



CHAPTER 2: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

This element includes a brief summary of existing conditions, a list of issues and opportunities that were identified during the planning process, a vision statement and a series of goals, objectives and recommendations to meet the current and future needs in the City of Neenah.

Neenah has a unique and distinct character that has been formed over time based on cultural, economic and political experiences. This element will focus on enhancing the “Sense of Place” through public place making, enhancement of neighborhoods, natural resources, architectural and aesthetic appeal of the City.

Issues and opportunities identified in this element were determined through the public participation process, collection of background data and through a review of the following documents:

- *Neenah Comprehensive Plan 2020*, adopted in 1999;

SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Changes in population and household characteristics combined with existing and future development patterns and policy choices will determine how well the City of Neenah will be able to meet the future needs of its residents.

Below is a summary of the key issues and opportunities conditions. For a complete listing, please see *City of Neenah Comprehensive Plan Update 2040, Volume Two: Existing Conditions Report*.

Population Trends

- The City of Neenah experienced a significant gain in population between 1960 and 1970, followed by a more moderate rate of population growth between 1980 and ~~2010~~2020.
- Between 2010 and ~~2015~~2020, the population in the City of Neenah is estimated to have grown by ~~4.57.3~~ percent or ~~370-1,818~~ people, outpacing the estimated growth in the county (0.9%) and the state (~~4.23.6~~%).
- According to the WDOA, the City of Neenah is expected to grow by ~~43.65.8~~ percent (~~3,4691,609~~ people) between ~~2010-2020~~ and 2040.
- From ~~2000-2010~~ to ~~2010~~2020, the overall population density of the City of Neenah ~~decreased-increased~~ from ~~2,971.72,762.8~~ persons per square mile in ~~2000-2010~~ to ~~2,762.82,915~~ persons per square mile in ~~2010~~2020.
- In ~~2010~~2020, the median age of City of Neenah residents was 36.~~79~~.
- The child bearing population (25 to 44) comprised the City’s largest cohort in both ~~2000~~2010 (~~3227.6~~%) and ~~2010-2020~~ (27.6%).

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Race

- In ~~2010~~2020, whites comprised ~~93.787.8~~ percent of the City of Neenah population compared to ~~92.586.7~~ percent in the county and ~~86.280.1~~ percent of the state's population.

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Household Structure and Trends

- Household size in the City of Neenah decreased from ~~2.362.47~~ persons per household in ~~2000-2010~~ to ~~2.362.4~~ persons per household in ~~2010~~2020.
- In ~~2000-2010~~ (~~66.962.7~~%) and ~~2010-2020~~ (~~62.756.0~~%), about two-thirds of the households in the City of Neenah were family households.
- Married couple families (husband and wife) made up slightly ~~less-more~~ than half (~~47.655.9~~%) of all households in the City of Neenah in ~~2010~~2020, compared to ~~47.858.3~~ percent in Winnebago County and ~~49.660.7~~ percent in the state.
- The number of households is expected to increase by about ~~48.69.1~~ percent from ~~10,69411,624~~ in ~~2010-2020~~ to 12,682 in 2040.

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Income and Education

- The ~~2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates~~ indicate that the City of Neenah had a slightly higher percentage of residents age 25 or older who graduated from high school or higher (~~93.494.7~~%) than the county (~~91.093.6~~%) and the state (~~90.492.9~~%).
- The share of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher increased by ~~3.84.9~~ percent in the City of Neenah between ~~2009-the 2009-2013 American Community Survey~~ (~~26.330.1~~%) and ~~the 2009-2013 2017-2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates~~ (~~30.131.6~~%).
- According to the ~~2009-2013 2017-2021~~ American Community Survey, approximately ~~78.479.2~~ percent (+/-~~4.2.08~~%), of households derive income from earnings in the City of Neenah.
- The average (mean) household income (\$~~70,77082.922~~ +/-~~\$3,3994,181~~) is ~~less-more~~ than the average (mean) earnings per household (\$~~72,76582,559~~ +/-~~\$4,4194,084~~).
- According to the ~~2009-2013 2017-2021~~ ACS 5-Year Estimates, the City of Neenah median family income was \$~~66,66379,872~~, which was an increase from the ~~4999-2009-2019 ACS~~ median family income of \$~~55,32966,653~~.
- The per capita income in the City of Neenah in ~~2009-2013 2017-2021 ACS~~ was \$~~29,16034,991~~, an increase of ~~29-20~~ percent from ~~4999-2009-2013 ACS~~ (\$~~24,28029,160~~).
- According to the American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, in ~~2009-2013 2017-2021~~ ~~40.411.0~~ percent (+/-~~2.42~~%) of the City of Neenah's population was living below the poverty line.
- Approximately ~~8.08.6~~ percent (+/-~~2.22.0~~%) of families lived below the poverty level in the City of Neenah, according to the ~~2009-2013 2017-2021~~ American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



A number of issues and opportunities were identified through the public participation process, collection of background data and through a review of other documents. A list of issues and opportunities are described below:

Placemaking

General comments made about Neenah during visioning was the “Sense of Community”, spirit, identity and pride that was felt in City. It was felt that Neenah’s neighborhoods were an asset to the City and that this was a great place to raise a family.

Shattuck Park and the Neenah Library are good examples of public spaces that were created in the downtown area. This space is used to host concerts, the Farmers Market and other events. It has enhanced the vibrancy of the downtown area. However, there may be other areas in the City that could also be used to create a public space that will enhance the Sense of Community Neenah residents feel. One such area that was mentioned numerous times during the visioning process was the undeveloped Arrowhead Park area. People felt that this area could be developed as a special place where residents and visitors to the City could enjoy the proximity and access to the water. The Loop the Little Lake Trail ~~will connect~~ds to the Park and ~~is planned to circle~~s the southern end of Little Lake Butte des Morts from the Trestle. To further enhance the experience, connections from Arrowhead Park could be made along the water to the downtown and the Neenah Riverwalk.



Shattuck Park

Though the public participation process, participants mentioned that they valued Neenah’s historical business district, neighborhoods and historic homes. Many people valued the neighborhood they lived in, the safety they feel, the quietness, the friendliness of their neighbors and the pride people take in maintaining their property. While people were very positive about their neighborhoods, there may be things that the City can do to enhance and strengthen connections and relationships both within the neighborhood but also between the neighborhood and City government.

Issues and Opportunities:

- The City has several great public gathering places including Shattuck Park and Kimberly Point Park.
- Arrowhead Park and Gateway Plaza are two underutilized public spaces.
- Many neighborhoods in the City have a neighborhood park, however, some neighborhoods lack an easily accessible park or other public area.

Community Entrances

Neenah’s community entrances provide the first impression of the City to visitors and residents. While the City has numerous positive attributes (Lake Winnebago and the Fox River, waterfront parks, historic neighborhoods and downtown, museums and public art), one must travel along



significant commercial corridors to access these destinations. Direct entry points into the City from I-41 are limited to three locations (Breezewood Lane / Bell Street, Winneconne Avenue and Main Street). Except for standard highway exit signs, entrances into the City are unannounced. Due to space limitations, it is difficult to make an effective welcoming area along I-41. ~~Therefore~~Therefore, a better location might be off the highway near I-41 corridor. The City installed an entrance sign along the northbound lane of I-41, south of the Breezewood/Bell intersection in 2018.

There are four main entrance corridors into the City (Breezewood Lane / Bell Street, Winneconne Avenue, Main Street and Commercial Street). Depending on the corridor traveled, land uses along these routes vary and include residential, commercial and industrial areas. Many of these corridors have seen little investment in some time; as a result, vacant buildings and lots, and run down properties are evident. Commercial corridors and suggested improvements were identified as part of visioning. These corridors should be redeveloped to connect to the surrounding neighborhoods. Corridor plans should be developed to include a purposeful arrangement and / or grouping of uses that are appropriate for the corridor and provide for the surrounding neighborhoods. These corridors should be designed to fill people's physical, social and economic needs. In 2019, the City finalized the South Commercial Street Corridor Plan to help stimulate private investment, increase a sense of place, and provide design alternatives for the reconstruction of S. Commercial Street in 2025.

The City should develop a wayfinding signage program that can be used to guide people to key destinations within the City. Wayfinding signage will help overcome some of the visual and geographic separation of city amenities from I-41 and will make it easier to visitors or those unfamiliar with the City.

Issues and Opportunities:

- I-41 running through the City provides an opportunity to guide visitors into the City, promote our downtown and other attractions, and welcome people to the City with signage.
- The City lacks ~~any~~ plans which would help redevelop and revitalize several commercial corridors/districts in the City.
- There are no consistent welcome signs along major entrance corridors into the City.

Natural Environment

Neenah's rich natural resource base is one of the City's defining aspects. This base includes access and shoreline along Lake Winnebago, Little Lake Butte des Morts and the Neenah Slough, as well as associated wetlands, environmental areas, fish and wildlife habitat and park and open lands. Many top assets (water resources, parks, trees, trails) associated with Neenah's natural resources, as well as ways to enhance these ~~assets, were~~assets, were identified during visioning, the Community Survey, and the Youth Survey. Protection of the City's natural resources is essential so that they will be available for current and future generations to enjoy. Neenah's natural resources should be used to enhance the community's identity and sense of place.



Lake Winnebago



Trees have a calming effect on people and vehicles. They increase curb appeal and property values, absorb traffic and other noises and build neighborhood and civic pride. Urban trees should be recognized as a natural resource and should therefore be properly managed and protected. While the City has an urban forestry plan, it does not currently have an urban forestry program.

The City's history is tied to its location along the Fox River. People identify and take great pride in the river system, which includes Little Lake Butte des Morts and Lake Winnebago. Neenah has embraced and should continue to utilize this resource to create a unique sense of community by showcasing and educating the public about local history, enhancing the downtown experience by connecting people to the water, and increasing recreational pursuits and tourism opportunities.

Issues and Opportunities:

- Lake Winnebago is a great asset for its recreational opportunities, however, ~~pollution of the lake is threatening~~ water quality concerns threaten those recreational opportunities.
- Neenah has several large parks adjacent to Lake Buttes Des Morts and Lake Winnebago and the Fox River which provide public access to those water resources.
- The City has an urban forestry plan, but does not have an urban forestry program.
- There is little public access to the Neenah Slough.
- Although the City recognizes the importance of protecting wetlands in the City, wetlands protection has come at the cost of development as poor drainage has created wetlands on undeveloped and developed land.

Signage and Street Graphics

Signs are not only used to provide direction and identification, but they can be used to enhance the urban landscape by providing branding and character and encouraging exploration. Signs should be designed based on the viewer. For ~~exampleexample~~, signs for the traveling public should be big, bold, concise and far enough away to give ample warning. Pedestrians, on the other hand, have more time to study a sign and therefore signs geared for pedestrians can be smaller, provide more detail and be at eye level.

Signs and graphics can be used to provide community and / or area identity. For example, the Downtown and Doty Island Business communities have utilized street banner and branding to better identify their district. Other commercial corridors would also benefit by adopting a brand that would provide unified recognition.

Issues and Opportunities:

- ~~The City's sign code is out of compliance with a recent Supreme Court decision regarding content-based signage.~~
- There are no specific sign guidelines for the Historic Downtown district.
- Neenah restricts off-~~premise~~premises (bill boards) signage.
- The City does not have a program to document existing off-premises signage in the City to determine when they need to be removed.



Historic Downtown Neenah



Historical/Architectural Heritage

Neenah's historic buildings and rich architecture defines the heritage that has shaped and formed the City. The importance that people place on preserving the City's historic architecture (businesses, homes, neighborhoods and corridors) was identified during visioning.

Both private and public investments have been made to protect the City's heritage. The Downtown Business District with its historic facades; well preserved historic homes along E. Wisconsin Avenue, Kimberly Point and Doty Island; the Clock Tower, Old Post Office, Lighthouse, Doty Cabin are examples of this investment.

In 1986, the City Landmarks Commission was created to support the efforts of private property owners and the public sector in the preservation and thoughtful redevelopment of the community's historic and architectural resources. The Commission has worked to identify local properties for historic landmark designation, reviewed proposed improvements at designated properties and has promoted the community's heritage to residents and visitors.

Issues and Opportunities:

- Neenah has a fascinating history spanning over 150 years which included the creation of successful businesses and prominent residents who helped build the community.
- The Neenah Landmarks Commission is active in promoting and preserving Neenah's history and its historic structures.
- The City has one locally designated Historic District (Downtown).

Public Art

Public art can be used to create a sense of place. Art can be utilized to impart new energy, enhance ~~aesthetics~~ aesthetics, or define a specific area. During the visioning process, participants identified the desire for additional local art in the downtown area. Investment has been made in bronze statues within the downtown area, in Riverside Park and in other areas of the City. Bronze statues include the Statue of Liberty, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, the Gateway Plaza entrance sign, and the American eagle in the downtown, Playing in the Rain at Riverside Park and the American eagle in the roundabout on Green Bay Road. It may be possible to bring additional statues into the City and to build upon the theme that is already here. Murals are another form of local art that can be applied to placemaking. Local history can be emphasized through a variety of murals, possible commissioned by local businesses and residents. ~~Under current zoning, murals are not allowed within the City.~~



George Washington Statue

Issues and Opportunities:

- The City has no guidelines for the placement of art in public spaces.
- Downtown Neenah and surrounding areas have benefited from private benefactors who commissioned and placed statues in parks, along sidewalks, and other public places.
- ~~The City's sign code does not permit murals.~~
- The City created an Arts Council to promote art within the City.

Urban Design



Concern has been expressed that current ordinances related to land use and development do not allow for flexibility. The City should utilize urban design standards to ensure that development corresponds to the City's vision. Design standards should allow flexibility, though the final product should conform to the City's ultimate goal or vision. An urban design manual could be developed to provide guidance on building architecture, site design, landscaping and signage and would allow the City to review projects in a neighborhood setting. The manual should provide guidance on commercial corridors so that they connect to existing neighborhoods and fill people's physical, social and economic needs (see community entrances above). The urban design manual should be used as a companion document to the zoning code. Therefore, as the City develops its urban design manual it should also be reviewing its zoning code and making revisions as necessary.

The City should be discouraging strip development and should be instead encouraging new commercial and industrial developments to develop in clusters or nodes. New residential, both single-family and multi-family developments should be encouraged to develop as clustered mixed-use developments that employ pedestrian friendly infrastructure that retains open space and natural features, encouraging walking and provides connections to area amenities.

During visioning, participants mentioned that they valued Neenah's historical business district and neighborhoods. They also valued other neighborhoods within the City that might not be historical but provided connections to neighbors. On the downside, people also felt that some neighborhoods in the City were in need of improvement.

Issues and Opportunities:

- The City's zoning code does not regulate or promote specific design standards.
- Many of the declining commercial corridors in the City are linear in nature as opposed to the more vibrant clustered commercial districts.
- The zoning code prohibits commercial uses in residential neighborhoods.
- Single-Family Residential uses are prohibited in the downtown zoning district.
- The City lacks a property maintenance code.
- Review and revise the zoning code to allow flexibility and ensure that the zoning code is meeting the City's vision.

Festivals and Community Events

Festivals and community events can enhance local character, image and pride and showcase the culture and history of the community. During the public participation process, people mentioned that there are great events and a lot happening in the City. Many of the community events hosted by the City of Neenah, Future Neenah, Inc. (FNI) and the Business Improvement District (BID) were identified through the public participation process. Community events, whether hosted by the City or other non-profit organizations, should promote the community in a positive way and attract both residents and non-residents alike.

Issues and Opportunities:

- The City of Neenah, Future Neenah, Inc. and the Neenah Downtown Business Improvement District host events in the Downtown that attract residents and non-residents to the City.
- Neenah's larger parks are capable of hosting larger community events.
- Many of the larger events in Neenah occur at Riverside Park.



- Downtown Neenah has several public spaces such as Arrowhead Park, Shattuck Park, and Gateway Plaza capable of hosting events.



VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vision Statement: *A community which embraces its history, protects and provides public access to its natural resources, and has a community identity which is unique, identifiable, and different from other communities in the Fox Cities.*

Goal IO 1: Develop a unique City identity based on the City's history and natural resources such as Lake Winnebago and the Fox River.

Placemaking

Objective IO 1.1: Enhance and strengthen neighborhoods to increase a sense of place and belonging.

- Recommendation IO 1.1.1: Identify key areas in the City that could be enhanced through creative placemaking techniques, or other methods such as neighborhood improvement districts or neighborhood associations. (See recommendation LU 1.2.3)
- Recommendation IO 1.1.2: Develop a process that can be used to identify and strengthen the relationship and connections both within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and City government. (See recommendation LU 1.4.7, H 2.1.4)
- Recommendation IO 1.1.3: Partner with neighborhood leaders and groups to identify and strengthen public places within existing City neighborhoods.

Community Entrances

Objective IO 1.2: Create welcoming and aesthetically pleasing entry points into the City.

- Recommendation IO 1.2.1: Maintain the current ban on the construction of new billboards. Enforce the removal of existing billboards as they become vacated.
- Recommendation IO 1.2.2: Work with WisDOT to provide additional signage to the downtown and other points of interest along I-41.
- Recommendation IO 1.2.3: Promote and encourage the underground installation of all electric, telephone and cable utility lines in newly developed areas. Pursue a plan to promote the burial of existing overhead lines, with prioritization of areas based on visual significance and sensitivity.
- Recommendation IO 1.2.4: Develop a plan to identify key entry points into the City and identify appropriate welcome signage and a wayfinding system that is consistent in design. (See recommendation ED 2.3.2, LU 1.5.6, LU 1.5.7)
- Recommendation IO 1.2.5: Encourage a tree planting program along major road corridors, recognizing appropriate species and placement.
- Recommendation IO 1.2.6: Work in cooperation with business and property owners along entry corridor commercial districts to develop detailed corridor plans for

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Winneconne Avenue, Bell/Breezewood Avenue, Green Bay Road, Main Street and Commercial Street. (See recommendation ED 2.3.5, LU 1.5.6, LU 1.5.7)

Natural Environment

Objective IO 1.3: Protect environmentally sensitive areas and corridors.

- Recommendation IO 1.3.1: Encourage the use of Green Infrastructure in areas planned for new development. (See recommendation LU 1.10.2, LU 1.10.4, CF 1.4.4)
- Recommendation IO 1.3.2: Continue ongoing regulatory control over wetlands and floodplain areas, shoreland protection areas, and other environmentally sensitive areas. (See recommendation NR 1.1.1)

Objective IO 1.4: Utilize and enhance the City's natural resources to create an inviting atmosphere for City residents, workers and visitors.

- Recommendation IO 1.4.1: Identify recreational and other opportunities on or adjoining community waterways that would offer greater public access and enjoyment while protecting this resource as our finest natural amenity. (See recommendation LU 1.8.7)
- Recommendation IO 1.4.2: Create a plan that would identify locations and increase the area of the community's waterfront that is accessible to the public for passive / active recreation, dining and enjoyment. (See recommendation LU 1.8.7)
- Recommendation IO 1.4.3: Continue the City's urban forestry program to address the long term care of urban trees for proper maintenance, removal, protection and planting.
- Recommendation IO 1.4.4: Utilize the water resources to teach the public about the value of the City's water resources, local history, enhance the downtown experience by connecting people to the water, and increasing recreational pursuits and tourism opportunities. (See recommendation ED 2.2.3, LU 1.8.7)

Signage, Street Graphics and Other Amenities

Objective IO 1.5: Establish a community identity through the use of distinct signage, street graphics and other amenities.

- Recommendation IO 1.5.1: Review and update the City's sign code to account for signage which is compatible to the district it's located in and for the use of the property.
- Recommendation IO 1.5.2: Assist business districts to create a unified brand and to incorporate that brand within business signage and street graphics such as banners.
- Recommendation IO 1.5.3: In conjunction with the adoption of a Sign Code, the City should prepare a street graphics handbook that can be used by property owners and the sign industry to select signage that is attractive, functional, and appropriate for the streetscapes of Neenah.



Historical / Architectural Heritage

Objective IO 1.6: Protect, preserve and promote the City's historical and architectural heritage. Continue to regard the preservation and promotion of historically and architecturally significant buildings and sites as an important component in maintaining the image and character of Neenah.

- Recommendation IO 1.6.1: Recognize and support efforts of the Neenah Landmarks Commission and other local preservation groups and other historic preservation efforts. (See recommendation CR 1.1.2)
- Recommendation IO 1.6.2: Develop a comprehensive preservation strategy to better define common goals, roles and responsibilities of all interested groups, individuals and property owners to ~~insure~~ensure broader community understanding and acceptance of the need to preserve Neenah's history. (See recommendation CR 1.1.3)
- Recommendation IO 1.6.3: Develop a comprehensive list of potential historic structures, properties, and districts.
- Recommendation IO 1.6.4: Support the continuation of state tax credits for historic building renovation.

Public Art

Objective IO 1.7: Support public art within the City.

- Recommendation IO 1.7.1: Develop an Arts Council/Committee responsible for encouraging and supporting public art within the City.
- Recommendation IO 1.7.2: Develop public art selection guidelines and an approval process that can be used as both a marketing and management tool.
- Recommendation IO 1.7.3: Create a database of existing art in the City to be used for marketing and tourism purposes.
- Recommendation IO 1.7.4: Review local ordinances to determine restrictions that would prohibit murals and other art forms.
- Recommendation IO 1.7.5: Develop a brochure that will provide information about local art in the City. The guide should provide information on the artist, a description of the art and a map.

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Urban Design

Objective IO 1.8: Encourage high quality design of public and private buildings and structures in the City.

- Recommendation IO 1.8.1: The City should explore the level of interest in using design review more fully in its development approval process.
- Recommendation IO 1.8.2: Identify districts/areas within the City that would benefit from consistent design standards.
- Recommendation IO 1.8.3: The City should develop an urban design manual that would provide guidance on building architecture, site design, landscaping and signage. (See recommendation LU 1.2.2)
- Recommendation IO 1.8.4: The City should review its Site Plan Review approval process to ensure that it's consistent with established goals in the comprehensive plan. (See recommendation LU 1.1.3)
- Recommendation IO 1.8.5: The City should direct new commercial and industrial uses to develop in nodes or clusters rather than as strip developments. Future developments should be subject to both site and design review approvals to produce quality projects that meet the desired community character. (See recommendation LU 1.5.2)
- Recommendation IO 1.8.6: The City should encourage the development of mixed-use cluster residential neighborhoods that are built at a pedestrian scale and that retain extensive open space areas. Neighborhoods should be developed with individual identities but which also reinforce the overall image and character of the community. (See recommendation LU 1.4.1)
- Recommendation IO 1.8.7: The City should rigorously enforce property maintenance and nuisance codes to enhance the attractiveness and quality of all areas in the community. (See recommendation H 2.2.4, H 2.2.7)

Festivals and Community Events

Objective IO 1.9: Create and sustain a positive community image by supporting festivals and celebrations, culture, and neighborhood events.

- Recommendation IO 1.9.1: Partner with and support local organizations to provide quality community events.
- Recommendation IO 1.9.2: The City shall proactively seek out community events and partners to host events in Neenah.



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