

Historic Preservation

This chapter of the *Comprehensive Plan* sets forth the policy framework to preserve and enhance the cultural and historic resources within the City of Eau Claire. With its location at the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers, Eau Claire has been transformed from an undisturbed wilderness to a bustling community of more than sixty thousand people. Norwegian, Irish, French, German, and Canadian immigrants settling here from the mid-1800s through the early 1900s constructed many homes and commercial buildings of diverse styles and scale, which helped define Eau Claire and its neighborhoods. Although Eau Claire is now a regional center for medical services, retail, education, government, and business, its early role as a center for lumber and manufacturing industries is still an integral part of Eau Claire's heritage, legacy, and identity.

Eau Claire recognized the importance of preserving its cultural and historic resources back in the 1970s when it initiated its preservation program. Many of the community's architecturally and historically important buildings were demolished in the early and mid-1900s, and citizens became increasingly concerned about preserving the remaining significant buildings and sites for future generations. The City's *Historic Preservation Plan* was prepared in 1982, and amended in 1988.

As the preservation program has grown, the community has experienced the broad range of benefits that preserving the City's historic resources brings, such as:

- ***Sense of Place.*** Perhaps the most important rationale is the desire to retain and protect a "sense of place". The preservation of historic and older buildings helps to keep the visible symbols of our heritage and to provide a connection to the past. The older buildings help define communities and their unique personalities, and their preservation provides the foundation for local pride. Much of America's landscape has gone the way of uniformity, franchise businesses, billboards, standardized housing projects, and other accompaniments of suburban development. Many of the unique cultural features, which distinguish one community from another, have been lost due to the economic expediency of standardization. The intangible qualities of our older buildings and neighborhoods have become a resource that is important to preserve and protect.
- ***Neighborhood Preservation.*** Another clear rationale for historic preservation is the contribution that the older neighborhoods make in defining the character of a community. Much of the ambience of neighborhoods is derived from the unique architecture and variety of housing styles of the older buildings, many of which have specific local importance attached to them.



- **Community Pride and Accomplishment.** An important component of preservation is the fostering community pride as individuals become involved in projects to preserve their heritage. Here in Eau Claire, many people have already participated in preservation either through the restoration, protection, and maintenance of older buildings, or through involvement with organizations or groups that have derived a feeling of pride and accomplishment in contributing to the community in a manner which may be handed down to future generations.
- **Economic Benefits.** Historic preservation is an important tool for economic development. As more people are placing a higher value on their community's unique identity, property owners and businesses are realizing clear financial advantages in maintaining and protecting older and historic structures. Recent market trends in housing restoration and the popularity of restaurants, specialty shopping facilities, and offices within older buildings have been major incentives for preservation. As the cost of construction and land increase, developers are finding that reusing older structures makes good economic sense.
- **Resource Conservation.** Preservation of older buildings and districts is one of the most cost-effective means of conserving resources. Frequently, the quality of construction and the materials used in older buildings cannot be matched using modern construction practices. Extending the life of these buildings not only retains the quality built into the original structures, but also reduces the new materials, which must be expended for replacement buildings.
- **Tourism.** National and state surveys consistently show that historic areas and attractions are a major reason why people travel and visit certain areas. Eau Claire has much to offer tourists in architecture and history. Preserving and enhancing these resources will help to bolster the tourism industry.

This chapter recommends the continuation of many policies and programs put in place over the years since Eau Claire's preservation program was initiated. The Chapter calls for the Eau Claire Landmarks Commission (ECLC) to continue its activities in enhancing and preserving the community's historic buildings. In addition, the Chapter calls for the ECLC to play a more active role in older residential and commercial areas where building design issues relating to redevelopment and infill have a significant impact in maintaining the character and stability of the neighborhoods.

The ECLC has been given the charge of encouraging the preservation of the City's architecturally and historically significant buildings, neighborhoods, and sites. It has been created as set forth in Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 62, which mandates that any city with buildings and/or historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places shall have a Historic Preservation Commission to oversee these properties. The Commission works to foster a sense of pride in the community's historic and architectural resources through educational and promotional activities and programs.

Key Issues

1. **Protection:** What should the City do to ensure adequate protection of the City's historic resources?
2. **Coordination:** What should the City do to ensure that the efforts of the Landmarks Commission, Historic Preservation Foundation, Chippewa Valley Museum, and

other organizations are effectively coordinated to promote and educate the community about historic preservation?

3. **Preservation Incentives:** What incentives should the City make available to encourage the preservation and restoration of both significant and older non-significant buildings?
4. **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?
5. **Downtown:** What should the City do to provide an appropriate level of recognition, designation, or protection for buildings in the Downtown?
6. **Citizen Interest:** What should the City do to increase citizen interest in preservation of Eau Claire's historic resources?
7. **Support:** What should the City do to work with individuals, neighborhoods, and community groups to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the benefits of historic preservation?
8. **Education:** What should the City do to strengthen the educational role of the Landmarks Commission in the community?
9. **New Materials:** What should the City do to balance the broader community interest in preservation with the interests of individual property owners in reducing maintenance of their property by utilizing new types of building materials and new technology?
10. **Tourism Promotion:** What should the City do to foster a more effective use of historic preservation in promoting tourism within the community?



Goal and Objectives

Goal: Identify, protect, and preserve Eau Claire’s resources, which reflect distinctive elements of the City’s cultural, social, economic, political, historical, and architectural heritage in order to enhance the quality of life and foster pride and knowledge about Eau Claire’s past.

Objective 1 – Evaluation and Designation: Continue to survey and evaluate historic and potentially historic resources for designation, recognition, and protection.

Objective 2 – Role of ECLC: Work to expand the role of the ECLC to utilize its expertise in assisting in the implementation of other elements of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

Objective 3 – Community Support: Increase community support for historic preservation and for the work of the ECLC.

Objective 4 – Education: Continue to provide and expand upon programs and activities that will instill an appreciation and pride in Eau Claire’s past.

Objective 5 – Tourism: Explore alternatives to enhance heritage tourism within the City and metropolitan area.

Historic Preservation Policies

Objective 1 – Evaluation and Designation

Continue to survey and evaluate historic and potentially historic resources for designation, recognition and protection.

Identifying and protecting resources that are important historically or architecturally is an ongoing process. Eau Claire has a very strong foundation in this regard and should continue to update this information.

Policies:

- 1. Intensive Historic and Architectural Resource Survey:** Continue to regularly update and expand the City's *Intensive Historic and Architectural Resource Survey* in order to have a current listing of properties and sites that may be historically and architecturally important within the community. This document was first prepared in 1983 and subsequently updated in 1987 and 1996. Updates should re-evaluate previous survey findings and provide more thorough historical research for buildings and sites. In addition, the City should initiate review of areas where structures are meeting the 50 year-old threshold.



Coordinate with the Wisconsin Historical Society regarding the location and preservation of archeological sites that may be within the community.

- 2. Certified Local Government Program:** Continue to maintain the City's status as a member of the Certified Local Government Program through the Wisconsin Historical Society. In addition, the City will continue to seek grant-funding assistance through the program to assist in preservation activities. The ECLC should periodically make application for funding through the City's Community Development Block Grant Program for surveys and National Register nominations.
- 3. National Register Nominations:** Seek and prepare nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for individual properties and districts that have been identified as eligible in the Intensive Historic and Architectural Surveys and in consultation with the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Cultural Resource Management Manual prepared by the Wisconsin Historical Society. The City currently has 68 individual properties and four districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Surveys have also identified a number of additional properties that are potentially eligible for the National Register.
- 4. Local Historic Designation:** Consider the local designation of properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition, the ECLC shall study areas outside the boundaries of existing or potentially eligible National Register Districts to assess whether such areas may be eligible for local designation even if not eligible for the National Register. In conducting this research, the City will consult with the Wisconsin Historical Society in order to evaluate whether this additional research may warrant reconsideration of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

Areas that should be studied by the ECLC include:

- Eau Claire's Central Business District
- Water Street Commercial District
- West Grand Avenue Commercial District
- The area north of the Randall Park Historic District
- Portions of the North Side Hill Neighborhood
- Portions of the East Hill Neighborhood
- Cemeteries within the community

Criteria for the consideration of local designations is set forth in Chapter 2.65, Landmarks Commission, of the City Code.

As a component of the local designations, the designations shall identify the most important characteristics of a building, thus, noting which features are important to retain. This is intended to assist the ECLC and staff in identifying what is significant upon designation and, thus, providing direction when reviewing proposed changes in the future.

5. **Ongoing Designation Program:** Set annual goals for the ECLC to consider local designations in order to maintain an ongoing designation program.
6. **Historic Sites:** The ECLC will research the location and significance of historic sites within the City, such as locations of important events that occurred in the City's past, the location of significant buildings that have been demolished, cemeteries (or portions thereof) within the community, etc. In consultation with the Wisconsin Historical Society, consideration will be given to designating these significant sites according to the provisions of Chapter 2.65 of the City Code or recognizing their importance with a historic marker.
7. **Status of Opted-out Local Landmark Properties:** Restore the continuity of the two locally landmarked historic districts and the individually landmarked program. The ECLC shall work with persons owning property that was removed from the local designation program in 1992 and encourage these property owners to reconsider the local landmark program. This should be undertaken by meeting with property owners individually and within a group setting. In addition, over time as property ownership changes, these new property owners should be contacted and encouraged to consider the local program.

In order to promote the broader, neighborhood-wide importance and benefits of the local preservation for the older neighborhoods, the ECLC shall work with the neighborhood associations to strengthen their support for the re-establishment of the local districts in their entirety and designation of all the individually significant properties.

8. **Review Guidelines:** The ECLC shall continue to follow review guidelines contained in Chapter 2.65 of the Municipal Code and within the historic district plans pursuant to the review of exterior alterations, remodeling, new construction, and demolition of locally designated individual properties and properties within locally designated historic districts. These guidelines are based on the “Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.”

When the replacement of original exterior building materials, such as siding, is considered, such work should proceed only if the historic character and integrity of the building is retained. Cosmetic repairs and improvements, which avoid the remediation of underlying problems, are not appropriate. Such underlying defects or problems must be addressed rather than concealed in order to better preserve the future integrity of the structure. The Commission should regularly consult with the Wisconsin Historical Society and National Park Service regarding updates or interpretations of these standards and update Chapter 2.65 and district plans as needed.

9. **Update Section 106 Agreement with Wisconsin Historical Society:** Update the Programmatic Agreement for HUD-funded activities between the City and the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation. This agreement was first entered into in 1996 and enables the ECLC to review City-sponsored housing rehabilitation programs using Community Development Block Grant funds and ensure that such activities conform with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

Objective 2 – Role of Eau Claire Landmarks Commission

Work to expand the role of the ECLC to utilize its expertise in assisting in the implementation of other elements of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

This *Plan* suggests that the ECLC become a stronger participant in Eau Claire planning and the implementation of this chapter, as well as assisting in the implementation of other chapters of the *Comprehensive Plan*. Their knowledge and experience can provide important contributions to City housing programs and revitalization efforts in older residential and commercial areas.

Policies:

1. **Neighborhood and Area Planning:** Include a member of the ECLC or consult with the ECLC in the preparation of neighborhood or area plans to ensure that historic preservation issues are addressed. The preservation of historically or architecturally significant buildings and sites is an important tool that has helped maintain the unique character and identity of the City. Involvement of the ECLC in planning activities would better ensure that information about historic buildings and sites is considered in conjunction with the preparation of the plans. The ECLC may have funding or informational programs that can assist or provide incentives when pursuing revitalization strategies in older residential or commercial areas.
2. **Design Standards and Guidelines:** Provide assistance in design-related issues pertaining to architectural changes required due to code requirements, Housing

Authority rehabilitation programs, infill development and redevelopment in older residential and commercial areas of the City that have unique and important character, but have not been designated as historic properties or districts. Although such areas are not designated historic, many still play an extremely important role in defining the fabric and unique appearance of Eau Claire's residential and commercial areas.

3. Applicability of Zoning Regulations in Older Neighborhoods:

Review and amend, where appropriate, zoning regulations within older neighborhoods to accommodate the nonconforming status of dwellings due to setback requirements and area requirements that are generally applicable to newer residential neighborhoods. Current zoning regulations create difficulties for property owners to properly maintain and upgrade structures in these areas due to their nonconforming status.



- 4. Conservation Districts:** Evaluate the use of conservation districts as a tool for the protection of older residential and commercial districts that are not designated as historic districts but could benefit from some level of review. Such districts have been used with success in many cities to provide a middle ground between locally designated historic districts where design review can be quite detailed, to areas where design review of any degree is non-existent. Some of the older residential neighborhoods or older commercial areas, such as Downtown and along Water Street, may benefit from some limited design review for major building alterations or new construction, which could radically alter the character of an area. If a conservation district were created, the ECLC could be involved in the design review for the district.

The Physical Character Chapter also stresses the importance of Eau Claire's older established neighborhoods. The chapter affirms "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." Conservation districts may be beneficial in certain locations to retain the character of these areas.

- 5. Heritage Recognition:** Continue and expand upon programs and activities, such as the historic marker program along the recreational trail. This is a non-traditional program for the ECLC as it provides information about sites along the recreational trail and the City in general. Programs such as this do not focus specifically on designated properties or districts, but rather encourage a broader appreciation of Eau Claire's past.
- 6. Landmarks Commission Title:** Consider a change in the title of the Eau Claire Landmarks Commission to a new name, such as the Eau Claire Historic Preservation Commission or the Eau Claire Heritage Preservation Commission. This change in title would reflect the Commission's expanded role in not only

overseeing designated landmark properties, but also its roles in neighborhood and comprehensive planning, education, and promotion of the City's history.



Objective 3 – Community Support

Increase community support for historic preservation and the work of the ECLC.

Support for the City's historic preservation program comes from several organizations in addition to the City, plus a broad base of citizen goodwill.

Policies:

- 1. Relationships With Other Organizations:** Continue to foster good working relationships with other preservation organizations within the community. This includes organizations such as: the Chippewa Valley Museum, the Eau Claire Historic Preservation Foundation (HPF), Paul Bunyan Camp, Waldemar Ager Association, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Geography and History Departments, and the Area Research Center. This should be accomplished by sharing information such as meeting minutes and by working jointly on projects and activities.

Since the ECLC and Preservation Foundation share common goals relative to education and promotion of Eau Claire's past, it is recommended that both organizations strive to select a person that will serve on both the Commission and HPF Board of Directors. This will facilitate coordination and communication between the two groups.

The ECLC should also maintain regular communication with other organizations that may utilize and promote the benefits of historic preservation in a more limited capacity. Such organizations would include: the Chippewa Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, Friends of the Chippewa River State Trail, Downtown Eau Claire, Incorporated, Water Street Business Improvement District, West Grand Avenue

Business Improvement District, neighborhood associations, Realtors Association and Apartment Association.

- 2. Economic Incentives:** Continue to explore and promote opportunities related to tax credit programs, historic building codes, state and federal loans and grants-in-aid programs that encourage the reuse and restoration of designated historic properties. The use and creation of economic stimulus programs utilizing local funding, which create incentives to reuse older buildings, should also be studied.

In addition, the reuse of historic buildings shall not be discouraged, provided the architectural character of the building is retained.

- 3. Commission Membership:** Strive to have a broad based membership on the ECLC. Membership on the Commission is established in Chapter 2.65 of the City Code, which specifies that a realtor, architect, and historian serve on the Commission. In addition, a City Council representative also serves on the Commission. The remaining three members may come from any discipline. This would include persons having a variety of interests pertaining to historic preservation and that live in a variety of neighborhoods within the community.
- 4. Education:** Develop and implement educational programs pertaining to historic and heritage preservation to build positive public support and participation in community preservation programs. This is discussed in more detail under Objective 4 in this chapter.
- 5. Wisconsin Association of Historic Preservation Commissions (WAHPC):** Continue to be a member of WAHPC and actively be involved with the organization. Membership with this organization provides a valuable network of communication with other communities within the state. In addition, the organization provides valuable training opportunities for staff and Commission members.

- 6. Recognition of Preservation Efforts:** Provide recognition of individuals and organizations that are involved in historic and heritage preservation activities within the community. This may include letters of commendation to property owners completing restoration or rehabilitation work on their properties or for positive preservation activities undertaken by a group or organization.



- 7. Historic Preservation at the County Level:** Support efforts to develop a historic preservation commission at the county level charged with the preservation of architecturally and historically significant properties within rural areas, the smaller towns, villages, and unincorporated areas. Significant structures located in these rural areas have no protection and are being lost with little consideration. Neither Chippewa County nor Eau Claire County have historic preservation commissions,

whereas a county such as La Crosse has a very successful commission that has preserved a number of rural sites and structures.

8. **Evaluate the Landmarks Commission Loan Program:** Review the requirements for the City's Historic Residential Loan Program and determine if modifications should be made to encourage greater utilization of the program. The ECLC should also determine if the scope of the program should be expanded to include designated commercial properties and non-profit or religious institutions.
9. **Public Facilities:** Provide leadership in setting an example and assuring that public capital improvements are undertaken and completed in a sensitive manner that retains the integrity of the facility or area. This would include work completed on historic buildings and site work in the vicinity of these buildings. Infrastructure improvements, such as for streets located in older residential and commercial areas, should also be sensitive to maintaining the character of the area. The ECLC should review such proposed improvements affecting historic properties and districts and provide recommendations to ensure public improvements are sensitive to the historic preservation policies of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

Objective 4 – Education

Continue to provide and expand upon programs and activities that will instill an appreciation and pride in Eau Claire's past.

Increased community awareness of and support for historic preservation will likely pay dividends in terms of local funding and regulatory support.

Policies:

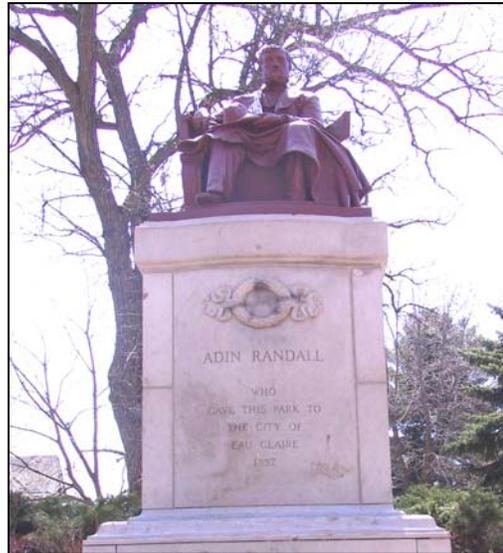
1. **Work with School Districts:** Work with the Eau Claire Area and Altoona School Districts in the implementation and refinement of the third grade curriculum about the history and development of the Eau Claire area. In 1987, the ECLC prepared this curriculum and copies were provided to each elementary school. The Commission should meet with the school district representatives and assess the effectiveness of the materials prepared by the Commission and determine what improvements should be made.
2. **Workshops and Programs:** Continue to sponsor informative workshops and programs for owners of designated historic properties and the general public that address a variety of topics ranging from the maintenance and upkeep of older structures, to assistance programs that are available, to presentations about various aspects of Eau Claire's heritage. Such activities should not be limited to only "Preservation Week." Efforts to co-sponsor such events and activities are encouraged.
3. **Informational Materials:** Continue to prepare and disseminate informational materials pertaining to heritage education. Examples include brochures about specific buildings, cemeteries, the Landmarks Tour Booklet, information about the

Federal and State Income Tax Credit Program and the State Historic Building Code, architectural posters, etc.

- 4. Design Assistance:** Make the expertise of the ECLC available to owners of historic and older non-historic structures regarding questions relating to exterior rehabilitation or additions. Information from the Commission's resource library shall also be made available to the public. The ECLC can help provide this advice at their regular meetings, resource fairs, seminars, etc.

The ECLC should also provide advice to property owners to help them streamline the renovation process.

- 5. Web Site Development:** Upgrade the information and materials currently on the City's web site pertaining to historic preservation.



- 6. Community Television Programming:** Study the feasibility of developing programming for Community Public Access Television pertaining to heritage education. Partnerships with such organizations as the Chippewa Valley Museum and Eau Claire Preservation Foundation should be encouraged.

In lieu of regular programming, the ECLC should request that Community Television record workshops and programs sponsored by the ECLC or other preservation organizations and request that they be broadcasted periodically.

- 7. Commission Member Training:** Explore opportunities for training and continued education for members of the ECLC. This would include programs offered by such organizations as the Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Association of Historic Preservation Commissions, and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Planning Association.

In addition, the ECLC should periodically request meetings with representatives of the Wisconsin Historical Society to discuss topics of special concern. One topic of particular concern pertains to the use and application of new technology building materials that would be used on older buildings. When appropriate, representatives from applicable building material industries should be invited speak to the Commission.



- 8. Records Management:** The ECLC should establish a more formalized framework to safeguard its collection of records and photographs of historic buildings and sites. This should include increased coordination with the Chippewa Valley Museum and Eau Claire Public Library in preserving these documents and photos.

Objective 5 – Tourism

Explore alternatives to enhance heritage tourism within the City and metropolitan area.

Policies:

- 1. Downtown Building Marker Program:** Develop a joint program of the ECLC and Downtown Eau Claire, Incorporated (DECI) to implement a building marker program for Downtown buildings. Such markers would discuss the history and architecture of the buildings and other buildings that may have once been present at a particular site. A brochure providing an overview of the program should also be developed.
- 2. Economic Benefits:** Study the economic impact of historic preservation in Eau Claire as an important means of gaining support for such programs. The benefits are two-fold, as preservation programs provide positive economic benefits through increased tourism. In addition, reinvestment in older areas of the City provides a stimulus for others to likewise make improvements in their properties.
- 3. Coordination with Other Organizations:** Work with organizations, such as the Chippewa Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Chippewa Valley Museum, to explore various means that the ECLC could assist in expanding the heritage tourism sector of the economy.
- 4. Plaque Recognition Program:** Continue the City's plaque program recognizing historic districts, properties, and sites within the community. This has included street signs, individual building plaques, and the trail marker program. Funds from the State Historical Society marker program should also be utilized.