



VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES INC.

To: Common Council, City of Wisconsin Rapids
Plan Commission, City of Wisconsin Rapids
Recovery and Reuse Project Steering Committee

From: Scott Harrington, AICP, Principal Planner
Sonja Kruesel, AICP, Associate Planner

Date: August 26, 2022

Re: Recovery and Reuse Plan Progress Report

Vandewalle & Associates and a sub-consultant team have contracted with the City of Wisconsin Rapids to develop a Recovery and Reuse Plan and Implementation Strategy in response to the idling of the Verso Papermill. This memo provides a status update as project work continues to progress, and supplements previous reports submitted.

As a recap, the following project activities have been completed. The primary focus of project work at this time is synthesis from project work and research to-date into the drafting of an economic opportunities analysis report.

- The “Forest Industries of the Future” symposium was held on Thursday July 21, 2022. The event started with an introduction by project team members. The second session featured research and innovative forest products. Presenters highlighted products in exterior, interior, and structural building materials, energy, and packaging. The final session featured a panel session of professionals who work in commercialization of research and economic development. Over 80 individuals registered to attend the symposium which actual attendance during the event totaling over 50 individuals. Following the event, the recording, presentation slides, speaker contact information, and registration list were emailed directly to those who registered. This information is also now posted on the city’s project webpage.
- Input sessions were held with the Plan Commission and Common Council, as well as the public. Events occurred on May 10, 2022, and June 1, 2022, respectively. Attendees heard a presentation from the planning consultant and engaged in an exercise to identify individual and group priorities. Through a sticky-dot voting system, the meetings concluded by identifying the top priorities of the group regarding mill’s future. These priorities will be incorporated into visioning and reuse or redevelopment scenarios for the mill. At the public meeting, participants were also asked to share a favorite memory or identify any sense of loss due to the mill’s closure.
- The same input questions from the above exercises were posted on the city website for members of the public to share additional responses. This survey was advertised by city staff and the Heart of Wisconsin

120 East Lakeside Street • Madison, Wisconsin 53715 • 608.255.3988 • 608.255.0814 Fax
247 Freshwater Way, Suite 530 • Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53204 • 414.988.8631
www.vandewalle.com

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Chamber of Commerce. Over 200 responses have been received since posting. A summary of survey results is being drafted.

- We initially anticipated completing the Economic Recovery study first (by early spring) followed by the Site Reuse Plan (early summer), but delays in coordinating with others for both portions have caused us to complete these together rather than separately. As a result, we should have drafts of both items to share late summer/early fall.
- Draft Economic Opportunities Analysis in progress. A draft report is underway that includes a synthesis of previous related economic studies and information gathered in project work to date. This work includes an analysis of workforce data, stakeholder meetings, purchaser meetings, the public input session, the Plan Commission and Common Council input session, public survey, and industry innovation symposium. From this data, economic opportunities are being identified.