

~~WINTER~~ EAU CLAIRE INTERMISSION ❄️ N

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
SUMMARY REPORT**

Wintermission Eau Claire is led locally by the City of Eau Claire, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Eau Claire City-County Health Department, Visit Eau Claire and the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. The program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. This report was prepared by 880 Cities in July 2019.

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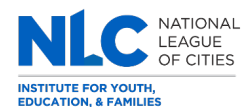


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INTRODUCTION



ABOUT WINTERMISSION

Wintermission is an innovative program that aims to combat social isolation and increase levels of physical activity in winter for all residents, no matter their age, ability, race, sexuality, ethnicity or gender.

Winter is a wonderful time of year, especially in communities like Eau Claire, where the natural surroundings provide many opportunities for outdoor recreation. It is also a challenging time of year. Lack of sunlight, cold weather, snow, and ice can make it difficult to get around and often prevents people from venturing outdoors. These challenges are exacerbated for people who have limited mobility like children and older adults, or are new to a winter community and may not have the time, resources, or experience to adapt to the elements. As a result, winter leads many people to experience feelings of loneliness and social isolation which are known to have detrimental effects on our physical and mental health.

Wintermission Eau Claire aims to reduce social isolation through building on Eau Claire's unique winter climate and culture by addressing barriers that prevent people from getting the most out of the season.

The program unfolds in three phases. In the first phase, residents, visitors, business owners, and other community stakeholders are invited to share their experiences of winter life in Eau Claire. This first step provides insight into what people love about winter in Eau Claire, and what improvements would make life easier, bring people together, and encourage more outdoor physical activity. In the second phase, the Wintermission Eau Claire team will collaborate with local partners to implement a series of pilot projects, based on ideas from the community, to live-test new winter programs, events, policies, and design interventions. In phase three, the



outcomes of the engagement and pilot projects will be used to develop a Winter City Strategy, providing a long-term road-map to continue improving winter life in Eau Claire.

This report summarizes the key findings from the first round of engagement and sets a framework for the second phase of Wintermission, which will bring the community's ideas to life.

TIMELINE



Wintermission Cities Selected

January 2019

Buffalo, NY, Eau Claire, WI, and Leadville, CO selected through a national competition to participate in Wintermission

Pilot Project Planning

June - September 2019

Wintermission teams review community feedback and identify new ideas to improve life in winter

Winter City Strategy Development

March-July 2020

Using lessons learned, the Eau Claire Winter City Strategy provides recommendations to continue improving public life in winter

Community Engagement

March - May 2019

Start a city-wide conversation about what people love about winter in Eau Claire and what could be improved

Pilot Project Implementation

October - March 2020

Wintermission Eau Claire teams test a series of programs, activities, and events to animate public spaces in winter

TEAM

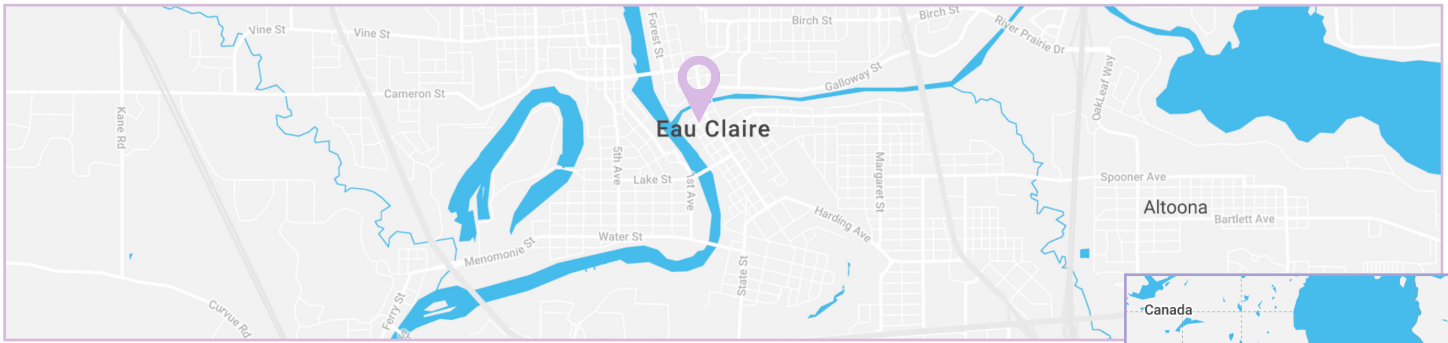


Representatives from Wintermission Eau Claire convened at the 2019 Winter Cities Shake Up conference.

Wintermission is led by 80 Cities, an international non-profit organization that works with communities to create safe and happy cities that prioritize people's well-being. The program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. Our partners include the Children and Nature Network and the National League of Cities.

In November 2018, 80 Cities launched a call for program partners and challenged U.S. cities to assemble diverse teams that would advance the goals of Wintermission. The response was astounding with 62 cities of all sizes submitting applications. Three cities were selected: Buffalo, New York; Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and; Leadville, Colorado. Representing diverse geographic locations and population sizes, these three cities will set new standards and precedents for winter friendly cities in the United States.

All three cities assembled multidisciplinary teams of city leaders committed to reducing social isolation and improving public life in winter. In Eau Claire, the lead applicants include representatives from Eau Claire City-County Health Department, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, the City of Eau Claire, Visit Eau Claire, and the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire.



WINTER IN EAU CLAIRE

There are many opinions on what constitutes a “Winter City.” Some researchers go by the average temperature in January. Others use the number of days with snowfall each year. No matter what criteria or definition you use, Eau Claire is a bonafide Winter City. Here’s a quick look at Eau Claire’s Winter City credentials:



Population: (2017): 68,587 (Eau Claire) 103,671 (Eau Claire County)



City motto: Voici l’eau claire! (Here is the clear water!)



Average annual snowfall: 47” (more than the average annual rainfall)



Average number of days with sub-zero temperatures: 50



Average temperature in January: 1 °F (low) 21 °F (high)



20% of adult population reports more than 7 days of poor mental health in winter



Park space: 33 parks and green spaces. That’s one park for every 2,078 residents

ParkScore: 62% of Eau Claire residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park. The national average in U.S. cities is 56%, according to the Trust for Public Land. 56% of children and 58% of older adults live within a 10-minute walk of a park.



EXISTING WINTER RESOURCES

Wintermission Eau Claire began every conversation with community members by asking what they like about the season. There is so much to love about winter in Eau Claire. Below is a summary of the existing resources, assets, places, people, and organizations that Wintermission Eau Claire will leverage and build on.

Winter Beauty: Winter aesthetic as seen at the various city parks, trails, and general city surroundings. Eau Claireans are proud of the natural beauty of their city and make the most of opportunities to be outside participating in winter activities. This positive connection to Eau Claire's winter conditions is an important aspect for the Wintermission project.

Outdoor Activities: Eau Claireans love being outside all year round, in large part due to the natural beauty of their surroundings. World-class cross country skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, hockey and snowboarding are all common activities that reduce social isolation in winter by getting Eau Claireans outside and bringing them together. Access to these activities is highly prized by participating residents.

Indoor Social Spaces: Eau Claire has a number of facilities and indoor community spaces where people can meet and gather in winter. The Pablo Center, L.E. Phillips Senior Center, Altoona Public Library, L.E. Phillips Memorial Library, and the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire already serve as community hubs that bring people together. These spaces provide limitless opportunities for residents to animate and host winter-themed events.

Winter After Hours and Let it Glow: These are Eau Claire's marquee winter events that residents felt most connected to. Residents love bringing light, warmth, movement, and energy to their streets and parks in the darkest, coldest months of the year. Winter After Hours and Let it Glow are public events for people to enjoy winter activities such as cross country skiing, ice skating or s'mores making all outdoors. These events

and programs illustrate how much residents love being outside during winter in Eau Claire.

University of Wisconsin Eau Claire: UW-Eau Claire is an important municipal asset and key Wintermission partner. The campus itself serves as a major community hub for thousands of residents. Various groups take part in the campus community all throughout the winter time and animate public spaces for others to enjoy. In 1905, the president of the university, Charles Van Hise said "I shall never be content until the beneficent influence of the university reaches every family of the state." UW-Eau Claire carries on that tradition today.

Committed Leadership: Eau Claire has dozens of local leaders, organizations, and institutions that are highly engaged and committed to helping the community thrive. These stakeholders include the Eau Claire City Manager, City Councillors and Council President. They also include City and County staff from a variety of departments who are accustomed to collaborating towards a common goal. Grassroots organizations and local institutions such as Outdoor More, Visit Eau Claire, JONAH (Joining Our Neighbors Advancing Hope), UW-Eau Claire, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation also provide vital leadership. Many of these people and organizations gave hours of their time to provide input and ideas during the Wintermission Eau Claire engagement process. This level of commitment will be critical to the long-term implementation and success of Eau Claire's forthcoming Winter City Strategy.



ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

WHAT WE DID

Wintermission is led by 88o Cities, and guided by everyone who lives, works, plays, or visits Eau Claire and Eau Claire County. In March 2019, the Wintermission team began a comprehensive and inclusive community engagement process to ensure that a wide range of voices and experiences were included in the process.

This engagement process included meetings with local businesses, front line service providers, stakeholder workshops, focus groups, online surveys, and a series of public pop-up events.

The following section describes these engagement methods and summarizes correlating findings.



1,000+
People Engaged



533
People Attended Engagement Events



471
Survey Responses



Pop-up Engagement at Pinehurst Park, Winter After Hours

POP-UPS ENGAGEMENT HUBS

Pop-Up Engagement Hubs were held in 13 different locations across Eau Claire. These sessions use a ‘go-to-them’ approach by locating places where people already visit as part of their daily routines. This helps reduce barriers to participation and ensures intergenerational and diverse members of the community have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the Wintermission process. Passers-by are invited to share their perspective with the Wintermission Eau Claire team through visual and informal conversations or by participating in dotmocracy surveys to indicate what types of improvements they would like to see. In appreciation of their time, participants received small tokens of thanks like free coffee and mini waffles or Wintermission stickers and hats.

The Engagement Hubs took place in a variety of settings at different times of the day and days of the week. Locations included the L.E. Phillips Senior Center, Altoona Public Library, Shift Cyclery and Coffee Bar, Eau Claire Area of Chamber of Commerce, River Prairie Festival, Eau Claire Ski Striders, Eau Claire Healthy Communities Annual Celebration, Pablo Center, Visit Eau Claire and La Luna grocery store. We also gave away free s’mores at Pinehurst Park during the Winter After Hours program, which was one of the busiest Engagement Hubs.

FOCUS GROUPS

Seven in-depth conversations with specific communities and groups were held as part of the engagement process. These sessions allowed for more extensive discussions around the barriers preventing residents from engaging in social and physical activity in winter and identified potential solutions, opportunities and resources that can be brought to bear to address those barriers.

Each focus group began with a presentation on the goals of Wintermission Eau Claire, followed by a facilitated discussion on the barriers preventing residents from participating in social and physical activity outdoors in winter. This was followed by a brainstorming session of potential solutions to those issues. Focus group participants were provided free snacks and translators were made available when requested.

STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

We held a stakeholder workshop during our engagement process with City and County staff from Transportation, Public Works, Parks, and Public Health, elected officials, local service providers and NGOs, and other Wintermission stakeholders. Participants collaborated in groups to identify the challenges of accessing public space in winter, and mapped key assets and resources present in Eau Claire that could be utilized to overcome those challenges. Groups then developed action plans to further the engagement process and connect with Eau Claireans of all socio-economic backgrounds.

SURVEYS

The Wintermission Eau Claire survey was available in print and online formats in both Spanish and English. It was recognized that there are other popular languages and dialects spoken in Eau Claire, however due to limitation the survey was made available in the two most common written languages. The questions asked in the survey were consistent with the questions posed to participants at the workshops and pop-up engagement events. Physical copies of the survey were also distributed in person at River Prairie Festival, Airport Neighborhood Association, Ski Striders, Shift Cyclery and Coffee Bar, City Council meetings, and Young Professional Chamber meetings. Wintermission Eau Claire received 471 responses between March 2 – May 31, 2019. This report includes a summary of survey responses on pages 15-19.



COMMUNITY RESPONSES

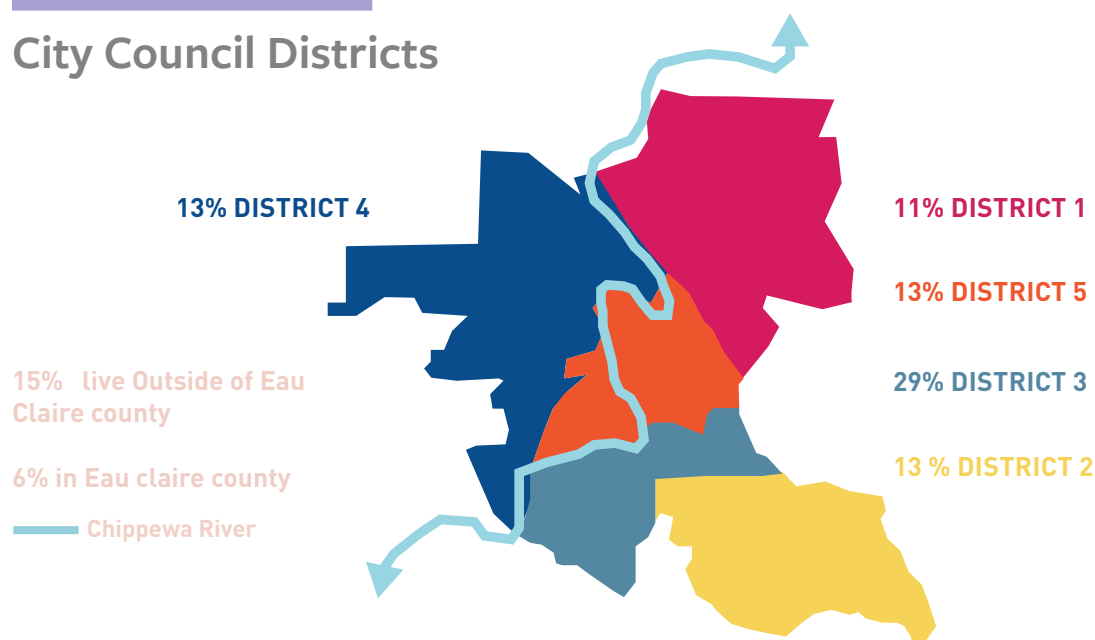




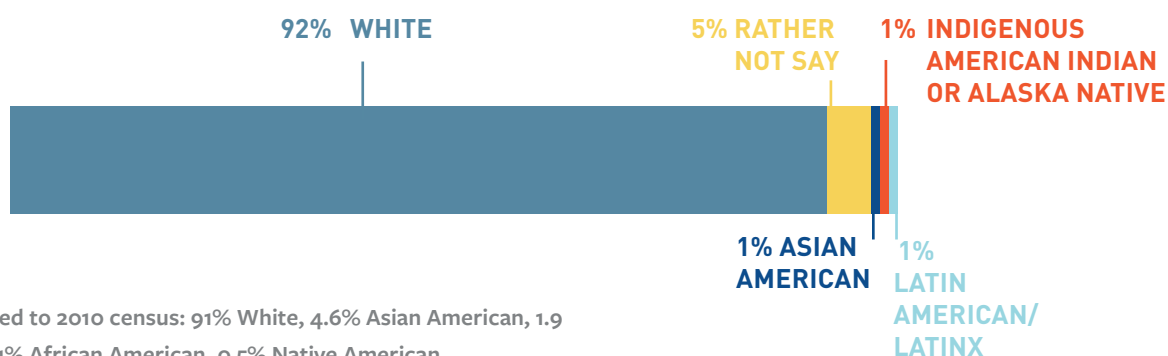
SURVEY RESPONSES

DEMOGRAPHICS

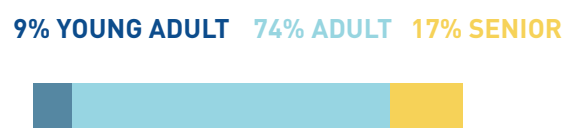
City Council Districts



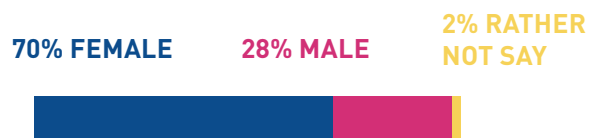
Ethnic Background



Age

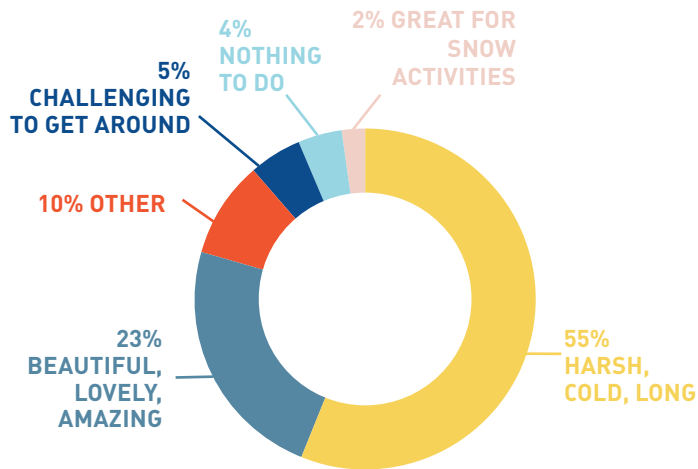


Gender

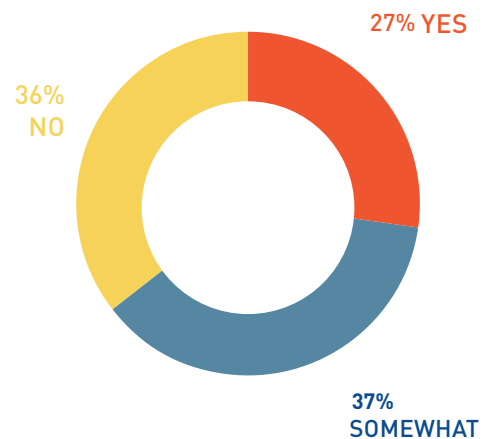


CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH WINTER

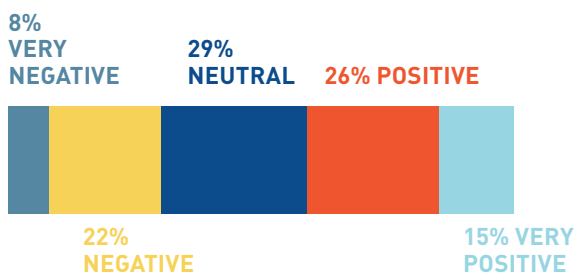
Winter in Eau Claire is:



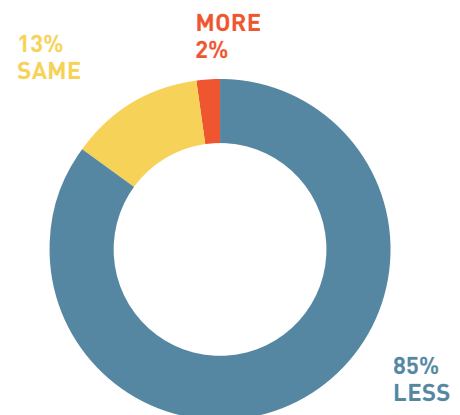
Do you experience feelings of isolation or a lack of contact with friends and family in the winter?



How would you describe your overall attitude towards winter?

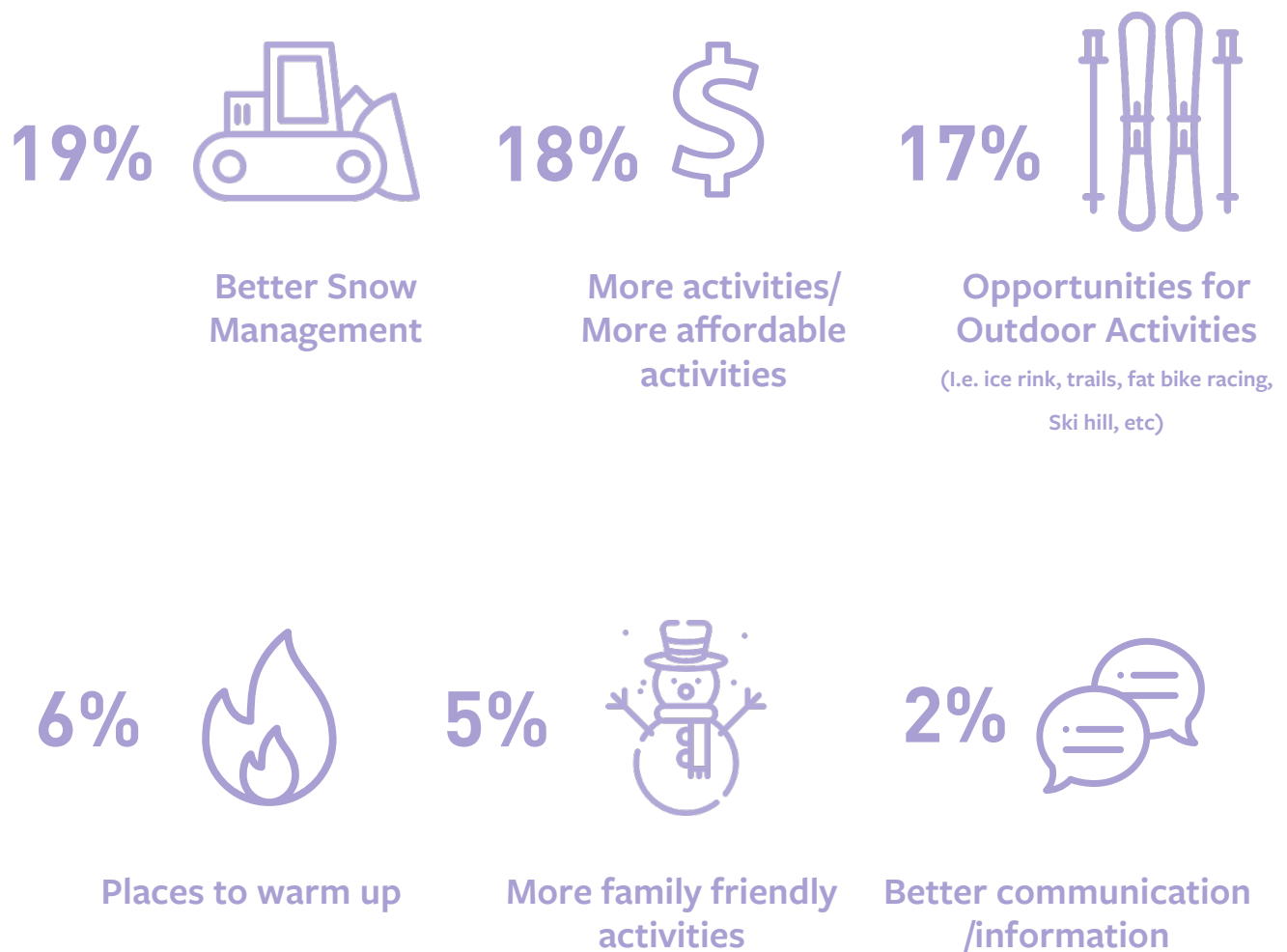


How much time do you spend outdoors during the winter compared to the rest of the year?



CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH WINTER

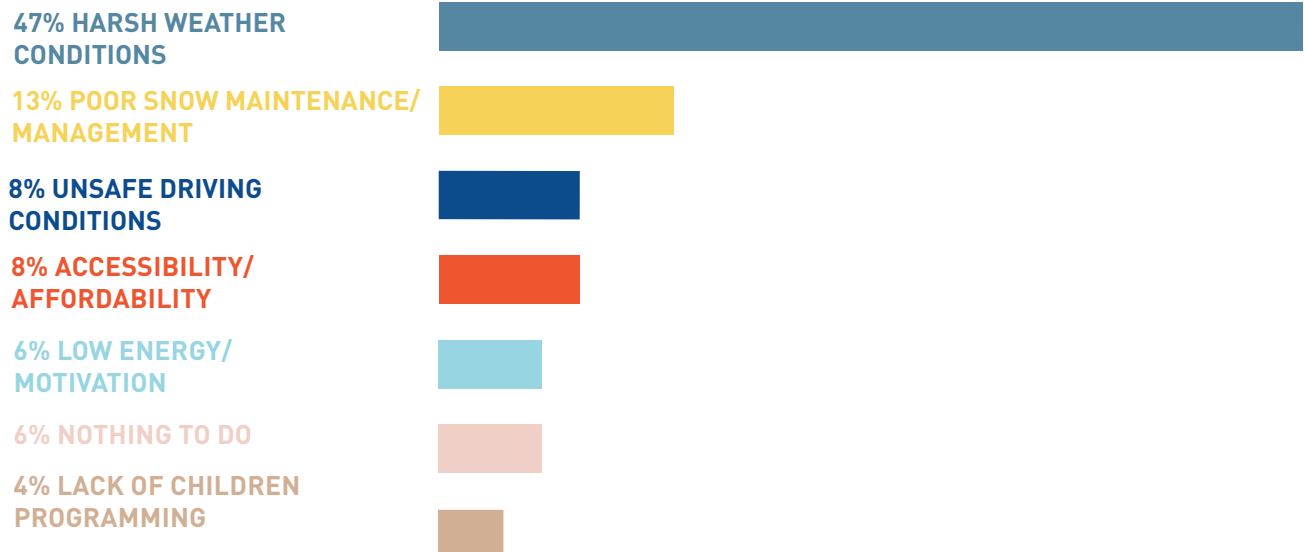
Complete the sentence: Winter in Eau Claire would be better if...



Other responses were primarily suggestions outside the abilities of the Wintermission team to implement, such as less snow or warmer temperatures.

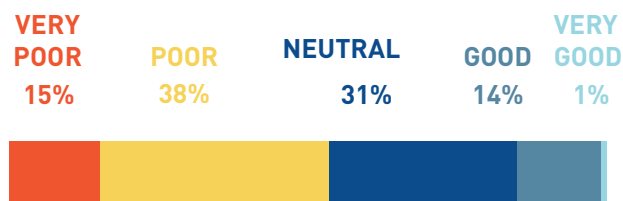
CHALLENGES

What, if anything, makes it challenging for you to get outdoors and be active in the winter...

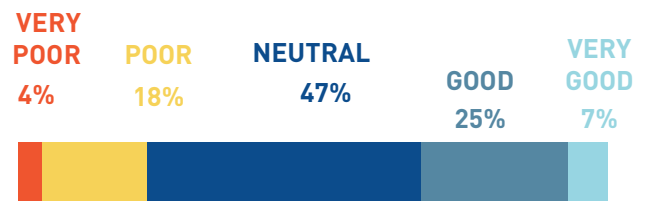


CHALLENGES

How would you rate the safety and accessibility of sidewalks in the winter?



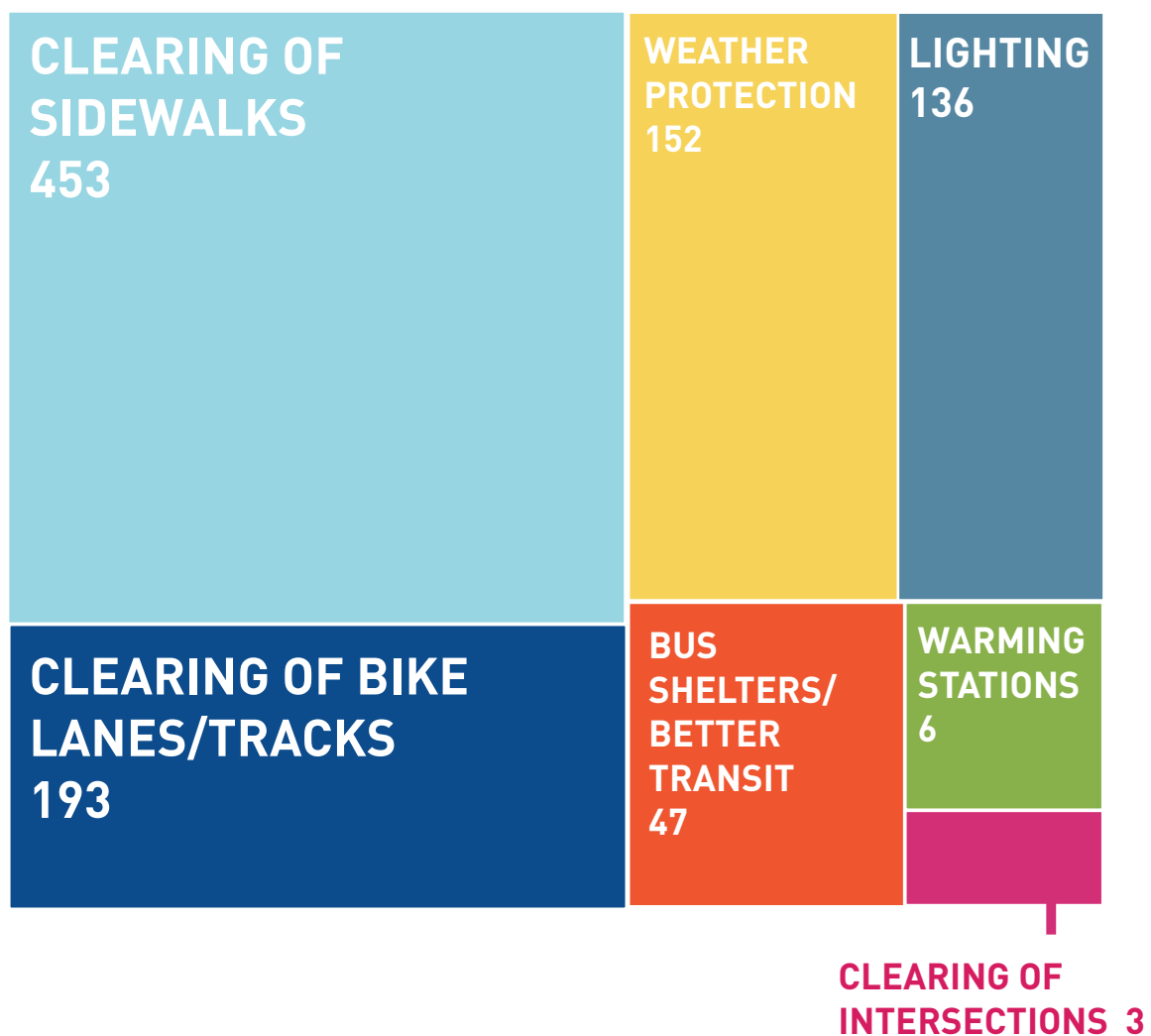
How would you rate the maintenance and accessibility of parks in the winter?



The questions asked in this section were multiple choice.

CHALLENGES

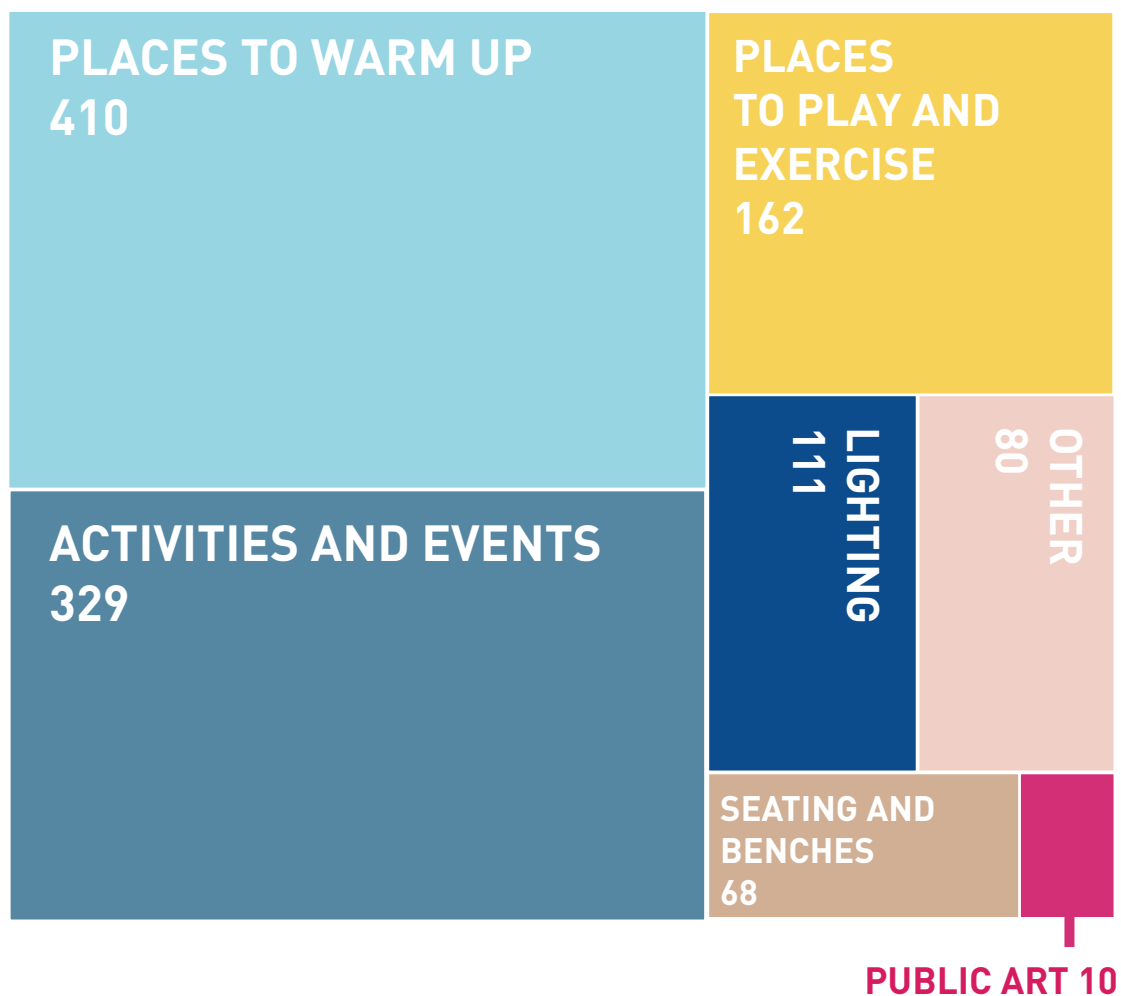
Walking, biking, and taking public transit in winter would be easier if there was more



The questions asked in this section were multiple choice. Respondents selected their top two priorities.

CHALLENGES

Visiting parks in winter would be better if there was/were more...?



The questions asked in this section were multiple choice. Respondents selected their top two priorities.

ENGAGEMENT HUB RESULTS

The Wintermission Eau Claire team hosted 13 pop-up Engagement Hubs over the course of the engagement process. These events were intended to ensure that the feedback we received through the engagement process represented the diversity of Eau Claire. People who attend townhall meetings or complete online surveys tend to already be engaged and interested in community initiatives. Pop-ups balance that effect. We hosted pop-up events that specifically targeted people who may not otherwise have the time or ability to provide input, including seniors, children, and members of the Latinx and Hmong communities. This attempt to connect with residents who reflect the entire diversity of Eau Claire was not wholly successful, as the summary indicates. The summaries below highlight key trends and insights collected from each target community.



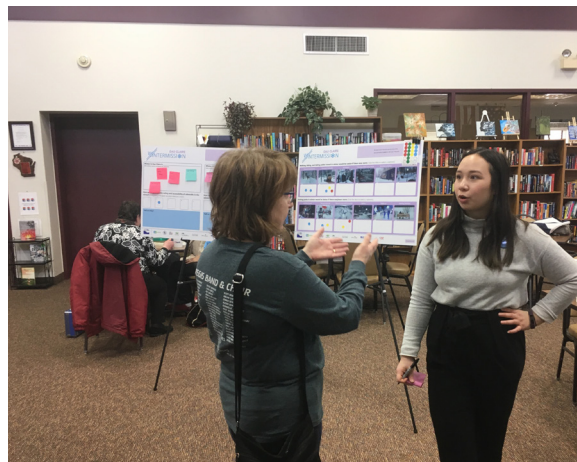


Community engaged: General Public

Events/Locations: Pinehurst Park during Winter After Hours, Pablo Centre during the official Wintermission Kick-off event, Shift Cyclery and Coffee Bar, River Prairie Festival, Eau Claire Ski Striders Annual Meeting

Insights: There is a general desire to see more programming and events in public spaces in winter. People love the Winter After Hours program and would like to see it expanded to more parks across the city.

The winter of 2018-2019 was a particularly snowy one in Eau Claire setting a new record level of snow fall. Residents emphasized their love of snow and enjoyment of outdoor winter sports, but were frustrated with the mobility difficulties presented by snowfalls. Many expressed frustration with the quality of snow removal on streets, sidewalks, and around transit stops. Residents identified an urgent need for improved winter road maintenance and the need to clear sidewalks on a regular basis, particularly around bus stops and for people who use strollers and mobility devices.



Community engaged: Older Adults

Events/Locations: L.E. Phillips Seniors Center, Pablo Center, Shift Cyclery and Coffee Bar, River Prairie Festival

Insights: Older adults expressed decidedly mixed feelings about winter, appreciating its beauty but indicating that they have a very difficult time getting around the city. The number one issue they identified that would allow them to be more active in winter was better snow management and removal of snow on sidewalks. Older adults reported spending less time outdoors in winter as compared to the rest of the year and felt that places to warm up in parks would go a long way in creating more winter-friendly outdoor public spaces.

Many of the older adults we talked to reported visiting the L.E. Phillips Senior Center on a regular basis. Several indicated to us that the personal contact they experience at the center is the number one source of social activity in their lives. However, the senior center advised that their attendance levels drop by close to 40% in winter, indicating that transportation to and from the L.E. Phillips Senior Center is a major barrier for older adults.



Community engaged: Children and Youth

Events: Altoona Public Library, Pinehurst Park, Shift Cyclery and Coffee Bar, River Prairie Festival

Insights: Children and youth typically exhibit more positive feelings about winter than adults and seniors, but that was not the case from what we heard in Chippewa Valley. Whereas adults and older adults in Eau Claire expressed mixed feelings about winter, children, youth, and young adults had an overall negative attitude towards winter. They identified opportunities for outdoor activities like skating trails, and fat biking as the number one thing that would improve their outlook on winter. Young Eau Claireians reported feeling very isolated in winter. More events in public spaces was a very popular idea amongst this age group. Similar to older adults, clearance of sidewalks and more places to warm up were also identified as a priority.



Community engaged: Latinx Community

Locations: La Luna grocery store

Insights: The Wintermission team struggled to make connections with Eau Claire's Latinx community. In general, we heard that social isolation issues in the Latinx community go far beyond winter as many people do not feel safe or comfortable spending time in public spaces year round due to ICE raids and other racial profiling concerns. For these same reasons, there are prominent concerns with safety in the participation in City-led initiatives and engagement processes. Moving forward, the Wintermission Eau Claire team is committed to building relationships with the Latinx community through organizations they trust, to ensure this project addresses their unique needs and concerns.

For the members of the Latinx community who engaged in the Wintermission process, they expressed overall the most positive feelings about winter from amongst all the demographic groups. They cited a lack of time due to work schedules as the biggest challenge preventing them from engaging in social and physical activity in winter. As we heard with older adults and youth, snow clearance on sidewalks, outdoor activities and events, and places to warm up were the most common ideas for improving winter.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The Wintermission Eau Claire team hosted seven Focus Group Meetings over the course of the engagement process. These events allowed specific communities, groups and service providers to participate in a more detailed manner than through the pop-Up engagements. Communities engaged through the various focus groups include the Hmong community, independent businesses owners, and JONAH. The summaries below highlight key trends and insights collected from each target community.



Community engaged: Business Community

Insights: Local small business owners were very excited at the unique opportunities afforded by the winter season. Events like Let it Glow demonstrate that there is a demand in Eau Claire for outdoor events and festivals in winter that bring together people of all ages. However, they recognized that dangerous driving conditions, poor plowing of sidewalks, and public transit routes that fail to connect residents to places of interest are major obstacles to residents participating in these events. Inaccessible sidewalks in the downtown in particular was identified as a major issue contributing to slowdowns of customer traffic in winter. Economic barriers were also discussed, as many winter activities like cross country skiing require expensive equipment to participate. Lastly, the business leaders felt that the way local media discuss winter, using terms like ‘snowmageddon’ and ‘snowpocalypse’, helps to create a negative attitude towards the season that only further people’s feelings of social isolation and depression.



Community engaged: JONAH (Joining Our Neighbors Advancing Hope)

Insights: JONAH is a grassroots organization of diverse faith communities who provide service and support in making healthier, safer, and better places for everyone to live and work. They highlighted the economic, racial, and physical ability barriers that prevent many residents from engaging in traditional winter activities like hockey, skating and skiing. For families struggling to make ends meet, activities and events that charge for admittance become completely inaccessible. For new residents to the city who come from parts of the world without snow, simply knowing how to handle snow removal can be a major obstacle in feeling comfortable being outside in winter. Residents in wheelchairs or other mobility devices are unable to depend on public transit or sidewalks being accessible in winter, effectively forcing them to become shut-ins. As identified by other groups, sidewalk clearance of snow is a major issue encountered by communities who are unable to drive either due to economic or personal circumstances.



Community engaged: Hmong Community

Insights: Cultural barriers were a major obstacle identified by the Hmong community. Residents reported feeling unwelcome at typically “white winter activities” like hockey. Many of the social activities that bring Hmong residents together, like gardening or outdoor community meals, are the ones residents feel are not winter-friendly. Hmong elders in particular use gardening as a social activity and way to stay active but lack spaces to garden in winter months. For older adults in the Hmong community language barriers also play a role in preventing them from participating in events that would allow them to maintain active social lives in winter. Economic barriers exist as well, and similar to the feedback we received from JONAH, it can be very difficult to afford typical winter activities that require expensive equipment to participate. As with the Latinx community, the Wintermission Eau Claire team is committed to building stronger connections with the Hmong community to ensure their unique concerns and needs are addressed.



Community engaged: Dell Ponds Neighborhood Association

Insights: Residents of the Dell Pond community were very appreciative of the winter sports opportunities in their neighborhood. Snowshoeing and skiing at Well Fields is a cherished and beloved community asset. That being said, they did identify areas in which Eau Claire’s outdoor facilities could be improved in winter. For starters, they identified a lack of benches and activities for older adults in parks and public spaces as being a major issue in allowing seniors to maintain social lifestyles in winter. For children and youth, they appreciate the events and activities that take place during the holiday season, and would like to see them extended year-round.



Community engaged: OutdoorMore

Insights: OutdoorMore is a non-profit organization responsible for the popular Winter After Hours program in Pinehurst Park. They are committed to creating parks and outdoor spaces in Eau Claire that are well programmed and well used in winter. They are appreciative of the many opportunities in Eau Claire for winter outdoor activities, but feel there is a lack of information about these assets available to the public outside of a few high profile downtown events. Many residents expressed an interest in more park programming in winter and support engaging the City of Eau Claire in this process.



City Manager Dale Peters and Councilor Emily Berge speak at the project kick-off event

WORKSHOP RESULTS

The Wintermission stakeholder workshop provided an opportunity to have deeper conversations with specific stakeholders and community members. The workshop began with an introductory presentation about the goals, objectives, and processes of Wintermission Eau Claire. Participants were then divided into groups and engaged in facilitated conversations about existing winter challenges and resources in Eau Claire. Each group built on these conversations by brainstorming how to best connect with diverse communities from across the city and bring them into the Wintermission process. These conversations served to help guide the entire engagement process.



STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

Location: Pablo Center / Visit Eau Claire

Audience: In attendance were city and county staff from Public Health, Transportation, Parks, and Planning, elected officials, community members, business leaders and non-profit service providers.

Barriers to being physically and socially active outdoors in winter:

- Accessibility due to ice and snow
- Lack of snow removal on sidewalks, transit stops, parking spaces
- Lack of nearby outdoor activities in local parks and public spaces
- Local parks are not maintained in winter
- Extreme cold and lack of sunlight
- Winter sports equipment and activities are expensive
- Lack of awareness about winter activities
- Lack of programming geared towards older adults, racialized communities, and those with mobility devices
- Newcomer populations aren't as knowledgeable about winter activities
- There's less guarantee people will come out to winter festivals as compared to summer ones
- Things feel unsafe
- Lower income residents can struggle with obtaining proper winter clothing

Resources that would support social and physical activity outdoors in winter:

- Outdoor More lends out sports equipment
- CORDBA does bike lessons in winter
- ADRC (assisted disability resource center)
- Free events and programming
- Visit Eau Claire as a resource to get promotional materials out
- Create a winter gear library
- Warming shelters and spots in public spaces
- Program parks and public spaces all year round
- Shuttle buses and public transit to major winter events
- Shuttle bus to seniors center
- Better lighting across the city
- Resident led 'Welcome Wagons'
- Walking clubs for children and older adults
- Safe routes to school clearance policy





BANBURY
PLACE



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND PILOT PROJECTS



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Four priorities emerged from the Wintermission Eau Claire surveys, workshops, pop-ups, and stakeholder meeting:



Snow & ice maintenance



Winter mobility



Winter events & activities



Winter culture

Under each priority area is a list of pilot projects that could be implemented in Eau Claire during the Winter of 2019/20. The proposed pilot projects demonstrate a range of approaches that respond to the main issues and opportunities raised by Eau Claire residents during the engagement process.

Throughout the engagement process when asked what would encourage them to spend more time outdoors in winter, residents identified more winter activities as one of their highest priorities. However, when asked what the biggest barriers preventing them from being socially and physically active in winter are, only 6% responded that there is nothing to do. A lack of safe and accessible mobility options was identified as the major barrier to being outdoors. This suggests that outdoor programming and enhanced mobility need to work together to reduce social isolation in Eau Claire. The pilot project ideas should be viewed through this holistic viewpoint.

Each pilot project contains suggestions for who could lead each type of project as well as a budget estimate ranging from inexpensive to moderately expensive to very expensive based on the \$15,000 materials budget.



INCLUSIVE WINTERS

When it comes to encouraging people to get outdoors in winter, the old Scandinavian adage that “there’s no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing” comes to mind. The problem is that not everyone has access to the latest gear and warmest clothing due to economic and cultural barriers. Eau Claire has a wonderful and diverse population of various ages, races, sexual orientations and income levels, and it is critical that Winter Cities create equitable spaces and opportunities to thrive. To help everyone enjoy the season, we need to ensure that all residents have access to the necessary information and resources.

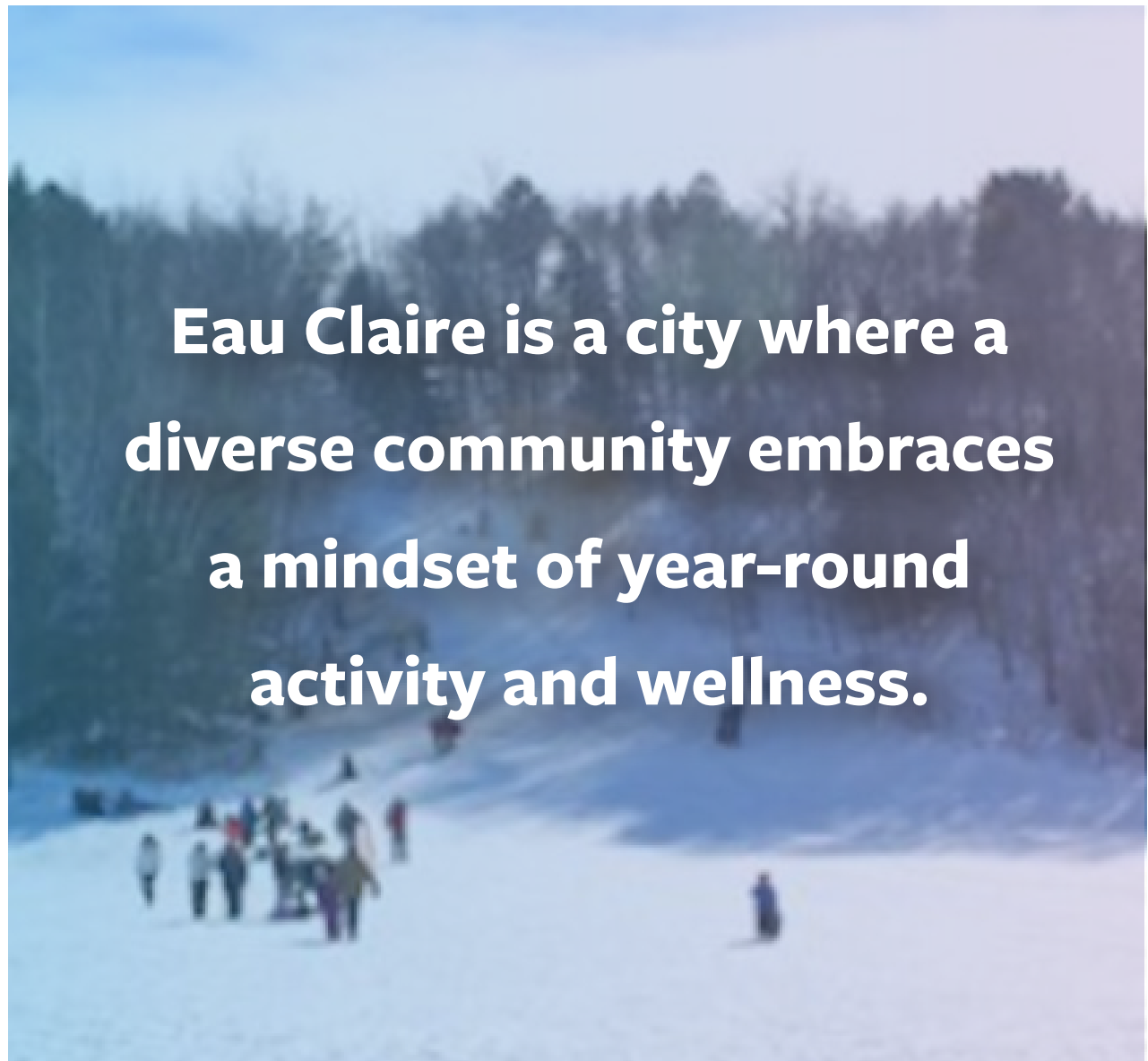
“We’re from the tropics. Winter is brutal for our people, they stay inside”
- Resident

A NOTE ON INCLUSION

While everyone to some degree experiences barriers in remaining socially and physically active in winter, some communities face greater barriers than others. For racialized communities, lower income residents, and undocumented people, city-run activities can be entirely inaccessible. Simply existing in public spaces for those communities can be dangerous. This is not an issue that is unique to Eau Claire, nor is it a winter specific problem, but it is a concern we heard loud and clear from racialized and lower income communities throughout the Wintermission Eau Claire engagement process. All the pilot project ideas attempt to address some of the specific concerns raised by those communities such as the affordability of winter activities and the accessibility of streets and sidewalks. But the reality is that systemic barriers exist, and they are not going away over the course of this project. We recognize that for some communities feeling safe to exist in their local park is a major hurdle. Wintermission Eau Claire must and will work harder to build trust with those communities. This can be achieved, in part, by co-creating the Wintermission pilot projects with members of racialized and marginalized communities. Developing strategies to sustain this outreach and engagement will be crucial to the success of the next phase of Wintermission Eau Claire.

VISION STATEMENT

Based on insights from local stakeholders, the Eau Claire Winter City Strategy is guided by the following vision statement:



**Eau Claire is a city where a
diverse community embraces
a mindset of year-round
activity and wellness.**



The City of Copenhagen has an official policy that prioritizes the plowing of sidewalks and bike lanes over roads.

SNOW MAINTENANCE

Residents made it clear in no uncertain terms that there is a strong need for better snow clearing on the streets, sidewalks, and trails of Eau Claire. The engagement outcomes identified broad concerns regarding the safety of others due to high volumes of snow that creates blind spots for drivers and dangerous pedestrian conditions. 38% of residents noted that the safety and accessibility of sidewalks in winter is poor. This result was consistent among respondents of all ages, genders, neighborhoods, and ethnocultural backgrounds.

While the city and county snow removal teams are responsive, sometimes severe snowfalls leave people stranded or left to fend for themselves for several days. Many people suggested finding more and better ways for local government and residents to work together to improve ice and snow clearance throughout the city.

38%

This was the average score that residents gave to the safety and accessibility of sidewalks in winter. This result was consistent among respondents of all ages, genders, neighborhoods, and ethnocultural backgrounds.

PILOT PROJECT 1.1

VOLUNTEER SNOW SHOVELING INITIATIVE

Launch a program that connects seniors and those with mobility issues with volunteers willing to shovel snow. One way to facilitate this is setting up a central online portal or telephone line where people can ask for and offer help. In a city like Eau Claire, volunteers or city staff could identify priority areas and dispatch shovelers to those streets and sidewalks. Similar to Altoona's Snow Angels program, local organizations and schools could lead the project, providing volunteers and human-power. This volunteer opportunity could be pitched to organizations and businesses as a fun and healthy team-building activity that gives back to the community. High school students who require community service hours in order to graduate could be an excellent source of shovelers.

- **Outcome:** Snow is cleared quickly, efficiently, and consistently throughout the city. It is easier for people of all abilities to walk on sidewalks
- **Suggested partners:** Local sports teams, L.E. Phillips Seniors Center, JONAH, local school boards, City of Eau Claire, City of Altoona
- **Measure of progress:** Number of people walking in winter. Level of satisfaction with sidewalk snow clearing reported by residents and stakeholders
- **Budget:** Inexpensive



In addition to shoveling sidewalks, private driveways or walkways, many residents in Eau Claire said that they also shovel their rooftops to prevent problems with leaking.

PILOT PROJECT 1.2

ESTABLISH SNOW-CLEARING PRIORITIES

A cost-neutral way of providing safe walking and cycling conditions in winter is to re-prioritize the order in which streets and sidewalks are cleared. The City of Stockholm has a “gender equal plowing” policy, which prioritizes areas around day cares and schools before office districts and main roads.

Snow-clearing provides Eau Claire with an opportunity to re-prioritize for vulnerable communities like women or lower incomes residents by focusing on areas around local schools, the library, aquatic center, and senior center.

Priority could also be given to existing bike lanes and trails. In Copenhagen, bike lanes are plowed before car lanes. This is a major reason why 75% of their cycling population chooses to bike year-round. Strategies for clearing bike lanes vary from place to place. Rather than dealing with snow storage, cities in Finland pack the snow down to create a flat surface to cycle on. People for Bikes have compiled all their knowledge on winter bike lane maintenance into a convenient guide.

- **Outcome:** It is easier and safer for people to walk and bike on priority routes in the winter
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, Residents associations, council members, day care centers, libraries, L.E. Phillips Senior Center
- **Measure of progress:** Percentage of residents satisfied with snow clearing on sidewalks and paths, increased use of bike lanes and sidewalks with prioritized plowing
- **Budget:** Inexpensive

“People walk in the street because sidewalks aren’t cleared. I saw one man using a blowtorch to melt ice” - Business Owner





PILOT PROJECT 1.3 EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT WAYS TO CLEAR SNOW AND ICE

The winter of 2018/19 saw record levels of snowfall in Eau Claire. Not surprisingly, much of what we heard from residents was that snow needed to be cleared. In fact, better snow management was the number one idea that residents said would improve their relationship to winter. We also heard that many people felt challenged to keep up with snow maintenance. Issues relating to frequency of shoveling and physical ability were all reasons why people struggled to keep up with all the shoveling. To this end, Eau Claire can take a lead in experimenting with innovative ways to clear snow.

In 2017, the City of Calgary, like other cities in Canada began experimenting with beet juice brine to de-ice sidewalks and roads. Originally tested in small amount, the beet juice brine sticks to the surface of the road and can break down the bonds between snow and ice. The program was so successful it has been scaled up by the City.

- **Outcome:** It is a low-cost, organic way of clearing snow and ice that does not require the same physical labor as shoveling.
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire
- **Measure of progress:** Number of people who report that snow clearing is improving
- **Budget:** Moderately Expensive

PILOT PROJECT 1.4 DEDICATED WINTER RECREATION ROUTE

Eau Claire's vast trail system is a beautiful and beloved natural feature. In the winter however, the trails can be entirely inaccessible to many residents. Taking a page from the City of Edmonton's approach to winter trail management, Eau Claire can create connected, well groomed multi-use paths and trails. Increased connectivity between groomed trails creates a more complete network and supports active transportation. It also can be leveraged to mobilize group activities like winter running clubs. The City of Edmonton also noted the importance of lighting, various access points, equipment storage and barrier-free shelters to compliment the dedicated winter recreation routes. With over 250 miles of trail in and around Eau Claire, opportunities to enhance this great natural feature during the winter are endless.

- **Outcome:** A well-groomed, connected trail network can make for a more enjoyable recreation experience. It can also create broader opportunities for groups to organize collective recreation programs such as a winter running group.
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, Outdoor More, YMCA, Run Eau Claire
- **Measure of progress:** A connected trail system that is groomed regularly. Number of people using the trail system in winter
- **Budget:** Moderately Expensive



The Powder Keg is an annual Snowshoe and Fat Bike race hosted in Lowes Creek Co Park.

WINTER MOBILITY

We know that winter reduces levels of mobility in Eau Claire. Everyday trips like traveling to work and running errands to the grocery store, or visiting friends and family becomes more challenging as the temperature drops. Clearing snow and ice is the first step in improving winter mobility. The variety of suggestions shared by local stakeholders to make it easier for people to get around Eau Claire in winter went beyond snow clearance. Some of those ideas are described below.

“We have to change our cultural focus away from indoors and embrace what makes us unique”
- Resident

PILOT PROJECT 2.1

FAT BIKE SHARE

On the more whimsical and active side of transportation, a public fat bike share program could alleviate mobility challenges for some residents. Fat bikes are regular bikes with larger or wider wheels to give the rider more traction in snowy and icy conditions. Eau Claire already has a growing community of Fat Bike riders, namely those who take them out for rides at Winter After Hours. A public fat bike share program can help grow the number of people riding bikes in winter.

The concept is simple – collect a fleet of winter-ready bikes and leave them in an easily accessible public space for people to ride and enjoy. As a pilot project, the equipment could be collected through donations. The bikes could then be tuned by local students to teach them basic maintenance skills.

- **Outcome:** More people cycling in winter as both a means of transportation and physical activity
- **Suggested partners:** Shift Cyclery and Coffee Shop, UW-Eau Claire, local school boards
- **Measure of progress:** Number of people who bike in winter, number of people using the fat bikes.
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive





PILOT PROJECT 2.2 SHUTTLE BUS TO WINTER AFTER HOURS

Several residents noted that winter programs were difficult to access on their own. Despite having a great affection for the Winter After Hours in Pinehurst Park, families noted that it was a struggle to get their families to Pinehurst after a long day. Furthermore, we heard that the Winter After Hours program was somewhat tucked away from the rest of the city and that if you didn't know about it already, the program is hard to find. To this end, a shuttle bus program can support families get to and from the Winter After Hours Program.

- **Outcome:** Increase the number of those participating in Winter After Hours
- **Suggested partners:** Outdoor More, Eau Claire Public Transit, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, resident associations
- **Measures of progress:** Increased turn out at Winter After Hours
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive

PILOT PROJECT 2.3 WINTER WAY-FINDING

In the winter, the days get darker faster and finding where to go can be challenging. Improving way-finding can be a helpful tool in promoting winter activities. Residents repeatably told stories of only finding out activities after the fact. Finding where in Pinehurst Park Winter After Hours was taking place was a common concern as well. Designated Winter way-finding is a plausible solution to providing public information about winter activities.

- **Outcome:** Improved visibility of winter recreation
- **Suggested partners:** UW-Eau Claire, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Resident Associations, Outdoor Moore, Visit Eau Claire
- **Measure of progress:** Number of additional signage and level of satisfaction in promoting and traveling to winter activities
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive

PILOT PROJECT 2.4

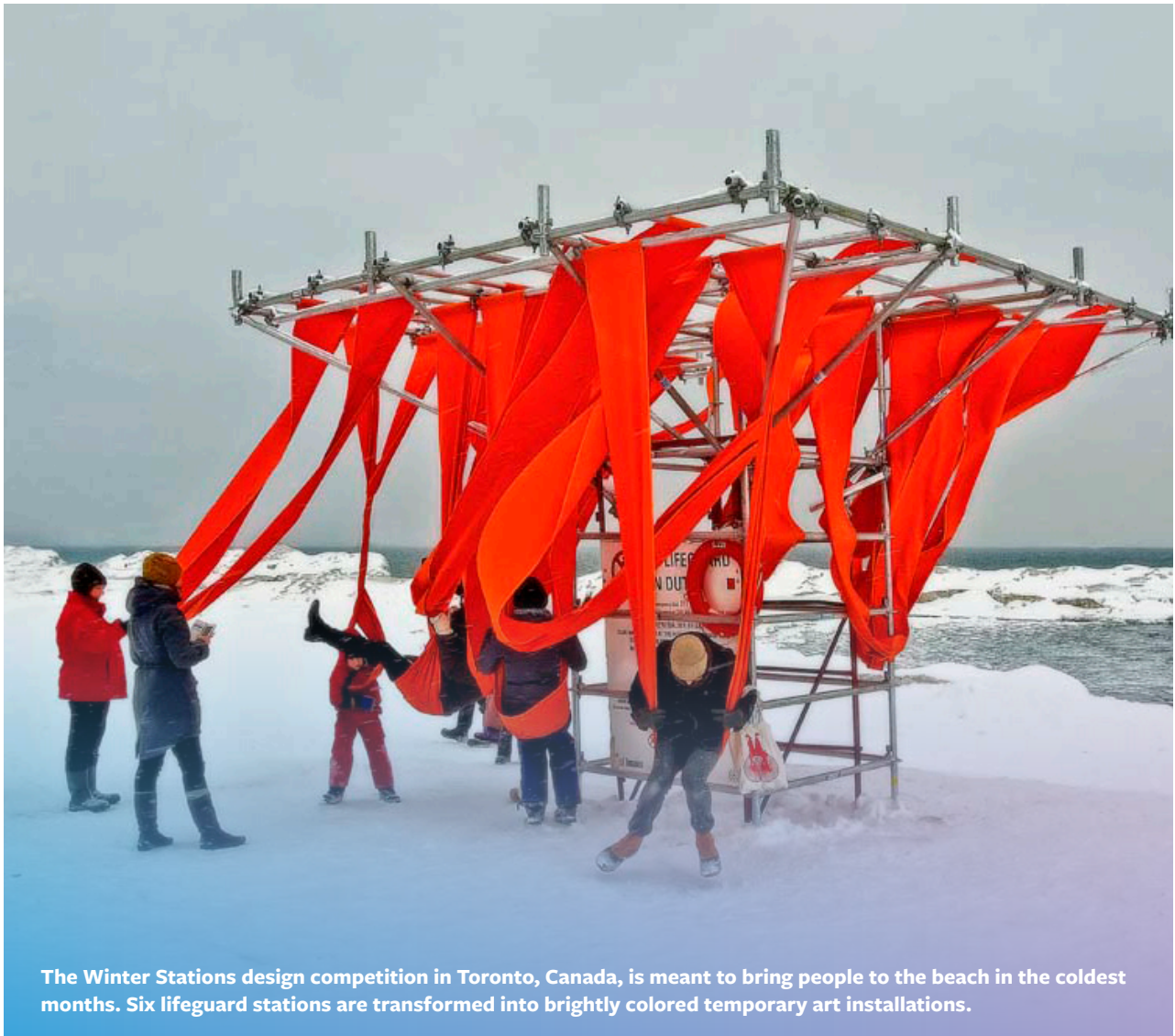
WINTER-PROOF TRANSIT SHELTERS

Waiting for the bus in winter can be an unpleasant experience, especially when there is no protection from the elements. During the winter of 2018/2019, unprecedented levels of snow created snow mounds that completely covered bus stop signs and made waiting for the bus a dangerous and uncomfortable experience. Winter-proofed Transit Shelters can help mitigate these experiences, particularly for marginalized communities who rely on public transit.

Creating winter-friendly transit shelters could be done through a design competition that challenges residents and designers to come up with concepts and perhaps even build prototypes. The competition could provide guidelines for how high tech the shelters should be.

- **Outcome:** The experience of waiting for transit in winter is improved. An increased sense of pride and excitement in winter through the design competition
- **Suggested partners:** Eau Claire Public Transit, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, City of Eau Claire, resident associations, elected officials
- **Measures of progress:** Level of satisfaction in service among transit users, number of design competition submission, increased use of public transit
- **Budget:** Expensive





The Winter Stations design competition in Toronto, Canada, is meant to bring people to the beach in the coldest months. Six lifeguard stations are transformed into brightly colored temporary art installations.

WINTER EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

People in Eau Claire think of winter as a beautiful time of year and there are lots of opportunities to build on that excitement through existing events to get more people outdoors. Residents, especially those with young children at home, called for regular and small-scale programming in neighborhoods across the city. Smaller events could be organized to target specific communities and groups of people who may not get outside and socialize frequently in winter.

Winter in Eau Claire is full of opportunities. We can do more with what we have
-Business Owner



PILOT PROJECT 3.1 EXPAND FIRE PITS TO MORE PARKS

Winter is a great time to cozy up by a fire, roast marshmallows, and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate with friends and family. Outdoor fire pits extend the amount of time you can comfortably spend outside in winter, and naturally draw people together. A formal fire pit policy and program could encourage more residents, businesses, and organizations to install and operate fire pits throughout the city. The program would set clear standards for how and where fire pits could be used in public spaces. People interested in hosting a fire pit could be required to attend a basic fire safety course beforehand.

- **Outcome:** Outdoor public spaces are more comfortable and animated during winter
- **Suggested partners:** Eau Claire Fire Department, resident associations, local businesses, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation
- **Measures of progress:** Frequency of visits to outdoor public spaces in winter, amount of time people report spending outdoors and connecting with friends and family in winter
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive

PILOT PROJECT 3.2 WINTER COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING FUND

The City of Eau Claire does not need to do all the heavy lifting of programming for winter by themselves. Create a micro granting program to help fund citizen-led initiatives that encourage people to socialize, get outdoors, and be physically active in winter. A simple application that asks them to explain the idea, how the funds will be used, and why it's needed in their community will ensure the process is accessible and user-friendly. The application could be made available online and in print form. As a streamlined 'reporting' process, ask fund recipients to send photos, videos, or written stories about their project. Share these results with the public and celebrate the success stories to strengthen the sense of community and togetherness in winter.

- **Outcome:** There are more small-scale events, programs, and placemaking activations in neighborhoods across Eau Claire. Residents feel a stronger sense of ownership over public space
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Visit Eau Claire, Residents associations, L.E. Phillips Seniors Center
- **Measures of progress:** Number of applications received and community events/projects implemented, types of projects
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive



PILOT PROJECT 3.3 NEIGHBORHOOD SNOWSCAPE COMPETITION

Challenge local residents to turn their snow covered yards into beautiful snowscapes by building snow sculptures or decorating their trees and house with ornaments and lights. Community organizations, businesses, and schools could also participate in the competition. Encourage these local snow artists to share photos of their creations on social media. The photos could be displayed on the City of Eau Claire and Visit Eau Claire's website and a physical exhibit could feature the yards in an indoor public space. Local businesses could sponsor prizes for the best creations.

- **Outcome:** Eau Claire's identity as a vibrant, community-oriented winter city is strengthened. Residents feel a stronger sense of ownership and pride in winter culture.
- **Suggested partners:** Local landscaping companies and businesses, elected officials, City Manager, resident associations, schools
- **Measure of progress:** Number of households and institutions participating in the competition, feedback from residents and stakeholders about the competition.
- **Budget:** Inexpensive

PILOT PROJECT 3.4 EXPAND WINTER PROGRAMING

Building on successful existing winter programming and replicating those models in parks and public spaces in Eau Claire will go a long way in engaging more residents in winter public life. We heard that there is a desire for programs like Winter After Hours to be expanded into hyper local spots across the city. Carson Park was raised by several folks as having huge potential for winter programming at a similar scale as Pinehurst Park. We also heard that there is a desire to animate the smaller public spaces in the city such as Phoenix Park, the public space beside the Pablo Centre, University Park, or other open spaces and lots.

- **Outcome:** Expanding the opportunities for people to engage in the Winter After Hours program
- **Suggested partners:** Outdoor More, Visit Eau Claire, Pablo Center, City of Eau Claire, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation
- **Measures of progress:** Number of additional Winter After Hours program beyond Pinehurst Park
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive



PILOT PROJECT 3.5 WINTER GARDENING PROGRAM

Winter creates unique barriers for communities and cultures that hail from warmer climates. When speaking with older adults and representatives from the Hmong community, we heard that gardening one of the major ways in which they stay socially and physically active, and they wish they could do it all year long. Investing in a community greenhouse that has winter programming for rooted vegetables is a great way to create culturally specific activities for residents of the Hmong community and older adults in general. Identify the preferred location for this pilot with the Hmong community.

- **Outcome:** A new community greenhouse for residents to use all year around
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, local businesses, faith groups, JONAH, Hmong Mutual Assistance Network
- **Measures of progress:** Number of people engaging in gardening, demographics of program users, numbers of those visited the greenhouse during the winter
- **Budget:** Expensive

PILOT PROJECT 3.6

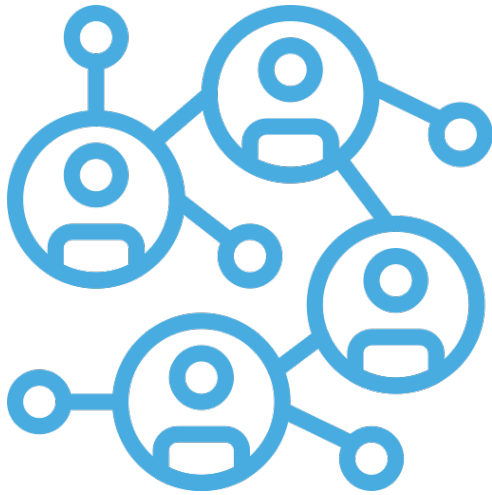
BRING NEW ACTIVITIES TO THE SOCIAL CALENDAR

Eau Claire and the surrounding County are stunning in winter. Recognizing resident's appetite to get outdoors, there is a great opportunity to incorporate new and diversified types of winter events and activities. Some of the ideas we heard during the engagement process included:

1. **Outdoor Food Festival:** Eau Claire is known for its great food and drink. There's more than 4 breweries in the city alone. Build on the success of Eau Claire's Summer Farmers Market with a similar food focused outdoor event in the winter. Encourage local brewers to create a winter beer competition.
2. **Winter Walking Groups:** We heard from lots of people who would be more likely to be outdoors if they were motivated by others. Organizing neighborhood walking groups is a great way to encourage people to get outside and get to know their neighbors.
3. **Group snowshoeing:** Similar to group walks, lots of folks showed interest in having group snowshoeing adventures. There was also specific comments about having dogs be included in winter group activities
4. **Build a snow playground:** As a way to utilize excess snow from roads and parking lots, snow playgrounds are a great way to create playful spaces in Eau Claire. Depending on the snow skills available, the playground could include a maze, ice slides, and seats. This could become the site of an outdoor movie theatre.
5. **Outdoor winter movies:** Host free movie screenings in local parks and underutilized public spaces. To get creative, organizers can create seating out of snow and offer free hot chocolate to viewers. Offer attendees options for warming up by providing fire pits and heat lamps nearby
6. **Outdoor winter fashion show:** Winter clothing must be warm and functional but that doesn't mean it can't be fashionable. Celebrate Eau Claire's winter culture by hosting an outdoor fashion show to feature the latest trends and styles in winter wear. Invite local and nearby designers to submit their pieces and create a runway in a central public space. Draw inspiration from Edmonton's Winter Wonderland Fashion Show, or the Cb. Revolution Couture fashion show that took place on ice in Toronto.

“WE NEED OPPORTUNITIES, OR EVEN AN EXCUSE, TO TALK TO OUR NEIGHBORS MORE”

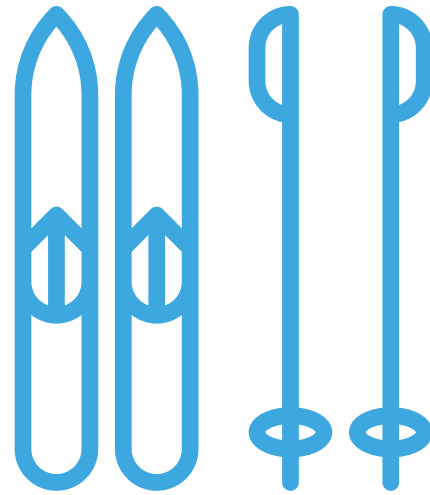
- Resident



PILOT PROJECT 3.7 WINTER SPORT MENTORING

Eau Claire has many opportunities to participate in traditional winter activities like ice skating at Hobbs Municipal Ice Center, cross country skiing at Pinehurst Park or snowshoeing in Carson Park. However, it was noted that these activities are difficult to pick up on your own, particularly if you did not grow up in a winter climate. For this reason, a matchmaker program that connects experienced skaters, cross country skiers and snow shoes with those interested in trying them out for the first time is one way to make winter sports more inclusive.

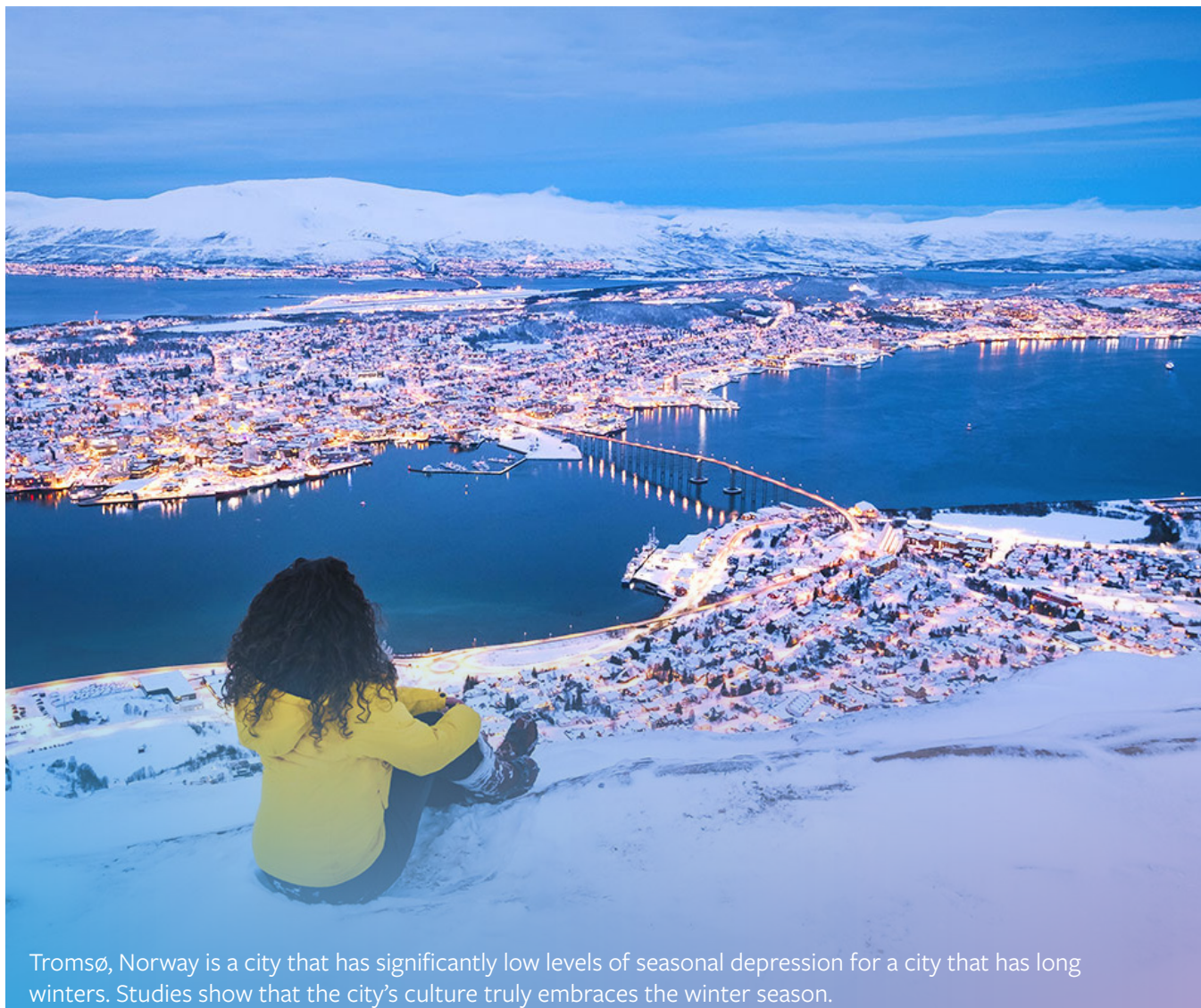
- **Outcome:** Wider range of people participating in winter activities
- **Suggested partners:** Local high school and sports clubs, Fire Department, Police Department, Outdoor More
- **Measures of progress:** Number of people who skate, ski, fat bike, and/or snowshoe in winter for their first time, number of mentor and mentee matches
- **Budget:** Moderately expensive



PILOT PROJECT 3.8 WINTER GEAR SHARE AND RENTALS

Winter is expensive. Between the skies, snow shoes, skates, boots, hats, scarves, jackets, and mittens, winter can be a financial burden for many. It also is a burden for those living in small spaces who can't store so much equipment. To this end, we heard folks tell us that they would benefit from a rental facility, similar to the Oxbow Hotel's canoe rental program in summer. Providing affordable rental options for winter gear will allow more people to access traditional winter sports and activities. A 'pay what you can' rental program would allow all to remain physically active all year round.

- **Outcome:** Skiing, snowboarding, tobogganing, and other outdoor winter activities are more accessible to more residents
- **Suggested partners:** Outdoor More, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, JONAH, L.E. Phillips Memorial Library
- **Measures of progress:** Number of people, particularly youth, skiing and snowboarding in Eau Claire
- **Budget:** Inexpensive



Tromsø, Norway is a city that has significantly low levels of seasonal depression for a city that has long winters. Studies show that the city's culture truly embraces the winter season.

WINTER CULTURE

Being a winter city is something cities should take pride in. It can be a core aspect of the culture and identity of a community. Although many people in Eau Claire love the natural beauty of the season, many were convinced that it's the worst thing to happen since un-sliced bread. We see this narrative get passed around frequently. News station report on snowfall as if the snowpocalypse is right around every corner. Families typically plan tropical vacations to avoid the cold. There are many ways in which cities have failed to make winter a season to take pride in.

However, we know that this does not have to be the case and that cities can shift cultural perceptions about winter. A Stanford University study found that Tromsø, Norway, a city that gets lots of snow but very little sun light, thrives during the winter time. The study found that the season is something to enjoy rather than endure. Instead of bonding over complaints, people in Tromsø shifted the culture around winter by hosting various public activities and supplying winter resources. The study noted that it is near impossible to have a positive mindset about the winter when people are accustomed to making negative winter small talk. Building a positive narrative can lead to broader cultural change on Eau Claire's outlook on winter.

PILOT PROJECT 4.1

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ALL WINTER EVENTS

There is no shortage of community organizations and engaged residents who are interested in hosting small-scale neighborhood events and celebrations in winter. A 'how-to' guide could simplify the process by explaining standard procedures for securing necessary permits (ie fire pits) and include a list of recommended games and activities. A 'winter party library' would include a menu of basic supplies and materials available for anyone to borrow for these events. The library could include things like fire pits, s'more kits, hot chocolate carafes, string lights, and yard games.

- **Outcome:** Neighbors, family, and friends spend more time outdoors together in winter
- **Suggested partners:** L.E. Phillips Memorial Library, City of Eau Claire, resident associations, elected Officials, Visit Eau Claire
- **Measures of progress:** Number of small-scale neighborhood events hosted throughout the winter, number of people attending these events, the number of times that resources from the library are borrowed by resident, diverse communities making use of the resources.
- **Budget:** Inexpensive

PILOT PROJECT 4.2

WINTERMISSION SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

Global precedents suggest that successful cultural change starts with communication. So, what better way to host that conversation than through social media? Social psychology researchers that focus on cultural perceptions of winter say that it is critical to consciously try to have a positive wintertime mindset to manage social and mental wellbeing. Much of the content cities are accustomed to painting winter as the worst season. By way of strategic communications, Eau Claire can start to introduce a positive wintertime mindset.

The Wintermission Social Media Plan, can be a collaborative effort to guide positive winter communication. It can be a series of sample posts, types of language to use and not to use, and a strategy to roll the messaging publicly. The objective of the plan is to create a way forward that can kick-start positive conversations about winter.

- **Outcome:** The use of positive language to talk about winter time
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, Visit Eau Claire, UW-Eau Claire, local News Stations,
- **Measures of progress:** Number of posts speaking about winter positively
- **Budget:** Inexpensive



PILOT PROJECT 4.3 WINTER WELCOME WAGON

Many residents reported that it's difficult to learn about winter programs, activities, and resources, particularly at the neighborhood level. Making information about winter in Eau Claire more accessible and readily available is a simple and effective way to increase resident engagement in winter activities. People who are new to winter climates, may not know how to dress or heat their homes properly in winter, so education campaigns should also provide practical advice for winter living. A winter city guide is an easy way to provide these practical tips while also featuring a comprehensive list of winter activities and events in Eau Claire. Guides can be shared in both print and digital formats. By establishing this central resource, residents will know where to go for all their winter needs.

- **Outcome:** Residents, particularly newcomers, are better equipped and informed to thrive in winter
- **Suggested partners:** City of Eau Claire, Visit Eau Claire, L.E. Phillips Memorial Library
- **Measures of progress:** Attitudes towards winter, particularly among the newcomers. Participation rates in winter activities and events among vulnerable communities.
- **Budget:** Inexpensive



NEXT STEPS



NEXT STEPS

This report marks the official end of the first phase of community engagement. It summarizes the collective vision that Eau Claire residents have for winter in the city, as well as their responses to our three key questions:

- **What do you like about winter in Eau Claire?**
- **What prevents your from being more active in winter?**
- **What ideas or suggestions do you have to reduce social isolation and increase public life in winter?**

The Wintermission Eau Claire team will continue to host meetings with stakeholders and community members in the lead up to the pilot project phase. These meetings will provide an opportunity for the community to review the results of the first phase of engagement to ensure we interpreted the findings correctly, and didn't miss anything important. In particular, the Wintermission team must continue to build relationships with Eau Claire's Hmong and Latinx communities. This report will also be made available to download on the Wintermission website with instructions on how to send additional feedback.

The next phase of Wintermission Eau Claire, will focus on testing out temporary solutions to the barriers identified by Eau Claire residents, based on their own ideas for improving winter experiences. In this next phase, we'll be evaluating the success and impact of our temporary interventions and asking residents and local stakeholders how they would like to be involved in sustaining a vibrant winter culture in Eau Claire.

The team will collect user data and feedback for each pilot project and program we implement in the upcoming 2019-2020 winter season. We will examine what changes worked well, which didn't, and why. The results of this evaluation process will inform the recommendations that go into Eau Claire's Winter City Strategy. This strategy will shape future winter projects, programs, and policies and set out a clear plan of action to ensure that residents' collective vision for Eau Claire as a leading winter city is realized.

