

Tosa Village Plaza

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Abstract
Tosa Village Plaza

The City of Wauwatosa, population 54,000, is a first ring suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The City has been actively studying how to enhance its historic 'Village' area, which contains small boutique stores and restaurants and is surrounded by numerous churches, a high school and the City park with athletic fields and a community band shell. The 'Village' was the original center of the City and as such is intersected by several through arterial streets, a main railroad line and the Menomonee River. Over time the 'Village' character has changed to a reflect a very active pedestrian area with a City-wide 'TosaFest' fall weekend festival that takes over the arterial street network and a very popular summer farmer's market. The 'Village' arterial street system is in need of total infrastructure reconstruction, presenting the City and Village Business Improvement District, an opportunity to create an enhanced pedestrian/bicycle friendly gathering place that reflects the original character of the historic Village buildings and increases its sense of place within the Milwaukee urban region.

Through a very intense public involvement process, street design improvements were identified that narrowed existing streets, improved intersection pedestrian friendliness and created a central curbless street plaza design, an adjacent pocket park community gathering area and artistic streetscape/wayfinding system. The project is being constructed in five phases at an estimated cost of \$25 million.

Tosa Village Plaza

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Wauwatosa was founded in 1835 along the Menomonee River where Charles Hart built his home and sawmill. This settlement was located six miles west of the heart of the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The village was originally named Hart's Mill and as it grew included a community green known as Root Common. Figure 1 provides a historic photograph of the original Village structures.

FIGURE 1: Historic Tosa Village Sawmill and Buildings, Circa 1850



In 1851 two important transportation improvements occurred involving construction of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad and the construction of Watertown Plank Road, which was constructed of wooden planks. The Village continued to grow with extension of street car service from Milwaukee reaching the Village in 1892. The Village has served a role as the heart of the City of Wauwatosa.

Jumping forward to today, the City of Wauwatosa had a 2014 population of 47,100 people. The Village is in close proximity to the Wauwatosa City Hall, the City library, the City Park and is surrounded by vibrant neighborhoods. The roadway corridor connecting the Village to the City of Milwaukee is changing in character from an industrial land use to neighborhood commercial uses extending the historic Village center along State Street which parallels the railroad tracks and the

Menomonee River. Figure 2 illustrates the current Village and State Street neighborhood retail/industrial corridor.

FIGURE 2: Tosa Village Land Use Corridor Map



Fortunately, many of the historic village buildings have been preserved and add to the village 'sense of place' identity while continuing to serve as a gathering area for City residents and visitors with numerous restaurants and the location of the City Farmer's Market as shown on Figures 3 and 4.

FIGURE 3: Historic Tosa Village Robertson Building Architecture



FIGURE 4: Tosa Village Activity Center**VILLAGE ENHANCEMENT STUDIES**

Over the past 40 years the City of Wauwatosa has recognized the importance of sustaining the health and attractiveness of their historic Village center. As shown on Table 1, there have been a total of 8 different studies of the Village.

TABLE 1: Tosa Village Comprehensive Planning Studies 1977 - 2015

- 1977 – Village of Wauwatosa Concept Plan
- 1994 – Village Strategic Plan/Land Use Study
- 1997 – East State Street Redevelopment Plan
- 2008 – Village Business Improvement District Master Plan
- 2013 Village Wayfinding Plan
- 2013 Village Strategic Development Plan
- 2014 Tosa Village Intersection Engineering Analysis
- 2015 Village District Planning and Streetscape Study

In 1977 the City commissioned a major redevelopment study of the Village by Barton Ashman Associates. That study focused on developing a traffic bypass network for the Village to create a car-free environment, on the need for additional Village parking and construction of a potential waterfront plaza with the Menomonee River. Ultimately this study resulted in the closure of Harwood Avenue, the only roadway through the Village that crossed the Menomonee River and construction of a new roadway river crossing bridge adjacent to the north edge of the Village and closure of Harwood Avenue which also traversed the Village center. The old Menomonee River bridge was converted to a plaza area with outdoor café seating.

In 1994 the City of Wauwatosa commissioned a strategic study plan and land use study of the Village area conducted by the Zimmerman Design Group. Two principle focus areas of this study included expansion of Hart Park and clean-up of the State Street industrial corridor. This effort resulted in the expansion of Hart Park through acquisition of three blocks of flood zone area housing and the long-term conversion of the State Street corridor to mix-use development and a greenway along the Menomonee River.

In 1997, the State Street Redevelopment Plan was commissioned by the City of Wauwatosa to be conducted by the firm Johnson, Johnson and Roy. This study continued and built upon the 1994 study by focusing on residential and retail redevelopment, aesthetic enhancements for the existing industrial areas east of the Village State Street corridor and landscaping beautification of the State Street right-of-way.

In 2008, the City of Wauwatosa commissioned a Village Business Improvement District Master Plan conducted by urban planning master's students of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This study laid the ground work for the City adoption of a Form-Based with a mixed-use development ordinance, new development design guidelines, and bicycle/pedestrian enhancement along with a recommendation that were not implemented to reopening Harwood Avenue as a two-way street with construction of a roundabout at the eastern edge of the Village.

Nearly concurrent with the Village Business Improvement District Master Plan, the Village Business Improvement District (BID) commissioned a Village Wayfinding Design Study.

More recently the Village of Wauwatosa Strategic Redevelopment Plan was prepared by RDG Planning and Design. This study looked at the area land use and business environment, and the transportation and parking environment. The study involved a very thorough economic market evaluation focused on opportunities and improvements to assure the long-term vitality of the Village and State Street corridor. The study also identified key transportation improvements. Figure 5 illustrates the Village transportation network.

FIGURE 5: Tosa Village Transportation Network



As shown on Figure 5, there are very few continuous east-west or north-south through transportation routes in the Village area with only two traffic crossings of the Menomonee River. Access between the Village itself and Hart Park are also very limited due to the existing east-west railroad tracks. This transportation component of the strategic development study identified intersection enhancement concepts designed to create a friendlier pedestrian and bicycle rider environment and connectivity improvement opportunities between the Village Center and Hart Park. As shown on Figure 6, each of the core Village intersection enhancement concepts were basically narrowed and in many cases realigned to create 90-degree street approaches.

FIGURE 6: Tosa Village Concept Intersection Improvements



The State Street mixed-use corridor recommendations involved development of a street cross-section that included construction of a new sidewalk between the southern on-street parking lane and the existing railroad tracks.

The next step in the City of Wauwatosa consideration of improving intersection pedestrian and bicycle rider comfort involved the commissioning of a seventh study by Ayres Associates to analyze each intersection concept to assure it would accommodate existing semi and fire truck turning requirements and ADA ramp design criteria. This resulted in minor adjustments to the RDG Planning and Design intersection recommendations.

FINAL VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN

The final implementation phase of the street improvements that are currently under construction involved retention of GAI and Associates to develop a set of design plans with a charge by the City of Wauwatosa to explore the form of the streets and public realm relative to walkability and safety - as well as the consideration of the broader community enhancement and economic development objectives.

Since the RDG Planning and Design strategic plan effort set the final course for implementation of major Village construction project concepts it was necessary for GAI to test the concepts and their refinements with community residents and Village business owners directly affected by each improvement. Community Design Group provided a key subconsultant role to GAI in this phase of implementation by leading the public engagement and development phase for final plan concepts. Public engagement was multi-faceted and started with setting up a project steering community composed of City officials, engineering and planning staffs, Village Business Improvement District representatives and community stakeholders.

Public Engagement Activities

- Steering Committee
- Public Meetings
- Walking Tours
- Design Studio Workshops
- Presentations
- Farmer's Market Information Booth
- City Website

In total, 35 public meetings were conducted with over 500 people involved in the public engagement process. Through this process a list of pluses and minuses were compiled as listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Public Engagement Opinions on Qualities of the Tosa Village

Pluses	Minuses
Great historic architecture	Traffic circulation
Strong Village identity	Parking accessibility
Nearby park proximity	Poor connection to Hart Park
Street activity and outdoor dining	Poor bike/ped friendliness
Quality of special events	
Overall vitality	
Unique businesses	

Based on an understanding of these public comments the Project steering committee debated the value of each comment with a discussion of the purpose of a street ranging from a street's ability to carry automobile traffic to its ability to provide other function related to people and business vitality. The bottom line conclusion of the steering committee was that traffic congestion was an acceptable tradeoff to designing a street that accommodated more friendly to pedestrians, bicyclists, business activity, and special events. Figure 7 illustrates the street design concept developed and approved by the Village Steering Committee. Public opinion values connectivity into the Village from the surrounding neighborhoods, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians.

FIGURE 7: Tosa Village Infrastructure Enhancement Design Concept

State Street is basically a 40-foot wide roadway providing two to four lanes of moving traffic or two traffic lanes with on-street parking. The building corridor along State Street in the Village center is approximately 66 feet wide. As shown on Figure 7, the street design for State Street in the center of the Village would include a curbsless pedestrian plaza reflecting numerous European old town centers that would purposely be friendly to pedestrian and special event. The plaza surface would be constructed with paving blocks organized to provide a textured pattern that served to eliminate the sense of a standard street roadway. The Plaza would still accommodate vehicular traffic, on-street parking along with wider sidewalk areas that were similarly constructed with paving blocks that matched the roadway surface treatment. Since the entire plaza and sidewalk was void of curbs and provided the same paving block textures sidewalk space was identified through the use of bollards and street furniture. On-street parking areas were defined by bollard areas that reduced the pedestrian space. Since the plaza is located adjacent to the Menomonee River and the fact much of the Village is located on higher ground it was necessary to rebuild all the underground storm water drainage system to remove water from the plaza surface and avoid flooding of historic building basements adjacent to State Street. Figure 8 provides a rendering of the final plaza design which was constructed very closely to the rendering image in 2015.

FIGURE 8: Tosa Village ‘Curbless’ Plaza Design Concept

In addition to construction of the Village Plaza, construction was also completed in 2017 on the side street connections to the Village from Underwood Avenue and Harwood Avenue that serve as access to many unique Village businesses and on-street ‘head-in’ angled parking. Both Underwood and Harwood Avenues are basically 38-foot wide roadways with one traffic lane and angled on-street parking. Underwood Avenue is operating as a one-way street exiting the Village Plaza area with Harwood Avenue operating as a one-way street providing traffic circulation into the Village Plaza area. The final design for both streets maintained their one-way operation but changed the angled on-street parking to ‘back-in’ parking and relocated to the other side of each street. In this manner drivers were provided a better vision of cars on each street and a newly constructed reverse direction marked bike lane. Drivers have adopted to the back-in’ parking concept with minimal confusion. This design reduced the street space allowing for wider sidewalk areas to accommodate street furniture and outdoor café seating opportunities.

Reconstruction will begin in 2017 on the main arterial street adjacent to the east side of the Village. The reconstruction will include a reduced Wauwatosa Avenue cross-section, the addition of sheltered on-street parking and a new intersection connection to Harwood Avenue. Wauwatosa Avenue is basically a 50-foot roadway with four traffic lanes and sidewalks on both sides. A major element of the Wauwatosa Avenue street redesign involved an extensive enhancement concept exploration of the historic Root Common green space. Over the last 40-years Root Common contained the City Christmas tree, more recently a water fountain feature that was removed because of local vandalism issues and currently is the location of a grass area and a popcorn wagon. The study goal was to reclaim this space as a civic activity center with features to announce the Village identity and history. Public comments sought an active park with potential terracing to create a safe,

family friendly space containing amenities for children, art and gateway features. Figure 9 illustrates the design concept for a revitalized Root Common green space.

FIGURE 9: Root Common Enhancement Design Concept



As shown on Figure 9, Root Common is proposed to include a Veterans memorial and an enhanced green space. The overall size of Root Common was increased by removing a parking area circulation road that also served as a connection to Harwood Avenue. A new connection intersection on Wauwatosa Avenue was constructed with Harwood Avenue which would still operate as a one-way street with head-in angle parking.

The final major infrastructure improvement for the Tosa Village area involves reconstruction of the State Street corridor connection from the east. State Street is basically 40 feet wide with on-street parking along both sides and one lane of traffic in both directions. As shown in Figure 10, the State Street corridor will be reconstructed to maintain on-street parking along both sides of the street, improved sidewalk space along the north side of the street and the addition of new sidewalk and a multi-use path along the between the south side of the street and existing railroad tracks.

FIGURE 10: State Street Corridor Street Design Concept

The roadway design includes traffic lane width reduction to accommodate 11-foot lanes. The development of a multi-use path involves obtaining agreement from the railroad which owns the adjacent right-of-way. The multi-use path is considered an important design element to improve bicyclist access to the Village and Hart Park since traffic and trucking volumes through the State Street corridor are relatively high. Marked bike lanes on State Street was not considered a safe or friendly option for recreational bike riders.

Due to the extensiveness, disruption to Village business access and the overall project implementation costs the infrastructure improvements they are being phased over a 6-year time frame with the last piece of reconstruction scheduled to occur in 2022. The estimated cost for these improvements is \$25,000,000.

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