

WAUSAU East Riverfront Planning and Design Charrette Summary

East Riverfront Planning and Design Charrette

Wednesday June 29th, 2011

8:30–10:30 a.m. or 3:00–5:00 p.m.

Dudley Tower -- 1st Floor Conference Room

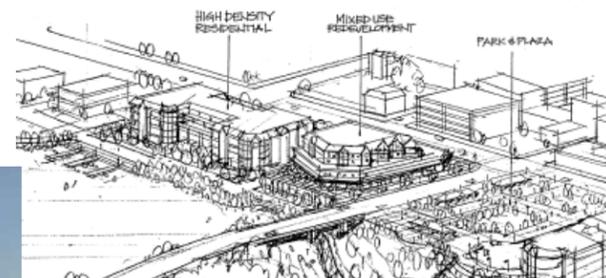
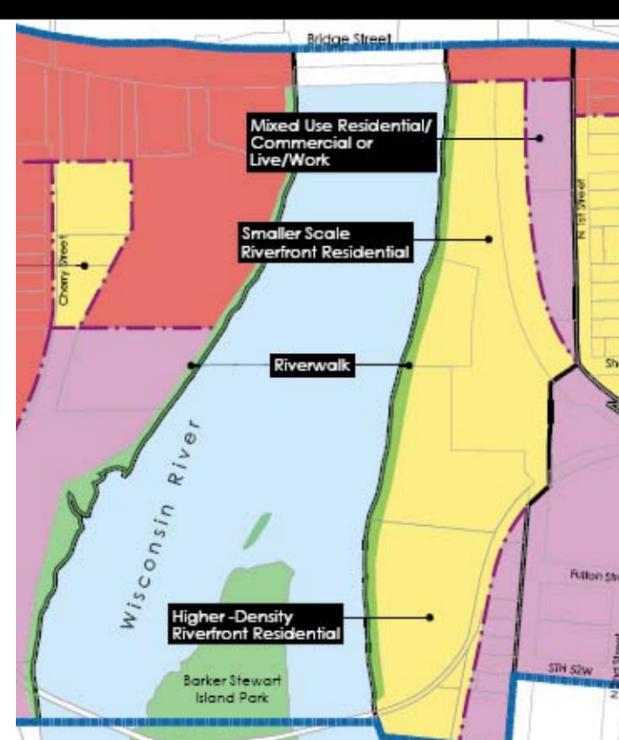
500 First Street, Wausau, WI

You are invited to participate in an exciting planning and design workshop with the city of Wausau and Community Design Solutions (CDS). The East Riverfront District is a unique opportunity for our community to reshape 16 acres of Wisconsin River waterfront adjacent to our downtown. We welcome your input at these short, interactive sessions on June 29th to begin creating a vision for this land that will maximize its benefits to the community long into the future.

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Kristy Bokelman

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UWMILWAUKEE



Wausau Riverfront Redevelopment Project

Community Design Charrette
June 29, 2011

Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Neel Kamal Chapagain (with on-site notes from David A. Erickson)

GROUP 2

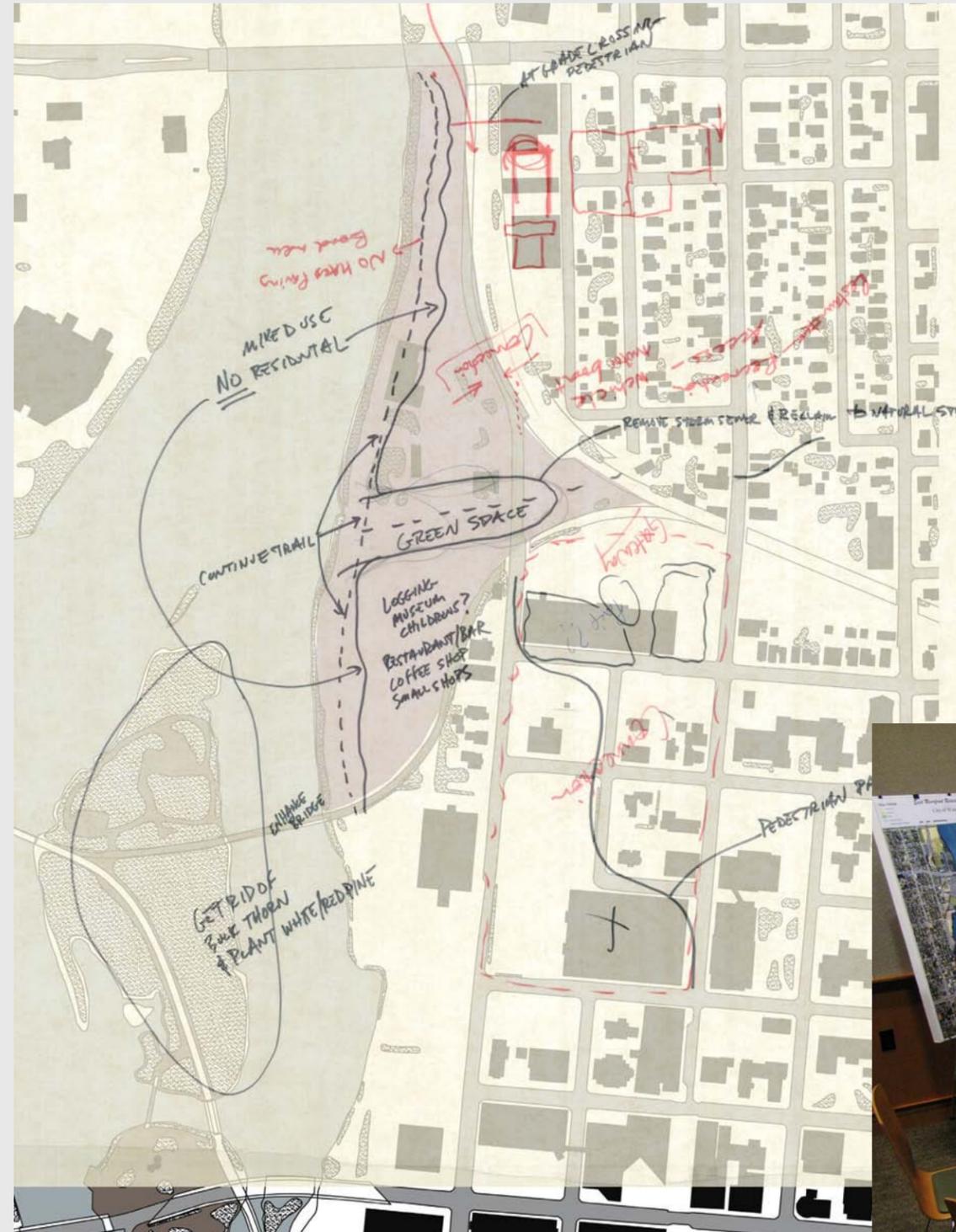
Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

The group included members from a number of professional groups, i.e. environmental engineer, architect, business persons, city hall staff, among others. The group primarily focused on environmental issues associated with the site, and explored how the site could be developed as a natural oasis keeping in mind what developmental and economic support would be needed. The group identified five major themes:

1. In flood plain area - green space and reclamation of the natural creek.
2. Connectivity and accessibility to and from nearby residential area and streets
3. Integrating redevelopment of nearby city blocks that contain huge buildings or huge parking lots with the east river planning/development
4. Mixed use buildings (less residential, more small commercial) that embrace public access to and use of the river
5. Restored and enhanced Barker Stewart Ave and Bridge Street.

Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

1. A natural landscape be maintained along the river and areas adjacent. As a major resource the river should be incorporated with leisure, recreational as well as educational activities. The flood plain triangle [map] should be the primary green space and well connected with the bike trail.
2. Potential soil contamination and current connection of the natural creek to the storm sewer are major concerns about the ability to develop the site.
3. Valuable riverfront land on the site should not be used/wasted for parking. Parking be provided on nearby city blocks.
4. Redevelop the blocks just east of the site that contain a big box building or mostly parking lot as mixed use with provision of some integrated (either underground or hidden somehow) parking. Such development will not only improve the aesthetic and economic quality of the area but also allow the creation of a pedestrian friendly link/connection to the downtown.
4. Because of the need of economic/service base for the site a mixed use (residential-commercial) option may be necessary. However, guide any new development so that public access and views to riverfront are not compromised and no large structure obscure the view of the river.



5. Given Barker Stewart Island's importance to the City and region – both in a historic and an ecological sense – the current bridge to the island should be enhanced as a major pedestrian access crossing the river. Such enhancement may help in creating a unique element on the site and experiential and education activities connected to the history of logging that existed on the Barker Stewart island could be offered to visitors. A children's museum, and an extended boardwalk along the river are other possibilities.

6. The nearby residential neighborhood must be integrated in all development process, and proper connections must be maintained. Perhaps an overhead or under the tracks pedestrian access could be created to link to the neighborhood on the northeast part of the site. In terms of connection, the group also discussed a possible extension of First Street to the river drive under the Bridge St. bridge.



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Payman Sadeghi

GROUP 3

The group focused on short-term objectives in order to, ultimately, attain long term goals. Beneath are the main discussed themes in the order of their importance;

1- Connectivity

- a) Pedestrian/car access from the Bridge Street. into the riverfront
- b) Pedestrian access from the residential development near Bridge St. toward the riverfront
- c) Increase visual connection by demolishing certain buildings on 1st Street
- d) Boat/Kayak access to the riverfront through boat dock

2- Land Use

- e) Keep the natural look of riverfront
- f) Design the walking trail near the riverfront
- g) Community garden in the narrow northern portion of the site
- h) Consider the floodplain zone
- i) Boat landing

3- Activity

- j) Passive activities like bird watching, sitting areas...
- k) Water fall features
- l) Water activities like boat riding

4- Sustainability

- m) Habitat restoration of bats living in the site

5- Identity

- n) Appreciate the historic industrial background of the City
- o) A green space as opposed to a modern hard surfaced area



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sahana Goswami

GROUP 4

Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

The groups saw this space as an extension of the Downtown River District with certain characteristics.

A wide open and multi-use trail was envisioned. The site as a whole should be an "urban space" defined as a space attracting not just families but also young professionals for leisure activities by offering "polished amenities". These amenities were described as boutique shops, local foods and wares (farmer's markets) – items to purchase or simply experience.

Destinations such as a farmers market were important as initial destination, but, once there, other activities would attract your participation.

Connecting to the downtown area is essential, maybe with the loop trail incorporating educational stations and so on. Re-use is an essential feature of redevelopment. Retain the historic industrial identity, but also add modern features to maintain the interest of a wide demographic.

Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

Safety and security - Reference was made to existing trail on Barker Stewart Island – there is a perception of low safety (especially for movement of a single individual). The trail – should be guided with stops for interaction. Especially for families with children – describing the History- Ecology- Biology of the area.

Access - To the site from the water (by kayak, pontoons etc.). Coordinate programming of leisure opportunities at this site with other leisure opportunities in the region. Also, consider the dam which is as well as water currents before selecting water activities.

To the water - Daylight the creek and create easier connection to the water via a boardwalk or cantilevered walkway or pier and by removing overgrown vegetation.

To public spaces - Especially from proximal existing buildings, make sure public is aware of these spaces. Reference to existing farmers market which is so cut off from downtown by the mall, people can only come here to buy produce but cannot connect the remaining shopping district.

Parking at entrance of development and other entrances to trail and site must be connected to downtown. These elements should not separate/ segregate the area.

Activities on river can include bird watching (reference to the local osprey population). Offer a bigger area for bird-watching activity. Reference to Minneapolis and the eagle watching activity.



One of the suggestions by this group was to consider an exercise of - **PLAN A DAY IN THIS DEVELOPMENT**

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE PRESENT THAT CAN INCLUDE PEOPLE FROM VARYING AGE GROUPS AND USER TYPES ?

CAN A FAMILY SPEND AN ENTIRE DAY HERE? WHAT ARE THE AMENITIES A FAMILY WOULD REQUIRE IF THE AGE GROUP COMPRISES TODDLERS TO AGING GRANDPARENTS?

The conclusion of this group was that the space should incorporate public use spaces, which can be used in a variety of ways by different user types. It was envisioned as a free-space where one and all could gather and have a choice of activities to partake in.

But the over-arching concern was to design the space such that it has a timeless appeal, and would be in use just as much twenty years into the future. The need is not for fixed activities or spaces, but an adaptable design which can integrate new uses and activities as the demographic and population changes in the City of Wausau.



Wausau Riverfront Redevelopment Project

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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sara Khorshidifard

GROUP 5

The Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

This group's overall concept is to create a year round, human-oriented landscape that will offer a river edge full of a variety of rather slow-paced, activities. Incorporating as many elements as possible to connect humans and activities, the group felt would give people positive "feelings" about the site and lead to people spending the whole day at the river's edge and traversing the Riveredge trail. The group also discussed how the site could serve as a "place" where various types of users can "plan a day on the river's edge."

The groups wanted visitors to see Wausau as a welcoming, "small town like" place, one said, NOT like Chicago. Leisure was mentioned as the site's major purpose where all ages and skill levels could access the river according to their needs. Quiet contemplative experiences and boats with restricted speed levels were suggested.

Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

The potential for creating more public open space in the flood plain area was identified. At the flood plain's edges a 'harbor' might be designed to extend into the river. Some fishing spots and a small boat landing deck could also be located nearby. Making accommodations for small boats, kayaks, piers, and permanent long-shore docking were discussed. The community envisioned the harbor to have a tiered surface descending towards the water with cafes, restaurants, and seating areas on various stages. The group wanted a restaurant with terrace gathering space, balcony seating, a restaurant that gives the feel of being "on the water."

The group suggested that connecting Barker Island (to be renamed Ecology Island) to the riverscape was a great educational opportunity. Expanding on this idea, the group discussed creating an "Urban Ecology Center" towards the Bridge Street entry that could generate additional ecological activities for kids.

Other ideas generated were: design 1st and Fulton as the major entries to the site; buffer parking surfaces with greenery; create other connections to Barker Island; develop a kayaking interpretive trail on the river; and, enhance the Riveredge trail.

The group reviewed particular elements the park might contain and viewed images of a variety of designs for the various elements. Lighting was identified as an important element because, in the winter, the river site is dark and uninviting after 4 PM.



In terms of other landscape elements, trees were mentioned as obstructing the ability to see and utilize the riverfront. A senior in the group asked for a space to be designated along the site to eat lunch, picnic, and play with grandchildren. Creative abstract signage and sculptural elements were selected from images presented as was off site or greenery buffered parking.

Low-impact land uses were requested and some members asked for the relocation of Wausau's existing Farmers Market/Garden to a site close to the river along with other amenities such as gardens where local people can grow food. Such catalytic projects would generate income for the community. For some members, crime was a concern and they described the incidents that had occurred on the site.

If, in order to generate tax revenue for the City, multi-level, residential units were to be built on the northern end of the site, this group wanted the street level spaces to be dedicated to public use. Mixed-use developments were preferred; they would provide residents with easy accessibility to the riveredge amenities envisioned and, also, encourage others to visit the site because of the additional attractions that the lower level businesses would provide, i.e., a coffee shop, boating equipment and bike rental outlets.

Bio-remediation of the contaminated sites, an idea presented by the CDS team, seemed interesting to the group, but the exact location was not determined and they wanted to know the timeline, for instance, when to start on it and how long it will take to clean up the sites.



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Kristy Bokelman

GROUP 6

The Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

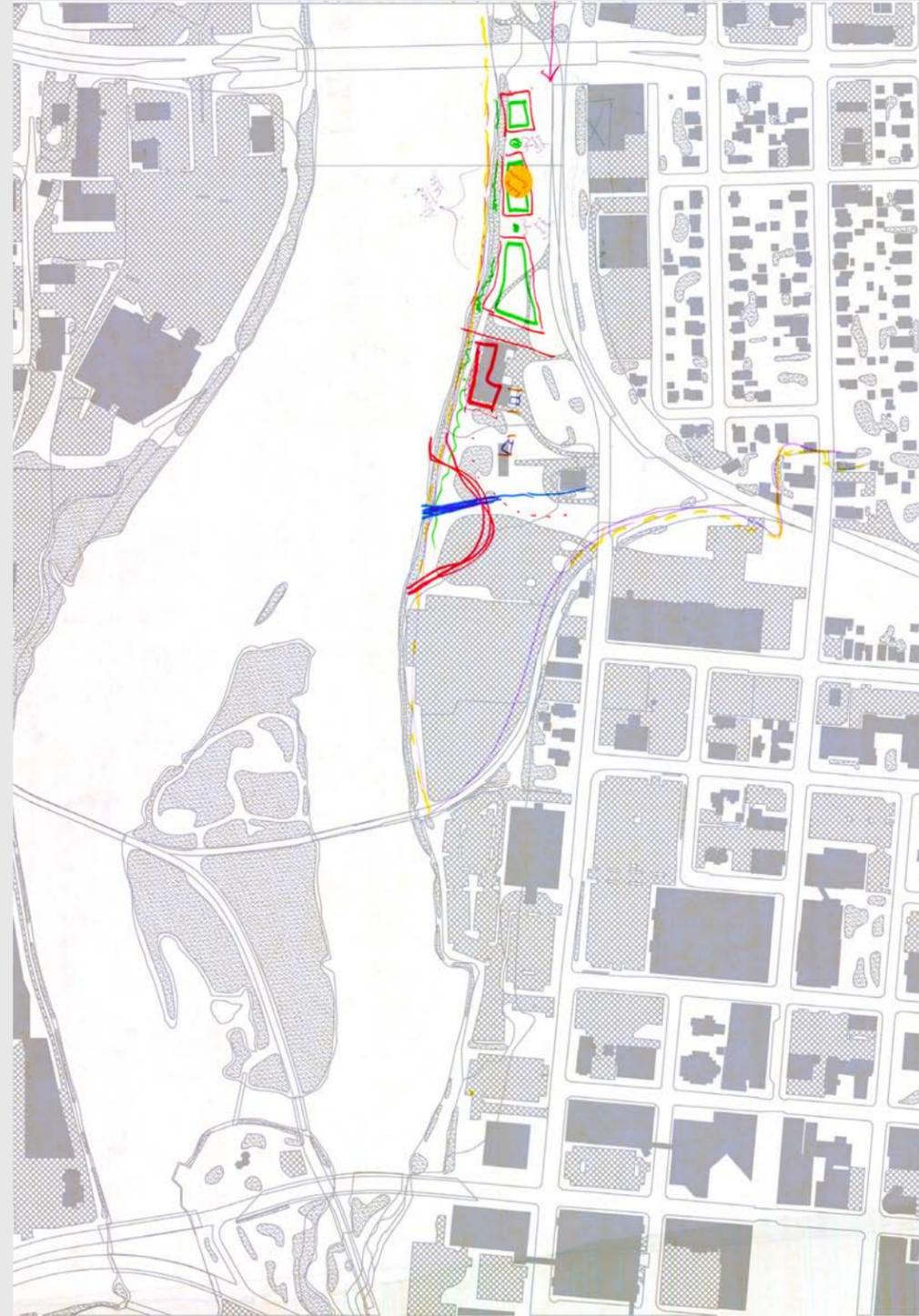
One of the major concepts mentioned was that it is important to retain as much green / natural area as possible. They also want some designed areas, but a careful combination of the two should be examined. This focus group was also concerned with retaining as many of the existing buildings as possible for adaptive reuse. Although maintaining much of the existing site was important, a more important concept to them was to create a space that served as an oasis from the surrounding downtown to create a sense of seclusion and enclosure, a space that would provide year round, multi-use areas.

The Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

The youth group felt that the 400 Block had a formal feeling to it, and prefer that this site, in contrast, serve as a more multi-functional and inviting space. It was discussed that there would be a mix of modern materials used to create both physical and visual connections. An example given would be to continue the red brick pavers used throughout downtown into our site. Minimal concrete and maximum green space was again mentioned. Retaining the southern loop bike path was discussed as a way to create another physical connection to adjacent neighborhoods and retain the historical integrity of the old railroad line.

Some amenities and activities requested were a disc golf course, coffee shops, large patio areas for gathering, community garden plots, rooftop gardens, re-location for the farmer's market, and a community arts building. The focus group unanimously agreed that the site should accommodate year round use including activities such as sledding, snow-shoeing, snow sculpting, ice carving, etc. Summer activities mentioned include fishing, canoeing kayaking, pontoon boating (provide moveable / floating docks), fireworks watching, bird watching, reading, etc.

Precedents Mentioned:
Pifner Park (Steven's Point, WI)
UW Memorial Union (Madison, WI)



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Payman Sadeghi

GROUP 7

The youth in this group were mainly interested in the potential activities that could happen in the site but safety issues were also considered so that families would allow kids to visit the riverfront. Following are the main themes discussed in order of importance;

1- Activity

- a) Have variety of youth activities
- b) Design a community garden
- c) Public art
- d) Boating
- e) Canoeing
- f) Snow showing
- g) Walking/ judging
- h) Bike trail
- i) Snow sculpture
- j) Golf course

2- Land Use

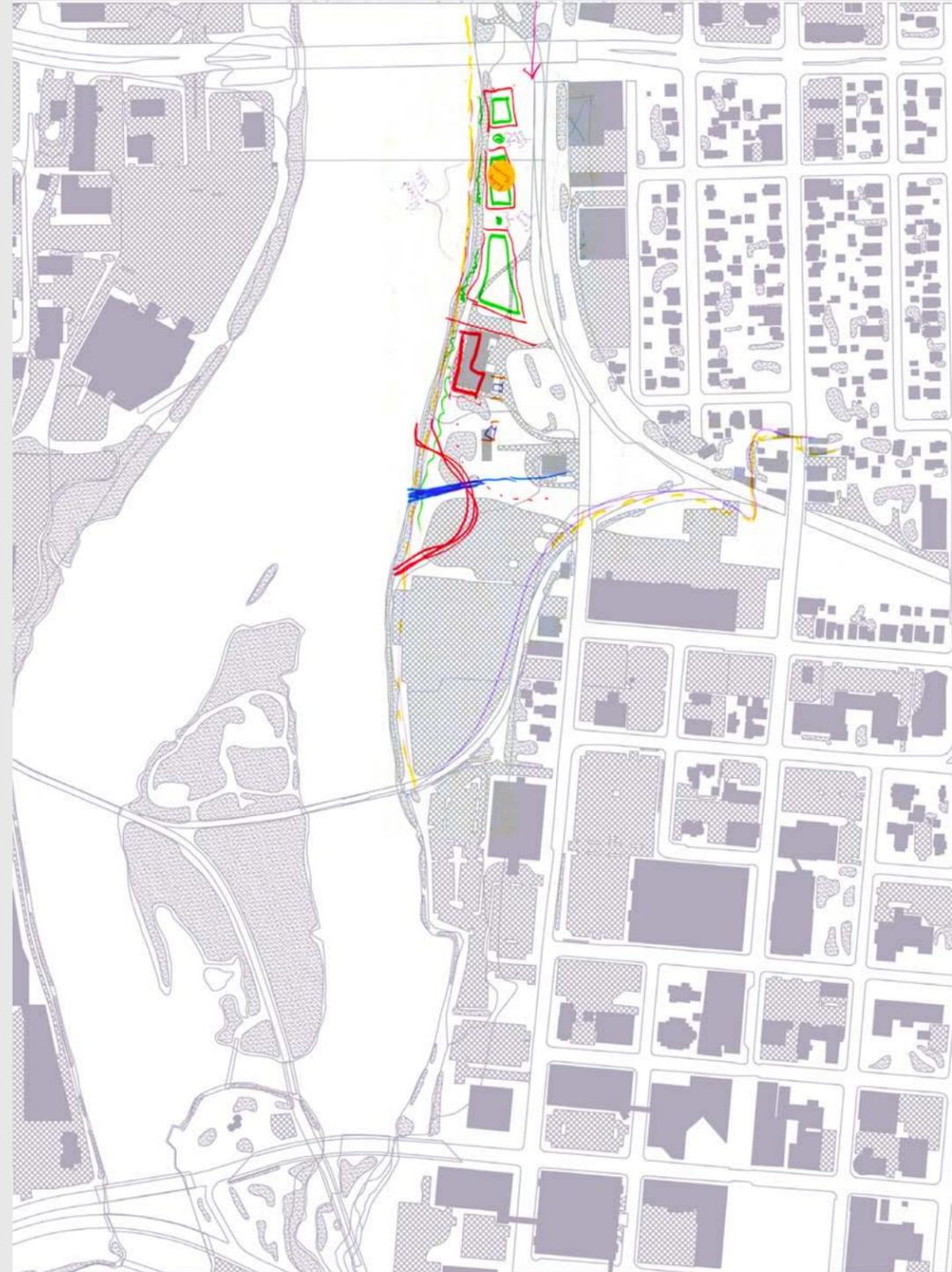
- l) Keep the natural look of riverfront with minimum hardscape
- m) Minimize design intervention on the site
- n) Expand the downtown towards the riverfront
- o) Design coffee shop /small restaurant/leisure store
- p) Design public space with mixed use function
- q) Community garden and farmer's market
- r) Design more open/walkable space
- s) Residential development in narrow northern portion of the site
- t) Public gardens on top of new buildings

3- Identity

- u) Design combination of historical and modern buildings

4- Elements

- v) Have more lighting for both attraction and safety



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sahana Goswami

GROUP 8

The youth group envisioned a leisure use space with many unprogrammed youth based activities. They talked of large open green spaces for picnics and games, but felt there was no need for large, formal ball parks. One of the major concerns this group had was how to bring people down to the area.

One of the suggestions was to have a small performance stage. This zone was described as a space with an urban feel to it. Hardscaped areas with sculptures and interactive elements with seating elements would be integrated into the design to accommodate large numbers of people (such as Bean at Millennium Park in Chicago).

The youth group wanted direct and close access to the water. They talked of a boardwalk or dock leading all the way into the water. *There was no distinct preference for dense vegetation along boardwalk.*

The youth wanted small-scale businesses in this district – eateries, cafes, sandwich places and these should extend all the way to the water. The water access was the most appealing feature for the youth.

Rather than trying to re-use / retain the existing buildings on site, the group favored judicious re-use. They thought that the south side should be left without change or minimal intervention be considered. The building foundations on site could be used for games courses such as BMX biking or skateboarding.

There was some discussion on access from close to Bridge Street (North end of site) with parking spaces adjacent (preferably on the N side of site) and consensus that large surface parking lots were not to be created nor multi-level structures that blocked the view of the river.

Day lighting the creek was an interesting concept for the youth group, and they envisioned a bridge crossing over it to continue the boardwalk along the river.



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sara Khorshidifard

GROUP 9

Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

Everyone in this group was a student at Wausau East High School. Visibility, peacefulness, walkability, viewing and seating destinations, entry clarity, flexibility, and winter activities were the key themes in the session. The youth particularly asked for a peaceful Riveredge concept with a feeling of openness and activities that are contemplative, rather than noisy and strenuous. This group proposes that this section of the river be seamlessly woven into the City of Wausau and that the final design rely more on the river. They also declared that the river's edge should be more visible from all directions. For this group, an important goal is how to design the site for winter use.

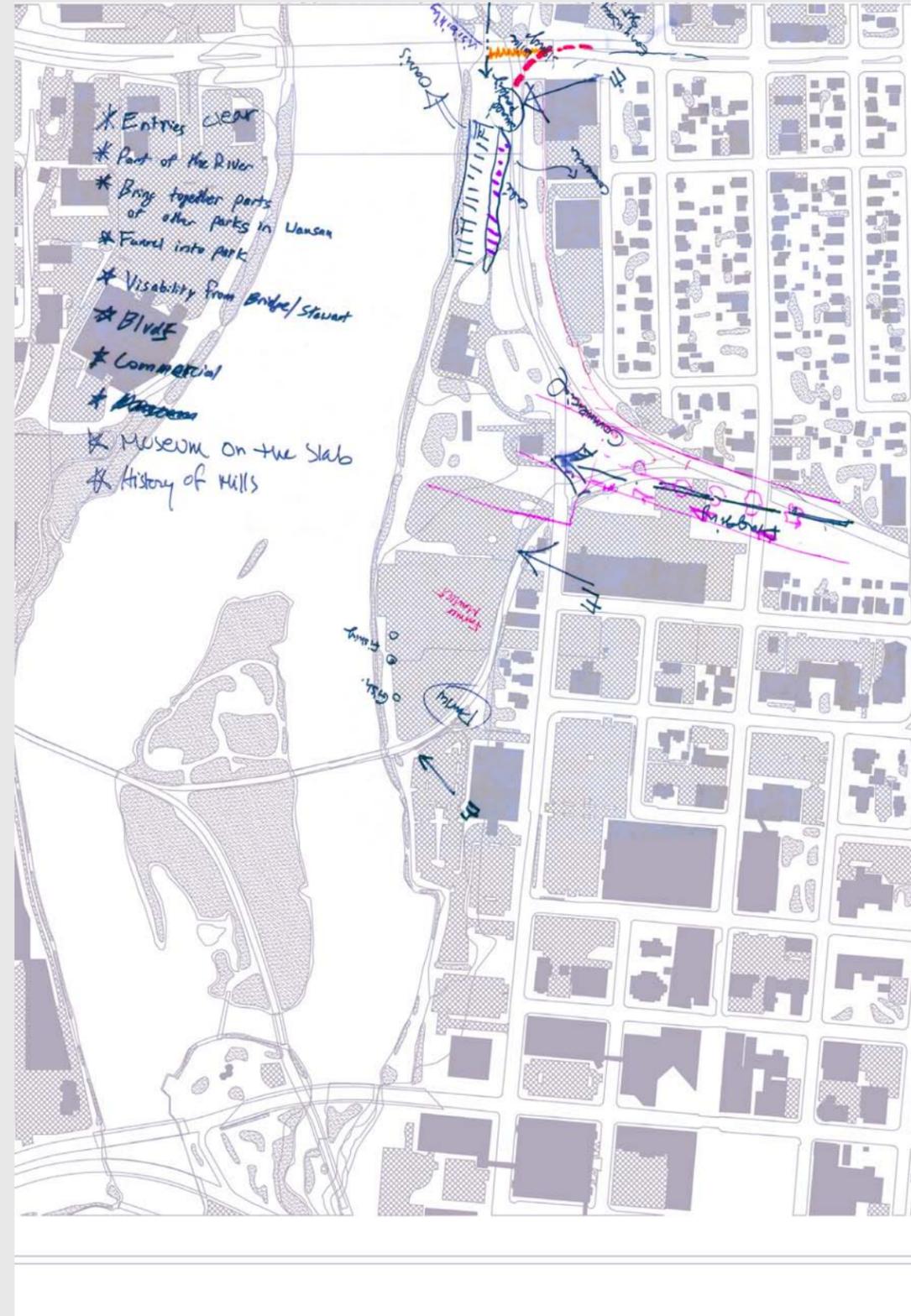
Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

Some specific ideas were: 1st+Fulton can become a tree lined boulevard with many designed benches with greenery along it; create more romantic spots along this promenade; and integrate street food vendors (they mentioned Navy Pier in Chicago)

The youths also suggested that the left-over slab towards the south be developed into a small museum that also exhibits aspects of the history of Wausau. Posters and history boards (of the mills....) can be integrated along the river bike path (they mentioned Patriot Center and Cedar Creek as examples).

Extending from the flood plain towards the river, the group asked for a design of an "oasis" harbor that goes into the water with unique nightlife, offering some cafes and restaurants.

The necessity of higher visibility and access from Bridge Street to the site was discussed, and flexible spaces for various activities were proposed. Some specific recommendations included: ideas of places to play frisbee; no more huge boat landings such as at 6th Street; and no need for another skate park (there are two of them with big jumps in Wausau). The group suggested a performance stage for "amateurs" to play here and then go and play in the 400 block square (they said it may be in concrete, and in a half-circle shape). Large trees could define the bike paths, but, in the group's perspective, there should be no thickly forested area. The winter activities mentioned included ice-skating, ice-fishing and ice-sculpturing. A Chalkfest and fishing were suggested for summer.



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Kristy Bokelman

GROUP 10

The Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

The major themes of this focus session were: in order to create strong connectivity, implement a public transportation loop to take tourists and community residents between downtown and the east riverfront; the park should have a 'destination' amenity to draw not only local residents, but also tourists (the 400 Block already provides a smaller scale venue); and, develop connections to other areas of Wausau, such as Granite Peak Ski Area, upstream of the Wisconsin River to attract resident boaters. Regarding materials, they proposed a careful combination of natural and designed spaces as opposed to all natural or all designed.

The Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

This group had many ideas about how to realize their overall concepts. Improved connectivity: The public transportation loop could be an expansion of the bus system or a new trolley loop. Either system would promote a more European way to link the downtown to the park and businesses.

The most ambitious proposal was construction of a large scale amenity such as an amphitheater to accommodate big name musical acts, which could spur larger development such as renovation of the Landmark Hotel or new construction of larger multi-use or commercial buildings. Since the master plan for the downtown includes construction of a large scale civic center, the group cautioned that these large scale projects should all be considered during the design of this project so as not to 'overbuild' on the site.

Other amenities discussed included dining options from a more affordable scale to fine dining, micro-brewery, kayak and sporting goods store and rental, patio areas that are not located outside of a bar (more open air cafe / coffee shop-type businesses).

Activity related ideas included the importance of creating activity specific areas as well as open areas, which could promote many types of uses. Safety was also a concern, keeping in mind how Barker Stewart Island has zero visibility in some areas. This should be remedied in conjunction with this current project.

Precedents Mentioned:

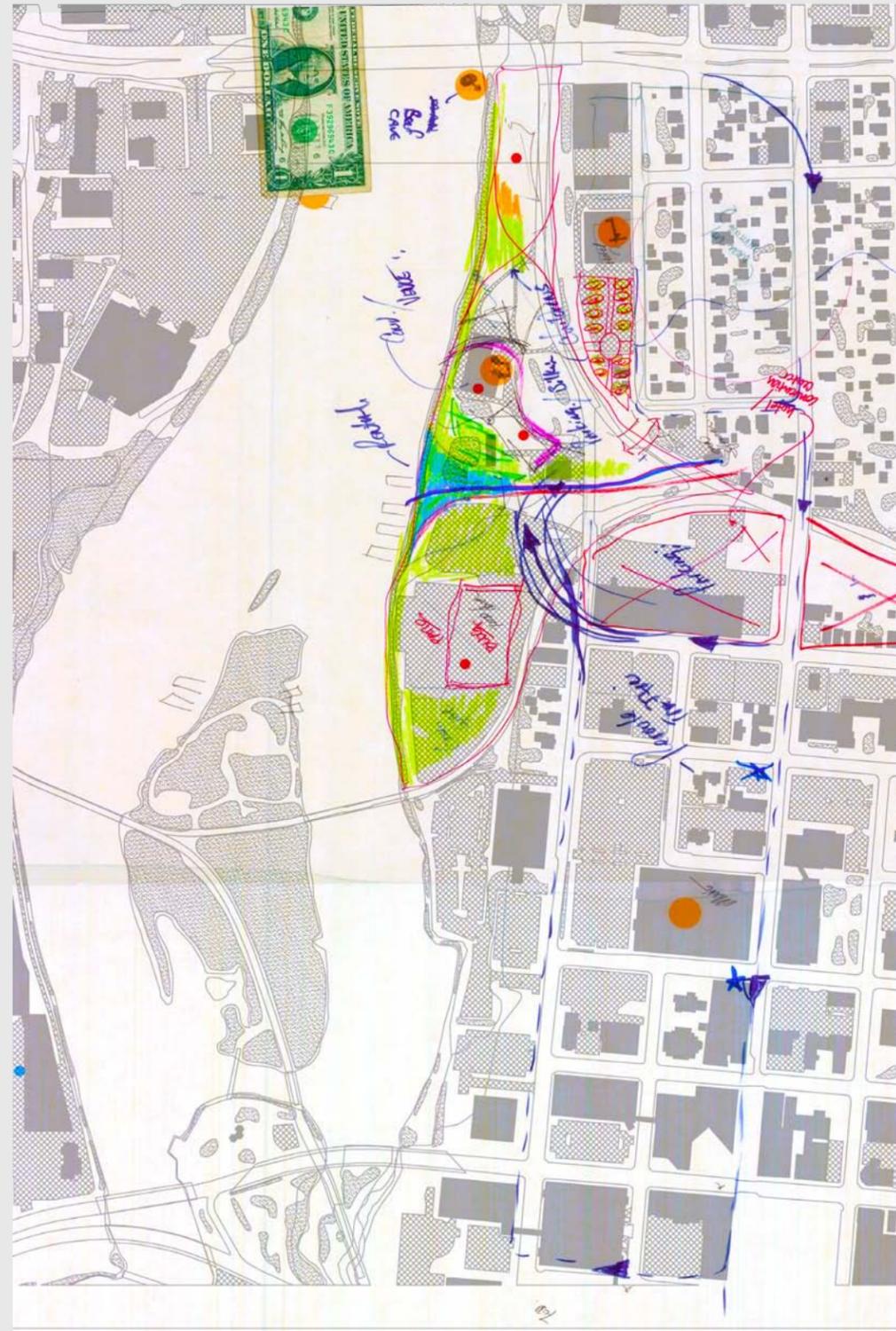
Pikes Market (Seattle, WA)

Pifner Park (Steven's Point, WI)

Milwaukee Public Market (Milwaukee, WI)

Iron Horse Hotel (Milwaukee, WI)

Riverfront Days (Steven's Point, WI)



Wausau Riverfront Redevelopment Project

*Community Design Charrette
June 29, 2011*

*Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Gary Lee Klingbeil, with minor additions by Neel Kamal Chapagain*

GROUP 11

Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

This group consisted of community members who were either historians or had a strong interest in the area's history and identity. So, the discussion started and focused on the identity as the major theme.

Identity:

The group came up with concepts for the future of the riverfront site and downtown Wausau based on their expectations of how Wausau was likely to develop over the next 10 years. It was felt that mixed use, low rise development best fit the East Riverfront and it should not be over commercialized. One concept driving the vision was to integrate into the site urban elements such as historic relics with green space, both natural and designed as well as both outdoor sports and cultural activities. Another concept was the importance of the Wisconsin River itself.

Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

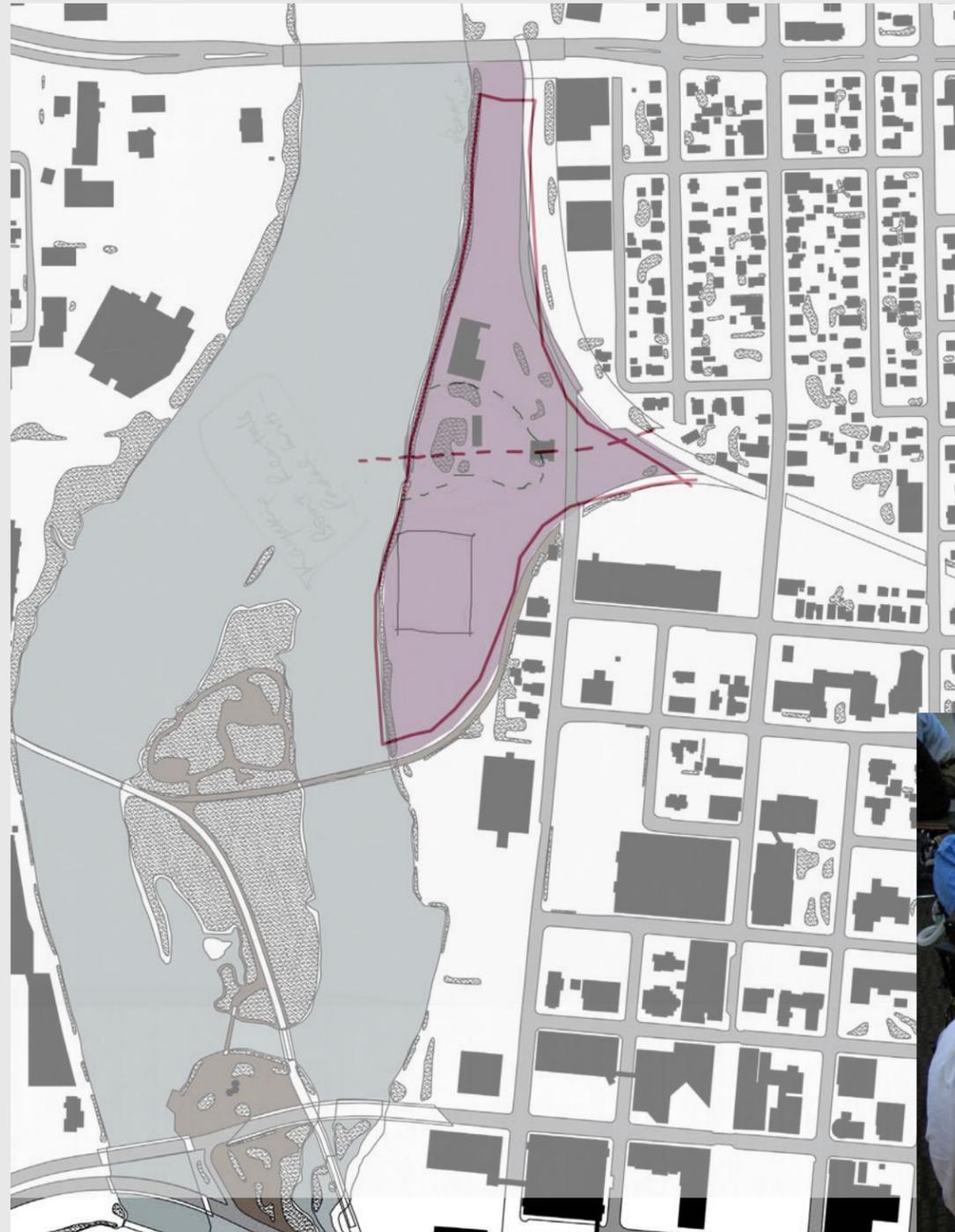
The group then reduced the big theme of identity into specific activities and associated design ideas:

Key Activities:

Key activities could include functions with historic and scenic value, which would encourage educational, cultural activities and public art along the river. Shuttles and trolleys could provide access to the Riverfront. Restaurants could use the river as their theme and houses could incorporate the design characteristics of the area. A completed Riveredge Parkway trail would have natural and designed green space. There would be a loop from point A to point B, which could be used for biking, walking, running etc., and also connect the site to Third Street and the Downtown City Center.

Details:

The group consensus was that the concepts developed for the East Riverfront District should extend to entire river front. Also the area should be used year round including park uses and Barker Island. Following a mixed use concept, uses could include housing, restaurants, retail (unique, educational, cultural, historical, natural resources, habitat, wildlife, river heritage, leisure. Concerns included: parking access (not creating a bottleneck); how the Flood Plain section which does not allow construction would be designed; and, permission and easements might be needed from the Railroad Company. The group decided not to select exact sites their proposed developments, leaving those decisions to be made when the activities are finalized in the Wausau East Riverfront Master Plan.



Community members participating in discussion and design charrette.



Wausau Riverfront Redevelopment Project

Community Design Charrette
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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Payman Sadeghi

GROUP 12

The Wisconsin River is the major element giving identity to this site and the City. Following are the main discussed themes in the order of their importance;

1- Identity

- a) Appreciate the Wisconsin River

2- Land Use

- b) Design a combination of hardscape and the natural look along riverfront
- c) Locate parking lots as far as possible from the river
- d) Design underground parking
- e) Keep the natural look of riverfront

3- Connectivity

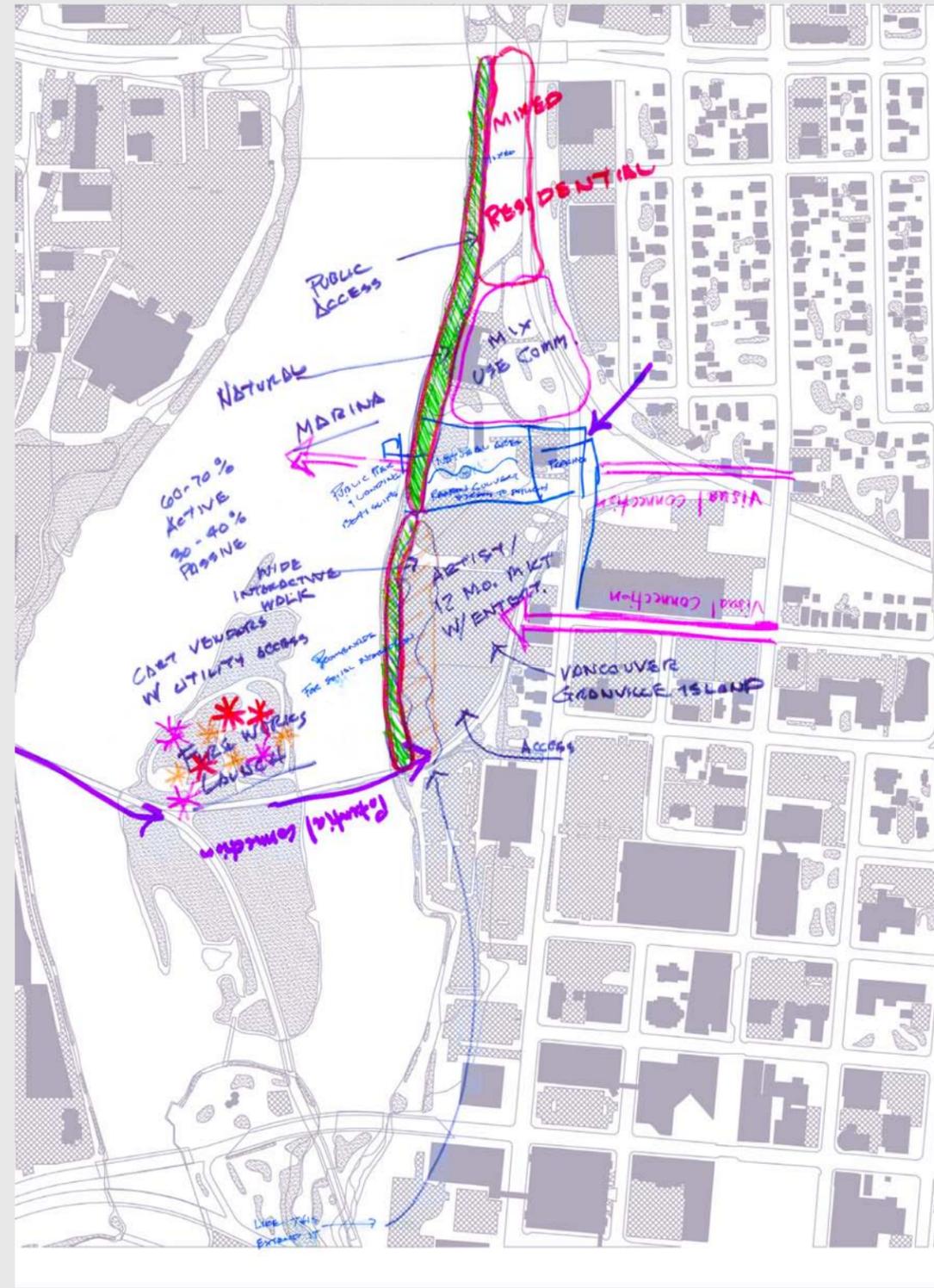
- f) Open up the underground stream

4- Activity

- g) 60-70% of riverfront activities should be active
- h) Boating (create landing)
- i) Water skiing
- j) Boating

5- Sustainability

- k) Water management
- l) Habitat restoration of bats now living on the site



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sahana Goswami

GROUP 13

The group talked of providing access to the area from both south and north. Low-density, high end condos, which would probably mainly attract retirees was envisioned. Private and separated space from the public use areas was deemed essential for these residential areas as well as private access to waterfront.

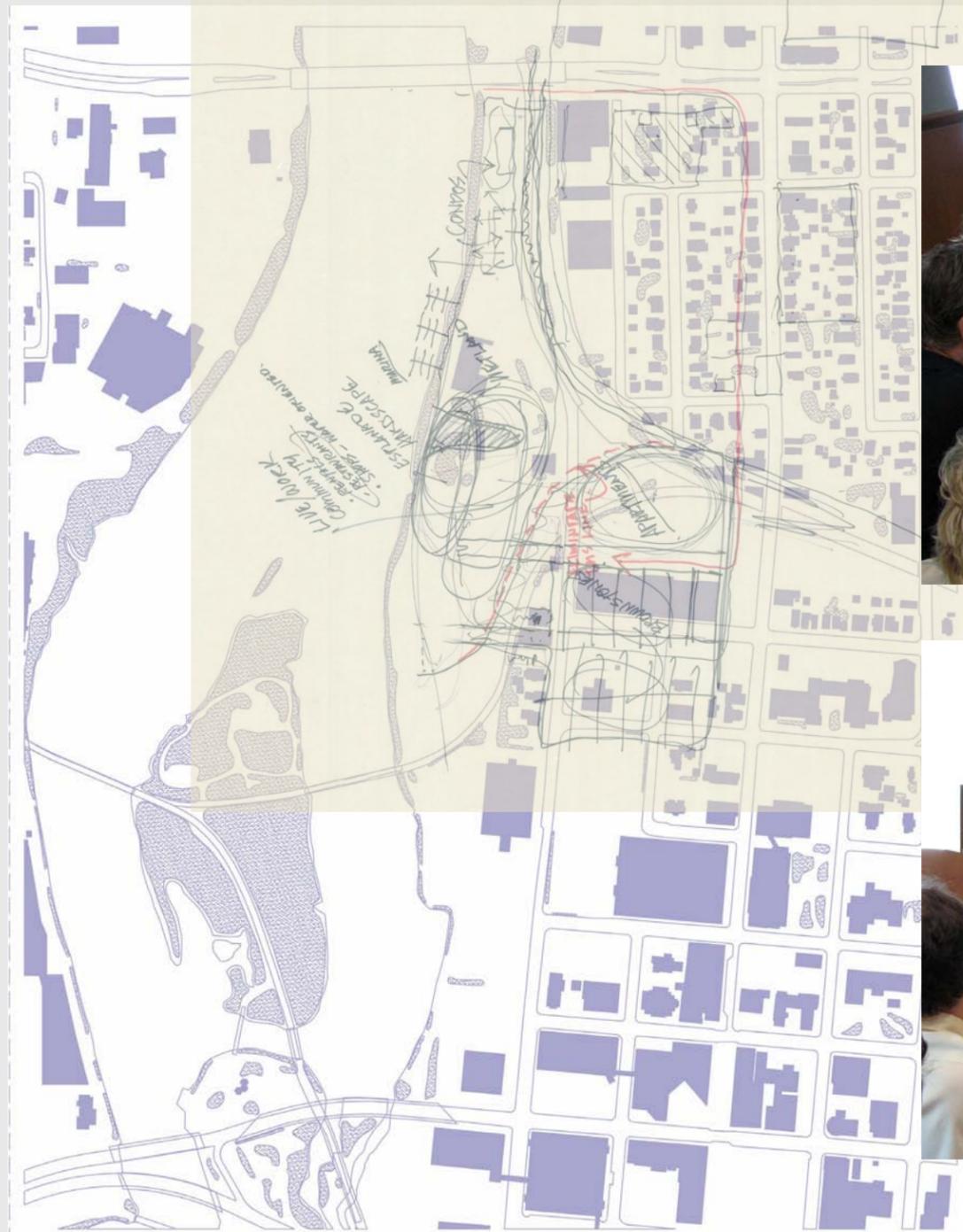
An esplanade with paved areas and high level of finish, completely separated from the residential areas was suggested. The plaza should be sophisticated, layered hardscape to distinguish from remainder of riverfront. This development site should connect easily to other downtown areas and contain businesses as art, which would not compete with the existing downtown stores such as galleries, a marina, boat repair or rentals.

This group talked of an all-year round use trail which must be wide enough to incorporate biking and walking without endangering either user type. Also this trail was to be cleared so as to be usable in winter as well. Other leisure and business activities must be integrated along this path such as recreational equipment rentals – water activities – canoes, kayaks, bicycles, roller blades.

Other Suggestions:

Incorporate a vibrant nightlife. Provide entertainment on the waterfront. Offer more passive activities, not more ball-fields. Make this a recreational – entertainment district. (Maybe incorporate a movie theater in the design). Expand what is envisioned in this development to surrounding neighborhoods by developing residential condos in adjoining parcels to the east and south-east (more like Brownstone developments, or with a common wall to increase yard spaces or zero lot lines).

Use a reclaimed, natural creek as a buffer between public use and private spaces.



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Dudley Tower - Wausau, Wisconsin
Summary by Sara Khorshidifard

GROUP 14

Macro-Scale: Overall Concept

The participants in this session were mostly stakeholders from the West Wausau area. They indicated and highlighted particularly that the Downtown area is not merely limited to the east side but is also partly on the west side. This was very useful for the CDS team to know because it highlighted the importance of envisioning a connection between the two sides of the river. According to the group, a goal for the Near West master plan design should include connecting the primary site both to the downtown section on the east side and to the portion of the downtown on the west side of the river.

The key concept for this group was to create a modern and "urbane," family-oriented and safe, landscape with a variety of use types. A unique, modern and high-end appearance is preferred that ties the riverscape to the architectural design of the 400 Block.

Micro-Scale: Particular Concepts

Some specific concepts from the group centered on the best ways to develop the flood plain zone into a green space that could act as a spatial divider between the mixed-use type developments to the north and the public buildings and facilities south of the flood plain. They suggested that Fulton street, along with the Fox 55 building, could act as a wide boulevard and the major connection to the city.

According to the group, the leftover slab could be turned into an aquarium building, and, close to it, towards the southern edge of the site, a visitor center could be located. Also, a bike rental center was proposed.

Urban, artsy, trendy, and modern were the key adjectives with which this west side group described the landscape elements. Specifically, artistic murals as well as historic markers could be placed on the trails and walking paths. Adding light and signage to the West Riverfront as well as ADA accessibility throughout the site were some other elements considered.

Four major entry points were marked by the group and a few sites outside the project's primary boundary were envisioned to serve as external parking facilities. The group looked at the site more holistically than the other two groups and connected other nodes outside the primary boundary for future development. These included a movie theatre complex, an indoor year-around public market (like one in Seattle), and outdoor food vending (like Boston's Quincy Market).

