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## WINTER CITY STRATEGY



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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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 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.

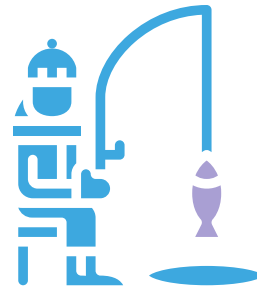
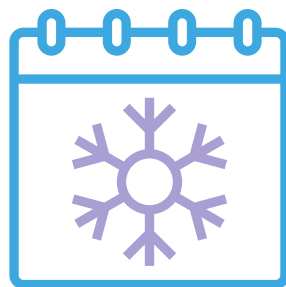


### Pillar 1: Winter Accessibility

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.





The 8 80 Cities team stumbled across this lovely message in the snow on the way to hosting an engagement event in Eau Claire. It was a beautiful reminder of the community spirit, playfulness, and positive winter mindset that shaped the course of Wintermission Eau Claire.





# INTRODUCTION



# ABOUT WINTERMISSION

Wintermission was a two-year project that set out to combat social isolation by inviting more people to get outside and enjoy the health benefits of social interaction, physical activity, and nature connection in winter.



Winter can be a challenging time of year, where snow, ice, lack of sunlight, and cold weather can combine to exacerbate social isolation. Social and physical activity outdoors declines in winter and feelings of loneliness and isolation creep in. Not everyone experiences winter the same, and qualities that can make winter joyful for some can serve as barriers for others.

For those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, winter means an increased risk of cold-related injury and death. Children and elderly residents are more vulnerable to extreme cold yet are often overlooked as important users of public space. The voices of those most vulnerable in winter are rarely invited to meaningfully shape and inform city building decisions.

A lack of winter-specific public space design and maintenance also reinforces inequity by creating additional barriers and challenges for those who walk, bike, or take public transit. This limits

independent mobility for transit riders, people with disabilities, older adults, and children. Winter can also come as a shock to newcomers and refugees immigrating and adjusting to colder winter cities. People with lower income may not have the time or resources to engage in winter activities. Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities face the compounding effects of historical and contemporary racist policies and practices influencing their everyday interaction with public space. All these examples stand in the way of increasing social connection and creating a sense of belonging in public space for all in winter.

When we embarked on this project in 2018, the predominant narrative about winter was that it was to be endured rather than embraced. There were few U.S. Cities proactively creating a culture of active and social winter life through the intentional design, programming, and management of their public spaces. Our Wintermission project aimed to challenge and change the status quo around winter and reimagine it as an asset to be leveraged in reducing social isolation and creating healthier, more equitable, and vibrant public spaces.



**“Loneliness is no longer just a personal misfortune, but has grown into a social epidemic”**

**- Rachel Reeves, Labour MP, UK**

# PROJECT PARTNERS

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Wintermission is led by 8 80 Cities, an international non-profit organization based in Toronto, Canada. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for people in cities no matter their age, ability, socioeconomic status, race, gender-identity, ethnicity, or cultural background. We bring people together to enhance mobility and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities. We believe that if everything we do in our public space is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for all people.

Wintermission is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. Project partners include the Children and Nature Network and the National League of Cities.





# THE ORIGINS OF WINTERMISSION

Wintermission was a response to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Global Ideas for U.S. Solutions fund, which sought to find global solutions for reducing social isolation and apply them to the U.S. context. In the fall of 2018, 80 Cities put out a call for program partners and challenged American cities to assemble diverse teams that would advance the goals of Wintermission. The response was astounding, with 62 cities of all sizes submitting applications. The three cities selected to participate in the program were:

Buffalo, NY  
Eau Claire, WI  
Leadville, CO

## Wintermission Cities Selected

### January 2019

Eau Claire, WI 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- December 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 team tests a series of programs, activities, and events to animate public spaces in winter

# THE WINTERMISSION METHODOLOGY

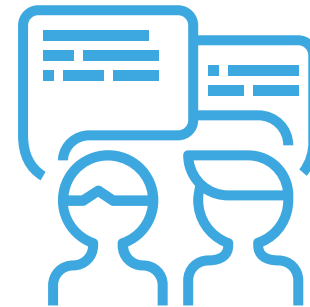
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## Phase One: Convene



The project officially began at the Winter Cities Shake Up in Saskatoon Canada in January of 2019. Representatives from each city attended the conference to learn from winter city leaders from around the world, and to develop a vision statement to guide the course of the project in their city.

## Phase Two: Engage



From February to May 2019, each city conducted city-wide conversations about winter public life. Utilizing equitable engagement strategies and tactics, the engagement process sought to identify existing barriers and challenges in each city preventing residents from engaging in social and physical activity outdoors in winter. Ideas and opportunities to overcome those barriers and bring public life to public spaces in winter were workshopped with a diverse range of communities and stakeholders.

**“For vulnerable groups, social isolation combined with health dangers of colder weather is a lethal combination”**

**- Professor Jane Cummings, Chief Nursing Officer for England & Executive Director, National Health Service**

## Phase Three: Test



Using the information and feedback collected, each city developed and implemented a series of low-cost, high-impact pilot projects over the course of winter 2020.\* The pilots tested innovative solutions for reducing barriers to social connection in winter.

\*Due to COVID-19, the pilot projects in each city were not fully implemented and evaluated as originally envisioned.

## Phase Four: Strategize



Combining everything learned throughout the convene, engage, and test phases, each city developed a Winter City Strategy that responds to their unique challenges and opportunities. The strategies outline specific goals, policy, and planning recommendations to help them become winter city leaders.

# SOCIAL ISOLATION, WINTERMISSION & COVID- 19

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### What is Social Isolation?

Social isolation describes an absence of social contact and connection. It is a state of being cut off from social networks<sup>[1]</sup>. It can operate on an individual level through an absence of contact with family, friends, and neighbors, or on a broader level, with a lack of connection to society at large<sup>[2]</sup>. While temporary feelings of loneliness are healthy, chronic feelings of social isolation are one of the single largest predictors of health and happiness.<sup>[3]</sup>



## Why should we address Social Isolation?

Human beings are inherently social creatures. We thrive when we have strong social connections<sup>[4]</sup>. Decades of research has found that being socially connected significantly reduces risk for premature mortality from all causes<sup>[5]</sup>. On the other hand, studies have found that experiencing social isolation increases risk for earlier death by 29%<sup>[6]</sup>. These effects are independent of age and initial health status<sup>[7]</sup>. Social isolation can completely alter an individual's health and wellbeing, regardless of how healthy they were prior to losing social connections.



Numerous studies have identified the myriad ways social isolation can impact physical and mental health. Loneliness can be as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day<sup>[8]</sup>. Social isolation and loneliness are strongly related to arthritis, mobility impairment, chronic lung disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other cardiovascular diseases. For mental and cognitive health, a lack of social connection leads to higher levels of depression, anxiety, poorer cognitive function, and dementia. Social isolation has also been linked to deaths of despair, such as drug and alcohol related deaths and suicide<sup>[9]</sup>. While research into social isolation continues, each new study deepens our understanding of how damaging social isolation can be to every aspect of wellbeing.

Social isolation also has wide-ranging impacts beyond individual health. There are major economic costs associated with high levels of social isolation. As a society, the social connections and wellbeing of our workforce are rarely discussed. Lonely workers think about quitting their jobs twice as often as non-lonely workers<sup>[10]</sup>. Looking only at Americans aged 65 or older, social isolation costs the U.S. government nearly \$7 billion in additional health care costs each year<sup>[11]</sup>.

## What causes social isolation?

The root causes of social isolation run deep into the foundation of our society and are intertwined with the roots causes of many societal inequities. What follows is a brief description of some of the most commonly understood factors contributing to social isolation:

### Access to Transportation

Safe, convenient, and affordable transportation options are key factors in developing social capital and community wellbeing. Individuals and communities lacking in access to public transit and safe active transportation infrastructure see much higher levels of social isolation as compared to those where taking transit, walking, and biking are common forms of travel<sup>[12]</sup>.

### Poverty

The links between poverty and social isolation are extensive and self-sustaining. Social isolation contributes to poverty, and poverty often means social resources are inaccessible. Experiences of social isolation are often cited by residents with lower income as painful aspects of poverty that prevent them from engaging in social and physical activity<sup>[13]</sup>. Conversely, social capital and connection are vital assets for those seeking to escape poverty.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Unemployment

Poverty, unemployment, and social isolation form a vicious cycle that reinforces and sustains itself. The marginalization caused by unemployment 'leads to poverty and social isolation, which in turn reinforce the risk of long-term unemployment.'<sup>[15]</sup> On a larger societal scale,

unemployment—in the absence of a universal basic income and robust social supports—drives poverty, and by extension, social isolation. On the individual level, job loss has detrimental effects on subjective perceptions of social integration and life satisfaction. Losing one's employment can cause an individual to feel more isolated. This feeling of isolation hinders the psychological wellbeing of the individual, making it more difficult to obtain new employment. The longer the duration of unemployment, the more profound and damaging the feeling of isolation becomes.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Access to high-quality public spaces

Social connections do not occur in a vacuum. They need safe, comfortable, welcoming spaces to grow and thrive. Multiple studies found that patients who were prescribed 'socialization', non-medicalized community-based activities, by their doctors gained self-confidence and reduced their social isolation. However, those studies also found that this strategy only works when public spaces, such as parks, libraries, and community centers, were easily-accessible, well-designed, and programmed for social interaction.<sup>[17]</sup>

### Physical and Mobility Impairments

Many of the factors that cause social isolation are systematic, but individual causes exist as well. Individuals who are not independently mobile are much more likely to suffer from social isolation as compared to those who are independently mobile. Physical impairments such as loss of hearing also create barriers in maintaining social connections<sup>[18]</sup>. Losing a loved one, domestic abuse, and personal crises can all create intense feelings of social disconnection. These individual causes are often exacerbated by systematic issues that contribute to social isolation.

### Who does Social Isolation impact?

The most conservative estimates suggest that loneliness affects one in five adults across the globe. From 2018 to 2019, rates of loneliness increased from 47% to 61% of the American population. The average size and diversity of core networks like spouses, friends, coworkers, etc.

**“Just as fish can’t swim without water, nor can victims of loneliness reap the benefits of social interaction without shared spaces to do so in.”**

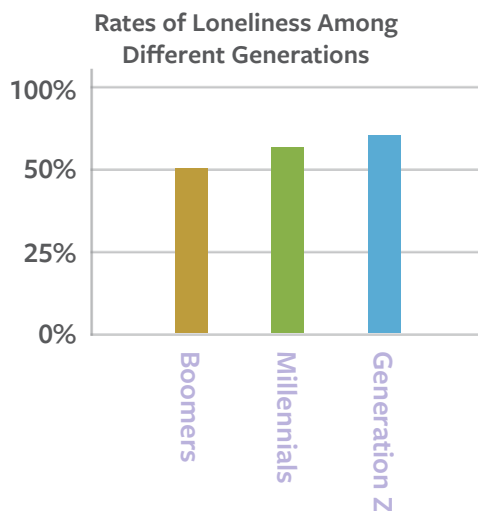
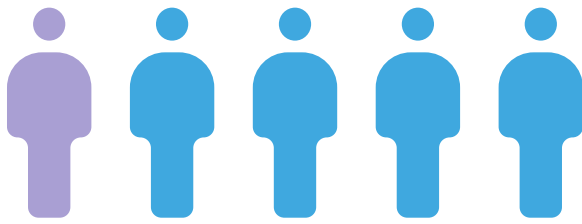
**- Julia Hotz,  
Journalist & Communities Manager,  
Solutions Journalism Network**

has similarly been declining for decades.<sup>[19]</sup>

Loneliness has been found to be prevalent amongst all age groups, but is highest among younger generations. 50% of boomers, 71% of millennials, and 79% of Generation Z self-report as lonely. Individuals with lower-incomes are far more likely to report feeling socially isolated as compared to individuals with higher income. Communities of color in general, and Latinx and Black Americans in particular, are most likely to suffer from social isolation<sup>[20]</sup>.

The connections between the main causes of social isolation and communities who are most likely to suffer from social isolation are clear. Individuals with lower-income who are experiencing poverty and unemployment report high levels of social isolation, as do Black and Latinx Americans, who are also more likely to be living in poverty. Neighborhoods that are parkland deficient and lacking in other public

One out of five people around the world is affected by loneliness



services, such as libraries and community centers, are far more likely to be home to lower-income communities of color. Similarly, neighborhoods that do not provide safe sustainable mobility options are also more likely to be home to marginalized communities. Health researcher Yolanda Ogbolu from the University of Maryland School of Nursing coined the term ‘situational isolation’ to describe the self-isolating behavior driven by the built form and environmental conditions of a social setting or neighborhood.

#### How does winter influence social isolation?

Winter in the United States amplifies existing conditions that cause social isolation. While some people may welcome colder temperatures, others feel trapped, vulnerable, and isolated. Research indicates that severe seasonal affective disorder (SAD) affects 6% of the American

**“Every year, as the days become short and dark, people with SAD... slow down and have a hard time waking up the morning... their concentration suffers, and they withdraw from friends and family. As you can image, their work and relationships suffer, and they can become quite depressed.”**

**- Dr. Norman Rosenthal,  
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry,  
Georgetown Medical School**

population, and disproportionately affects women. An additional 10-20% of Americans suffer from mild forms of SAD. Symptoms of SAD include depression, social anxiety, a desire to avoid social contact, lethargy, and sleep deprivation.<sup>[21]</sup>

Why does social isolation get worse in winter? Most cities in the northern United States experience winter for substantial portions of the year. However, their built environments and transportation systems do little to embrace their climate. Public spaces and transportation systems that are already forces for exclusion and



social isolation become even more problematic in winter. On average, parks and public spaces see significantly fewer visitors during colder months, and residents report being much less socially and physically active in winter as compared to other months. Many municipalities stop maintaining and programming their public spaces in winter. Outdoor spaces are often not designed to enhance warmth and light, two key factors in encouraging people to spend time outside in colder months. Those with independent mobility barriers in particular report feeling disconnected in winter, as sidewalks and transit stations are often left unplowed and unsalted by municipalities. In icy conditions, residents are 40% less likely to leave their homes, with older adults having great difficulty setting foot outside due to unmaintained sidewalks.<sup>[22]</sup> Women are far more likely to rely on walking and public transit to get around and, not coincidentally, experience SAD at a much higher rate as compared to men.

Many northern American cities also see economic activity fluctuate with the seasons, reaching peak activity in the summer and slowing greatly in the winter. The same barriers that make it harder for people to engage in social activity in winter also prevent people from participating in local economies.<sup>[23]</sup> For many individuals with lower income, employment can be seasonal and winter often sees levels of unemployment and poverty rise in American cities, further contributing to levels of social isolation. Winter in the United States worsens many of the conditions that contribute to social isolation in the first place, making it no surprise that Americans who suffer from SAD typically exhibit symptoms that last 40% of the year.

### How has COVID-19 influenced Social Isolation?

While social isolation and loneliness were prevalent in Americans prior to COVID-19, efforts to reduce the virus spread via stay-at home orders, quarantine, and physical distancing recommendations have exacerbated an already acute mental health situation. 28% of Americans live alone, and the pandemic meant little to no

human contact for months. Regardless of living situation, interactions with anyone outside the home have been severely limited across the board.

While the impacts of COVID-19 will not be fully understood for years to come, we do have some sense of how it has impacted people's emotional and mental health. Some surveys suggest that within the first month of COVID-19, loneliness increased by 20-30%, and emotional distress tripled.<sup>[24]</sup> In particular, older adults, people of color, individuals with lower-incomes and those in congregate living centers such as long-term care homes and prisons have seen their mental health and levels of social interaction disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.



28% Americans live alone, and during COVID-19 loneliness has increased by 20% - 30%

### Impacts of inequity and COVID-19

Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19. Inequities in the social determinants of health, such as poverty and access to healthcare, combine with interpersonal racism and racial biases in the health care system to expose BIPOC communities to the greatest risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19. Some of the many inequities that put vulnerable communities at increased risk include:

#### Discrimination

Unfortunately, discrimination exists in systems meant to protect well-being or health. Discrimination, which includes racism, can lead

**“The old African American aphorism when white America catches a cold, Black America gets pneumonia has a new, morbid twist: when white America catches the novel coronavirus, Black Americans die.”**

**- Taylor, Assistant Professor of African-American Studies, Princeton University**

to chronic and toxic stress and shapes social and economic factors that put some people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk for COVID-19.

#### **Healthcare Access and Utilization**

People from some racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanic whites. Healthcare access can also be limited for these groups by many other factors, such as lack of transportation, child care, or ability to take time off of work; communication and language barriers; cultural differences between patients and providers; and historical and contemporary discrimination in healthcare systems. Some people from racial and ethnic minority groups may hesitate to seek care because they distrust the government and healthcare systems responsible for inequities in treatment.

#### **BIPOC Communities in Essential Jobs**

Some BIPOC communities are disproportionately represented in essential work settings such as healthcare facilities, farms, factories, grocery stores, and public transportation. Some people who work in these settings have more chances to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 due to several factors, such as close contact with the public or other workers, not being able to work from home, and not having paid sick days.

#### **Educational, Income, and Wealth Gaps**

Inequities in access to high-quality education for some racial and ethnic minority groups can lead to lower high school completion rates and barriers to college entrance. This may limit future job options and lead to lower paying or less stable jobs. People with limited job options likely have less flexibility to leave jobs that may put them at a higher risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. People in these situations often cannot afford to miss work, even if they're sick, because they do not have enough money saved up for essential items like food and other important expenses.

These factors and others are associated with more COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in areas where racial and ethnic minority groups live, learn, work, play, and worship. They have also contributed to higher rates of some medical conditions that increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. In addition, community strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 may cause unintentional harm, such as lost wages, reduced access to services, and increased stress for some racial and ethnic minority groups. These populations were already at high risk for poor health outcomes prior to the pandemic. The very same inequities in transportation systems, access to public space and resources, unemployment, and poverty that drive social isolation and prevent people from leaving their homes in winter are contributing to the pandemic's disproportionate effect on vulnerable communities.

A photograph of a winter scene. In the foreground, a wide river is mostly frozen, with a thin layer of ice and some open water reflecting the sky. A concrete bridge with several pillars spans the river in the middle ground. In the background, a city skyline is visible against a vibrant sunset sky with shades of orange, pink, and purple. A large industrial building with a tall smokestack is prominent, with smoke rising from it. The sky is clear with a few wispy clouds.

# **WINTERMISSION EAU CLAIRE**





Representatives from Wintermission Eau Claire

University of Wisconsin  
**Eau Claire**



Wintermission Eau Claire is led locally by the representatives from the City of Eau Claire, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Eau Claire City-County Health Department, Visit Eau Claire, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, the City of Altoona, and Downtown Eau Claire.

# WINTER CITY CONVENING

Wintermission Eau Claire kicked off with a convening of representatives from all three Winter Cities at the Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference in Saskatoon, Canada from January 23-25, 2019. Winter Cities Shake-Up is a biennial conference that brings together people from a wide variety of disciplines and backgrounds to discuss all aspects of what makes a successful winter city and to forge new approaches for improving the quality of life in winter cities. What better place to launch Wintermission Eau Claire?



In addition to the workshops, presentations and guided tours, the conference provided an opportunity for the Eau Claire representatives to begin envisioning what Wintermission would like in Eau Claire. 8 80 Cities and Children & Nature Network hosted two workshops for the Winter City teams. The first focused on developing a vision statement for Wintermission Eau Claire that laid out the direction and core principals of Eau Claire's approach to the program. The second discussed 8 80 Cities approach to inclusive community engagement. Eau Claire representatives developed a list of key local groups and stakeholders to engage and brainstormed potential methods for connecting with harder-to-reach communities. This would serve as the basis for the next phase of the project.

# WINTERMISSION EAU CLAIRE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The second phase of Wintermission was all about sparking a city-wide conversation about how people in Eau Claire experience winter. We wanted to understand the barriers that prevent Eau Clairians from participating in social and physical activity outdoors in winter and hear how residents would like to improve Eau Claire’s winter public life. From March to May 2019, Wintermission Eau Claire started a community engagement process that intentionally sought out traditionally underrepresented voices to ensure a wide range of perspectives and experiences were heard and included in the process.

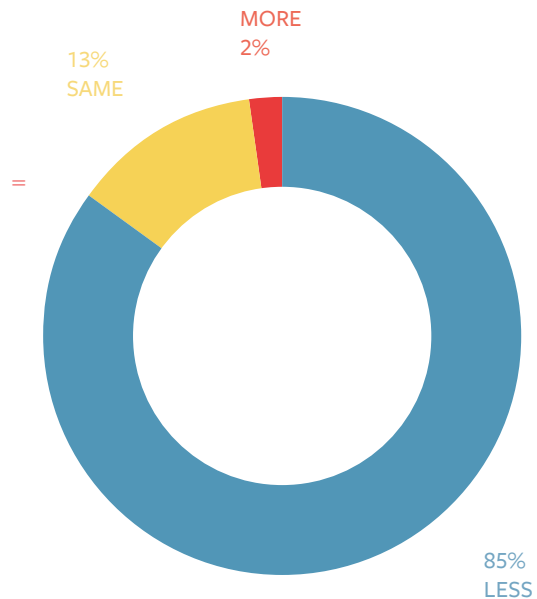


**Pop-up Engagement at Pinehurst Park, Winter After Hours**

Wintermission Eau Claire took a ‘go to them’ approach to community engagement, seeking to meet residents where they live, play, work, and study. The process included ‘pop-up’ engagement hubs, workshops, online and in-person surveys, focus groups and meetings with local businesses, front line service providers, and faith leaders. The full findings from this process are contained in a separate report (see [Winter Cities Toolkit](#)), but here’s a quick snapshot of what we heard.

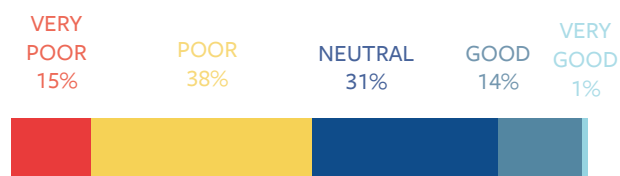
## CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH WINTER

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

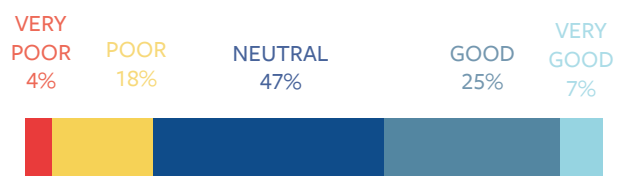


## CHALLENGES

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.



## CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH WINTER

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

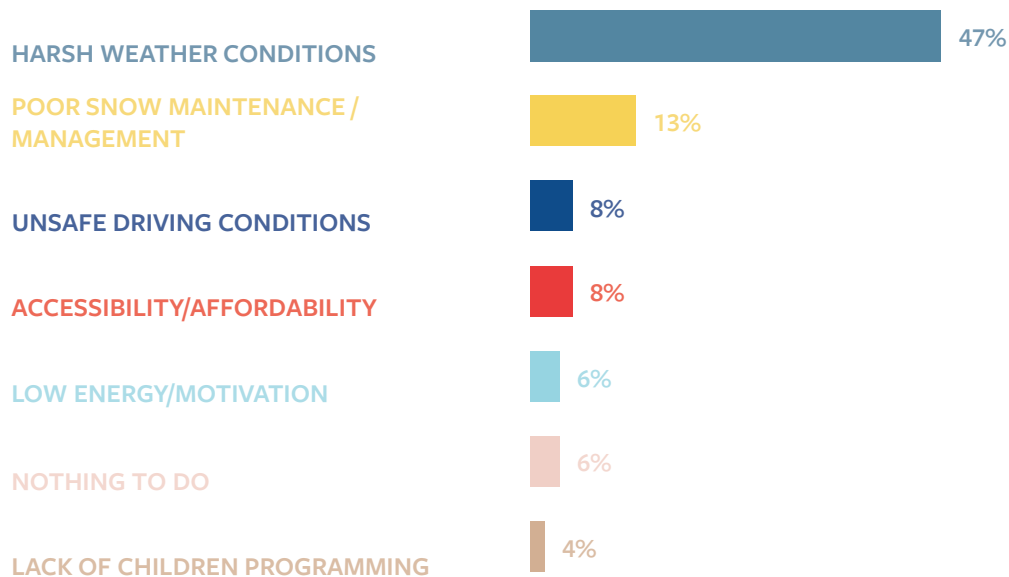


Other responses were primarily suggestions outside the abilities of the Wintermission team to implement, such as less snow or warmer temperatures.

## CHALLENGES

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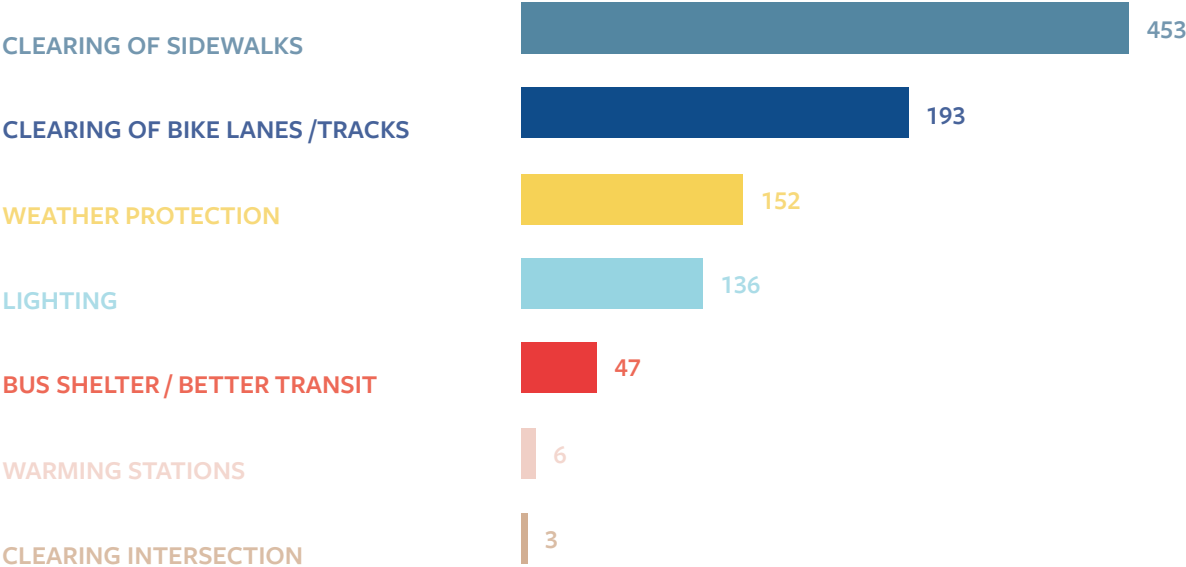
What, if anything, makes it challenging for you to get outdoors and be active in the winter...



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

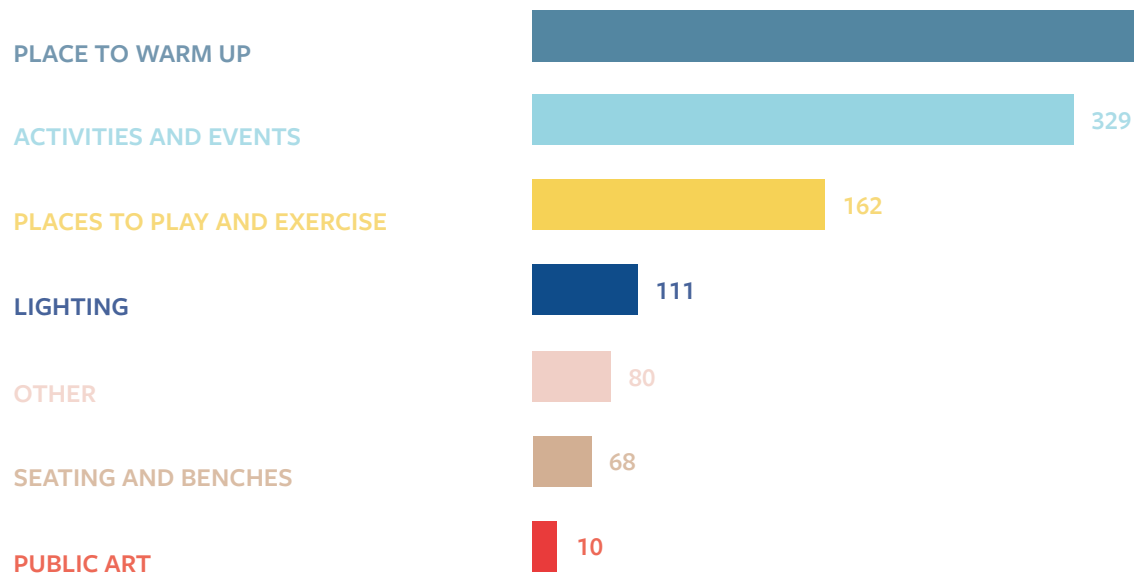


The questions asked in this section were multiple choice. Respondents selected their top two priorities.

## CHALLENGES

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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.



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# WINTERMISSION EAU CLAIRE PILOT PROJECTS

# PILOT PROJECTS

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The third phase of Wintermission Eau Claire was all about implementing quick and simple pilot projects to better combat social isolation and improve public life during winter. Building on the information gathered through the engagement process, the Wintermission Eau Claire team identified four key priority areas of opportunity. The priority areas were:



## SNOW AND ICE MAINTENANCE



## WINTER MOBILITY



## WINTER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



## WINTER CULTURE

Working with city partners and community leaders, the Wintermission Eau Claire team planned and implemented the following pilot projects.

### **Dedicated Winter Route**

A dedicated winter recreation path that created a circuit through Downtown Eau Claire. The route received first priority snow plowing after snow events, allowing residents a reliable venue for active recreation and commuting.

### **Winter Wayfinding and Signage**

New and improved signage helped guide residents to key winter activities or attractions like Winter After Hours in Pinehurst Park.

### **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 changing how residents and media talk about winter, in an effort to improve perceptions and attitudes toward winter life in Eau Claire.

The nature of these pilot projects was to experiment with quick, cost-effective solutions to advance the goals of Wintermission. We recognize that there are no quick fixes that create equitable winter public spaces or combating social isolation during the winter. The intention of these pilot projects was to study their performance and determine clear opportunities to iterate moving forward.

In January 2020 the novel Coronavirus—or COVID-19—developed into a global health pandemic that quickly swept into Eau Claire. This unprecedented turn of events meant that everyone was encouraged to stay home to physically isolate in a global effort to prevent the spread of the virus. COVID-19 drastically altered the way cities function and this strategy document recognizes the uniqueness and inherent bias COVID-19 has on the evaluation of the pilot projects.

Wintermission Eau Claire studied each of the four pilot projects for their impact on winter life in Eau Claire. Due to the severity and impacts of COVID-19, the evaluation of the pilot projects could not be captured in situ. The following methods were used to study the performance of the Wintermission Eau Claire pilot projects:

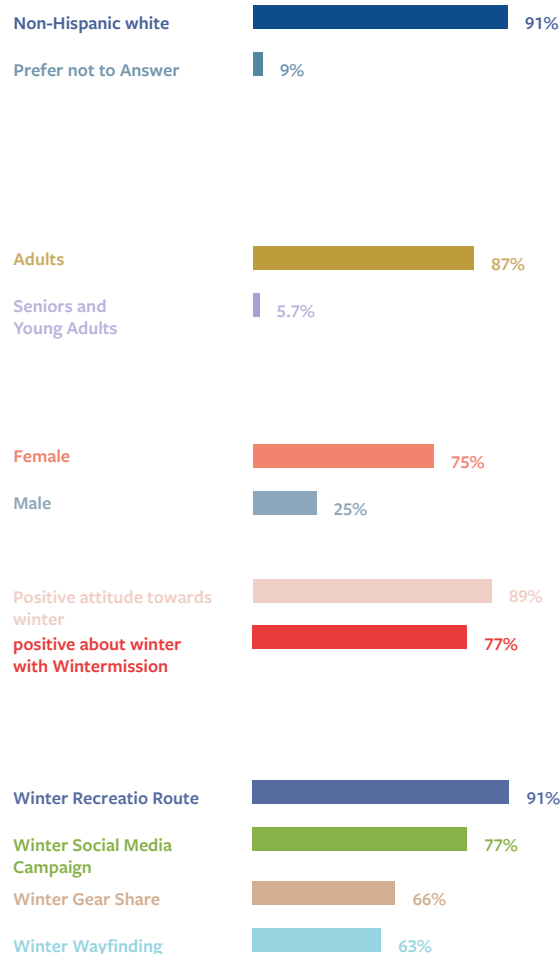
**Surveys:** The Pilot Project feedback survey was available online for 3 months (February – April, 2020), and was supplemented by in-person surveys prior to COVID-19. The purpose of the survey was to garner feedback from residents who were familiar with the pilot projects.

**Stakeholder Interviews:** Throughout the spring of 2020, the Wintermission Eau Claire team connected with key individuals and community partners who played a role in organizing and operationalizing the pilot projects. These interviews captured feedback from the people who were most familiar with the pilot projects to learn what worked and what didn't. A series of stakeholder interviews were conducted with people from Eau Claire City Services, Library catalogers, Parks Forestry and Recreation Staff, and community organizers.



## PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY

- Lack of diversity and representation in survey responses. Over-representation of non-Hispanic white individuals, who make up 91% of survey respondents, whereas 9% come from “Prefer not to Answer”
- Majority of respondents are those that identify as adults at 87%, while seniors and young adults have low response rate of 5.7% in each category
- 75% of respondents identify as female, 25% as male
- Prior to Wintermission, 46% of respondents had a positive attitude towards winter. With Wintermission, 89% of respondents had a positive attitude towards winter
- 91% of respondents familiar with Winter Recreation Route, 63% with Winter Wayfinding, 66% with Winter Gear Share, 77% with Winter Social Media Campaign



## RANKINGS

### Which pilot projects encouraged respondents to be most physically and socially active?

- **1st Choice:** Winter Route
- **2nd Choice:** Way-Finding Signage
- **3rd Choice:** Gear Share Program
- **4th Choice:** Social Media Campaign

### Which pilot projects do respondents want to see continued?

- **Winter Route – 91%**
- **Gear Share Program - 69%**
- **Social Media Campaign – 57%**
- **Way-Finding Signage – 37%**

# DEDICATED WINTER ROUTE



The WEC team collaborated with City partners and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire on a Winter Recreation Path that was plowed with high priority after snow events. The project idea stemmed from feedback we heard during the engagement process. Many residents expressed great love for the City's trail network but indicated they rarely utilized them in winter due to uncertainty about when trails were plowed or maintained.

The four mile route connected Phoenix Park to UW-Eau Claire's campus and created a circuit around Downtown Eau Claire. The path was accessible from the city's Phoenix Park parking ramp and Hobbs Ice Arena. UW-Eau Claire's parking lots on Water Street maintained priority access to the city trails with free parking on weekends. The route received the highest plowing priority of any city trail, making it a reliable asset for recreation and connectivity in the City.

## SURVEY

- 97% of respondents reported using the winter route for recreational purposes, 27% for socializing, and 13% for commuting
- 43% use the route with others occasionally, 27% mostly use the route with others, 20% always use the route with others, 10% use the route alone
- 97% of respondents said the route encouraged them to be more physically/socially active
- 96% of respondents said the priority plowing encouraged them to use the path more
- 91% of respondents improved their outlook on winter thanks to the winter route program
- Route expansion and improved maintenance measures (ice clearing, salting) were the most common suggestions for improvement
- Some noted that snow plowing priority should be shifted to sidewalks rather than recreational trails

## INTERVIEW

### Positives:

- Greatly increased levels of winter recreation and trail usage
- Age-diversity on the trail increased
- Children were seen riding bikes in winter, a rare site in previous years
- New networks and connections between project partners were created
- The trail helped develop a stronger sense of community
- Social media campaign helped get the word out and make the route successful
- Led to increased collaboration with various community and recreational groups

### Suggested Improvements:

- Expand the priority snow plowing to more trails
- Create more connections to other trails
- Add access to equipment along trails e.g. snowshoes, fat bikes, etc. Perhaps combined with Winter Gear Share?
- Add events and programs to the trail, like nature walks in winter, tobogganing hill, marshmallow roast, bonfire, etc.
- Let community groups organize activities, but Wintermission/City supports with promotion and plowing
- Use the trail as a platform to share ideas and build connections across communities

### Critiques:

- The communications materials were not translated and therefore inaccessible to many in the Hmong and Latinx communities

### Challenges:

- **Maintenance Issues:** Planning salting routes were a logistical challenge
- **Material Costs:** Sand was the short-term alternative (cheaper) used rather than salt
- **Roles of Responsibility:** Conflicts around who is responsible for plowing on private land/ portions of property
- **Reliability:** Flyers used to ensure private portions of route were plowed, to mixed success

# WINTER WAYFINDING SIGNAGE



Pinehurst Park Wayfinding Signage

Eau Claire has over 28 miles of recreational trails across the city. While these trails are popular attractions, there is a recognizable decline in their use during the winter. During the engagement process, we heard that many community members did not know about the city's vast trail network or were unclear how they could be accessed. Many of the trails are uniquely equipped for snow shoeing, cross country skiing, or winter fat biking. There were also notable observations that the City's winter programming was not easily located. Specifically, the Winter After Hours program in Pinehurst Park is in a residential cul-de-sac and, unless you lived in the area, is difficult to locate or get to. The Wintermission Winter Wayfinding pilot project sought to increase awareness and wayfinding for residents seeking to access these amenities by installing new directional signs to Pinehurst Park and recreational trails.

## SURVEY

- 64% of respondents found signage helpful in providing awareness of a program or public space they weren't previous aware of
- 73% of respondents found signage helped encourage social/physical activity outdoors
- 77% of respondents found their outlook on winter improved or greatly improved by the wayfinding signage
- 85% of respondents used the signage to find the Winter Route, 50% used it to find Pinehurst Park, 15% to find Snowshoe trials



## INTERVIEW

### Positives:

- Noted increase in people walking to Pinehurst Park and the Winter Route
- Anecdotally heard that the signage helped with navigation and direction
- Helped create more positive messaging and attitude around winter

### Suggested Improvements:

- Add lighted walks along with wayfinding
- Build off the signage and create a winter recreation trail guide
- Connect with school groups, as there are lots of trails in different parts of the city, and school groups could make great use of them

### Critiques:

- Uncertainty to how impactful the signage for Pinehurst Park and snowshoe trails was

## WINTER GEAR SHARE



We heard from residents with lower income and newcomer groups that one of the largest barriers of being active in winter is accessing the appropriate winter gear. Winter sports are often quite expensive and require a lot of equipment. The gear share provided access to free winter equipment like snow shoes, sleds, and ice fishing kits. The gear was made available to check out through the public library system in Eau Claire and Altoona, as well as at Pinehurst Park.

## SURVEY

- 61% of respondents found the Winter Gear Share encouraged more social/physical activity in the winter
- 87% of respondents had their outlook on winter improved by the Winter Gear Share

- Most common suggestions for improving the Winter Gear Share are:
  - 67% Greater promotion and visibility
  - 43% More gear
  - 38% Greater variety of gear
  - 33% More gear share locations

## INTERVIEW

### Positives:

- Helmets, sleds, and tubes were most highly requested items
- Attendance at Pinehurst Park was higher than previous years
- Items at libraries were returned mostly on time and in good condition

### Suggested Improvements:

- More information for library staff on the program so they can better promote it
- Ensure items like snow shoes have enough for an entire family to enjoy at one go

### Critiques:

- Management of gear share materials was poorly organized at Pinehurst Park and needs better structuring
- No lighting in gear share area at Pinehurst Park
- Some signage was misplaced and did not direct people properly

### Things to Think About:

- Build a user base and utilize it as a springboard
- Rather than having 2 or 3 copies of lots of winter gear, be known for the program first, have many copies of a few items first and then build out a wider selection of items
- Let Parks and Rec focus on outdoor spaces and maintenance and partner with the libraries on the gear share. Be clear about what our strengths are and collaborate



# SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN



How we talk about winter affects how we feel about winter. Too often during the engagement process we heard residents say they feel overwhelmed by all the negativity that exists around winter. Wintermission Eau Claire sought to change that dynamic through a social media campaign that emphasized the positive aspects of winter, and created awareness of winter events and recreational opportunities.

## SURVEY

- 82% of respondents noticed winter being spoken of more positively on social media
- 100% of respondents found the campaign to be helpful in promoting winter activities and event

### Feedback/Improvements

- Provide a printed media promotion (similar to local dining guide) and translate it
- Campaign needs more time and consistency to spread word
- Not grand enough as an idea to create change

## INTERVIEW

### Positives:

- Collaboration sparked by this pilot lead to permanent winter culture site with Visit Eau Claire

### Suggested Improvements:

- Brand identity needs stronger clarity and communication
- One organization, possibly Visit Eau Claire, needs to take whole ownership of the campaign

### Things to Think About:

- Opportunity to expand: Visit Eau Claire can generate its own winter content, manage social accounts.
- It's helpful to have the Wintermission Eau Claire group at the table to provide insights into the content but VEC can organize content to increase engagement

### Quotes

- "Far more than dollars and cents - It's about mental and physical health and that's the most important thing for cities to prioritize."
- "Route needs to be close to where people are, don't make people travel 30 minutes to get there."
- "Give people the promotion and opportunity to get outside in winter, and the mental health improvements will follow."
- "It was a project that took the right people that care about winter, to get things done"
- "The Winter Route was a huge example of that success and it should be expanded. Parks and Rec alone can't do that."





# EAU CLAIRE AS A WINTER CITY



# WINTERMISSION

## EAU CLAIRE VISION

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Throughout the engagement process, residents didn't just share experiences of how tough being socially and physically active in winter in Eau Claire can be. They also talked about how wonderful winters in Eau Claire are. Eau Claire has many of the key ingredients of a winter city already in place, with world-class outdoor trails and facilities, coupled with signature winter events and programs. Eau Claire's Winter City Strategy is about capitalizing on these existing assets, creating new programs and policies to fill gaps in winter design and public life, and ensuring the city is equitable and accessible to all. To set the tone of for the future of winter in Eau Claire, the Winter City Strategy is guided by the following vision statement, based on insights from local winter city champions:



This vision statement is the prism through which all future strategic decisions about winter in Eau Claire and efforts to address social isolation should be viewed. The recommendations and observations contained in this strategy are informed by this vision.

# EAU CLAIRE WINTER CITY STRATEGY PILLARS

Three main priority areas for increasing social and physical activity in winter emerged from the engagement and pilot project phases. Those priority areas form the pillars of the winter city strategy and each recommendation relates to one or more of the pillars. To help guide recommendations and spur action, each pillar has its own vision statement, drafted from priorities identified by local residents and stakeholders.

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

## Pillar 1: Winter Accessibility

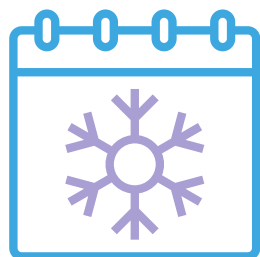
The City of Eau Claire will work collaboratively toward prioritizing mobility and safe access to winter public life.



## Budget Key



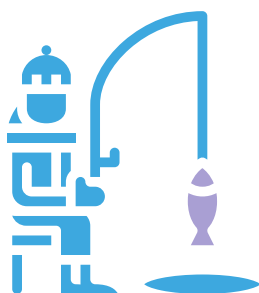
## Pillar 2: Winter Events & Recreation



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.



# WINTER CITY STRATEGY

The initiatives contained in this strategy are based on the feedback gathered from the engagement phase of the project, and on lessons learned from the successes and failures of the pilot projects. This strategy purposefully does not lay out strict timelines for implementation, but rather estimates how long each initiative would take to complete. The Wintermission Eau Claire team will work with the community on identifying which initiatives in the strategy should be prioritized for implementation first.

# DIVERSITY WITHIN WINTERMISSION EAU CLAIRE

The Wintermission Eau Claire team is comprised of interdisciplinary Eau Claire representatives. Over the course of this project, it became apparent that there are certain gaps in the perspectives of the team's leadership. There is a need to include diverse voices in Eau Claire's winter city leadership, particularly with regards to the Hmong, Latinx, and lower-income populations of the city. Diversifying the Wintermission Eau Claire team will be a step forward in ensuring that the City's winter culture is uniquely applicable to everyone in Eau Claire.

The engagement phase of the project garnered perspectives from people who are commonly left out of the conversations that shape the development of the City. The project connected with low-income groups, communities of color, and individuals both young and old. While the Wintermission Eau Claire team included representatives from the City of Eau Claire, the University, and more, there were no representatives that could speak to the lived experience of many marginalized groups. This point was further emphasized during the pilot project phase of Wintermission. Despite having notable communities of color in Eau Claire, specifically Hmong and Latinx groups, the predominant users of the pilot projects were white. The Wintermission Eau Claire recognizes this as a major issue and has begun assessing ways to improve Wintermission's impact on equity, inclusion, and diversity. Some initiatives that fall outside the scope of this report, such as sanctuary city policies or gender-sensitive budgeting, would further reinforce the efforts Wintermission Eau Claire is taking to build a more inclusive city and are worth pursuing.

The Wintermission Eau Claire team continues to engage with communities of color to further understand their winter needs and strategize ways for the city to be more equitable. The challenges and barriers that prevent marginalized groups from engaging in civic life are deeply



rooted and the team recognizes that there are no fast or simple solutions to make everyone in the City feel welcome, comfortable, and motivated to partake in winter public life. To this end, the proactive recruitment of diverse representatives to join and have power in the Wintermission Eau Claire team is a key step in equitably guiding the development and application of the Winter City Strategy.

**Time to implement:** Ongoing

**Potential Partners:** UWEC-Student Senate, L.E. Phillips Senior Center, Community leaders from the Hmong and Latinx community, JONAH community organization, Faith leaders

**Inspiration:** Wintermission Buffalo is made up of interdisciplinary and diverse team members of all different ages, backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses. The team engage the Youth Vista program to work collaboratively with young members of the city to help shape how Buffalo can improve winter public life for all.

New Brunswick Ciclovía is a recreational program that excels in building a diverse leadership team and ensuring the program meets the needs of diverse communities.

**Budget:**



**Winter City Pillar:**





# SECTION ONE: PROGRAMS & EVENTS

## 1.1 EXPAND WINTER GEARSHARE

**Description:** The Winter Gear Share pilot project was a great success. By expanding the gear share offerings with more gear and at additional locations, a greater number of Eau Claireans will be able to participate in winter sports and recreation.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 6 months

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Eau Claire Public Library, Altoona Public Library, Outdoor More

**Equity Impacts:** Removes the economic barrier to accessing winter recreation

**Inspiration:**

Wintermission Eau Claire's Gear Share

**Budget:** \$ - \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**  



## 1.2 EXPAND WINTER AFTER HOURS

**Description:** Winter After Hours is one of Eau Claire's signature winter programs, connecting thousands of residents to outdoor recreation and social activity every winter. Located in Pinehurst Park, it is hosted by [Volume One](#) in partnership with Eau Claire Parks and Recreation Department and Outdoor More. Its combination of recreational activities, food, music, light, and fire pits is a perfect distillation of everything that makes winter in Eau Claire wonderful. It's time to build on the success of Winter After Hours and bring the program to parks across the city. Start with at least one Winter After Hours program in all five of Eau Claire's political districts. Look at neighborhoods that are most in need of physical activity programming. Explore the viability of holding it on multiple evenings during the week, or all weekend. The possibilities for a program this successful are endless.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1-3 years

**Potential Partners:** Volume One, Outdoor More, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Eau Claire City Council, Eau Claire City-County Public Health. Neighborhood Associations

**Equity Impacts:** When deciding where first to expand Winter After Hours, the city should prioritize neighborhoods with larger BIPOC and lower-income populations.

**Inspiration:**

Winter After Hours in Pinehurst Park, Eau Claire

**Budget:** \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:** 



## 1.3 CAMPAIGN: WINTER BUSINESS PLEDGE

**Description:** Everyone has a role to play in shifting our perceptions of winter, and local businesses are no exception. As innovative and nimble independent operators, small business owners can quickly implement small-scale, winter-friendly initiatives that can shape whole communities' perceptions of winter. A Winter Business Pledge to embrace winter—to collectively celebrate the season all season long, is a great first step in engaging entrepreneurs and building a collective vision for long-term improvements and change.

**Time to implement:** 3 months to 1 year

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Economic Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Local businesses, Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce

**Equity Impacts:** An aspect of the pledge could be ensuring business owners provide spaces for all people to warm up for a few minutes in winter.

### Inspiration:

Anti-Racist Small Business Pledge

**Budget:** 

**Winter City Pillar:**



## 1.4 PUBLIC MUSIC

Eau Claire's public spaces are usually animated during the long summer months and a full range of outdoor entertainment options can be found throughout the city. However, as Eau Claire enters into its winter season, there is a substantial decrease of activity in outdoor entertainment.

By bringing music into Eau Claire's urban spaces during winter, a more vibrant and animated atmosphere can begin to grow. Injecting urban spaces with music can act as a form of art therapy to alleviate the winter blues and uplift those coping with forms of seasonal depression. Public music can also act as a magnet for attracting crowds that foster social connections and sense of belonging.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 6 months

**Potential Partners:** Local musicians and music groups, school boards, local buskers, cultural associations

**Equity Impacts:** Free musical performances reduce economic barriers to arts and entertainment. This initiative would create opportunities for performers from diverse backgrounds to showcase their music through paid performances provided free to audiences by cultural grants, sponsorships, and donations. Music through paid performances provided free to audiences by cultural grants, sponsorships, and donations.

### Inspiration:

Rockefeller Center, New York, NY

Evergreen Brickworks, Toronto, ON

**Budget:**  –  

**Winter City Pillar:**





## 1.5 WARMING HUT COMPETITION AND EVENTS

**Description:** More winter-themed events, places to play, lighting, and seating were other common ideas for making public spaces more attractive destinations in winter. Why not combine several of these together with warming huts? Utilizing art and design, these warming huts can serve as public pavilions in parks that ensure residents know parks are open and active all year long. Alternatively, commission local artists to build warming huts that add beauty and light while warming the city.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 2 - 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Recreation Department, UWEC, Eau Claire Fire Department, Eau Claire Building Department, Pablo Center at the Confluence, Local arts organizations, Local artists

**Equity Impacts:** Public spaces that do not provide protection from the elements can be quite inhospitable to small children, older adults, and those with mobility impairments.

### Inspiration:

The Forks, Winnipeg, Canada

Winter Public Pavilions, Edmonton, CA

**Budget:**



**Winter City Pillar:**





## 1.6 SNOW SCULPTURE COMPETITION

**Description:** Snow sculpture competitions offer an attractive way to bring arts and culture activities that tend to take place inside outdoors in winter. Snow sculptures are a fantastic basis for a winter competition because anyone, from award winning artists to small children, can build them. Snow sculptures competitions can operate at the neighborhood level, city-wide level, or attract national artists.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 6 months – 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Pablo Center, Visit Eau Claire, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Local businesses, Community organizations, Eau Claire Economic Development

**Equity Impacts:** At the neighborhood level, providing snow blocks, equipment, and sculpting workshops for lower income and newcomer populations can ensure everyone gets a chance to participate.

### Inspiration:

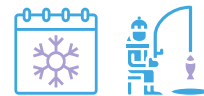
Annual International Snow Carving, Yellowknife, CA

Snow Sculpture Competition, Kenora, ON

### Budget:



### Winter City Pillar:



# SECTION TWO: INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

## 2.1 ENHANCE + EXPAND WINTER ROUTE

**Description:** Another hugely successful pilot project, the Winter Route should absolutely become a permanent fixture of winter in Eau Claire. Program growth could take many forms, from expanding the size of the route to adding programming, food, and classes, to providing winter gear along the route. All are worth exploring, but in terms of connecting to the most people and providing the most widespread benefits, expanding the route should be the first priority.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 - 10 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Transportation, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Eau Claire Planning, Eau Claire City County Public Health, OutdoorMore, UW-Eau Claire, Community Associations

**Equity Impacts:** The Winter Route is very similar in concept to Open Streets or Ciclovía programs, which are internationally recognized to be accessible and barrier free public health and recreation programs.

### Inspiration:

[Open Streets Project](#)

**Budget:** \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**  



## 2.2 SIGNAGE + WAYFINDING FOR TRAILS

**Description:** Throughout the engagement phase, residents lamented the disconnect between the many opportunities for outdoor recreation in Eau Claire and how difficult it is to find them. Clear, well-located signage and wayfinding can assist in breaking down the mental barriers that prevent people from enjoying the trail system by reinforcing how close and accessible recreational opportunities are.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 - 2 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Planning, Eau Claire Transportation

**Equity Impacts:** In communities with a significant English as second language population, ensure signage is translated.

**Inspiration:**

Yellowknife Wayfinding Strategy

**Budget:** \$ - \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:** 



## 2.3 SKI LIFT IN PINEHURST PARK

**Description:** Pinehurst Park has a small ski hill that is a popular attraction all winter long, particularly during Winter After Hours. Local residents and recreation groups have been advocating for a ski lift to be installed for years. A ski lift would open up access to this fantastic amenity to even wider and greater use.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 3 - 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, OutdoorMore, Elected Officials

**Equity Impacts:** A ski lift would make it more appealing for beginners to take advantage of the free skiing and snowboarding in Pinehurst Park.

**Inspiration:**

Batawa Ski Hill, Batawa, ON

Earl Bales Ski & Snowboard Centre, Toronto, ON

**Budget:** \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:** 

## 2.4 WINTER GREENHOUSE AND GARDENING

**Description:** Gardening is a fantastic social and recreational activity, particularly for older adults. A winter greenhouse would extend this social connector into a year-round activity. Throughout the engagement phase of this project, we heard from older adults and the Hmong community that there is a gap in winter services for those who don't gravitate to outdoor winter running, skiing, or skating. We also heard that gardening is one of the ways they traditionally stay socially and physically active during warmer months. A winter greenhouse can fill that service gap and appeal to people who aren't as interested in more sport-based activities.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 - 3 years

**Potential Partners:** Children's Museum of Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Eau Claire Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association, L.E. Phillips Senior Center, Gardening stores

**Equity Impacts:** In addition to meeting a need for older adults and the Hmong community, a winter greenhouse could help tackle issues related to food access and food deserts.

### Inspiration:

Growing in the City, Victoria, B.C

**Budget:** 

**Winter City Pillar:**



Photo credit to Garden Planner

## 2.5 WINTER BLOCK PARTIES AND KITS

**Description:** Block parties provide an opportunity for community building, social connection, and physical activity. It doesn't take much to create a winterize block party, incorporating blankets, community bonfires, soups & stews, craft beers, backyard ice rinks, and Winter Kubb. The City of Eau Claire can help communities by providing block party kits with materials, making permits for street events free and providing technical support for filling out event applications.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 year

**Potential Partners:** Neighborhood and Community Associations, City of Eau Claire, Elected Officials, Community Centers, Local Businesses

**Equity Impacts:** By making permits for events free and assisting residents in filling out forms, Eau Claire can remove some of the economic barriers preventing lower-income communities from organizing events.



### Inspiration:

Santa's Winter Block Party - Cranbrook, BC

Love Your Block Buffalo – Buffalo, NY

### Winter City Pillar:



## 2.6 WARMING ZONES

**Description:** When asked what would make visiting parks and public spaces more enjoyable in winter, places to warm up was by far the most common response from Eau Claireans. No one likes being cold, and even worse is being cold and alone. Eau Claire can find creative ways to keep people warm, safe, and connected through public fire pits, drop-in warming shelters in public buildings, and even pop-up saunas.

### Timeframe for implementation:

6 months – 3 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Fire Department, Eau Claire Public Library, Eau Claire Senior Center, Eau Claire City Hall, UWEC, Eau Claire

Recreation Department, Eau Claire Department of Transportation, Eau Claire City-County Health Department

**Equity Impacts:** By using public buildings as drop-in warming shelters, Eau Claireans experiencing homelessness, or who can't afford to purchase food from a commercial establishment, will always have spaces where they can be protected from the elements.

### Inspiration:

Dufferin Grove Park, Toronto, Canada

24 hour respite sites, Toronto, Canada

Sauna Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Canada

### Budget:



### Winter City Pillar:





Image of Cochrane, Ontario Bike Share Program

## 2.7 FAT TIRE BIKE SHARE

**Description:** Over the past ten to fifteen years, fat bikes and bike share programs have become incredibly popular in cities across North America. Why not combine both cycling trends to create a winter-friendly active transportation program? Originally designed for riding over snowy tundra in Alaska, fat bikes make riding in snowy conditions much easier and safer. While the infrastructure for large scale bike share programs can be expensive, smaller cities have found ways to build community run and managed programs that are scalable to mid and small sized towns.

### Timeframe for implementation:

6 months – 1 year

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Planning, Eau Claire Transportation, Visit Eau Claire, Outdoor More, Shift Cyclery & Coffee Bar

**Equity Impacts:** Independent mobility is major factor in removing barriers to participant in civic and economic life. Making it easier for people

without access to a car to move around the city in winter is a key aspect of an truly equitable community.

### Inspiration:

[Horse Shoe Resort Fat Biking](#)

[Cochrane Ontario Bike Share Program](#)

**Budget:** \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**





## 2.8 SENIOR CENTER SHUTTLE

**Description:** The L.E. Phillips Senior Center is vital hub and lifeline for many older adults in Eau Claire. During the engagement phase, we heard from many patrons who told us that their social lives and mental and emotional well-being are entirely reliant on the services the center provides. Attendance drops precipitously in winter, primarily due to how difficult transportation is for older adults during colder months. A free shuttle service to the center from a convenient location would provide a lifeline to older adults who otherwise have little or no social contact in winter.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 year

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Transit, Elected Officials, L.E. Phillips Senior Center

**Equity Impacts:** Many older adults lack the physical ability or financial means to drive. A free shuttle service would remove that barrier to lower-income seniors, and those who lack independent mobility.

**Inspiration:**

Evergreen Brickworks Shuttle Bus, Toronto, CA

**Budget**



**Winter City Pillar:**



photo taken by Rick Urwin

## 2.9 BUS STOP ENHANCEMENTS

**Description:** Bus stops are one of the few places in our cities where people must wait outdoors, regardless of weather conditions. The majority of transit users in Eau Claire use transit to go get to work, school, grocery stores, and doctor's offices out of necessity, not choice. For those residents, ensuring stops have comfortable places to sit, are properly cleared of snow, and are sheltered from the elements is a matter of basic dignity. Some cities have even gone beyond those basics and have started equipping stops with heaters and public art. The old saying that if politicians rode the bus, bus stations would be palaces is even more relevant in winter.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 2 - 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Elected Officials, Eau Claire Transit

**Equity Impacts:** Lower income residents in Eau Claire are far more likely to rely on public transit as their primary means of mobility.

**Inspiration:**

Winnipeg Transit Shelters

**Budget:**



**Winter City Pillar:**



## SECTION THREE: PLANS, POLICIES AND GUIDES

### 3.1 BUILD OUT EAUWINTER.COM + RESOURCES

**Description:** Developed as part of the social media campaign pilot project, EauWinter.com is the landing page for all things winter in Eau Claire. This page links to winter recreational paths, gear sharing information, venues for recreation and additional information on how to stay active and involved in the winter. It has proven to be a valuable resource for stakeholders across the city in coordinating winter culture messaging and should continue to grow as Eau Claire implements future Winter City initiatives.

**Timeframe for implementation:** Ongoing

**Potential Partners:** Visit Eau Claire

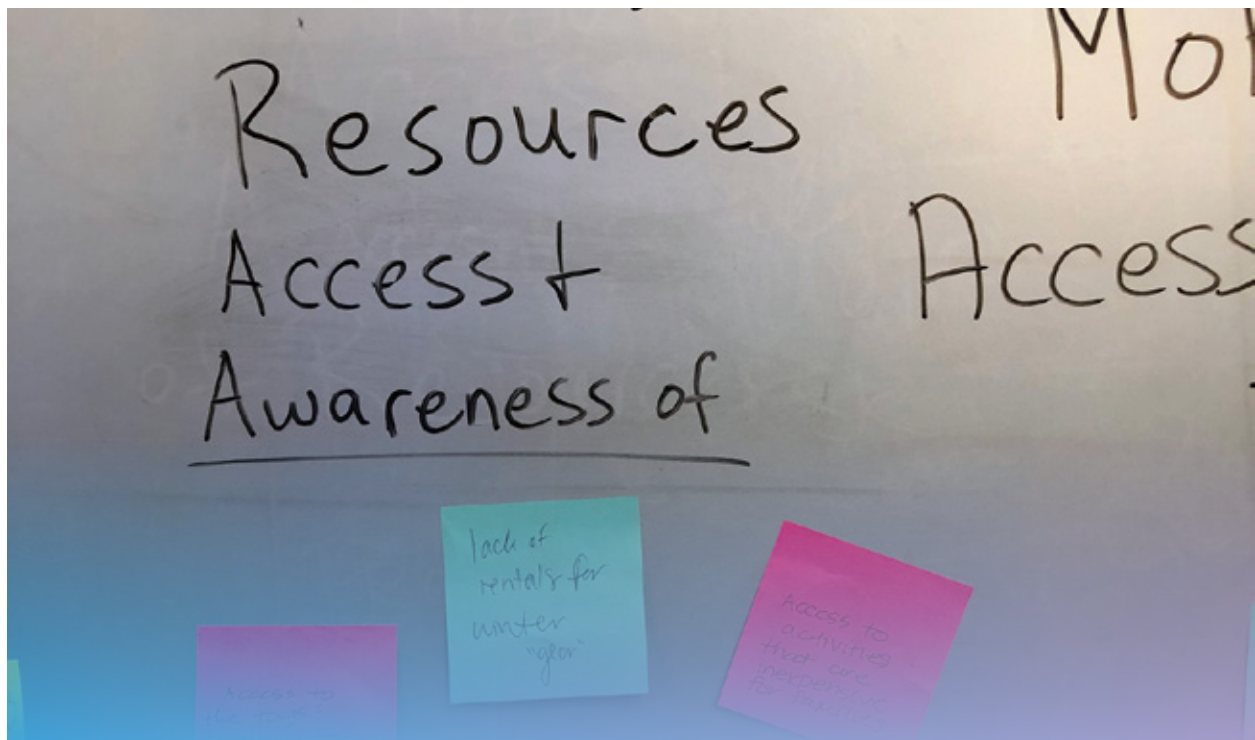
**Equity Impacts:** Translating materials and communications will help Hmong and Latinx communities engage with winter city efforts.

#### Inspiration:

Winter City Edmonton

**Budget:**  -  

**Winter City Pillar:**





## 3.2 WARMING LOCATION GUIDE

**Description:** Where can Eau Claireians go right now in winter to keep warm? A warming location guide will help residents feel comfortable spending time outdoors by knowing where the nearest welcome location to warm up indoors is. Hard copies and easy-to-use maps could be distributed to local businesses and displayed at all municipal buildings. As outdoor fire pits and warming pavilions come online, they can be added to the guide so residents know that warming up can be an outdoor experience as well.

**Timeframe for implementation:** 1 - 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Eau Claire Planning Department, UWEC, local businesses, Eau Claire and Altoona Public Libraries

**Equity Impacts:** Vulnerable communities, such as those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity may struggle with home heating expense, would benefit from a guide that informs when and where spaces exist for warmth in winter.

**Inspiration:**

Downtown Yonge BIA Drop In Resource Guide

**Budget:** \$ - \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**





### 3.3 ROOFTOP SHOVELING GUIDE

**Description:** After storms and blizzards, snow can add many pounds of extra weight to roofs, which can lead to structural failure and collapse. Veterans of cold cities can struggle managing this problem, much less newcomers, older adults, or those with mobility concerns. Developing a guide with handy tips outlining what to look for and how to ask for help in removing excess snow would be helpful for all Eau Claireans

**Timeline for Implementation:** 1 - 2 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Planning, Elected Officials

**Equity Impacts:** Translating the guide will help ensure the information is available to all communities.

#### Inspiration:

FEMA Snow Load Safety Guidance

**Budget:**  

**Winter City Pillar:**





## 3.4 WINTER DESIGN GUIDELINES

**Description:** Cities can actually plan for warmth, light, and comfort in winter. Applying a winter lens to planning frameworks and zoning codes can ensure buildings and public spaces are designed to maximize sunlight in winter. Comfortable microclimates can be nurtured. Wind mitigation can be planned for. Encouraging the use of colorful lighting and bright paint in new buildings and streetscapes can help keep the winter blues at bay. A planning framework that explicitly encourages and requires these interventions as part of new development and design can help move the city towards a more winter-friendly future.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2 - 4 years

**Potential Partners:** Eau Claire Planning, Eau Claire Transportation, Eau Claire City-County Public Health, Eau Claire Parks and Recreation, Visit Eau Claire, Development Industry, Elected Officials

**Equity Impacts:** Winter design guidelines could include details such as requirements for public seating, washrooms, and warming spots, all of which would provide more comfortable spaces for children, older adults, and lower-income residents.

**Inspiration:**

[Winter Design Guidelines & Policy, Edmonton, CA](#)

**Budget:** 

**Winter City Pillar:**



## 3.5 WINTER CITY TOURISM STRATEGY

**Description:** Eau Claire is home to world-class cross-country skiing trails and competitions. In fact, 6.2% of winter tourism in Eau Claire is thanks to winter activities such as skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. A formal winter tourism strategy that capitalizes on Eau Claire's existing assets (as well as ones that arise from this report) can help further the city's lead on winter-friendly initiatives and really put Eau Claire on the map as a winter wonderland.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 1 - 2years

**Potential Partners:** Visit Eau Claire, Eau Claire Economic Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Local businesses

**Equity Impacts:** Applying a sustainable tourism lens to the strategy will help ensure the benefits of increased tourism are shared by all residents of Eau Claire.

### Inspiration:

Revelstoke Destination Tourism Strategy

**Budget:**  

**Winter City Pillar:**





### 3.6 WINTER INNOVATION AWARDS (BEST WINTER EVENT/ COCKTAIL/STORE FRONT)

**Description:** Winter Innovation Awards offer a way to recognize local business and highlight the many great things winter in Eau Claire has to offer. Awards for best winter event, storefront, lighting design, cocktail, and fashion display are just some of the ways local businesses can get into the winter spirit.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 6 months

**Potential Partners:** Visit Eau Claire, Eau Claire Economic Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

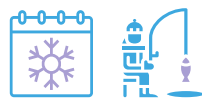
**Equity Impacts:** Work with cultural associations to co-create awards that showcase the cultural diversity of Eau Claire.

**Inspiration:**

Winter Signature Drinking Contest

**Budget:** \$ - \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**



### 3.7 PLOW MUNICIPAL SIDEWALKS

**Description:** Residents were very clear in the engagement phase. Mobility in winter is severely restricted due to a lack of sidewalk plowing and maintenance. Providing safe sidewalks and walking conditions in winter is one of the most effective things any city can do to ensure winter life is thriving, and to combat social isolation and physical inactivity in winter.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 3 - 5 years

**Potential Partners:** Elected Officials, Eau Claire Transportation

**Equity Impacts:** Older adults, children, youth, women, and lower-income residents are far more likely to rely on walking to get around. Plowing sidewalks is a major and necessary step in building a more equitable approach to winter.

**Inspiration:**

Sweden Clear Walkways

**Budget:** \$ \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$ \$

**Winter City Pillar:**



# CONCLUSION

Over the last two years, Wintermission Eau Claire has had the opportunity to connect with thousands of residents from every part of the city and from every walk of life. A few key themes have emerged during that time:

1. Winter is tough on everyone's mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing, particularly vulnerable communities.
2. Winter in Eau Claire doesn't have to be so hard.
3. Residents want to enjoy and love winter.
4. Eau Claire has all the ingredients in place to be a fantastic winter city

When we set out on our Wintermission journey, we thought we would need to convince people about the benefits of winter, that winter itself was an asset, not a liability. What we've learned is that people don't need to be convinced. They know the magic of winter and are eager for initiatives to unlock its potential for improving wellness, economic development, and sustainability. Enhancing people's experience of winter in Eau Claire will be a process of continual improvement, experimentation, and evaluation.

To that end, the Wintermission Eau Claire team has been hugely successful in bringing together cross-disciplinary partners from diverse fields and areas of expertise. Building on that foundation and crafting new relationships and bi-directional learning opportunities between equity seeking groups and the City and County will be a key aspect of maintaining existing winter-friendly momentum. We hope the Wintermission Eau Claire working group continues to meet, whether in its current informal incarnation, or as a more formal group under the auspices of the City or County government. Visit Eau Claire, a key project partner, has already stepped forward to act as a convener of the working group for the foreseeable future, organizing quarterly check ins, and recruiting winter ambassadors from the community.

As the working group continues to meet, one strategy for prioritizing and achieving the recommendations in this report is to create working groups dedicated to one of three pillars. The working groups, made up of community representatives, businesses, non-profits and city officials, would report to the Wintermission team.

The recommendations contained in this report are meant to be a starting point, a launch pad for Eau Claire to capitalize on energy built up over the course of the project. As the city moves forward and continues to engage and work with local communities, initiatives will evolve and new ideas will emerge. The core principals of Wintermission Eau Claire, principals founded in equity, health, and wellness, are the foundational bedrock that will guide on-going efforts to reduce social isolation. Eau Claire has so much to build on, so many assets to nurture and grow. There is no reason why in ten years from now, Eau Claire can't be the foremost winter city in the United States.



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## **Community Partners**

Altoona Public Library  
Blue Ox Running  
City of Eau Claire Parks, Recreation, & Forestry  
City of Eau Claire Street & Fleet  
Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce  
El Centro de Conexión de Chippewa Valley  
Hmong American Leadership & Economic Development  
L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library  
OutdoorMore  
University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire Distance Running Course  
Volume One  
Xcel Energy

Thank you to the several other community members, organizations, and businesses who championed Wintermission in our region.



