Increase outdoor activity and profitability of downtown businesses by encouraging outdoor patios and creating an option for parklets or pedlets which allow businesses to utilize parking spaces immediately in front of their business for seasonal outdoor dining/seating. This enhances the downtown environment (by adding people and therefore vibrancy), and can also boost business sales by up to 20%, in addition to being one of the most frequently identified desired amenities in the survey.



- Promote/incentivize additional evening activities through events such as the ArtWalk and Wine Walk, introduction of additional lighting (including overhead lighting in pocket parks and/or lighting of trees), and coordinated business activities (i.e. First Fridays, Third Thursdays).

