



# Goodbye Lake, Hello Urban Cottage?!

How Wisconsin's gateway to the northwoods is enticing vacationers to its downtown



It takes a special kind of person to give up their picturesque lakeside Wisconsin retreat in order to move into a one-bedroom, downtown apartment for an entire summer. But then again, it takes a special downtown to make a homeowner on the lake willing to make that type of move.



For one Wisconsin couple, this is exactly how a recent summer played out when they decided to give up the comforts of summer lake living to embark on an inner city adventure.

"We've done the lake and countryside," stated summer in the city fan Sue Lang. "My husband I and wanted to be in an active place that offered a fun atmosphere, a vibe we could enjoy with our friends, and a feeling of being in the middle of it all."



What type of downtown would persuade a couple to say goodbye to lake living and hello to parking garages letting their urban cottage take root in Wausau.

Wait, what? Wausau? Yes, unconventional. But as the Lang's already knew, Wausau's downtown offered everything they need-

ed for the ultimate summer adventure.

"Downtown Wausau is special. Public events. An awesome art and gallery scene. Hip restaurants and nightlife. The Wisconsin River running through it. Outdoor concerts steps from our front door. Green spaces and parks galore. And it is all so accessible and easy to get around," remarked Sue. "It is the perfect mix of action and relaxation. We love it."

## Wausau Facts

Revitalization of downtown Wausau began in the late 1990s, when the city demolished a number of aging buildings on a square in the center of downtown, creating what is known today as the 400 Block - an open, grassy block with paved sidewalks crossing it. The square is a focal point for summer festivals and concerts. In recent years Wausau has redone the 400 Block, adding a permanent stage and other renovations that in total cost \$2 million.

Downtown Wausau's River District represents nearly 150 property owners and over 250 businesses. It covers about a 34 square block area, with the Wis-

consin River running through the middle of it. And business is good. According to statistics from the WEDC between July 2015 and June 2016, downtown River District customers spent about \$8.1 million at restaurants and \$101.2 million at retail stores. Within the past year, the organization's events have created an estimated \$1.96 million in economic impact in the district.

The city's downtown arts, music and theater scene is vibrant. The Center for Visual Arts and Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum feature the artwork of local, regional and national artists. The Grand Theater and Wausau Community Theater provide a wide-ranging mix of performing arts entertainment, from local productions to nationally touring Broadway shows and concerts. Wausau's Downtown also features a diverse mix of restaurants, shopping and an active nightlife scene.





The city's East Riverfront Redevelopment project is the next-generation of Wausau's revitalization. The \$80 million downtown improvement undertaking broke ground in the spring of 2016, and is the biggest, most elaborate development project the city has ever seen. At its conclusion, the project will revamp over 16 acres of prime Wisconsin River waterfront using a mix of recreational, residential, office, retail, and public green space. "Knowing our urban waterfront was critically important to the city's sustainability and growth, Wausau's leaders over a decade's time had the will and foresight to assemble, remediate and replay these former industrial parcels," stated Christian Schock, Wausau's Economic Development Director. "We now have a vibrant, mixed-use downtown neighborhood that attracts not only residents, but visitors from all parts of the world."

When it comes to events and festivals, Wausau has it down. Wausau Events, the local organization dedicated to producing high quality, year-round events in the city, has hosted just under 100,000 people at their events so far this year. From weekly concerts on the 400 Block, to beer festivals, hot air balloon rallies, downtown farmer's markets, and the state's longest running blues festival, there is always something going on. ([www.wausauevents.org](http://www.wausauevents.org))

Athletic Park, originally built in 1936 and home today to the collegiate summer baseball team Wisconsin Woodchucks, is located just blocks from the downtown. The park completed an extensive renovation in 2016 after completing a separate renovation in 2013 with a \$6.5 million grandstand, community park, third base bleachers, restrooms, group outing and concession stand renovation. The entire park is surrounded by a stone-wall structure and is considered to be a historical landmark. (Source: [Wisconsin Woodchucks](#))

The city acquired a nearly continuous one-mile section of downtown riverfront



property along the east side of the Wisconsin River and reclaimed it for public access, a bimodal trail system and major enhancements to a national whitewater kayak course. (Source: [WEDC](#))

No matter what the season, outdoor recreation abounds. With 30,000 acres of lakes, eight beaches, 34 local parks, over 100 miles of hiking and mountain bike trails, a 74 run ski and snowboard

hill and a whitewater kayaking course, outdoor enthusiasts can easily keep busy.

The City of Wausau is located in north central Wisconsin in Marathon County. The city is crossed by two major highways and is bisected by the Wisconsin River, a state-designated Outstanding Water Resource. Wausau is Marathon County's largest city and county seat. In 2014, the city's estimated population was 39,218, approximately thirty percent of the county population of 134,875.

Crime rate: Wausau has been named the safest metro area in the Midwest, according to FBI crime statistics. Wausau's rates of murder and larceny are among the nation's lowest for small cities with populations under 200,000. (Source: [WAOW TV](#))

