

# Movement in the Mills

Connecting Cycling and Walking to the Public Health, Safety and Welfare of a Growing Economy



John M Hagedorn  
Department of Urban and Regional Planning  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
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## **Executive Summary**

Like many cities, the built environment in Lake Mills, Wisconsin has been organized around motor vehicles. The existing bicycle network fails to connect riders to local amenities and businesses and rather routes them away from town. Sidewalks in many locations are absent or intermittent. This is due in part to the multi-jurisdictional nature of some roads. Public sentiment is sometimes opposed to the City's efforts to install sidewalks, most especially when assessments are used to finance the work.

Between June of 2013 and September of 2014, the author observed that existing planning documents held little merit and were rarely referenced in public and private meetings. Fostering municipal relationships and utilizing city resources, the author was successfully able to improve the city bicycle infrastructure through methods of grassroots advocacy planning.

A strong advocacy presence is encouraged to remain in Lake Mills to keep the needs of cyclists and pedestrians firmly onto the city agenda.

## Introduction

Nationally, there is a growing desire for bike and pedestrian friendly communities. This is a reality that many municipalities fail to recognize and proactively approach as plans to grow and develop the built environment are nonstop.

This paper chronicles the author's efforts to analyze the cycling and walking climate of Lake Mills and describes the action taken to improve the infrastructural conditions from June of 2013 to September of 2014. An internship with the city provided opportunities to establish relationships with city staff and elected officials and learn about the regulatory and legal process of implementing changes to existing cycling and walking infrastructure. Independent from government, a grassroots advocacy presence was established to encourage a cultural shift for locals by engaging schools in walk and bike to school day events, engaging businesses in bicycle incentive programs, and partnering with other neighboring advocacy organizations.

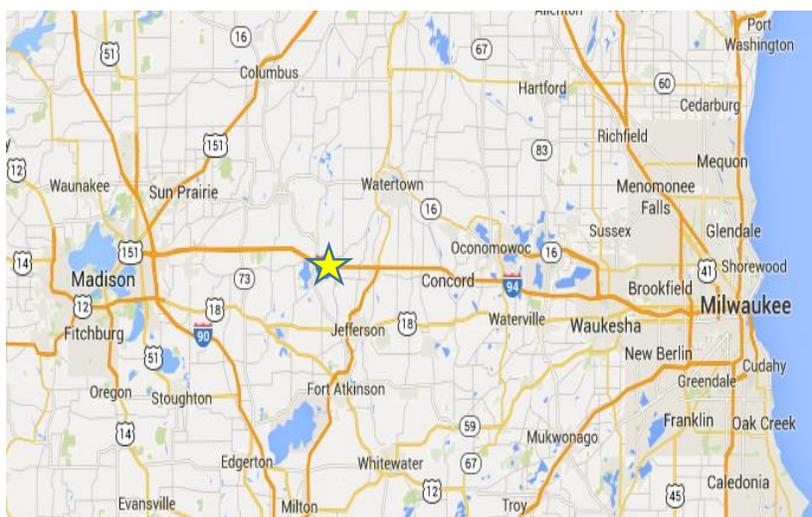
The purpose of this project is to organize and inform the Lake Mills community to improve conditions for bicycling and walking and promote these as healthy and enjoyable ways to travel. The long-term vision is a network of highly visible, safe, bicycle/pedestrian paths on direct routes to encourage the people of Lake Mills to eliminate unnecessary automobile trips and rather walk or cycle to the farmers market, the beach, or any of the dozens of Lake Mills attractions.

## About Lake Mills

Lake Mills is a small city located in Jefferson County, Wisconsin. The city is convenient for automobile drivers because of its location off Interstate 94 providing quick access for commuters traveling to the state's largest metropolitan areas (Figure 1). With the Glacial Drumlin State Trail headquartered near the city's downtown, bicycling in Lake Mills is defined primarily as a recreational activity. Regarding bike routes, the city failed to seriously incorporate the needs of people without cars routing them out of town and away from direct access destinations.

Lake Mills, at 5,708 people, is the fifth most populated municipality in Jefferson County. Streets here are identified and recognized by their state or county trunk highway name. Many of the cities in Jefferson County have followed the same land use prescription since the late nineteenth century. The downtowns have one main street that are ripe with preserved (and oftentimes deteriorating) historic buildings. Much of this development

Figure 1: Map of Lake Mills in Proximity to Milwaukee and Madison.



Source: Google, 2015

began pre-zoning so it is not uncommon to see a mixture of residential with commercial and industrial uses. The streets are narrow, residential setbacks are large with commercial setbacks closer to the street. Some unincorporated areas still have downtowns that emulate this character but the rest of their area failed to incorporate and expand leaving passersby to their own imaginative memories of how thrilling city life might have been.

Lake Mills has kept its historic, small town character intact and chosen to develop according to a twentieth century land use prescription that every other incorporated municipality in this area has adopted. Land uses are separated by zoning, business parks are located within commercial-industrial districts, and housing stock is aged with half of its total housing stock built before 1959<sup>1</sup>. Its historic downtown district is protected by a local Main Street Program<sup>2</sup> and single family, detached homes developed rapidly outward up to the city boundary limits. Neighboring towns and unincorporated communities can't help but entertain the thought of future annexation.

96.7% of Lake Mills identifies as white, which makes perfect sense considering that it identifies as a suburb located directly off Interstate-94, approximately 53 miles from Milwaukee.

The city has only 4 square miles of land to use and everything is within comfortable walking and biking distance. I observed how often people drove places. There is a taxi cab service in town that is expensive and time consuming to use. Lake Mills, like other small towns, has been organized around motor traffic, thus biking has not been considered an important mode of transportation.

I began observing the local bicycle routes, noting the condition and completeness of the sidewalks, and imagining alterations that would make the existing streets more livable<sup>3</sup>. My observations ultimately led me to the City Manager's office which landed me an internship working as his assistant.

## **Municipal Planning Internship**

The city administration hired me without any real knowledge of my background or my skill sets and provided no structure or schedule for me. What I did at work and when I arrived and left was almost completely up to my own discretion. My desire to learn and passion for improving the quality of life for the city must have left an impression upon my employer. I attended numerous meetings with him aside from closed meetings. I met lots of people working for and with the city on various projects. Being fairly new to the city, new to the job, and new to the field of urban planning, I wasn't able to provide thorough critiques and sound advice when handed development agreements to review, memos to draft, or contracts to analyze. I lacked the experience and knowledge. What I did notice was that when dealing with economic development and the built environment, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations were often relegated toward the bottom of the priority list.

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<sup>1</sup> P.117 of 2010 Lake Mills Comprehensive Plan

<sup>2</sup> The Lake Mills Main Street Program is a non-profit organization whose mission is to foster downtown revitalization and promote economic redevelopment while preserving cultural heritage. Available at: <http://www.legendarylakemills.com/about-the-lake-mills-main-street-program/>

<sup>3</sup> Livable Street is defined as a transportation corridor for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, cars, trucks, motorcycles and busses. Livable Streets are designed and operated to safely facilitate movement of people of all ages and abilities from destination along and across a continuous travel network, (Livable Streets Policy from Blue Springs, MO, 2011).

Lake Mills has a 2010 Comprehensive Plan, a Council approved 2004 Bicycle Plan and a Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan that is set for completion by the summer of 2015. The city has spent about \$60,000 over a span of five years updating and rewriting their zoning code. This lengthy timeframe and use of money has prompted many residents and business owners to develop a jaded view of planning in general. One memo I helped draft for the Common Council was about the importance of the planning practice for communities. Apparently they were feeling pressure from the public to eliminate zoning altogether! I began to study these planning documents and refer to them as often as I could in meetings with city department heads and council members.

Some staff saw these documents simply as "state requirements that were met" and now forgotten. There was no real impetus to apply these planning principles and projects in the community. Only Jefferson County, the Village of Palmyra and the City of Watertown have a Comprehensive Outdoor and Recreation Plan that is up to date, (Appendix A). This is specifically troublesome for communities seeking recreational trail and stewardship grants from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. It is clear from this list that the problem of plans not holding much weight extends beyond just Lake Mills.

## Methods Employed

As a new member of the community and an intern standing in the shadow of the City Manager, my voice was often not heard and opinions not taken seriously. Persuading elected officials and longtime residents that streets should accommodate more than just automobiles was going to take time. A *cultural shift* was going to have to take place and I felt it was my job to help initiate it. It was clear that an outside voice was needed to help make this issue relevant. With years of experience organizing people in Milwaukee, I believed it was time to encourage residents to raise questions to their government about their incomplete bicycle network, the outdated and poorly placed signage, and the fact that some schools, parks and homes were close in proximity to each other but impossible to walk to. It was time to help Lake Mills see biking and walking as a mode of transportation, not just recreation.

## Grassroots Advocacy Planning

I was given permission to split my time with the city so I could establish a grassroots advocacy presence in the community. There are over 60 people living in the city and town of Lake Mills that commute to Trek Bicycle's Headquarters in Waterloo, just 11 miles away. I found one man who also saw problems with the existing bicycle network and had experience improving the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for the City of Oshkosh when he was a resident. He and I decided to form the Lake Mills Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Committee, (LMBPC) (Figure 2).

We spent many hours arranging meetings to discuss plans with various business owners, Chambers of Commerce staff, School Board members, elected officials, Jefferson County staff, and local homeowners and renters. I gave presentations to the local Rotary Club, the Young Rotarians and Junior Optimists at the public high school (Appendix C). We connected the LMBPC's finances and advocacy efforts to a regional bicycle advocacy planning organization,

Figure 2: Lake Mills Bike-Ped Committee Organization Logo



Source: Hagedorn, Robinson, 2014

the Jefferson County Bicycle Club, (JCBC)<sup>4</sup> in order to expand membership and utilize their 501(c) 7 status for grants.

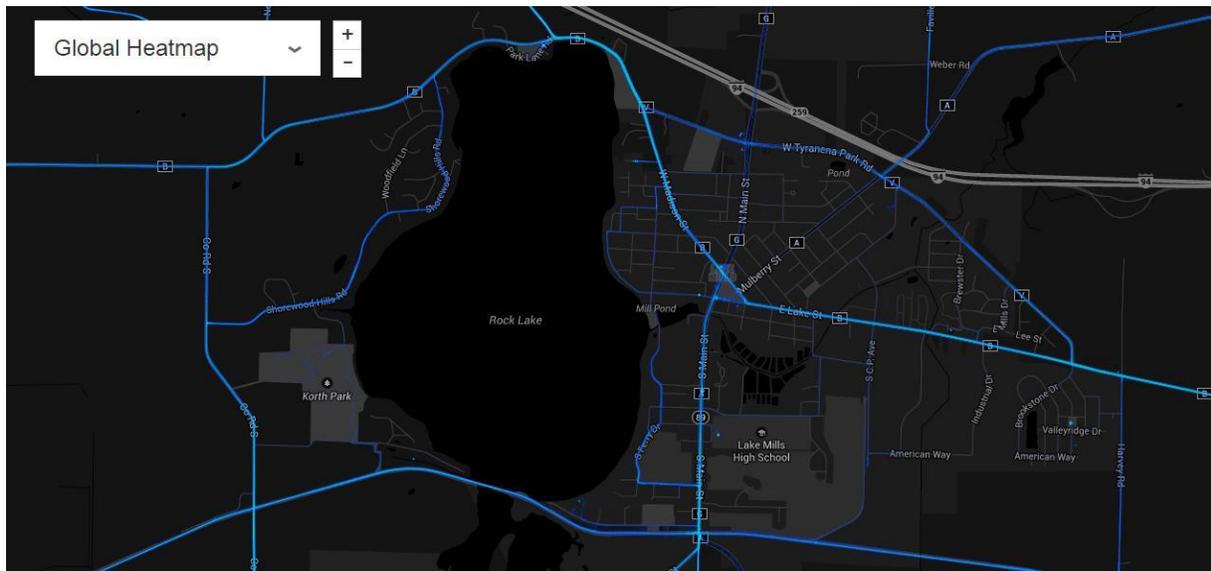
We took measurements by hand on the streets and sidewalks of Mulberry and Madison to determine if they were up to code and what the feasibility might be of making them more amenable to pedestrians and family riders. We referred to the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) urban bikeway design guide for standard measurements and up to date designs and state of the art practice solutions<sup>5</sup>.

Realizing that a few important roads have shared jurisdiction with the city and the county, an important partnership was formed with the County Highway Operations Manager.

Based on assessments from the 1996 Jefferson County Bikeway/Pedestrian Plan<sup>6</sup>, the 2004 Lake Mills Bicycle Plan, and LMBPCs own observations and recommendations, safe and effective routes that connect to the existing network were prioritized as grassroots organization initiatives that the LMBPC would attempt to make a reality.

We used the Strava Global Heatmap<sup>7</sup> as a tool to demonstrate to the Common Council where bike lanes and routes should be placed. Heat mapping is a method of showing the geographic clustering of a phenomenon. Heat mapping is a way of geographically visualizing locations so that patterns of higher than average occurrence can emerge. The light blue lines indicate high bike traffic and dark blue lines indicate lower lever bike usage, (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Strava Global Heatmap of Lake Mills, Wisconsin, 2014.



Source: <http://labs.strava.com/>, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jcbc.info/>

<sup>5</sup> National Association of City Transportation Officials. (2015). Urban Bikeway Design Guide, 2013. Accessed on June 2014. Available at: <http://nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide/>

<sup>6</sup> Jefferson County Bikeway/Pedestrian Plan. (1996). City of Lake Mills Community Plan P. 78-81.

<sup>7</sup> This method comes with its limitations as bike routes are only recorded from those riders who have and use the application from their phone. But apparently, many, if not all Trek commuters have and utilize this application.

## Results

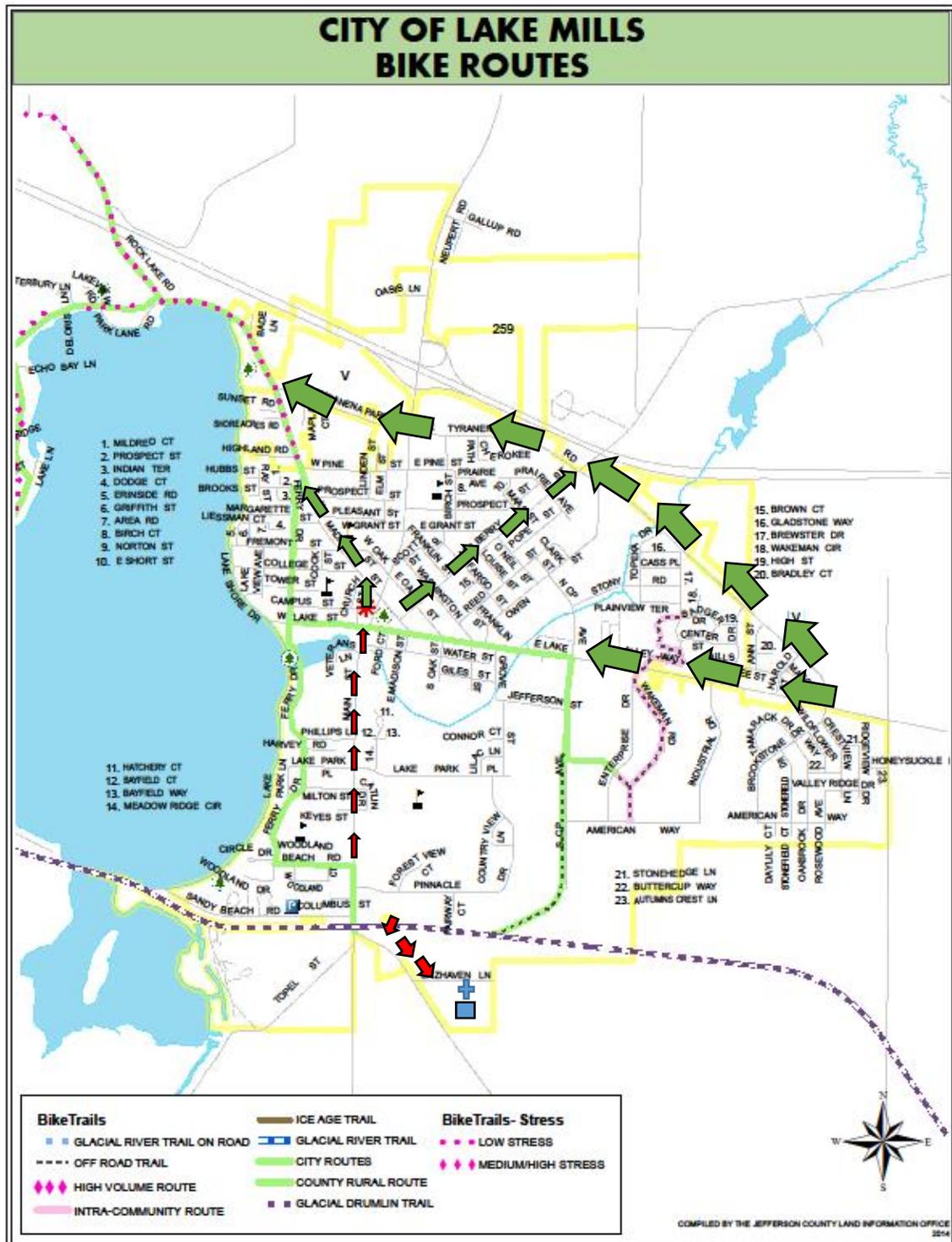
On September 16, 2014, LMBPC members and others attended a public meeting at City Hall to speak in favor of bicycle sharrows on South Main Street. A sharrow is short-form for "shared lane bicycle marking". This pavement marking includes a bicycle symbol and two white chevrons and is used to remind motorists that bicyclists are permitted to use the full lane. There are no striped bicycle lanes on streets marked with sharrows<sup>8</sup>. The Council approved the measure 5-0 and expected to paint sharrows along the route in spring of 2015<sup>9</sup>. Figure 4 is a map of existing bike routes, bike routes LMBPC was able to implement, and planned routes LMBPC expects to initiate.

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<sup>8</sup> Bike Sharrows, Transportation and Traffic Management, Ohio State University. (2012). Accessed on 5/11/2015. Available at: [ttm.osu.edu/bike-sharrows](http://ttm.osu.edu/bike-sharrows).

<sup>9</sup> Lake Mills Leader. (2014). Citizens Speak on Bike Trails to City Council. Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. Available at: [http://www.hngnews.com/lake\\_mills\\_leader/news/government/article\\_001a0536-39ea-11e4-a1e8-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.hngnews.com/lake_mills_leader/news/government/article_001a0536-39ea-11e4-a1e8-001a4bcf6878.html)

Figure 4: City of Lake Mills Existing Bike Routes, LMBPC Implemented Routes and LMBPC Planned Routes.



Source: Jefferson County, Wisconsin Parks Department. (2014). Bike Trails, Community Routes. [http://www.jeffersoncountywi.gov/departments/departments\\_fr/docs/Parks/BikeMapPg2\\_LowRes.pdf](http://www.jeffersoncountywi.gov/departments/departments_fr/docs/Parks/BikeMapPg2_LowRes.pdf)

There are two sets of red arrows pictured in Figure 4. The smaller dark red arrows represent the newest city bike route that the LMBPC successfully petitioned the Council for in 2014. Instead of routing cyclists that exit the Glacial Drumlin Trail from Main Street to Woodland Beach Road, to Ferry Drive to Lake Street, the new route reserves space for riders to enter the downtown area directly from Main Street.

The three larger red arrows represent the Glacial Drumlin Trail Spur taking children, families, and trail riders safely to St. Paul Evangelical Church and School. This trail is currently in the application selection process with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Construction is planned for completion by November of 2015.

The small green arrows represent planned bike routes that LMBPC has discussed with its members and the city in 2014. We hope to petition the Council for sharrows on both Madison and Mulberry streets before they are reconstructed in 2016. Both Madison and Mulberry are classified as minor arterial roads. With North Main Street not retrofitted to hold bike lanes, sharrows and/or bike lanes on these minor arterial roads are integral to connecting residents to the north end commercial shopping area (Appendix B).

The large green arrows represent future bike route initiatives LMBPC wishes to engage in. East Lake Street is in city jurisdiction and has a bike route leading into downtown. We hope to extend this bike route to where Lake Street becomes Highway B thereby connecting low-middle income, multi-family households and newly developed single family detached households on the fringe of town to activity in the central downtown area. Both Highway B and Highway V, (Tyranena Park Road) share jurisdiction with the County. The County and City would ultimately have to agree to work together to lower the speed limit, widen the shoulder about a foot, and finance annual painting of lanes and/or sharrows.

## Other Accomplishments

The Council resolution adding sharrows onto South Main Street was a major accomplishment<sup>10</sup>, but there were other results of our advocacy planning during this short timeframe.

- In 2014, the Lake Mills Bike-Ped Committee decided to pursue a matching grant through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources that would fund the creation of a recreational trail, spurring off of the Glacial Drumlin Trail that would serve the community as a safe route to school for St. Paul Evangelical Church and School<sup>11</sup>. Approval from City Council and School District is pending, but project is fully funded and approved in context by the DNR. Fundraising efforts continue while School Board decides what route they want us to build on<sup>12</sup>.
- LMBPC has sponsored 4 Bike and Walk to School events averaging 125 people per event. Local businesses are beginning to help out with donations of fresh fruit, bottled water and granola bars.

<sup>10</sup> Wisconsin Bike Federation. (2014). Lake Mills Makes Progress. Accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. Available At: <http://wisconsinbikefed.org/2014/09/22/lake-mills-makes-progress/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Stewardship/Grants/Forms.html>

<sup>12</sup> On 5/11/2015, The Lake Mills School Board agreed to give the city an easement to build this trail on the back route. If this city decides to build a CP Avenue, which would connect to Unzhaven Lane and ultimately provide an opportunity to include bicycle and pedestrian access to St. Paul Church and School, then plans for this trail would cease.

- Bicycle Benefits<sup>13</sup>, a pro-biking group that incentivizes consumers for riding their bicycles to places rather than drive has agreed to share profits with LMBP and has already donated \$500.
- The Jefferson County Bike Club is LMBPC's fiscal sponsor and has become more active in organizing and supporting events in Lake Mills.

## Challenges

There are still major challenges and roadblocks ahead. Adding a bicycle route onto South Main Street took a considerable amount of effort. North Main Street was reconstructed in 1999 and retrofitted in a way that doesn't allow for bicycle lanes. Many people in Lake Mills entertained the idea of reserving South Main for automobiles to stay consistent with North Main and preserve

Figure 5: Image of Sharrow in Seattle, WA, 2006.



Source: [www.streetsblog.org](http://www.streetsblog.org)

its trees. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is undertaking a massive reconstruction of Highway 89, or Main Street in 2017. Bike lanes have to be added in urban areas when federal or state funds are used due to the 2009 Complete Streets policy signed into Wisconsin law<sup>14</sup>. In other words, bicycle lanes on the South Main were inevitable. We argued that designating South Main Street a bike route and placing a sign wasn't going to be a strong enough communicative tool. Sharrow markings were our alternative which was a foreign concept to them.

<sup>13</sup> <http://bb2.bicyclebenefits.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Complete Streets was a law written by Senator Fred Risser of Madison and passed by the state legislature in 2009. Wisconsin's law provides that our state's Department of Transportation: "ensure that bikeways and pedestrian ways are established in all new highway construction and reconstruction projects funded in whole or in part from state or federal funds." Facilities that might accommodate bikes and pedestrians, like painted bike lanes, widened sidewalks, curb extensions and paved shoulders on rural roads, can also end up serving motorists and even prolonging the life of the road. Building these facilities, whether in rural or urban areas, from the start is less expensive than retrofitting them later on.

A few days after the resolution was signed and sharrows on Main Street were approved, the Department of Public Works, (DPW) and the Lake Mills Police Department, (LMPD) decided to hastily paint “no-biking” markings all over the downtown sidewalks on every intersection in front of the stores. These were in accordance with an ordinance that prohibits people from riding their bikes on the downtown sidewalks<sup>15</sup>. Apparently over the summer, a few middle school children refused to walk their bike causing interference on the storefronts and frightening pedestrians. Mimicking LMBPC’s argument and approach that signage for bike routes in town were not communicating effectively enough, DPW and LMPD decided to paint the downtown white (Figure 3).

The route we originally requested took riders from the Glacial Drumlin Trailhead, into and through downtown, connecting to West Madison Street, eventually to Pine Street. This is the popular commuter route mentioned previously. This part of our request was omitted from the Council Resolution on recommendation from DPW because of traffic in the downtown area. Therefore we could only discuss and debate the South Main Street portion of our plan during the public hearing.

There are many areas in the City of Lake Mills that share jurisdiction with the Town of Lake Mills and Jefferson County. These happen to be areas where sidewalks are in disrepair, not up to code, or do not exist yet. Housing development along Tyrannena Park Road is intermittent leaving many sections of this arterial road without a sidewalk. The shoulder is paved wide enough to accommodate on-street riders, but the speed limit is too high to comfortably ride. Painting has not been maintained annually and signage communicating to drivers, pedestrians and cyclists is non-existent. Although there are solid relationships established with the City of Lake Mills and the County Highway Operations Manager, political views clash elsewhere throughout the county department and within the acting City Council.

The City of Lake Mills has a policy to include sidewalks on all newly constructed urban roadways<sup>16</sup>. This is a policy that is lawfully adhered to, but circumstances such as timing, location and financing tend to admit a certain amount of flexibility to the rule. Many residents would prefer not to pay the extra expense for sidewalk assessments and oppose the city when they enforce it. The city also has a policy that permits cycling on all sidewalks except for the downtown square where people and auto traffic are the highest<sup>17</sup>.

## Recommendations/Conclusions

Lake Mills is a beautiful place to live, loaded with plentiful amenities in a convenient location off of the interstate. Because of its small size and location of the Glacial Drumlin Trial Headquarters, cycling and walking for recreation and as modes of transportation will become an important planning topic for future generations. If Lake Mills expects to attract and keep young professionals in this bedroom community, cycling and walking issues must become relevant and

Figure 6: Lake Mills Police Department Effort to Communicate City Ordinance, 2014.



Source: Photo courtesy of John Hagedorn, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Lake Mills Zoning Code S6-4-4

<sup>16</sup> Lake Mills Zoning Code S11-5-2G

<sup>17</sup> Lake Mills Zoning Code S6-4-5

considered important to the health of a growing local economy. The city must strictly adhere to complete streets policies and existing planning documents, as well as amend city codes that discourage cycling on the street.

In about two years, the author used his connections with the local and county government, the local media, private businesses and the public to raise some concerns with the local cycling and walking infrastructure. Two trails were added but more importantly LMBPC provided an outlet for other members of the community to have their voices heard.

There is a long way to go however to change the minds of those that oversee and implement the law. Some policies are dated and some aren't followed thoroughly<sup>18</sup>. A quasi-governmental agency that ensures that bike and pedestrian connectivity, access, and capacity are included in the site design and planning process might be considered. The Lake Mills Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee has become an active voice for residents of Lake Mills, but overall interest within the community is low. Many residents resist efforts to slow down their vehicles and do not support complete streets with wide sidewalks and furnishings. LMBPC maintains a multileveled approach consistently hosting and supporting fun events for riders and children, while remaining focused on politics, planning, and policy change in the bicycle-pedestrian field. The main accomplishment has been to put biking firmly onto the Lake Mills City agenda.

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<sup>18</sup> Some policies are under threat of termination. A recent draft of the Wisconsin Transportation Budget calls for the elimination of state funding for Community Sensitive Solutions (CSS) on state highway projects. CSS, a 1.5% set aside for enhancements of state highway construction projects, has funded such improvements as aesthetic treatments for highway bridges, additional landscaping, and the expansion of a required sidewalk to a full width recreational trail. It is unlikely that local communities will be able to fund such improvements especially considering the revenue generating restrictions placed on the communities by the State legislature, (Weber, Carl, APWA, April, 2015).



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Wisconsin Political Subdivision Eligibility for Outdoor Recreation-In-Aid Programs

**Table 1 Wisconsin Political Subdivision Eligibility Outdoor Recreation Grant-In-Aid Programs.**

Political Subdivision	CORP Good Through Date	Eligibility Status
Fort Atkinson, City	12/31/2013	Expired
Ixonia, Town	1978	Expired
Jefferson County	12/30/2018	Good Thru 12/30/2018
Jefferson City	1/31/2013	Expired
Johnson Creek, Village	12/31/2008	Expired
Koshkonong	12/31/2010	Expired
Lake Mills, City	Extension until end of 2014	Expired
Lake Mills, Town	2010	Expired
Palmyra, Village	12/31/2015	Good Thru 12/31/15
Waterloo, City	May 2014	Expired
Watertown, City	12/31/2019	Good Thru 12/31/19

Source: Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Department, Updated 2/19/2015.

## Appendix B: Lake Mills Major Street Network

### LAKE MILLS Functional Classification 5/8/2006



#### Legend

Existing	Planned*	
		Principal Arterial
		Minor Arterial
		Collector
		Local

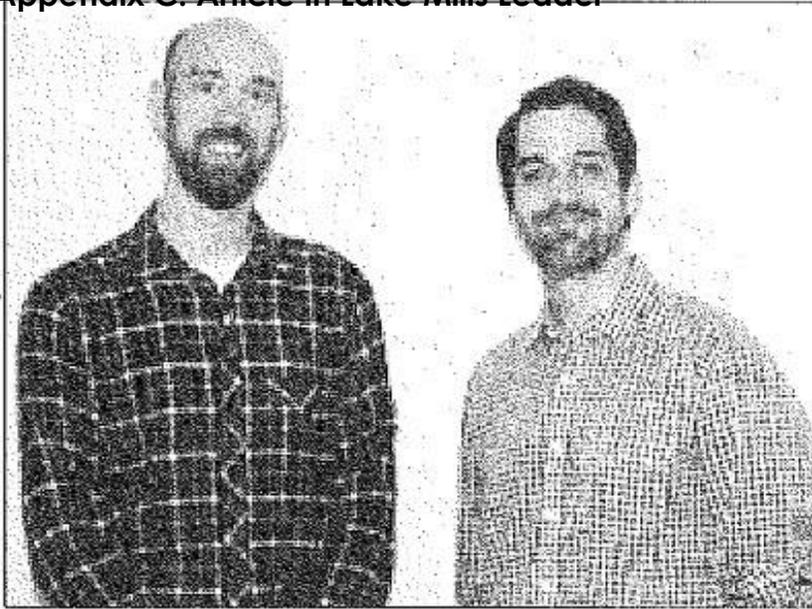
In rural areas, routes are shown coming into the urbanized areas in corresponding functional colors.

#### Others

	Railroads
	Lakes, Rivers, Streams
	City and Village Boundary
	Urbanized Area
	Other surrounding urbanized areas
	Rural Area
	County Boundary

\*NOTE: All planned route locations are approximations only.

## Appendix C: Article in Lake Mills Leader



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE** – Marty Hagedorn and Nick Robinson are looking for people to get involved with the Bike/Ped Advisory Committee. *(Submitted Photo)*

# Bike/Ped Advisory Committee Seeks Members

The Bike/Ped Advisory Committee is seeking bicycle and pedestrian enthusiasts who want to become engaged and involved in improving Lake Mills bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure.

The committee is interested to know what people's bike and pedestrian related interests are.

Are the bike trail signs in town informative enough? Would citizens like to see bike lanes painted on the streets? Are the crosswalks and sidewalks wide enough for families to walk? Do our schools have safe, accessible routes leading to them? How can biking and walking promote/increase eco-

nomie development downtown?

These are some of the issues the committee will be discussing on a monthly basis. It eventually hopes to work with the city of Lake Mills to ensure bike and pedestrian related improvements and projects are included within the city budget.

The committee will meet for its first meeting of the year at El Mariachi restaurant Monday, Feb. 17 from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

If interested in learning more about this and/or wishing to get involved, contact Marty Hagedorn and Nick Robinson at [LakeMillsBikePed@gmail.com](mailto:LakeMillsBikePed@gmail.com).