



11/23/09 [revised 11/25/09 for clarification purposes]

To Wausau City Council
Re Proposed Third Street Reversal

Dear Alderpersons,

The purpose in writing this letter is to recommend that the Council return to the CISM Committee the Third Street project for additional study including an option for a two-way street with parallel parking on both sides of the 400, 500, and 600 Blocks of Third Street.

Many ingredients are required to make a successful, livable, and economically viable “Main Street” experience. If we as a community are planning time, effort, and monies to demolish then reconstruct three blocks of street & sidewalk from building face to building face within this downtown district then I recommend we follow due diligence to investigate all options that may make the experience even more successful, livable, and economically viable. Goals to consider include ingredients such as improved storefront visibility, increased vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and an experience that is easy-to-use by regular, occasional, and first-time visitors.

This recommendation to consider other options are outlined in the several sections listed below:

- #1: Demonstrate evidence for a Third Street Reversal
- #2: Design is a combination of significance and utility
- #3: Summary of Recent Studies and Reconstructions
- #4: Survey of Wisconsin Main Street Communities

Item #1: Demonstrate evidence for a Reversal

1. Demonstrate compelling evidence that the direction change of will positively benefit the east-side and west-side districts as they both together comprise the “Wausau River District”.
2. What positive benefits or negative affects will the Reversal have on a visitors experience of the prominent “heritage corridor” extending along Stewart Avenue from 17th Ave to downtown?
3. Outline where Reversal might negatively affect the downtown and what steps would be required to overcome those challenges?



This Way, That Way, or Two Way
- Balance Beauty with Ease-of-Use
- Find balance to maximize parking while allowing for generous sidewalk amenities such as cafe tables and chairs

Item #2: Design is both significance and utility

1. Design is a combination and a balance of the following pairs:
 - Significance & Utility
 - Beauty & Easy-to-Use
 - Being Attractive & Practical
 - Thoughtful & Contextual.
2. Whether it be a chair, a nice hat, or a city, things that are thoughtfully crafted are both beautiful and useful.
3. If an item is only one or the other, it is perhaps neither well-designed nor worthwhile to devote time, efforts, and monies.
4. Options include: **This Way, That Way, or Two Way.**



Match 700 Block of Third
11' wide sidewalk both sides
(18) 7'x23' parallel parking stalls, (9) per side
vs e(14) angled stalls existing
(2) 12'-6" wide drive lanes



Using 600 Block of Fourth as sample:
maximum parallel parking stall is 18
--- 4 more stalls than current. Target 14 stalls then add more space for tables?



Item #3: Summary of Recent Studies and Reconstructions on “Main Street” Retail Districts

The following eight excerpts are from media sources and municipalities where studies have been completed or construction has been implemented to convert one-way streets to two-way in downtown retail districts.

1. Idaho Statesman, “Some business owners think two-way streets can help boost Downtown Boise”, Cynthia Sewell, June 18, 2009

- Now city leaders want to know if it is time to change some of those one-way streets back to two-way streets to give Downtown more of a neighborhood feel and improve visibility for businesses.
 - John Cotten's coffee shop sits at 10th and Bannock, both two-way streets. He likes the extra exposure he gets from traffic going in both directions on both streets. He'd like to see more Downtown streets go back to being two-way.
- Pros and Cons of Two-way and One-way traffic:
 - TWO-WAY TRAFFIC is slower and provides more of a neighborhood feel, but it means longer waits at traffic signals and slower travel, and those can increase congestion and air pollution.
 - ONE-WAY TRAFFIC flows more smoothly and quickly, but it provides less exposure for businesses and detracts from a neighborhood feel.
- Studies: Cities converted streets back to two-way: Austin, Berkeley, Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Denver, Des Moines, Lansing, Louisville, Palo Alto, Portland, Sacramento, San Jose, Seattle, St. Petersburg and Tampa.

2. Public Open House: Future Traffic Pattern Changes, City of Newark, OH, May 25, 2009

- A public open house “...to eliminate one-way traffic in the downtown area of the City of Newark.
- These conversions would improve access to businesses in Downtown, improve area-wide traffic circulation, and distribute traffic more evenly on all adjacent streets.

3. The Oregonian, “Conversion to two-way streets revs up Vancouver retailers”, Jim Braly, January 25, 2009

- “Now we have twice as many people going by as they did before.” The switch delighted downtown merchants, who’ve pestered the city of years over the issue. Though it hasn’t increased spending noticeably, shopkeepers and city officials alike marvel at how it appears vehicle and pedestrian traffic has increased.
 - “Easier and more accessible to get there”, “...it’s more convenient for people to come straight to us”, “...having two-way traffic, more people are willing to come downtown,” and “...it exceeded our expectations, it’s like, wow, why did it take us so long to figure this out?”
- The switch to one-way in the 1980s was intended to make it easier for downtown workers to travel in and out of downtown. Every little bit helps, such as removing the traffic safety sign at the north end of Main Street after converting it from northbound to two-way. It’s a sign some people thought has a double meaning. The sign said, “Do not enter.”
- City of Vancouver began efforts to revitalize downtown in about 2005 through an extensive public process to gather opinions and information from all parties. Integral to discussion was a “Recipe for Main Street Retail Success”, see image.



Recipe for Main Street Retail Success

The above diagram highlights the key ingredients for revitalizing downtown Vancouver’s retail environment.

4. Converting Downtown Napa [California] Streets from One-Way to Two-Way: A Fact Sheet, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc., 2008

- Many downtowns across the nation have a desire to convert their one-way street systems to two-way [which mostly had been two-way in prior to the 1960’s/70’s] to two-way.
- The most common reasons for converting back to two-way include:
 - One-way streets create a circuitous and confusing circulation pattern, particularly for visitors.
 - Businesses located on one-way streets have poor access or less exposure to passing motorists.
 - Narrower two-way streets have slower traffic
 - Two-way streets improve pedestrian and bicycle safety



- Two-way streets result in less use of fuel, fewer miles of travel, and less automobile emissions from circulating around downtown
- Two-way streets eliminate wrong way travel.
- Does converting from one way to two-way streets improve business?
 - While there is no definitive answer to this question and no support by scientific studies correlating street direction with business economy, there is ample anecdotal before and after information about the positive results of converting from one-way streets back to two-way. One study(1) surveyed 22 communities that converted their one-way streets back to two-way. The vast majority of the communities reported that the conversion was positive for business development and none of the communities reported tangible negative effects of the conversion. Communities reported improved business, increased investment in the downtown, more choices for travel in downtown, increased pedestrian friendliness, and a general feeling of improved “livability”, “quaintness”, and “sense of community”. (1) *Hyannis Main Street Improvement District. Survey of Communities Converting Downtown Streets from 1-Way to 2-Way Traffic Circulation. December 1999.*

5. Des Moines Traffic Safety Committee, City of De Moines, IA, April 12, 2005

- City received requests to change downtown streets from one-way to two-way to improve traffic circulation and access to the adjoining businesses. These requests follow a national trend where other cities are studying and converting some of their one-way downtown streets to two-way operation.
- Typically, one-way streets provide greater capacity, more parking opportunities and certain safety benefits, but create some access and circulation concerns, as well as being more difficult for unfamiliar drivers to find a direct route to their destination.

6. Pedestrian facilities users guide: providing safety and mobility, Charles V. Zegeer, 2002

- “...some places are returning one-way streets back to two-way to allow better local access to businesses and homes and to slow traffic.”

7. Urban Street Symposium 1999, One Way Street Conversions, Glatting Jackson, 1999

- In many downtowns, one-way street networks present a confusing situation for the occasional and even regular visitor to navigate. This legacy of one-way streets can be traced back to the time when traffic engineers were tasked with the mission to move as much traffic into and out of the downtown employment center as quickly as possible, without regard to any other mode of transportation.
- Now, as downtowns change roles and become cultural and entertainment centers for a region, the unequivocal movement of commuter traffic is no longer the first priority.
- Livability of downtown streets becomes paramount, balancing traffic movement among modes/users.

8. Downtown Streets: Are We Strangling Ourselves on One-Way Networks? Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez Rinehart, Orlando, FL, 1999

- The prevailing wisdom is that in a retail district, two-way streets enhance a neighborhood's environment, reduce speeds to levels that are more compatible with pedestrian traffic, and that a "busy" street can be an indicator of a healthy business environment. Often times one-way streets create an unnecessary struggle for retail districts. They make it difficult for motorist to stop at, or return to a business they have passed.
- It is the occasional visitors to downtown who are often confused & disoriented on encountering a one-way street network. Often, these motorists are able to see their destination but shunted away by one-way streets.
 - But these occasional users are in fact the customers that revitalized downtowns are trying to attract. If circulation in the downtown can be made easier by converting one-way streets, people in this target market segment may be better pleased with their overall downtown experience and become more regular downtown patrons
- Some national chains are beginning to develop downtown locations, with an emphasis on service industries such as office supplies, bookstores, and coffeehouses. In our experience, most of these retailers prefer the exposure and accessibility offered by a location on a two-way street.
- By requiring less out-of-direction travel and fewer turning movements, a two-way street network is better for short trips to local establishments than a one-way network.
 - Most downtowns have a well-developed street grid; this abundance of alternate routes is the inherent advantage that downtowns have over their competitors, suburban office and retail parks, where all traffic is generally forced onto the one or two available arterials.



- One of the inherent disadvantages with one-way streets is that they force additional turning movements at the intersections caused by motorists who must travel “out-of-direction” to reach their destination.
- Additional turning movements increase chance of a vehicular-pedestrian conflict at any given intersection, and also result in a systemwide increase in VMT over a comparable two-way system due to the amount of recirculating traffic.
- One-way streets have a negative impact on storefront exposure for those businesses highly dependent on pass-by traffic. As a vehicle stops at or enters an intersection the driver has excellent visibility of the storefronts on the far side of the cross street. On one-way street networks, precious storefront exposure is lost when one direction of travel is removed, causing one side of every cross street to be partially “eclipsed” from view, see Figure 5.
- “Eclipsing” occurs on cross-street storefronts along the nearside of the intersection relative to the direction of travel, and where downtown street networks contain many one-ways the accumulated negative impacts are significant.

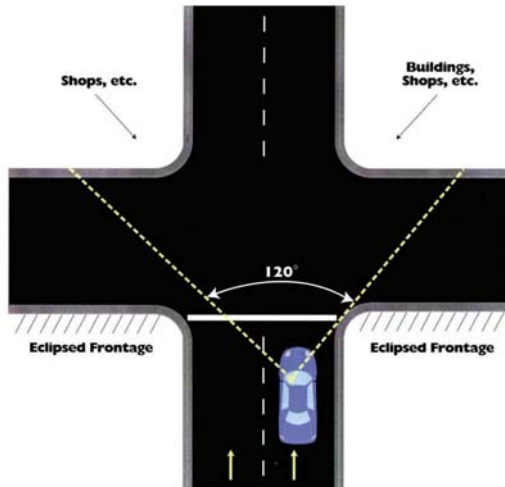


FIGURE 5 Retail eclipsing a diagrammatic summary.

See below for “eclipsing” in Wausau.

- The report concludes, “...it is important to note that converting the street network from one-way to two-way will not by itself guarantee an immediate resurgence of growth and activity downtown. See Figure 7 for a Sample Evaluation Matrix used to compare one-way with two-way situations. Most communities have come to this recommendation as a part of a greater vision or urban design plan for their downtown. The conversion of one-way streets is most often accompanied by other initiatives designed to attract additional downtown development or redevelopment and make downtown a more livable community.”

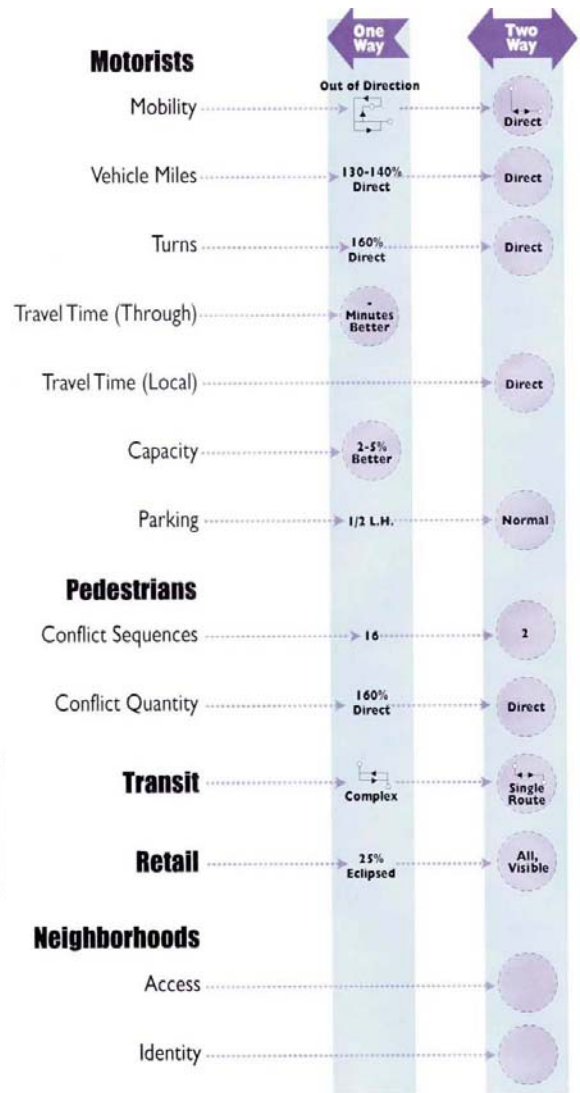


FIGURE 7 Sample evaluation matrix.



One-way traveling North (Existing)



One-way traveling South (Proposed Reversal)

Examples of a Negative Impact on Storefront Exposure



Item #4: Survey of Wisconsin Main Street Communities

Surveyed 16 of the over 30 Main Street Communities in Wisconsin and asked three questions:

1. What mix of one-way and two-way streets are located in your retail district?

- All 16 Main Street communities feature two-way streets for the main retail areas with either parallel or angle-parking depending upon width available. Typically, one-way is located in areas for non-retail streets, allies, narrow streets such as in Platteville, or streets with less retail-type businesses.
- Communities with a mix of one & two-way, such as Manitowoc, would like to change all to two-way.
- De Pere recently changed a couple of streets from two-way to one-way, primarily due to new bridges that were constructed where conversions assist with moving more quickly high traffic volumes from one side of the river to another. Though the primary retail district remain two-way.
- Platteville changed several streets from one-way back to two-way seven years ago. Merchants, shoppers, visitors like the switch and appreciate the ease of use. They also had planned in a review process at Year Five after the conversion to survey and discuss whether the new two-way system was effective in meeting objectives of both ease-of-use, better storefront visibility, and increased retail activity. The outcome from this process was a definitive "...it will always stay two-way," states the Main Street Director.
- In Green Bay, all streets in the On Broadway district are two-way with parallel parking.
- In early 2009, Sturgeon Bay converted a one-way to two-way with parallel parking on both sides. A study recently completed noted a 20% increase in sales of the businesses surveyed.

2. What mix of parallel parking and angle parking?

- Angle-parking often because streets are part of a State Highway where width is more.
- In Lake Mills one side abuts a city park where City acquired a portion of the park land to widen the street thus allowing of angled parking on at least one side of the street.
- Green Bay is investigating options for angled parking on streets that are two-way but those stalls would only be located on streets where there is adequate width while seeking a balance between sidewalk amenities and parking. In no circumstance would the two-way streets be converted back to one-way streets to accommodate angled parking unless there was a very good reason.
- In Beloit, the majority of parking is parallel on both sides with a small number of angled stalls.
- West Bend implemented about eight years ago a successful approach to parking: they've a tier 1 and tier 2 program where employees and owners of downtown businesses are required to register their car and asked to park (at no charge) in designated areas off of main street, thus leaving the prime parking stalls on main street or on the adjacent side streets for customers. The two-tier program has been received well.

3. How do you fit sidewalk amenities within this mix?

- The majority of the communities suggested that they do the best that they can to balance parking with sidewalk amenities such as tables, chairs, benches, trees and lampposts.
- Other communities suggested that they limit amenities to save on costs, yet allow and encourage shopkeepers to add tables/chairs to enhance their business.
- Beloit includes amenities such as trees, benches, and an approximately eight-foot wide sidewalk.
- Pewaukee has wide sidewalks, approximately 16 feet wide, because the main street is set along waters edge & city park with buildings on one side only. They extended street easement into park to allow for angled-parking on one side, two-way travel, and the 16 foot wide sidewalk.
- In West Bend, the city has been a good partner by requiring only a minimum three foot wide clear path on sidewalks for pedestrians/strollers etc. thus allowing for more tables/chairs.

Please use the information in this letter to define clearly the many ingredients required to make a successful, livable, and economically viable "Main Street" experience. I recommend that we follow due diligence to investigate all options that may make the experience even more successful, livable, and economically viable. Goals to consider in planning a reconstruction project include ingredients such as improved storefront visibility, increased vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and an experience that is easy-to-use by regular, occasional, and first-time visitors while providing both beauty and utility to a reconstructed "Main Street" experience.

Please contact me if you have any questions and I welcome the opportunity to be involved in the process.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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