

# LOWER NORTH SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN



LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN  
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## Introduction to the Lower North Side Neighborhood

The attractiveness of the Lower North Side Neighborhood is its small town atmosphere. It is a walkable and resident friendly neighborhood having some of the best assets of urban living. The neighborhood has four churches, three schools, three city parks, an abundance of small businesses, and a rich variety of housing opportunities.

The purpose of this neighborhood plan is to identify issues that are of concern to the residents of the neighborhood, to devise strategies for addressing these concerns, and set the foundation for collaborative efforts between public and private sectors to help implement the plan recommendations. More specifically, neighborhood plans are intended to:

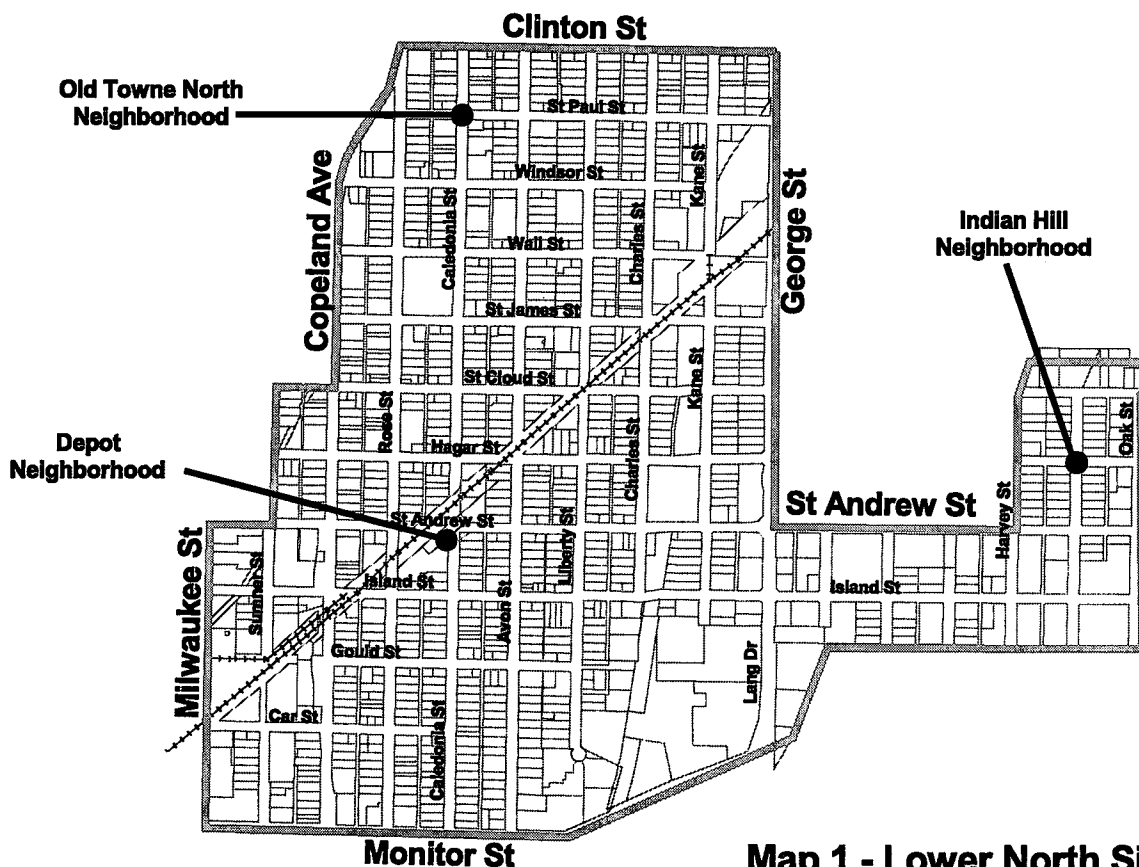
- Educate both city government and neighborhood residents about each

other's concerns and visions for the future.

- Promote collaboration between the city and the neighborhood in order to achieve mutual goals and a shared sense of responsibility.
- Create a "sense of place" within the community by identifying and developing the assets within each neighborhood.
- Initiate change, rather than simply reacting to it, by addressing specific issues and opportunities.
- Strengthen neighborhoods.

## What are the boundaries of this neighborhood planning study?

The planning boundaries include Indian Hill, the Depot, and Old Towne North (see Map 1). The study area is bounded by Clinton St. on the north, George St. on the east, Indian Hill to the east, Monitor St. on the South, and Milwaukee St. and Copeland Ave. on the West.



Map 1 - Lower North Side Neighborhood Planning Area

## **Why was the Lower North Side Neighborhood selected to receive planning services?**

The Lower North Side neighborhood was selected for a variety of reasons. It is one of the City's oldest neighborhoods with much of its older housing in need of repair. Many of its residents are renters; consequently, the population is more transient than in more heavily owner-occupied neighborhoods. In 1995, the entire north side was comprehensively rezoned resulting in an emphasis being placed on single family homes. In the fall of 1997, the City created a Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) District around the Depot to renovate the Depot and surrounding neighborhood. Lastly and most importantly, a neighborhood group comprised of residents formed to address neighborhood concerns. This group eventually approached the City for its services.

## **How did the Lower North Side Neighborhood develop their plan?**

Through a series of community forums, neighborhood residents and the business community set the framework for the planning process by identifying the major issues facing the neighborhood. Participants then volunteered to serve on one of three task forces: Housing; Public Infrastructure; and Parks, Open Space and Trails. Their goal was to formulate preliminary strategies for the most important neighborhood issues. More than 30 residents volunteered to analyze these critical issues over an eight-month period.

## **What is the outcome of the planning process?**

The outcome of this planning process is a set of plan recommendations that will enhance the quality of life and environment within the neighborhood. It is understood that the implementation of plan recommendations will vary based upon

existing resources, community support, and priority of need relative to other community planning initiatives. However, the Lower North Side Neighborhood strongly encourages the City, school district, community-based organizations, and the business community to consider funding the neighborhood's recommendations in upcoming budget cycles.

## **How do the Lower North Side Neighborhood Plan recommendations get implemented?**

There are two major steps for plan implementation:

1. *Adoption of the Lower North Side Neighborhood Plan by the La Crosse Common Council.*

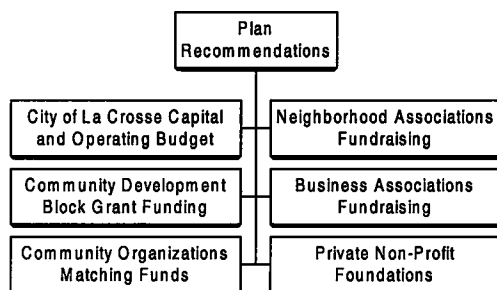
Attached to this neighborhood plan is a Common Council resolution that designates City agencies and departments to implement the plan recommendations. Inclusions of neighborhood improvement projects in the capital or operating budget, work plans, or other sources of funding from state or federal governments are possible ways to implement plan recommendations.

2. *Monitor plan recommendations by District Councilpersons, a designated Planning Council, and/or neighborhood associations.* To ensure the carry-through of plan implementation, the City should designate a Planning Council comprised of neighborhood residents, businesses, and other affected interest. For the City's part, the Planning Department should coordinate with City departments the development of and submittal of an annual status report to the Common Council on plan implementation.



## What are the possible funding sources that could help implement the neighborhood plan recommendations?

Possible sources include:



## What role can the neighborhood play in the implementation of their plan recommendations?

Although the implementation of recommendations is not guaranteed, there are three strategic steps that may help implement the neighborhood's plan recommendations.

1. Neighborhood and business community involvement. One of the most critical factors in determining the success of the neighborhood plan is the involvement of citizens, neighborhood associations, and the business community in the planning process.
2. Public and quasi-public involvement. Building good working relations with District Council Members, City staff, school board representatives (to name only a few) is imperative. Government officials and staff are essential to chaperone recommendations through the necessary channels.
3. Prepare carefully for public presentations. Spell out the recommendations, the alternatives, and the pros and cons of a given issue as clearly as possible. Assemble critical back-up material (for example, results

from a neighborhood survey) to help support your recommendations.

4. Strategically campaign for plan implementation. Developing a strategy for plan implementation is crucial. Strategically approach governmental officials, City departments, and non-profit organizations for funding during their annual budget cycles.
5. Actively participate in the City's Capital and Operating Budget process as well as the CDBG Budget Process. (See Appendix A on page 50 for overview of budget processes).

## Should the neighborhood regularly update the recommendations in the Lower North Side Neighborhood Plan?

The Lower North Side Steering Committee strongly believes that this plan should not become a plan that sits on a shelf, gathering dust. The Steering Committee strongly recommends that this plan be viewed as a dynamic document, annually revisited by neighborhood residents, whose progress at meeting goals and objectives is annually reviewed, and whose goals and objectives are modified and/or added to, so as to better reflect the changing needs and desires of the neighborhood.

The Lower North Side Neighborhood Steering Committee identified eleven major issues that would enhance this north side neighborhood. The common threads that emerged from the nine-month planning process are:

1. *Maintain, Upgrade, and Enhance the Physical Features of the Neighborhood to Improve the Aesthetics, Environmental Quality, And Accessibility in the Lower North Side Neighborhood.* Public improvements such as landscaping, repair of streets and sidewalks, street lighting, and neighborhood entrance markers can be used to define the neighborhood, establish attractive entry points, and enhance the appearance of residential streets. Residents plan to work with the City to improve public right-of-ways in areas such as trees, sidewalks, lighting, and the Depot.
2. *Improve Property Maintenance & Compliance with the City's Dwelling Codes.* Improving the physical appearance of both residential and commercial properties in the neighborhood will enhance the value of the neighborhood and persuade others to maintain and improve their properties. In order to make the neighborhood a more desirable place to live, residents, with the help of the City, will attack the contributing factors of blight.
3. *Maintain & Upgrade Existing Housing Stock.* Reinvestment by property owners in the housing stock will increase the overall appearance, accessibility, and value of the neighborhood. Neighborhood residents plan to increase communication with property owners so that they know the types of programs available from the City of La Crosse and other organizations to help maintain the housing stock and quality of living for the occupants.
4. *Enhance the Neighborhood through Improvements and Expansion of Goose Green Park and Linking Park with New Trails to Existing City Bike/Ped Trails.* Goose Green Park is located in an area with a lot of children and could be a real asset to the neighborhood. Leagues extensively use the ball field, but the rest of the park is under utilized. We recommend expanding the size of the park and adding some key new resources. Additionally, more landscaping and connecting it to the bike trail system could be an important part of revitalizing the neighborhood.
5. *Encourage the Adoption of New Programs that Target Minor Property Repairs and Clean-up.* Programs currently exist to address major rehabilitation work on homes. What is missing though are programs that target minor property repairs, which can comprise a majority of neighborhood blight. The neighborhood and City should expand on ideas and programs such as "Neighbors Day."
6. *Expand Home Ownership within the Neighborhood.* This neighborhood contains a variety of housing types that are affordable to people at a wide range of income levels. However, in the last decade the neighborhood has experienced a significant turnover (reduction) of single family homes. The neighborhood's goal is to maintain this housing diversity into the future and encourage new home ownership as a way of promoting stability.
7. *Maintain the Beauty and Resources of Copeland and Red Cloud Parks, Carefully Providing Some New Resources.*

8. *Preserve the Existing Residential Character of the Neighborhood by Ensuring Future Redevelopment in the Neighborhood is Consistent with the Character and Integrity of the Neighborhood.* The mid-range vision for this neighborhood is to preserve the overall character of the residential areas, but allow residential infill developments on appropriate sites with the following considerations: existing density of a block, adequate green space on the lot, adequate and convenient parking spaces, and aesthetically pleasing architectural features.
9. *Survey the Neighborhood and Designate Areas Appropriate for Redevelopment.* Given the age and disrepair of some housing, that a sizeable portion of the housing is in the flood plain, and the large number of rental units, it is prudent to survey the neighborhood and try to determine best uses for the future.
10. *Develop and Promote a Positive Image for the Neighborhood.* A step toward a positive perspective of the Lower North Side Neighborhood begins with this plan. This neighborhood has many assets not found in other city neighborhood and this needs to be promoted and publicized.
11. *Clean Up Undeveloped Land and Provide More Green Spaces For the Neighborhood.* Vacant parcels exist throughout the neighborhood. Some could be made into park or greenspace. Others at least need to be cleaned up.

The Lower North Side Neighborhood Steering Committee, in conjunction with interested neighborhood residents, has identified 20 major actions that would enhance the quality of life the north side. The top 20 overall recommendations in the plan are (in priority order):

1. Keep Jefferson Elementary School Open as a neighborhood school.
2. Oppose the North-South transportation corridor plan.
3. Sponsor a housing workshop(s) that will target homeowners, investment property owners, and tenants to increase awareness of loans, grants, and programs available to purchase, maintain and upgrade residential and commercial properties.
4. Work with City and C.P. Rail to improve and maintain the Depot and surrounding area.
5. Work with the City on traffic management in the neighborhood, particularly for safety.
6. Inspect and monitor residential properties to ensure compliance with minimum housing and property maintenance codes, with a goal of surveying the neighborhood biannually (twice a year) and inspecting as necessary.
7. Designate City/County land adjacent to Goose Green Park as parkland.
8. Shift Community Garden to the North of present location.
9. City of La Crosse maintains their properties, keeping them safe and clean.
10. Develop additional programs to encourage and assist repair and maintenance of homes within the neighborhood.
11. More and better lighting at Goose Green Park to increase safety.
12. Notify property owners early in the planning stage when street improvements or power line work will affect trees.
13. Work with Park & Recreation Department on an alternative to the wading pools, such as a sprinkler type park which could be safer, cleaner, and more useful to a wider range of children and adults.
14. Encourage the planting of trees throughout the neighborhood to help improve aesthetics.
15. Create Housing Resource Center at North Community Library to market available housing, home ownership financing programs, rehabilitation grants and loans, and related programs within the neighborhood.
16. Create a Code Enforcement Team comprised of various code enforcement personnel throughout the City: Inspection, Health, Fire, Police, Housing, and Legal.
17. The Inspection Department and neighborhood organizations work together to eliminate problems regarding the maintenance and appearance of neighborhood properties.
18. Target the purchase of single-family and two-units for owner-occupancy, especially properties that are in rental status, using existing home loan programs to help in the purchase as well as the rehabilitation of the properties.
19. Continue funding and expand marketing efforts for existing housing rehabilitation and home ownership programs.
20. Clean up tunnel under the George Street overpass and surrounding area, making it safer and more inviting.

**What are the community networks that make up the neighborhood?**

Community associations, organization, and institutions provide a structure for a neighborhood to organize, network, and possibly implement the needs and wants of its residents and business community. Community networks within the planning area include:

**Business Associations**

- Caledonia Street Merchants

**Centers of Worship**

- Immanuel Lutheran Church
- Saint James Catholic Church
- Saint Elias Eastern Orthodox Church
- Saint Luke’s United Methodist Church

**Community Centers & Services**

- Northside Policing Center
- Hmong Mutual Assistance Association
- Kane Street Community Garden
- Options in Reproductive Care
- Elderly Daycare – Merit Centre
- Windsor House
- Sauber Manor
- Tristate Ambulance Service

**Child Care Centers**

- Mini Miracle Child Care
- Head Start at Saint Luke’s
- Toni’s Tots
- Kids Are My Business

**Financial Institutions**

- M&I Bank

**Shopping Centers and Business Strips**

- Old Towne North – an Arts and Antique District
- Menards/Quillin’s Plaza
- Rose Street Merchants (700 and 800 blocks)
- Copeland Merchants (600 block – Board Store and Monsoor’s)

**Schools**

- Immanuel Lutheran School (K – 8)
- Saint James Catholic School (K – 6)
- Jefferson Elementary School (K – 6)

**Festivals**

- Torch Light Parade
- Northside Festgrounds (Octoberfest)
- African-American Festival
- Rail Fest
- Saint James Jamboree
- Caledonia Street Flea Market

**What are the unique features of the Lower North Side Neighborhood?**

The Lower North Side neighborhood enjoys a wealth of unique assets all within walking distance. The neighborhood is further enhanced by easy access to the **Amtrak station**, city buses, and boat landings. Art galleries and antique shops (J M P Studio and Gallery plus many antique shops) contribute to the uniqueness of the neighborhood. Green space and aesthetic pleasures such as **Copeland Park**, **Goose Green Park**, and **Red Cloud Park** with access to the **Black River**, **La Crosse River**, and the **Marsh** while on your way to or from 9 restaurants and confectioneries: **Ardies** Lang Drive Restaurant, **Bucky’s Burger Barn**, **House of China**, **The Maid-rite**, **Marge’s** on Rose, **Mississippi Brittle Ltd.**, **The Sweet-shop**, **Sloopy’s Alma Mater**, and **Taco John’s**. You can also walk to two Grocery Stores (**Quillin’s Foodhouse**, and Hmong Asian Market store on Lang Drive plus one **Kwik Trip**). Additional, professional services in the Lower Northside Neighborhood include: Accountants (**Accounting Plus**), Architects (**Kratt associates Inc.**), Attorneys (**Collins Quillin & Knothe**), Chiropractors (**Bronston Orthopedic – Chiropractic Clinic**), Contractors (**H N R Electric**, **Kish & Sons Electric**, **Cary Heating and Air**

ing and Air Conditioning, Mike Flottmeier Plumbing and Heating), Engineers (Michaels Engineering Inc.), Printers (Ambergraphics Printing, Curtis Printing Comp., Inc.).

## **What are the historic assets of the Neighborhood?**

One of the landmarks that define the Lower North Side is the **Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul Rail Road Station** (1926-27) [later the Milwaukee Road Depot and now the Amtrak Station and office complex]. A few blocks up the tracks is the **Canadian Pacific switching yard**, one of two historical switching yards on the North Side. These railroad yards employed the early residents of the neighborhood and brought the lumber for the construction of homes. The **La Crosse Rubber Mills** opened in 1897 and some of the later structures remain (1913, 1916, 1923) to this day. The railroads, the Rubber Mills and the Churches are among institutions that shaped and built this neighborhood.

On Caledonia Street stands **Saint James Church** (1900-01) and **Saint Claire's Convent** (1893) both structures retain their historic integrity. One block away on Avon and St. Paul stands **Immanuel Lutheran Church** (1907), which is also in good historical preservation. Within a block of the southeast corner of Copeland Park (1909-10), we find one of the few remaining wood frame churches in the city, **St. Elias Orthodox Church** (1911-12). This church is also in good historical condition.

Caledonia Street between St Paul and Clinton Streets has a number of historical buildings including the **Rivera Theater** (1920) and the **Horner Building** (1894). These buildings retain some of the historical facades of the originals. Restoration of the Rivera Theater as a film or live theater could possibly en-

hance the already rich historical ambiance of the street.

During La Crosse's economic boom period, beginning in the 1880's and lasting until the end of the lumber era at the turn of the century, the Victorian Queen Anne was the most popular style of architecture in La Crosse. Sixteen of the 269 houses built in this style during this period are of sufficient quality to be classified as architecturally significant examples of the Victorian Queen Anne style. The **John J. Callahan House** (1894) at 933 Rose is one of these sixteen. It was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1995.

The former elegance of **Exchange State Bank and Masonic Temple**, while still visible, has lost much to bad remodeling. This building seems beyond restoration, at least without considerable investment and imagination. Many of the stone buildings on the 500 block of Copeland Avenue including the **American House** (1877; addition in 1887) appear in relatively good historical condition. These buildings should be maintained and improved.

In addition to these historical buildings, a **steam locomotive** and a **switching tower** have been preserved. These artifacts stand near Clinton Street in **Copeland Park**.