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**Cuba City Receives Funding for Plaza Project**

CUBA CITY, WI. While Cuba City can boast that its Main Street has no empty storefronts and that its downtown was recently recognized by the State of Wisconsin for its revitalization efforts, there remains a strong desire to make additional improvements. Already adorned with its Presidential Shields and Caboose, the residents have long sought a community gathering space in the downtown area. Recent community engagement activities have confirmed this desire and a 2018 survey of 218 high school students added a younger perspective to the concept. “The young people, much like our older residents, are seeking a place to hang out downtown” stated Mayor Tom Gile. “With the virus forcing more people to seek outdoor options, developing a downtown plaza appears more timely than ever.” In addition to the downtown gathering place, the plaza is seen as a means to get more of the 5,200 daily vehicles to stop and patronize Cuba City’s vibrant Main Street businesses.

Drawing upon the recent community input and a desire to continue to develop the downtown area, Cuba City entered into the University of Wisconsin-Platteville’s (UW-P) Senior Design Program seeking to develop a ten year vision for the area around the Presidential Caboose. The goal of this endeavor was to create a community center for games, activities and just “hanging out” while attracting more traffic to the downtown businesses. The University provided a team of four senior engineering students to work with the City’s Economic Development Director, Bob Jones. “The pandemic created unexpected issues as the University restricted the team to campus very early in the project. As we identified outside funding sources that would permit us to actually implement some of the concepts in 2020, we altered the scope of the team’s work. As a result the students were able to provide invaluable assistance in the grant application process,” stated Jones. The City was able to obtain a free Wi-Fi hotspot at the Caboose, courtesy of Cuba City Telephone, as well as additional funds from the City of Presidents Committee, a local philanthropic organization that maintains the City’s Presidential theme among other activities.

The team also opted to apply for AARP’s Community Challenge Grant Program which aims to create public spaces that foster intergenerational activities, green space, art, transportation, connectivity and a more livable community. 2,800 communities across the USA applied for the AARP grant in 2020 and Cuba City was recently notified that it was one of the 184 successful entries. “These funds will enable us to take action this fall. While the deadline for completion presents a challenge, the end result will bring nearly instant benefit to the City,” said Jones.

In addition to the Wi-Fi hotspot, the City will turn a gravel parking lot into green space with trees, tables and games. There will be a bicycle rack, a small sound system and ADA compliant sidewalk ramps.

Another partnership with UW-P and its art department will create a large ground mural of the Mississippi River on the pavement running through the plaza area. The mural be 3 dimensional and contain interactive elements. Visitors will be able pose on the mural and there will also be an area to add chalk art to the mural itself. “Having this opportunity to paint such a large mural is really quite special. In a time where we are all adapting to new learning environments our students at UW-Platteville will develop new skills while working outside in a safe and socially distanced environment,” said Scott Steder, Lecturer at UW-P’s Art Department.

“We must thank the donors who have permitted us to make these positive changes without any City funds. We have the opportunity to gauge the impact of the plaza and develop the concept further, thanks to their generosity and the work of the team members and partners,” said Mayor Gile. Donna Rogers, President of the City of Presidents Committee added, “The addition of the mural, green space and seating to the Presidential Courtyard will be changes that keep us moving forward in our efforts to attract day trippers from the surrounding area.”