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## WISCONSIN DOWNTOWN ACTION COUNCIL DOWNTOWN PROJECT CASE STUDY PROFILE

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**Project Name**  
Onalaska Waterfront

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**Project Location**  
City of Onalaska

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**Project Type** (check all that apply)

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Adaptive Reuse
- Redevelopment
- Signage
- Creative Partnership
- Financing
- Mixed Use
- Historic Preservation
- Transportation
- Open Space
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

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**Project Completion Date/Schedule**  
10 year Master Plan

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**Brief Project Description**

The City of Onalaska acquired 47 acres of riverfront property in the heart of it's downtown in June of 2006. This land is the only waterfront property accessible to the public via an at-grade railroad crossing and public right of way. The land was in private ownership and used as a campground and boat rental area for decades. The property is currently being master planned by the City in cooperation with Schreiber Anderson Associates.

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**Project Location**

Irvin Street, One Block West of STH 35 (The Great River Road)

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**Site Size**

47 Acres

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**Land Uses**

Conservancy/ Open Space

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**Key Words, Special Features**

Redevelopment, eco-tourism, recreation, waterfront, riverfront, conservancy

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**Project Address**

Irvin Street

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**Owner**

The City of Onalaska

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**Developer**

The City of Onalaska

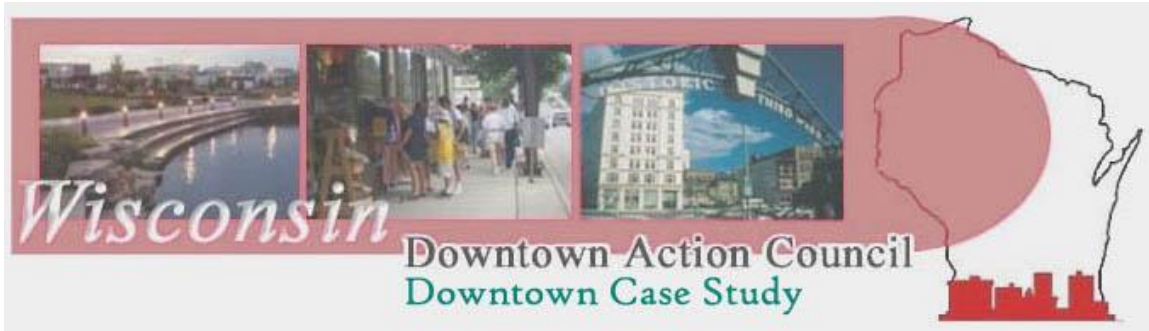
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**Architect**

N/A

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**Landscape Architect**



Schreiber Anderson Associates

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## Other Key Development Members

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### **General Description (Use, Density, Partners, Strategy, Details...)**

The Onalaska waterfront is a spectacular underutilized area at the convergence of the Black River and Lake Onalaska just west of Onalaska's downtown area. The area forms the convergence of many unique features including the two bodies of water which are contiguous with the Mississippi River, Onalaska's downtown, the Great River Road or STH 35, the Great River State Bicycle Trail, a WisDNR State Trailhead, and 7 acres of public land slated for redevelopment and a tourism and cultural center which will entertain and educate visitors of the Great River Road of life over 12,000 years on the Upper Mississippi River through extensive collections of archaeological artifacts and records. Acquired in June of 2006 by the City, the land offers a unique opportunity to be a community asset as well as an economic development and tourism opportunity. The City contracted with Schreiber Anderson Associates in 2007 after undergoing an extensive qualification based selection process, to create a waterfront master plan encompassing the 47 acre waterfront and the adjacent STH 35 frontages and connections to Main Street.

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### **Site Description (Infill, Adjacencies, Transportation, Age, Opportunities...)**

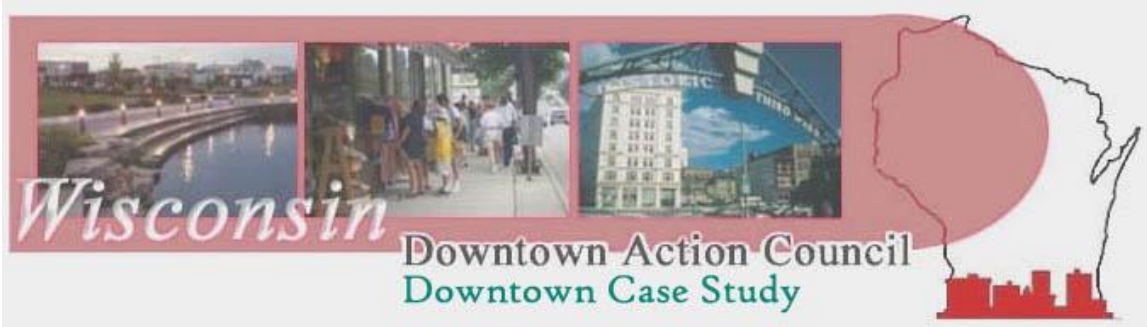
The 47 acre waterfront is primarily floodplain but includes a 5 acre open space area, a shoeline connection to the US Army Corp of Engineers spillway (a popular fishing area) and an extensive emergent marsh which has habitat for eight species of concern and is a prime spawning area for fish. The area also includes several Bald Eagle nests and an abundant variety of wildlife. The area is accessed by an at-grade railroad crossing over the Burlington Northern railway at Irvin Street. The waterfront lies between 30 and 40 feet lower in elevation than the City's downtown, offering spectacular vistas from above.

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### **Development Process (Explain, in detail, the development story)**

The waterfront master plan included intensive public engagement and the creation of a citizen-driven vision for the land. The preliminary master plan which represents the evolution of the plan through public critique of three concept options includes a prominent visitor and cultural center, streetscape enhancements on STH 35, redevelopment sites, public parking, an outdoor expo area for farm markets, an improved at-grade rail crossing, a riverwalk, fishing nodes, natural trails and boardwalks and interpretive areas with wildlife viewing areas, boat docks and an open-air welcome center.

### **Planning and Design (Partners, Challenges, Tools Used, Innovation...)**



The City engaged numerous partners in preparing for the acquisition and master planning of this land. A ten-year public education and awareness effort preceded the acquisition and planning with help from the local news organizations and Centering Onalaska, a citizens advocacy group that supports downtown and waterfront redevelopment. In addition, the City has partnerships with the Wisconsin DNR in improving the adjacent State trailhead and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in providing education and access opportunities for the public. The City is also taking advantage of the opportunity of several planned projects including the planned redevelopment of STH 35 which will include Community Sensitive Design funding.

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**Approvals and Permitting (Agencies, Challenges, Costs, What was learned...)**

A long term public education and awareness campaign was beneficial. It helped bring about an expectation and support by the public and involved agencies that the area would be improved.

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**Financing (Partners, Level of Participation, Equity, Grants, Loans, Revenue...)**

A \$200,000 State Stewardship Grant was received for acquisition of the 47 acre waterfront. The City also received a \$25,000 grant from the Paul E. Stry foundation for the waterfront acquisition. The remainder was funded through the City's Capital Improvement Program and general obligation bonds.

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**Marketing and Management (Keys to success, Promotion, Target audiences...)**

The facilitation of public involvement and support for a long range vision is and was critical to the project's success. The City's consultant Schreiber Anderson Associates, a well-qualified waterfront planning firm, was also important to the projects success.

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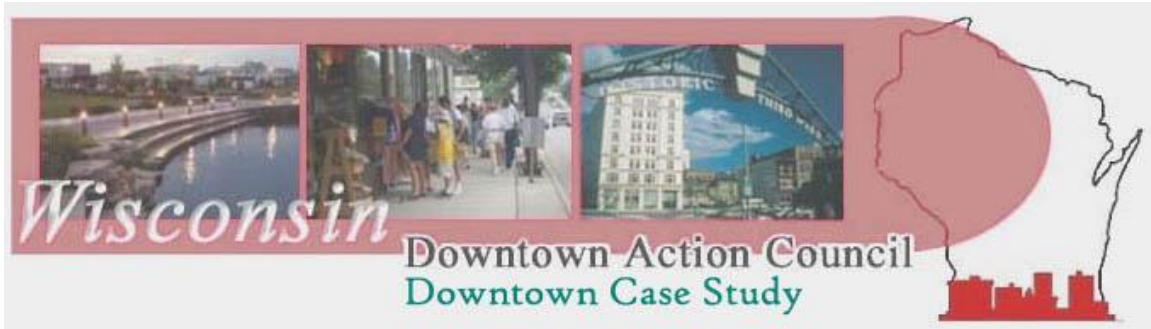


**Experience Gained (Key Issues, Difficulties, Challenges overcome, Solutions..)**

The City encountered one setback in 2004 when we tried to acquire the waterfront from the owner at that time. The property was sold to a third party when the City did not act fast enough, resulting in the price of the land escalating dramatically. In hind sight, the City should have secured a right of first refusal at that time which may have saved over \$300,000 in acquisition funds.

**General Project Data**

<b>Land Use Data</b>				
Site Area: 47 acres				
Percentage Complete: In Master Plan Phase				
Gross Density:N/A				
Number of Off Street Parking Spaces: In planning				
<b>Land Use Plan</b>				
Use: Open Space	Acres	Percentage of Site		
Buildings: 1	1	2%		
Streets/ Surface Parking: 0	0	0		
Landscaping/Open:	46	98%		
Total:	47			
<b>Residential Information</b>				
Unit Type	Number of Units	Area/ Square Feet	Percentage Leased	Initial Rental /Sales Price



<b>Commercial Information</b>		
Classification/Type	Number of Stores/Spaces	Total Gross Land Area
<b>Development Cost Information</b>		
Site Acquisition Cost: \$650,000 Site Improvement Costs: Public Infrastructure: None Demolition: None Relocation: None Environmental: None Paving: Structures: Total Construction Costs: N/A  Soft Costs: Architecture and Engineering: Marketing: Taxes/ Insurance: Construction Interest and Fees: Other:		
<b>Development Schedule</b>		
Planning: 12 months Site Purchase: 3 months Demolition: N/A Construction: Yet to be determined Sales/ Leasing/ Occupancy: Project Completion: 5 to 10 year master plan implementation		