

Maritime Plaza & Heritage Garden

1209 Franklin Street

The Wisconsin Maritime Museum (WMM) connects all people to Wisconsin's waterways. Founded in 1969, the museum is an anchor destination along Manitowoc's waterfront. For half a century the museum has championed the unique maritime heritage of this region and Manitowoc's proud shipbuilding tradition. That commitment to maritime preservation and interpretation has since broadened to cover the entire state of Wisconsin. This led to an increased collection of watercraft and shipwreck artifacts housed at 1221 Franklin Street. Currently, the total number of three-dimensional artifacts in the collection is in excess of 20,000 objects, including more than 10,000 shipwreck artifacts, as well as over sixty boats and more than 100,000 archival documents and images that are stored at the museum location at 75 Maritime Drive.

In 2011, the Wisconsin Maritime Museum acquired the former Lauson Chevrolet dealership and garage to accommodate its growing collection. The entire property is 90,000 square feet and encompasses half of a city block. Currently the lot is denuded of any vegetation and susceptible to stormwater events that impact the interior of the facility and artifact storage. The museum is taking measures to renovate the exterior and interior of the building complex to better care for the collection and allow the public to see and be part of the conservation process. Therefore, this proposal is to begin the foundational work of developing approximately 20,000 square feet of asphalt parking lot in the northeast corner of the lot into a maritime plaza and heritage garden. By providing a public space to showcase maritime themed artifacts and sculptures, coupled with a gathering space for educational or entertainment events, it will only enliven the Franklin Street corridor between Maritime Ford, the US Post Office and Associated Bank. The multi-functional space would be suitable for an outdoor classroom, craft/farmers markets, or even as a performing arts venue. This proposed maritime heritage garden outside the museum's storage facility will become an added experience for visitors to the Wisconsin Maritime Museum and downtown Manitowoc.

A serendipitous connection to this project and Manitowoc's maritime heritage is the fact that this proposed public space will be directly on the footprint of the home of Great Lakes Captain, Edward Carus. Carus was a maritime chronicler and avid photographer during the late 19th and early 20th century. Born in 1860 in Manitowoc, Carus began his career on the Great Lakes sailing aboard schooners and spent many years as a captain for the Goodrich Line. Captain Carus passed away following a stroke in August 1947 while sitting outside his home at 1209 Franklin Street. In 1981 a collection of nearly 3,000 photographs from Captain Carus was donated to the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, thus forming a cornerstone of the museum's archival collection. The Carus house was eventually torn down to make way for a Chevrolet dealership parking lot in the 1950s. Today that former dealership and by coincidence the site of the captain's former residence, are part of the museum's off-site collections storage property at 1221 Franklin Street.

This proposal is one part of a larger plan to upgrade this facility, which will incorporate an artifact conservation space and boat restoration workshop. Therefore, the grounds outside will reflect the maritime preservation work happening within the building using original photographs taken by Captain Carus that will be incorporated into a maritime mural on the exterior of the building (west facade). This mural and interpretive signage at the site will pay tribute to the legacy of the captain as an invaluable maritime chronicler during an era when Great Lakes transportation was rapidly modernizing.

Additionally, one large significant artifact that we intend to display within this maritime heritage garden is the sail assembly (conning tower) from the USS RASHER. Built and launched in Manitowoc on December 20, 1942, the RASHER submarine played an important role in the Pacific Theater during World War II. The vessel and crew received the Presidential Unit Citation for outstanding performance in combat during four World War II patrols. She received seven battle stars in World War II service, and two battle stars for service off Vietnam. Currently the RASHER assembly is disassembled behind the Franklin Street facility. This project would bring this authentic and symbolic piece of Manitowoc's maritime heritage into a public space for long term preservation, interpretation and community engagement.

Today, people are seeking experiences and connections to where they live. This is a placemaking opportunity where the community interacts with their maritime heritage surrounded by pollinator-friendly garden space. Offering a beautiful and contemplative environment across from the post office where many in the community visit regularly, will provide a unique common space to celebrate a shared maritime heritage. While significant improvement and investment has been made along this corridor, much more is needed, especially in offering non-commercial space that is open to the public. We see the Maritime Plaza and Heritage Garden as the anchor public space for this entire corridor, while also being accessible to the Manitowoc River and ultimately Lake Michigan.

This project is shovel-ready and able to begin in Spring 2023. Exterior building restoration and site landscape construction will take place throughout 2023, with exterior work on the collections storage buildings anticipated to be completed by the end of 2023. WMM staff and volunteers welcome a working collaboration with the City of Manitowoc on planning, implementing, and maintaining this maritime heritage garden. In fact, we welcome the opportunity to consult with gardeners from West of the Lake Gardens to help plan and activate this space. By incorporating native perennial plants, it will reduce the amount of future maintenance needed. To complete the site masterplan, WMM is seeking additional funding sources such as the Vibrant Spaces grant administered through Wisconsin Economic Development. In effect, the City of Manitowoc is already contributing to the project via its Facade Improvement grant and Spirit in Action mural funding. Further partnership opportunities are being developed with: Master Gardener program at UW Extension, Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership, Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve, Wisconsin Historical Society, and Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary. We appreciate your consideration of our vision for this generational opportunity.