



MAEDC Awards 2022  
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation  
Category: Placemaking

## DESTINATION MAYVILLE

*Southern Wisconsin community makes judicious use of public-private partnerships to add new attractions and revitalize familiar ones*

Located at the edge of a national wildlife refuge in southern Wisconsin, Mayville is off the beaten path. Growth requires local developers, the city, business owners and community members to work together to capitalize on what makes the small city special and meet their community's own needs.

Although Mayville's revitalization efforts started more than 30 years ago, it was in 2018 after joining the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC's) Wisconsin Main Street Program that a coordinated public/private effort began to pay off.

A focus on creating a unique sense of place for this historic riverfront town has resulted in more than \$2.8 million in private investment to renovate 15 district properties during this time, even amid the pandemic.

Two initial WEDC Wisconsin Main Street Program technical assistance visits provided a common framework for coordinating efforts—a waterfront and public space activation plan and a marketing and branding toolkit.

Public sector initiatives were important to catalyze effort, including the creation of a façade improvement program and revolving loan fund to support private investment, incorporating bike and pedestrian trail improvements to coincide with recent road construction efforts, enhancing the downtown gateway by installing interactive sculptural letters on a brownfield site, and partnering with the community to furnish and program the Mayville Park Square community plaza in the heart of downtown. By the end of its second season, this community plaza will have hosted 22 activities, drawing new life and energy into the community.

Other civic partners have also done their part, with the Rotary Club funding pedestrian bridge lighting, enhancements to Mayville Park Square, and kayak and bike rental programs in the community. Businesses have also contributed to and programmed around the space, with True Value donating a cabinet of yard games and five local restaurants creating to-go food specials for patrons heading to the square.

By working together, the city, WEDC and other civic partners were able to connect businesses and property owners with available resources, resulting in several large-scale renovations in this community of 4,875. These projects included a new home for the nonprofit Open Door Mayville. The nonprofit, which runs parenting, mental health and youth

**LOOK FORWARD** ➤

programming, purchased and renovated a historic theater property to turn it into the Open Door Coffeehouse, which quickly became an accessible gathering place for the community.

A historic, long-vacant corner property lured a Minnesota pie maker to town. With grant funding from WEDC, Sweet Pea's Pie was able to include a retail storefront in their business plans.

Work is also underway to renovate the former Mayville High School—an iconic red brick building designed by noted La Crosse architectural firm Parkinson & Dockendorff—into 20 apartments. Over the past three decades, the project had been proposed and stalled three times. In total, state funds of \$2.1 million leveraged \$2 million in private investment, which, combined with other private investment, increased the property tax base of downtown by 20%.

Local businesses were also able to tap into funding opportunities, including nearly \$60,000 in local façade grants, \$5,000 in Kiva matching funds to help open the retail element of Sweet Pea's Pie, and \$30,000 in Main Street Bounceback Grant dollars to open three new businesses in formerly vacant spaces along Main Street. In addition, Fred's Beds and More won WEDC's statewide Main Street Makeover Contest, bringing with it \$10,000 to help renovate and merchandise the growing furniture shop.

The success of small businesses like these has attracted still greater interest in Mayville as a business destination. The historic Audubon Inn has new owners, an expanding salon bought and renovated the historic newspaper offices, and the iconic historic Ruedebusch Building was just purchased by out-of-town investors hoping to create additional commercial and residential opportunities in the property.

"What we're trying to do is turn Mayville into a destination for new businesses and travel enthusiasts," said Dawn Gindt, manager of Mayville's Main Street program and Chamber of Commerce administrator. "We are a rural community. We have the same struggles everyone does in terms of funding. WEDC and their continued generous support has really helped us make great strides."

