

# Milwaukee Harbor Strategic Plan

A Strategic plan for Milwaukee's waterways and lakefront to maximize their long term benefit to Milwaukee

Prepared for the Wisconsin Coastal management program

by

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# STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MILWAUKEE'S WATERWAYS.

## INTRODUCTION

An extremely basic question Milwaukee must face is, "Why bother to cleanup the waterways in the community?" The rivers and harbor have been polluted for years, and yet life has gone on. The city and region are losing population, but income has increased, downtown is the site of numerous new buildings, the port is undergoing a mild recovery, the marinas are full, and people are flocking to activities along the lakefront. With so much positive happening, one might ask what further benefit could be derived from remediation efforts in the waterways. The answer is, a great deal.

Milwaukee has a window of opportunity over the next twenty-five years to dramatically reshape its future in both a physical and an economic sense. Large areas of land bordering the waterways are or will be available for redevelopment. What happens to that land will have an enormous impact for the next century, just as developments on these sites have influenced Milwaukee for the last one hundred years. Not only will the physical shapes be important but also the role the waterways and adjacent lands can play in the local economy can be greatly enhanced.

Milwaukee's economy historically was integrated with the waterways, and both on- and off-shore activities were central to the economy. As transportation modes and demand for industrial products changed, however, the role of the waterways diminished. In the last two decades the waterways have come to play only a peripheral role, as evidenced by the hundreds of vacant acres adjacent to the water, the disregard for water quality, the vacant buildings on what had been prime locations for water-related industries, and the precipitous decline in Great Lakes shipping activity. Newer buildings have ignored the water completely.

But this is beginning to change as the waterways are increasingly being recognized as the resource they are. Enormous economic potential exists, if only it can be tapped. Unlike the past, though, the use of the water will be more related to service than manufacturing industries. This time around the emphasis will be on water quality and the opportunities for recreation which remediated rivers and the harbor can provide. Tourism and various forms of recreational fishing will be the driving forces behind job creation and the utilization of the water. The potential is enormous. The rewards can be realized if the water is indeed cleaned-up and if the redevelopment of the adjacent lands is done in a thoughtful and systematic fashion.

The purpose of this project is to expose a wider audience to the potential which lies in Milwaukee and to build the support necessary to begin the steps which are required if that potential is to be realized.



Menomonee River valley from the 6th Street Viaduct