

## 6. DOWNTOWN PLAN

Over the past 2 decades, downtown Manitowoc has transitioned from the City's primary commercial district to a more narrowly-defined specialty district with a mixture of government offices, professional services, specialty retail, and tourist-oriented businesses.

Prior to construction of the Edgewater Mall and Lakeview Center on the City's northeast side and the expansion of commercial development on Calumet Avenue, downtown Manitowoc was the primary shopping district for a regional trade area consisting of nearly all of Manitowoc County and small portions of adjoining counties. Until the 1970's, downtown Manitowoc contained a broad array of general merchandising businesses, and most consumer needs could be met by the downtown businesses. There was a wide range of department stores, clothing stores, restaurants, hardware stores, and pharmacies.

As shopping centers and discount stores with large square footage and traffic generation requirements developed elsewhere in Manitowoc, there was a gradual erosion of the and shopper support from the downtown. At the same time, improvements in I-43 and new regional shopping centers in Green Bay, Appleton, and Sheboygan began drawing spending from Manitowoc's overall trade area, thus reducing the number of shoppers that could potentially be attracted to downtown. While many of the core businesses remained in the downtown through the 1980's, the number of retail dollars spent downtown continued to decline. The loss of the Schuette Department Store in the early 1990's signaled the departure of one of the last and most important general merchandising businesses from the downtown.

As City officials, business leaders, and property owners began shopping and developing for the new markets, steps were taken to stabilize the downtown. The most promising expanding markets in downtown are specialty retail, entertainment, and tourism. Other strategies pursued by the City and business community have included retaining government and professional offices, encouraging new residential development, and expanding the marina and lakefront development. Today, the cost of doing business in downtown Manitowoc is very affordable when compared to sites with escalating land prices on the City's southwest side.



*Downtown Business*

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The City has worked hard over the past decade to maintain the infrastructure and improve the appearance of the downtown area to make it a more attractive destination for visitors. Most visitors to downtown are impressed by the neat appearance of the downtown and the lakefront improvements.

Some of the specific improvements over the past decade that have stabilized downtown and supported the transition of the economic base of the district include:

- Reconstruction of 8th Street and the 8th Street Bridge and Streetscape program.
- Development of the Wisconsin Maritime Museum.
- Re-establishment of the S.S. Badger/Lake Michigan Carferry Service on the downtown lakefront.
- Construction of the riverwalk and trail system along the north side of the Manitowoc River and lakefront.
- Development of the Medical Arts Center on York Street.
- Renovation of the Capitol Civic Centre.
- Construction of the new Manitowoc Library at the corner of So. 8th Street and Quay Street.
- Expansion of the YMCA along the lakefront.

- Expansion of the Manitowoc Harbor.
- Creation of the 8th Street Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Renovation and expansion of the Strand Theatre into a downtown 6-screen multiplex theater complex.
- Financial support of business growth and expansion in downtown via Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs and TIF.
- Concentration of City and County government functions downtown.
- Establishment of the Manitowoc Visitors & Convention Bureau, Inc. to promote tourism in Manitowoc.
- Strong collection of employers in downtown with substantial employment base.
- Maintenance of a State highway throughout the heart of downtown.

These major accomplishments over the past decade have successfully prevented downtown Manitowoc from suffering the type of physical decline that many other smaller and mid-sized downtowns throughout the Upper Midwest have experienced. These improvements provide the foundation for continuing revitalization and reinvestment in the downtown as a retail, government, cultural, service center, and tourist destination of the area.

## 6.A. DOWNTOWN MANITOWOC REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

In the early 1990's, the City and a group of community business leaders formed the Retail 2000 Committee to help revitalize the downtown area. The organization commissioned a consortium of consultants to prepare the Downtown Manitowoc Revitalization Strategy, April, 1993.

This report, and a series of supporting market studies, specific recommendations to help bolster downtown service sectors and attract more shoppers to the area. focused on enhancing both local retail spending and tourism spending in the area. The 1993 report included retail sales patterns for downtown Manitowoc. Among were the following:



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- Despite population growth in the City since 1990, the regional population will be essentially stable over the long term.
- Approximately 35% of the County's population lives within one-half mile of the downtown core.
- While the overall population appears to be stable to slightly declining, the distribution of people, households, and income across the area appears to favor downtown revitalization--or at least not to pose a substantial hurdle to the revival of downtown.
- Retail businesses along the Calumet Avenue corridor capture approximately 40% of area shoppers; downtown should be capable of capturing 5-7% of the retail trade expenditures in the region -- its level of success to be determined by how well it enhances its competitive position in the market.
- The perception of downtown Manitowoc is that it offers little variety, limited parking, high prices, inconvenient store hours, and "unfriendly" stores.
- Retail opportunities do exist for downtown Manitowoc.

The key recommendation in the report was that downtown Manitowoc needed a single coordinating organization, referred to in the report as Downtown Partnership, Inc. (DPI), to collectively manage the downtown business district and coordinate both private and public sector development. The report recommended formation of a Business Improvement District (BID) as the primary funding vehicle for financing downtown improvements and marketing the district. A BID is essentially a special assessment district that would levy an additional property assessment on downtown properties to fund management as well as physical improvements.

Some of the other specific priorities that the Downtown Manitowoc Revitalization Strategy recommended included:

- Cooperative public and private sector management of downtown business district improvements.
- Coordinating the area's many organizations, businesses, and cultural groups to sponsor downtown events.
- Developing a downtown Business Improvement District as the financing vehicle for downtown improvements and activities.
- Undertaking a regular calendar of special events and promotional activities designed to attract people to the downtown, and to establish it as a vital, exciting, and fun place to visit.
- Advertising and promoting downtown through printed brochures and maps.
- Coordinating the physical design and quality of both private and public sector improvements in the downtown area.
- Providing architectural guidelines and advice to property owners on rehabilitation, signage, and architectural design.

Following the recommendations of the 1993 Downtown Manitowoc Revitalization Strategy, a Business Improvement District (BID) was created but lasted only 3 years, coinciding with the reconstruction of 8th Street. The BID was subsequently dissolved because it was not successful in gaining the support from the majority of property owners in the district.

While many of the individual recommendations contained in the 1993 study have been implemented by individual businesses, the key problem of not having a unifying business organization with a fixed funding mechanism remains one of the impediments to a truly successful downtown revitalization.

The business community should take the lead role in reconsidering the major recommendations of the 1993 study, and make another attempt to form a Business Improvement District or a comparable organization to provide district management services. There are many successful examples of this type of program throughout Wisconsin.

## **6.B. DOWNTOWN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

One of the most important components of a strategy for revitalizing downtown is attracting visitors into the area, thereby increasing tourism spending, building rents, and property values.

Many individual businesses and the Manitowoc Visitors & Convention Bureau, Inc. have aggressively promoted attractions and activities in the downtown. The Manitowoc City Center Association publishes an annual calendar of events and map of the downtown area.

In 1996, tourism expenditures in Manitowoc County were approximately \$89,400,000, which represented an increase of 5.87 percent over expenditure levels in 1995. The majority of these expenditures occur in the City of Manitowoc. The tourism expenditures in Manitowoc County represent an important source of "outside" money that would not otherwise be spent in the community. Tourism dollars circulate and re-circulate through the community, creating a multiplier effect.

One of the key tourism attractions in Manitowoc is the S.S. Badger/Lake Michigan Carferry Service, which brings in excess of 125,000 visitors to the lakefront, and has the potential to be an even more significant attraction. The carferry is the only regularly scheduled carferry service across Lake Michigan. It is estimated that the carferry's economic benefit to the City of Manitowoc is \$13 to \$15 million per year.

The key to successful efforts to promote tourism in downtown Manitowoc will involve coordination of both private and public sector efforts. The development of businesses that tourists want to patronize is an obvious private sector responsibility. However, there are a number of very specific steps the City can do to create a setting for private sector investment and further promote downtown tourism. These include:

- Build a direct street and pedestrian connection between the S.S. Badger/Lake Michigan Carferry docking area and downtown Manitowoc via an extension of Quay Street to connect with So. Lakeview Drive.
- Extend the riverwalk system along the south side of the Manitowoc River.
- Relocate and/or consolidate the coal storage facility at the mouth of the Manitowoc River.

*Note: The primary users of the coal storage facility are the S.S. Badger and the Manitowoc Public Utilities. At some point, it is anticipated that the S.S. Badger will convert to a fuel source other than coal. The City and MPU should study alternative sites or sources for the MPU coal supply.*

- Assist Lakeside Foods to relocate some or all of their lakefront facilities to inland industrial sites in order to create lakefront redevelopment sites.
- Develop lakefront and riverfront housing.
- Attract additional Lake Michigan passenger craft and charters to make stops in downtown Manitowoc.