

EAU CLAIRE WINTERMISSION

WINTER CITY STRATEGY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From January 2019 to December 2020, Wintermission Eau Claire set out to reduce social isolation by changing how Eau Claireians live, move, and play in winter. Over two years, Wintermission engaged thousands of residents on the barriers preventing them from engaging in social and physical activity in winter, and then piloted out a series of interventions to reduce those barriers by bringing public life back to public spaces in colder months.

The Eau Claire Winter City Strategy provides a path for Eau Claire to build upon existing assets to become a global winter-city leader. This strategy was created by 8 80 Cities, a non-profit organization with international expertise in creating equitable, dynamic, and vibrant parks, streets, and public spaces, in consultation with local Wintermission Eau Claire organizers.

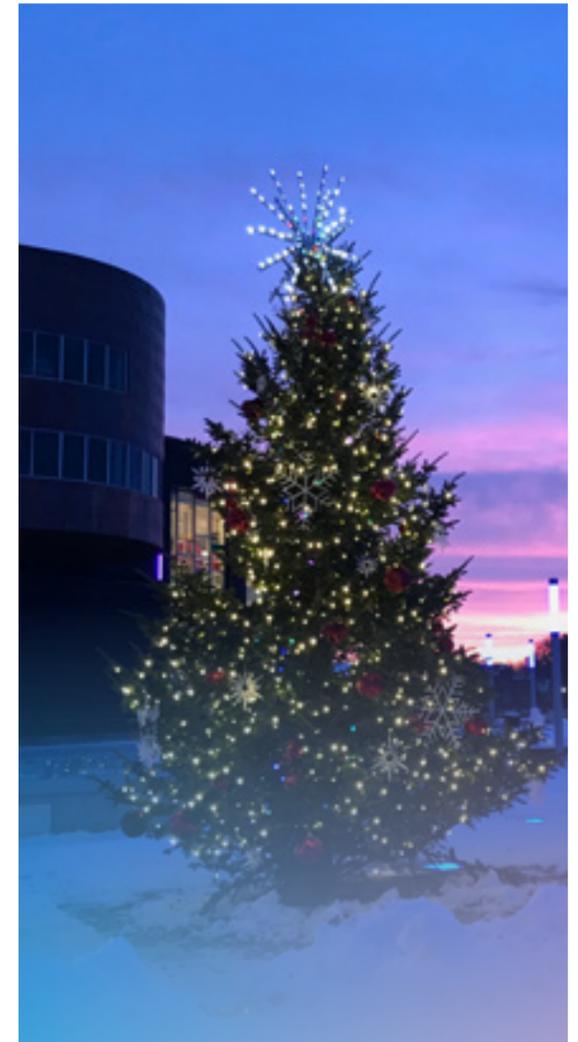
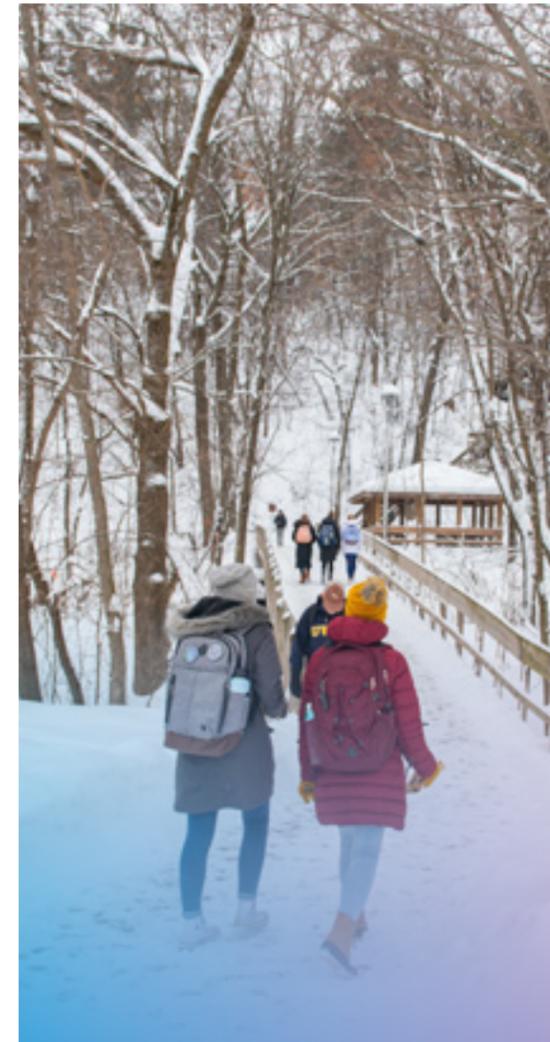
Over the course of the project, we spoke to residents from across Eau Claire, including city and county staff, businesses, community leaders, elected officials, non-profit organizations, and advocacy groups. We engaged these stakeholders through online surveys, interviews, workshops, and pop-up engagement tactics. This process provided an accurate picture of what winter in Eau Claire is like, as well as the challenges and opportunities present for improving social connections. We heard that better snow management, more affordable activities, and places to warm up were key to encouraging residents to spend more time outdoors in winter. Residents identified plowing of sidewalks, weather protection in public spaces, colorful lighting, and varied festivals and events as initiatives the city should pursue to reduce social isolation during colder months.

Based on this feedback, Wintermission Eau Claire planned, implemented, and evaluated four pilot projects over the winter of 2020:

- Dedicated Winter Route - A 4-mile long dedicated winter recreation path that created a circuit through downtown
- Winter Wayfinding and Signage - New and improved signage helped guide residents to key winter activities or attractions
- Winter Gear Share - Free winter sports gear was made available for check out in Pinehurst Park, and at the public libraries in Eau Claire and Altoona

- Winter Media Campaign - A coordinated approach to change how residents and media talk about winter

The lessons learned from these pilot projects and from the engagement process served as the basis for the Eau Claire Winter City Strategy. The strategy focuses on three key pillars that are at the core of the city's efforts to reduce social isolation and build a more inclusive winter culture.



WINTERMISSION EAU CLAIRE'S VISION AND WINTER CITY PILLARS

VISION STATEMENT

Eau Claire is a city that embraces winter, year-round activity, and wellness by providing safe access to community resources.

Three main priority areas for increasing social and physical activity form the pillars of the winter city strategy. Each recommendation relates to one or more of the pillars.

All pillars are supported by a foundational belief in increasing the equity and inclusiveness of winter for diverse populations.

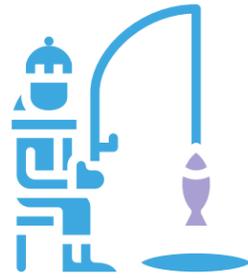
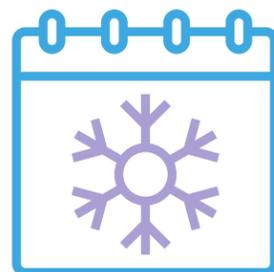


Pillar 1: Winter Accessibility

The City of Eau Claire will work collaboratively toward prioritizing mobility and safe access to winter public life.

Pillar 2: Winter Events & Recreation

Driven by collaborative efforts from local partners, Eau Claire will develop and sustain diverse winter programming that caters to all.



Pillar 3: Winter Culture

Eau Claire's winter culture will support all communities in embracing and celebrating the unique, fun, and social aspects of winter.

This strategy summarizes the feedback gathered from the community engagement process and the lessons learned from the pilot project initiatives. It highlights 22 recommendations to help guide Eau Claire to the next phase of becoming a fantastic winter city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

1.1 Expand Winter Gear Share – Expand the successful Wintermission pilot project offering free access to recreational winter gear.

1.2 Expand Winter After Hours – Bring elements of “Winter After Hours” in Pinehurst Park to neighborhoods and parks across the city.

1.3 Winter Business Pledge Campaign – Encourage businesses owners to take an official pledge to embrace winter and work together to make winter an asset for local entrepreneurs.

1.4 Public Music – Support local musicians and Eau Claire's cultural industry with outdoor winter concerts.

1.5 Warming Hut Competition – Partner with local artists and designers to build warming huts around the city. Offer prizes for the most innovative or fun designs.

1.6 Snow Sculpture Competition – Support local neighborhoods in competing against each other to see who can create the best snow sculptures.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

2.1 Enhance + Expand Winter Route – Expand the successful Wintermission pilot project. Options for expansion include lengthening the route or adding programmatic elements.

2.2 Signage + Wayfinding for Trails – Make it easier for residents to access outdoor recreational opportunities with improved wayfinding and signage to key destinations.

2.3 Ski Lift in Pinehurst Park – Improve accessibility and usage of the Pinehurst Park for tubing and sledding.

2.4 Winter Greenhouse + Gardening – Make age-friendly activities like gardening and urban agricultural accessible all year round through a winter greenhouse.

2.5 Winter Block Party Kits – Support residents and community groups in programming their neighborhoods for winter fun with winter activation kits.

2.6 Warming Zones – Use fire pits, drop-in warming stations in public buildings, and even pop-up saunas to encourage people to spend more time outdoors.

2.7 Fat Tire Bike Share – Provide affordable or free access to fat bikes with a bike share program that will expand active mobility options in winter.

2.8 Senior Center Shuttle – Make it easier for older adults to access the L.E. Phillips Senior Center during colder months by providing a free shuttle service to and from the center.

2.9 Bus Stop Enhancements – Improve the experience of transit users by adding weather protection and other amenities to transit stops and stations.

PLANS, POLICIES, AND GUIDES

3.1 Build Out EauWinter.com – Continue the work begun by the Wintermission Eau Claire pilot project and develop further a social media campaign to change how residents think and talk about winter.

3.2 Warming Location Guide – Create a simple to use and access resource that plots out the many locations in Eau Claire where residents can duck inside to warm up.

3.3 Rooftop Shoveling Guide – Develop a resource with tips and tools for keeping rooftops safe and clear of too much snow.

3.4 Winter Design Guidelines – Plan for warmth, light, and comfort in winter by developing a planning framework to support future winter-friendly development and initiatives.

3.5 Winter Tourism Strategy – Unlock economic opportunities by marketing the many natural landscapes and recreational opportunities in the Chippewa Valley.

3.6 Winter Innovation Awards – Encourage local businesses to program for winter by giving out awards for best winter cocktail, holiday storefront, and other winter-themed competitions.

3.7 Plow Municipal Sidewalks – Clear municipal sidewalks of snow and ice to increase residents' access and participation in winter social activities.

Eau Claire already has in place the ingredients required to become a fantastic winter city, one that puts the needs of the most vulnerable at the center of efforts to reduce social isolation and increase winter public life. As the Wintermission Eau Claire team moves forward with implementing these initiatives, the next key step will be working with local communities on prioritizing which initiatives should be focused on first.