

Chapter Five: Cultural Resources

CULTURAL RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Preserve Indian Mounds Park, as well as other historically and culturally significant sites and buildings.
- Advance “placemaking” projects to celebrate and showcase the City’s unique character and culture and inspire a sense of community.

Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and recommendations related to Whitewater’s cultural resources. This includes not only its historic resources, but also an overview of the places and events that distinguish Whitewater and also contribute to its quality of life.

A Brief History of Whitewater

Whitewater's first settler, Samuel Prince, erected a cabin on his claim of 60 acres in 1837. The Potawatomi Tribe originally named the area Wau-be-gan-naw-po-cat meaning white water because of the white sands that covered the bottom of what is now known as Whitewater Creek.

The Old Stone Mill was constructed in 1839, at which time the community began to grow into an industrial hub. By 1852, the first railroad was constructed through Whitewater, spurring greater industrial growth. It was around this time that several important industries were established, among them were the Winchester and DeWolf Plow Factory (established 1850), the Esterly Reaper Works (established 1857 and at one time Whitewater’s largest employer), and the Winchester and Partridge Wagon Works (established 1860).

Between 1855 and 1888, the City’s population expanded quickly from 2,224 to 3,621. In 1868, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater became the state’s second public college. The school was originally named the Whitewater Normal School and was dedicated to training teachers. When the school first opened its doors it had only 39 students taught by nine faculty members.

Whitewater continued to grow until the 1890s when Esterly Reaper Works moved its operation to Minnesota and Winchester and Partridge Wagon Works closed its doors. With the loss of these major employers, the City lost one quarter of its population, which it did not regain until the 1950s. During the world wars the community’s economy was comprised largely of agricultural trade and light industry.

The Wisconsin Normal School went on to become a state teacher’s college, a Wisconsin state college, and then eventually became part of the Wisconsin State University System. It wasn’t until 1972 that the campus became known as the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Historic Sites

The Wisconsin Historical Society’s Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) contains data on a wide range of historic properties throughout the state. The AHI identifies 500 documented places in the City of Whitewater within Walworth County and three within Jefferson County. Five properties or areas in the City are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These include the following:

- East Wing (Old Main) of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.
- Halverson Log Cabin of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

- Maples Mound Group located in the Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve (or Indian Mounds Park) on the City's west side. This is an extraordinary collection of intact Native American effigy mounds.
- Whitewater Post Office, located at 213 Center Street.
- Main Street Historic District, located along West Main Street from Prairie Street to Fremont Street and Church Street from Forest Avenue.

Archeological Sites

There are 37 archeological sites within the City of Whitewater or within 1000 feet of the City limits designated by the Wisconsin State Historical Society, including the extraordinary Indian Mounds Park. These sites include cemeteries/burial sites and effigy mounds. All human burial sites, including cemeteries and Indian mounds, are protected under State law. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires federal agencies to ensure that their actions do not adversely affect archeological sites on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Archeological sites can be protected during the course of state agency activities if the sites have been recorded with the Office of the State Archeologist.

Under Wisconsin law, Native American burial mounds, unmarked burials, and all marked and unmarked cemeteries are protected from encroachment by any type of development. Many of these sites are located on private land, and may not be viewed by the general public.

Cultural Activities and Local Attractions

The culture of the City of Whitewater is as diverse as the people who live here. The following is a sample of the many cultural, recreational, and artistic opportunities in and near the City. While an effort was made to identify many of the City's most prominent events and venues, this list is not intended to be all-inclusive.

- The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UW-W) offers many cultural opportunities that are not typically available to communities of Whitewater's size, including performing arts and sporting events. For example, the University has one of the top Division III football teams in the nation. In addition, the presence of college students in the community contributes significantly to the culture of the community.



Cravath Lake Waterfront Park provides an ideal location for community events.

- Young Auditorium, located on the UW-W campus, serves as the regional cultural and education center for the performing arts. Young Auditorium provides continuing education courses, guest lectures, student performing arts, community activities, and conference facilities. Young Auditorium provides an arena for outreach between the UW-W and the community at large.

- Opened in spring 2004, the Whitewater Aquatic and Fitness Center is a 6,000-square foot fitness center that offers personal training, aerobics, and water aerobics; and houses state of the art weight and fitness equipment. It is directly adjacent to Whitewater High School on the City's southwest side.
- Indian Mounds Park, also known as the Maples Mounds Group, is a Native American ceremonial and burial site dating back to approximately 1,000 A.D. This park features a diverse collection of animal and geometric mounds. This site continues to be used for Native American fasts and fire burning ceremonies.
- Located within Cravath Lakefront Park, Whitewater's historic Train Depot is home to the City of Whitewater's Historical Society Museum which houses artifacts and archives of the City's past. At the time of writing, the Depot was undergoing significant renovations. Cravath Lakefront Park itself is home to the City's regionally-renowned 4th of July Celebration.
- Sponsored by the Whitewater Tourism Council, the Whitewater Historic Homes Walking Tour is a historical walking guide of homes, buildings, schools, parks, and cemeteries. Landmarks include the City's octagon house, Birge fountain, and the Victorian Gothic passenger train depot.
- The Whitewater Cultural Arts Center is located in the historic White Memorial Building, which was the original home of the Whitewater Public Library, constructed in 1903.

Cultural Resource Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goal

Celebrate our City's unique character, historical and archaeological assets, and vibrant culture, which are all enhanced by the University's influence.

Objectives

1. Preserve unique historic and archaeological sites.
2. Preserve and enhance the character of Whitewater's downtown and the City's main entryways.
3. Promote and enhance the City's unique cultural assets as a source of community pride and as attractions.

Policies

1. Promote the restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings where possible, in order to enhance the viable economic use of these structures, particularly in and around the Downtown.
2. Work with the Whitewater Historical Society, the Landmarks Commission, Downtown Whitewater, Inc., its Design Committee, and property owners to protect historic and cultural resources that contribute to the City's character.
3. Ensure that new development in the downtown is compatible with the historic context and the form, height, and setbacks of existing buildings, using the City's Downtown Design Guidelines to guide decisions.
4. Effectively provide and mark important approaches, transitions, and gateways to significant community features such as the planned University Technology Park and the Walworth Avenue, Elkhorn Road, and Highway 89/59 entrances to the City.
5. Work with the Chamber of Commerce, UW-Whitewater, neighborhood associations, and other local groups and organizations to plan and support local festivals, fairs, markets, and other events that celebrate the City's heritage and culture.
6. Continue to collaborate with the University, the School District, and others to cross-promote and mutually support local events such as sporting events, performing arts events, city festivals, and other activities.

Cultural Resource Programs and Recommendations

Preserve Indian Mounds Park

Indian Mounds Park is established around a Native American ceremonial and burial site that dates back to 1000 A.D. The park has a diverse collection of burial mounds and draws people from near and far to view and learn from these historic features. To preserve and promote this important piece of local and regional history, the City has expanded the park to the west to help buffer this area from future development. If and where deemed appropriate by the State Archaeologist, the City will also support the restoration of mounds that have already been disrupted. Such projects may warrant significant investment to ensure that they are done correctly and effectively, and therefore grants and other contributions (financial and volunteer) will be sought wherever practical.

Preserve Historically and Culturally Significant Buildings

The City will continue to coordinate with the Landmarks Commission, Downtown Whitewater, Inc., the Whitewater Historical Society, and affected property owners to clearly mark existing buildings and sites that are listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places, and to nominate other buildings sites that may be appropriate for historical designation. The City will also support these organizations' efforts to educate property owners on resources available to assist with historically-sensitive remodeling projects, which include the following:

- Property owners can qualify for a 20 percent federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC) to rehabilitate their historic commercial, industrial, and rental residential properties. Preservation tax incentives are available for buildings that the Secretary of Interior has listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In Wisconsin, owners of historic properties can claim an additional five percent ITC from the State against the approved costs of the rehabilitation of their building. All work must comply with federal guidelines established in the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Building Rehabilitation.
- At the state level, another tax relief program provides a 25 percent Wisconsin ITC for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied structures that either contribute to a National Register-listed historic district or that are individually listed—or eligible for listing—with the National or State Register. To qualify, rehabilitation expenditures must exceed \$10,000 and the State Historical Society must certify that the work is compatible with the historic character of the building. All applications must be made to the State's Division of Historic Preservation, where required forms and additional information can be obtained.
- Historic property owners can apply for grant funding from the Wisconsin Humanities Council's Historic Preservation grant program. The program provides grants for projects that enhance the appreciation of important historic buildings or decorative art works. Preference is given to significant preservation projects in small towns with populations less than 30,000. All applications must be made to the Wisconsin Humanities Council, where additional information can be obtained.

Advance "Placemaking" Projects in the City

The term "placemaking" generally relates to the idea or process of adding value to both public and private spaces to enhance community identity and better connect people to the local values, history, and culture of a place. In other words, "placemaking" helps instill in people a sense that they belong to a unique and identifiable community.

Examples of placemaking projects may include constructing community or neighborhood entryway features; placing markers on historic or significant community sites; decorating buildings, structures, walkways, or sidewalks; installing or enhancing public art, small monuments, or statues; displaying unique community features or relics from the community's history; working together to construct play equipment or amenities in a public park; hanging signs or banners; planting median strips or terrace areas; and incorporating any other similar or related projects that build upon the culture, history, or unique features of a place.

Placemaking initiatives are generally carried out through locally-based revitalization projects, but need not be expensive or large-scale to be effective. During more difficult economic times, it is important to recognize the impressive achievements communities can make just by drawing upon the energy, creativity, and resources of the people who live and work in a place.

The City will continue to act as a facilitator to placemaking projects in the community where practical. The City of Whitewater has access to a diversity of talent and resources at the University and through groups like the Arts Alliance, who can continue to work with volunteers, students and professors to advance such projects.

