

SCOPE OF WORK

Feasibility Study for a Riverwalk District



Project Overview

The Core Reinvestment District Redevelopment Plan identifies the river corridor as an area where additional public access, recreation, redevelopment, and placemaking could help strengthen connections between surrounding neighborhoods, businesses, destinations, and the river itself.

A feasibility study would take the next step by evaluating whether a riverwalk district is realistic within the identified focus area and, if so, what form it could take. The study is intended to answer several fundamental questions before the Redevelopment Authority considers more detailed design or implementation work:

- Where could a riverwalk or related riverfront improvements realistically be located?
- What existing conditions or constraints would influence its design?
- How could a riverwalk connect with surrounding streets, trails, parks, neighborhoods, businesses, and redevelopment opportunities?
- What types of commercial, recreational, cultural, or public uses could realistically be supported along the corridor?
- What regulatory, environmental, infrastructure, ownership, and financial challenges would need to be addressed?
- How do nearby residents, businesses, property owners, and other users currently experience the river corridor, and what opportunities or concerns should be considered?
- Could improvements be completed in phases rather than through one large project?
- What actions should the Redevelopment Authority and City consider if the concept is determined to be feasible?

Community engagement would be incorporated at key points throughout the study. The intent would be to keep the public informed, understand how people currently use and experience the area, gather feedback on opportunities and concerns, and test potential concepts before recommendations are finalized. Engagement would be structured to provide meaningful opportunities for participation while allowing the technical feasibility work and decision-making process to continue moving forward.

STUDY TIMELINE

Phase #1 — Project Kick-Off & Stakeholder Engagement

Establish a shared understanding of what the study is intended to accomplish, identify the people and organizations that should help inform the work, and develop a clear process for gathering input throughout the project.

1. Conduct a kick-off meeting with RDA members, City staff, and key partners.

The project team would begin by reviewing the Core Reinvestment District Redevelopment Plan, discussing the goals of the riverwalk study, confirming the study area, and identifying the major questions the feasibility analysis should answer. This would also establish expectations for communication, project milestones, community engagement, and RDA involvement throughout the study.

2. Identify key stakeholders along and near the study area.

Potential participants may include adjacent property owners, businesses, residents and neighborhood representatives, civic organizations, recreational users, tourism organizations, environmental and watershed partners, developers, utilities, and other public agencies.

Particular attention should be given to individuals and organizations most directly affected by potential riverfront improvements, including nearby neighborhoods, property owners, and businesses.

3. Develop a stakeholder and public engagement plan.

The project team would recommend how and when different audiences should be involved throughout the study. Engagement methods could include targeted interviews, neighborhood meetings, small-group discussions, public workshops, surveys, online feedback opportunities, or other methods appropriate to the project.

The engagement plan should clearly distinguish between opportunities intended to inform the community, opportunities intended to collect feedback, and targeted conversations necessary to understand specific property, business, neighborhood, or implementation concerns.

The goal would be to gather meaningful input at points when it can still influence the study without creating an open-ended engagement process or delaying completion of the technical work.

4. Establish a project communication approach.

Determine how project information, schedules, maps, frequently asked questions, meeting materials, and opportunities to participate will be shared publicly throughout the study.

Deliverables

- Project kick-off memo summarizing goals, study area, major questions, and project approach
- Stakeholder identification list
- Stakeholder and public engagement plan
- Community communication approach
- Engagement schedule tied to major project milestones

Phase #2 — Existing Conditions Assessment

Establish a clear picture of what exists along the river corridor today and identify the physical, environmental, ownership, infrastructure, community, and policy conditions that would shape a future riverwalk.

1. Inventory existing land uses and property ownership.

Map public and private ownership, existing buildings, vacant or underutilized properties, public spaces, easements, and other relevant land uses. This work would help identify where public access already exists, where additional access may be possible, and where coordination with private property owners could be required.

2. Review infrastructure and utilities.

Identify known public infrastructure and utility systems within or near potential riverwalk areas, including streets, sanitary sewer, stormwater facilities, water, electrical facilities, retaining walls, and other infrastructure that could affect construction or long-term maintenance.

3. Evaluate environmental and site constraints.

Review available information related to floodplain boundaries, wetlands, shoreline conditions, topography, soils, erosion potential, environmental contamination, and other conditions that could limit development or require additional investigation.

4. Evaluate transportation and access.

Document how people currently move through and around the study area by walking, bicycling, driving, transit, and other modes. Particular attention would be given to existing trails, sidewalks, crossings, bridges, parking areas, trail gaps, and potential connections to surrounding destinations and neighborhoods.

5. Review zoning, redevelopment plans, and applicable City policies.

Determine how existing zoning, comprehensive planning, redevelopment plans, transportation plans, parks plans, neighborhood plans, and other adopted policies relate to the river corridor and could support or constrain future improvements.

6. Gather community perspectives on existing conditions.

Use early stakeholder and neighborhood engagement to better understand how residents, businesses, property owners, and recreational users experience the area today. Feedback could help identify issues that may not be obvious through mapping or technical analysis, such as difficult crossings, safety concerns, informal access points, valued views, neighborhood connections, underused spaces, or locations people already view as community assets.

This phase should focus primarily on understanding existing conditions and community experience rather than asking participants to select a preferred design before alternatives have been developed.

Deliverables

- Existing conditions report
- Maps illustrating ownership, land use, transportation, environmental conditions, infrastructure, and other key features
- Summary of major opportunities and constraints
- Summary of stakeholder, neighborhood, and public feedback related to existing conditions

Phase #3 — Market & Economic Analysis

Determine what kinds of activity could realistically be supported along the river corridor and how a riverwalk could contribute to surrounding redevelopment, business activity, tourism, recreation, and placemaking.

1. Study comparable riverwalk districts.

Review riverwalks and riverfront redevelopment projects in communities with characteristics relevant to Eau Claire. Case studies would examine how other communities have approached design, programming, public-private development, funding, maintenance, neighborhood integration, seasonal use, and connections between riverfront amenities and surrounding commercial districts.

2. Evaluate the visitor and user market.

Review available information about local residents, regional visitors, downtown activity, tourism patterns, nearby employment, recreation, and major destinations to better understand who could use the riverwalk and when activity is most likely to occur.

Feedback collected from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders should also help inform how people currently use the corridor and what types of activities or destinations may attract future use.

3. Evaluate potential supporting uses.

Consider the types and scale of uses that could complement a riverwalk, including restaurants, cafes, retail, recreation, entertainment, cultural attractions, lodging, office uses, residential development, event spaces, or temporary and seasonal activities.

The analysis should distinguish between uses that appear realistically supportable based on market conditions and ideas that would likely require significant subsidy or a broader change in the surrounding market.

4. Consider neighborhood compatibility and community benefit.

Evaluate how different types of activity could interact with surrounding neighborhoods and existing businesses. Consider potential benefits such as improved access, recreation, public gathering spaces, business activity, and redevelopment as well as possible concerns related to parking, traffic, noise, operating hours, event activity, or other impacts.

5. Consider economic development and redevelopment potential.

Evaluate whether riverfront improvements could help support reinvestment in surrounding properties, improve connections between existing destinations, create new development opportunities, or strengthen the overall identity of the district.

Deliverables

- Market and economic analysis report
- Comparable community case studies and key lessons
- Assessment of potential uses and activity generators
- Discussion of neighborhood compatibility and potential community benefits
- Summary of potential economic development and redevelopment opportunities

Phase #4 — Concept Plan Development

Translate the study's findings into realistic conceptual options showing how a riverwalk and surrounding district could function, then gather community feedback before a preferred direction is identified.

1. Develop potential riverwalk alignments.

Prepare conceptual alternatives showing where a riverwalk could potentially be located based on property ownership, physical conditions, environmental constraints, connectivity, community input, and redevelopment opportunities.

Alternatives may include combinations of riverfront paths, on-street connections, bridges or crossings, overlooks, trail connections, or other approaches where continuous riverfront access is not practical.

2. Identify potential access points and activity nodes.

Determine where people could enter the riverwalk and where higher levels of activity may be appropriate. These locations could include trailheads, plazas, parks, gathering spaces, intersections, bridges, commercial areas, or connections to existing community destinations.

3. Explore public spaces, amenities, and programming opportunities.

Identify amenities that could support year-round use of the corridor, such as seating areas, lighting, public art, landscaping, overlooks, recreational features, event spaces, wayfinding, winter activities, or temporary programming.

4. Integrate the riverwalk with neighborhoods and redevelopment opportunities.

Consider how potential riverwalk improvements would connect with surrounding neighborhoods as well as redevelopment sites. Concepts should evaluate how buildings, streets, public spaces, river access, and neighborhood connections could reinforce one another rather than treating the riverwalk as an isolated trail project.

5. Present conceptual alternatives for public and stakeholder feedback.

Share a manageable number of realistic concept alternatives with residents, nearby property and business owners, recreational users, and other interested stakeholders.

Engagement at this stage should focus on understanding tradeoffs rather than asking participants to design the project themselves. Feedback should help identify which elements are most valued, which concerns require additional consideration, and whether important opportunities or impacts have been overlooked.

6. Refine the concepts based on technical analysis and community feedback.

The project team would consider public input alongside environmental, regulatory, market, cost, property, and engineering considerations when identifying a recommended or preferred concept.

A preferred concept may not necessarily represent every individual preference received during engagement. The final recommendation should explain how public feedback was considered and where technical or implementation constraints influenced the outcome.

7. Develop preliminary implementation phases.

Determine whether the riverwalk could be constructed incrementally as redevelopment occurs, funding becomes available, property access is secured, or infrastructure projects are completed.

Deliverables

- Conceptual riverwalk alternatives
- Maps and graphics illustrating alignments, access points, activity areas, neighborhood connections, and redevelopment opportunities
- Public and stakeholder feedback summary
- Explanation of how community input influenced concept refinement
- Recommended or preferred concept, if supported by the analysis
- Preliminary phasing strategy

Phase #5 — Regulatory, Environmental & Implementation Review

Identify the major regulatory, environmental, infrastructure, property, financial, and implementation issues that would need to be resolved before a riverwalk could advance into engineering or construction.

1. Identify likely regulatory approvals and permits.

Review potential requirements associated with floodplain development, shoreland regulations, wetlands, waterways, erosion control, stormwater, and other applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

Early coordination with appropriate regulatory agencies should be used to identify significant concerns before substantial design work occurs.

2. Identify property and access considerations.

Determine where public ownership or existing easements may accommodate improvements and where property acquisition, easements, development agreements, or partnerships with private property owners could potentially be necessary.

Direct conversations with affected property owners should occur where appropriate to better understand existing conditions and identify potential concerns or partnership opportunities. These discussions would be exploratory and should not imply that the City has made a decision to acquire property or advance a specific alignment.

3. Identify infrastructure considerations.

Evaluate whether major utilities, retaining structures, road improvements, drainage systems, or other infrastructure would need to be relocated, reconstructed, protected, or incorporated into future riverwalk improvements.

4. Identify environmental risks requiring additional study.

Flag locations where further environmental assessment, geotechnical investigation, shoreline stabilization analysis, contaminated-site investigation, or other technical work may be necessary.

5. Develop preliminary cost considerations.

Prepare planning-level estimates or cost ranges for major components of the concept. At the feasibility stage, these estimates would be intended to establish the approximate scale of investment rather than serve as detailed construction estimates.

6. Identify potential implementation and funding approaches.

Outline possible implementation tools, public-private partnerships, grant programs, redevelopment tools, capital improvement opportunities, or other funding mechanisms that could be explored if the project advances.

7. Identify future engagement needs.

Determine where additional neighborhood, property owner, business, or broader public engagement would be appropriate during later design and implementation phases. The feasibility study should distinguish between questions that need to be resolved now and those that would be more appropriately addressed during engineering, detailed design, property acquisition, or construction planning.

Deliverables

- Regulatory and permitting matrix
- Property and infrastructure considerations summary
- Risk and constraints assessment
- Planning-level cost ranges
- Preliminary implementation and funding strategy
- Recommended community engagement needs for future project phases

Phase #6 — Final Report & Presentation

Bring the study's findings together into a clear set of conclusions and recommendations that the Redevelopment Authority can use to determine whether and how to advance the riverwalk concept.

1. Prepare a draft feasibility report.

The report would compile the findings from each phase of the project and explain the opportunities, limitations, costs, community considerations, and implementation issues associated with creating a riverwalk district.

2. Document community and stakeholder engagement.

Provide a clear summary of who was engaged, what methods were used, the major themes heard throughout the process, and how feedback influenced the analysis and recommendations.

The report should distinguish between broadly shared themes, issues raised by directly affected stakeholders, and individual comments. Public feedback should be presented as one important component of the feasibility analysis alongside technical, environmental, market, regulatory, and financial considerations.

3. Develop clear recommendations and next steps.

Rather than simply presenting concepts, the study should identify what actions would be necessary to move the project forward. Recommendations may include additional engineering or environmental studies, property acquisition or easement discussions, funding applications, redevelopment activities, partnerships, additional neighborhood or public engagement, or detailed design work.

4. Share study findings with the community.

Provide an accessible summary of the study's conclusions, recommended concept, major considerations, and next steps so participants and the broader community can see the outcome of the process and understand how feedback was incorporated.

5. Present findings to the Redevelopment Authority.

The project team would present the study's major findings, conceptual alternatives, community feedback, feasibility considerations, and recommended next steps to the RDA and respond to questions from members.

Deliverables

- Draft feasibility study
- Community and stakeholder engagement summary
- Executive summary
- Final feasibility study incorporating RDA and staff feedback
- Public-facing project summary
- Presentation materials
- Recommended next steps and implementation priorities

Key Considerations Throughout the Study

Community & Neighborhood Engagement

The study should provide meaningful opportunities for residents, businesses, property owners, and other stakeholders to understand the project and provide input at points when that feedback can help shape the work.

Engagement should be proportionate to the decisions being made during the feasibility stage. The goal is not to ask the community to design the riverwalk or achieve unanimous agreement on every element. Instead, engagement should help the project team understand how the area functions today, identify community priorities and concerns, evaluate conceptual alternatives, and avoid overlooking important local knowledge.

Particular attention should be given to neighborhoods, businesses, and property owners most directly affected by potential changes.

The project team should also communicate back to participants by explaining what was heard, what changed as a result, and where technical, regulatory, financial, or property constraints affected the final recommendations.

Transparency & Project Communication

Because a feasibility study involves evaluating ideas that may ultimately change or prove impractical, communication should clearly distinguish between concepts being studied and decisions that have actually been made.

Maps, concept drawings, cost estimates, and potential alignments should be described as preliminary until adopted or advanced by the Redevelopment Authority or City.

Regular project communication should help residents understand what stage the study is in, what questions are currently being evaluated, when public input is most useful, and what decisions will come next.

Floodplain, Shoreline & Water Quality

The river is the project's greatest asset but also creates some of its most significant development constraints. Floodplain regulations, shoreline conditions, wetlands, stormwater management, erosion, water quality, and other environmental factors should be considered early so concepts are developed around realistic conditions rather than identifying major obstacles later in the process.

Economic Activity & Year-Round Use

A successful riverwalk would need to function as more than a pathway along the river. The study should consider what brings people to the area, gives them reasons to stay, and encourages repeated use.

Restaurants, businesses, housing, recreation, cultural attractions, public spaces, events, and nearby employment can all contribute to activity. Particular attention should be given to how the riverwalk could function throughout different times of day and different seasons while remaining compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

Connectivity

The riverwalk should be considered as part of Eau Claire's larger transportation, trail, park, downtown, and neighborhood networks. Connections to existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, parks, bridges, streets, transit, nearby destinations, and surrounding neighborhoods will be important to determining whether the riverwalk can become part of everyday movement through the district rather than functioning as a stand-alone attraction.

Redevelopment

One of the study's central questions should be how riverfront improvements and private redevelopment could reinforce one another. Public investment may help create redevelopment opportunities, while new development may provide activity, destinations, connections, or infrastructure that make a riverwalk more successful.

The study should identify where those relationships appear strongest and where future redevelopment projects could help gradually implement the larger riverwalk vision.

Public Access & Private Property

Portions of a potential riverwalk may involve privately owned property. The study should not assume that continuous public access along the river can be achieved immediately.

Instead, it should identify existing public access, potential future connections, alternative alignments, and areas where partnerships or easements could become part of longer-term redevelopment efforts. Affected property owners should be engaged early enough to identify concerns and opportunities, while recognizing that formal property negotiations would generally occur during later implementation phases.

Phased Implementation

The feasibility study should recognize that a riverwalk district would likely develop over many years rather than as a single construction project. Recommendations should identify improvements that could occur independently, opportunities that could be coordinated with future redevelopment or infrastructure projects, and longer-term elements that may require additional property, funding, or planning.

A phased approach can also create opportunities for continued neighborhood and public involvement as individual sections move from conceptual planning into detailed design.

Long-Term Operations & Maintenance

Concept development should also consider what happens after improvements are built. Different types of landscaping, public spaces, lighting, amenities, programming, and riverfront infrastructure carry different maintenance responsibilities and costs.

The study should identify significant long-term operational considerations so that feasibility is evaluated based not only on the ability to construct the project, but also the City's ability to maintain and activate it over time.