

# **DRAFT SECTION 4(F) EVALUATION**

## **STILLWATER COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

### **I. DESCRIPTION OF SECTION 4(F) RESOURCE**

The Section 4(f) resource discussed in this evaluation is the Stillwater Commercial Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### **A. DETAILED MAP**

Figure E-14 shows the relationship of the Build Alternatives to the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

#### **B. SIZE AND LOCATION**

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District is located in Stillwater in Washington County, Minnesota. The Commercial Historic District includes most of Stillwater's central business district and stretches from Nelson Street on the south to Commercial Street on the north, and from the St. Croix River on the east to approximately the alley just west of Main Street. The district includes approximately 11 blocks, which make up most of the downtown commercial area. The Commercial Historic District includes 82 properties, which are a collection of late nineteenth-century commercial structures representing the economic development of Stillwater. Of these 82 properties, 63 properties are considered to contribute to the Stillwater Commercial Historic District's significance.

#### **C. OWNERSHIP AND TYPE**

The properties within the Stillwater Commercial Historic District are owned by a variety of private and public entities.

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District is considered a locally significant historical resource that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criteria A and C: Architecture and Commerce. The historic contexts for this multi-property district are "The Development of Stillwater, 1860 – 1940," and "St. Croix Triangle Lumbering, 1839 – 1914." The primary period of significance covers the period from the 1860s to 1911, although significant elements represent dates as late as 1940. The district contains primarily commercial properties as well as a few properties directly connected with the lumbering industry.

**Figure E-14 – Location of Stillwater Commercial Historic District and Build Alternatives  
(8.5x11 – b/w)**

## D. FUNCTION OF AND/OR AVAILABLE ACTIVITIES

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District primarily includes commercial buildings (i.e., retail stores, office buildings, restaurants, hotels, etc.); however, it also includes Lowell Park and the Sunken Garden (a memorial). Tourism has become an increasingly important industry in the area due to the area's historic associations and picturesque setting. Stillwater has become an area of specialty shops and a recreational and historic tourist attraction for residents in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

## E. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING AND PLANNED USES

Historic resources, specifically the Stillwater Commercial Historic District, are an important element of Stillwater. A large part of the City's appeal and attractiveness to residents and tourists are its historic resources.

The city is committed to preserving its historic resources and has established a heritage preservation commission. The purpose of the commission is to safeguard historic resources, and to foster and promote the preservation and continued use of historic sites. Under this commission, Stillwater has also designated the Stillwater Commercial Historic District as a local heritage preservation district. Any alterations or construction/improvements to buildings within the district are subject to review by the Stillwater Heritage Preservation Commission. Land use activities within the Stillwater Commercial District are also regulated by city zoning ordinances and setback requirements.

### **Role of Stillwater Commercial Historic District in Local Plans**

Local plans emphasize the importance of continuing to preserve the historic character of Stillwater. The Stillwater Downtown Plan (December 1988) is a comprehensive plan that examined the economics, land use, urban design, traffic, parking and utilities of the downtown area. The goals and objectives of the plan call for preserving the image and identity of Stillwater as an historic rivertown. These goals include the preservation of historically-important downtown structures.

The 1995 Stillwater Comprehensive Plan (1995-2020) reinforced the goals and objectives set forth in the Stillwater Downtown Plan. This plan also stressed the importance of preserving Stillwater's historic character. Objectives of the plan include preserving the downtown Stillwater Commercial Historic District and adjacent historic properties. The plan also identifies the importance of preserving locally-designated historic properties and those listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## F. ACCESS AND USAGE

The two main Minnesota vehicle access routes to the Stillwater Commercial Historic District are via Trunk Highway (TH) 36 and TH 95. Minnesota TH 36 is a major four-lane, east-west thoroughfare that extends from the northern suburbs of St. Paul to Stillwater. Minnesota

TH 95 is a two-lane, north-south highway which generally follows the western shore of the St. Croix River and functions as an important link between communities along the river.

TH 36 and TH 95 merge just south of downtown Stillwater. TH 95 becomes Stillwater's Main Street, which is the primary arterial of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. TH 36 turns off Main Street at Chestnut Street, where it proceeds east over the St. Croix River on the Lift Bridge. At the state line, Minnesota TH 36 becomes Wisconsin State Trunk Highway (STH) 64.

Wisconsin STH 64 and STH 35 are the key highway corridors providing vehicle access from Wisconsin to the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. Wisconsin STH 64 is a two-lane, east-west highway which traverses the state from the Houlton area east to the City of Marinette, on the shore of Lake Michigan. STH 35 is a two-lane, north-south roadway that extends from the Illinois/Wisconsin border to the City of Superior in northern Wisconsin.

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District experiences a very high level of pedestrian traffic. Sidewalks are adjacent to all local streets within the district. Pedestrian counts collected in the summer of 1998 indicated that over 1,200 pedestrians crossed the Main Street and Chestnut Street intersection during the peak weekend hour. About 400 pedestrians crossed this intersection during a weekday p.m. peak hour.

## G. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER SIMILAR RESOURCES

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District lies within the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District. The boundaries of the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District (see Figure E-15) essentially coincide with the 1848 Original Town Plat (O.T.P.) for Stillwater and an adjacent strip of land along the waterfront extending south of town. The boundaries of the O.T.P. are approximately Willard Street on the south (including part of the Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property), 6th Street on the west, Maple Street on the north, and the St. Croix River on the east. The O.T.P. consists of some 50 blocks of varying numbers of lots and sizes. Most lots were between 50 feet and 60 feet wide, and most blocks included 10 to 12 lots. The Stillwater Cultural Landscape District is approximately 260 acres.

The Stillwater Cultural Landscape District contains 248 properties that contribute to its significance, including residences and commercial buildings as well as public stairways, parks and an historic archeological site. The Stillwater Commercial Historic District is among the 248 properties that contribute to the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District.

The Stillwater Cultural Landscape District has been identified as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Stillwater Cultural Landscape District is considered significant and eligible for listing under National Register Criteria A and C. The district and its development are directly associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the country's history (Criterion A), including lumbering and logging. In addition, the district embodies the distinctive characteristics and appearance of the periods of development (Criterion C). The Stillwater Cultural Landscape District is discussed in more detail in Chapter 11 of the SDEIS and the Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation.

**Figure E-15 – Stillwater Cultural Landscape Boundaries (8.5x11 – b/w)**

## H. APPLICABLE CLAUSES AFFECTING OWNERSHIP

There are no applicable clauses affecting the ownership of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. However, there are regulations related to impacts on the district. As the proposed project is a federally-funded project and the district is a resource listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the district is subject to the provisions of Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended. In addition to this Section 4(f) Evaluation, the project is also being reviewed under Section 106. In addition, rehabilitation, demolition, or construction activities within the district by any party are subject to review by the city's Heritage Preservation Commission.

## I. UNUSUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District is significant both architecturally, as an unusually large and cohesive collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commercial buildings, and historically, as a representation of the developmental patterns of Stillwater and of the early diversification of economic interests which prevented the community's collapse with the waning of the lumber industry.

Stillwater's Main Street is lined by a high concentration of two- to three-story yellow or red brick commercial buildings, representing a diversity of nineteenth- and twentieth-century styles reflecting national architectural trends that were popular between 1870 and 1940: Italianate, Queen Anne, Richardsonian, Classical Revival, and early 20th Century commercial. The district also contains a number of 1860s and 1870s structures constructed of limestone representing a very early period of development in Minnesota. These storefronts and commercial buildings wrap around corners to the side streets as well, encompassing the majority of Stillwater's central business district. Loss of this historic commercial fabric, and subsequent infill development, has been minimal. The result is an unusually cohesive historic district with a high degree of integrity of design and feeling.

Historically, the district is a tangible reminder of the foresight of local businessmen, who built a diversified economic base that allowed the city to continue to thrive after the lumbering industry collapsed in the early 20th century. The diversity of styles and time periods found in the architectural designs reflects the continuous development of Stillwater and the strength of its economic base.

The Stillwater Commercial Historic District has become a regional attraction for residents, businessmen, and tourists because of its remarkable architectural distinctiveness and strong historical associations.

## II. IMPACTS ON SECTION 4(F) RESOURCE

### A. NO-BUILD

The No-Build Alternative has the potential for long-term adverse impacts on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. Congestion problems currently exist in downtown Stillwater with the Main Street (TH 36/95) intersections at Nelson and Chestnut Streets currently operating beyond capacity (Level of Service F and D, respectively) during p.m. peak periods. Congestion

is expected to worsen with seconds of delay per vehicle increasing from a current (2003) delay of approximately 53-82 seconds to greater than 300 seconds in 2030.

Capacity improvements are not feasible in downtown Stillwater due to the existing narrow streets, proximity of the buildings to the street, and high levels of pedestrian activity. Thus, the No-Build Alternative would result in increased traffic congestion in the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. However, the No-Build Alternative would leave intact views from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

Increased traffic congestion in Stillwater may also affect the number of tourists visiting the district. As periods of congestion in Stillwater increase, pedestrian access and safety are also likely to decrease, possibly further dissuading people from visiting the area.

## **B. BUILD ALTERNATIVES**

Construction of the Build Alternative bridges would not physically impact the Stillwater Commercial Historic District or Lowell Park, one of the contributing elements of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. However, it is possible for temporary construction occupancy in the historic district with conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility. Minor modifications to the Lift Bridge approach in Lowell Park would also be required to prevent vehicle use with the conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility. The Build Alternatives would also not physically impact the Lift Bridge, which is connected to the Commercial Historic District via Chestnut Street.

Chapter 11 of the SDEIS discusses the preliminary assessment of effects of the Build Alternatives under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended). A summary of the preliminary assessment of effects on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District for each Build Alternative is also included below. Formal determination of effects will be made by FHWA following completion of remaining information, public input received throughout the comment period, and further discussion with consulting parties. Refer to Chapter 11 of the SDEIS for additional information.

### **Alternative B-1**

A beneficial impact of Alternative B-1 on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be the reduction in motor vehicle congestion caused by through-traffic. The 1991 National Register nomination form cites traffic through downtown as the “greatest danger to the district today.” The Lift Bridge could remain open under Alternative B-1 to local vehicular traffic, resulting in continued traffic congestion in downtown and contributing to traffic impacts on the Commercial Historic District. Year 2030 traffic levels for Alternative B-1 with local traffic using the Lift Bridge are lower compared to the No-Build Alternative. Despite this, Nelson and Chestnut Street intersections with Main Street would operate beyond capacity (Level of Service F) in year

2030 with the Lift Bridge open to local vehicular traffic under Alternative B-1. If the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility with Alternative B-1, there would be no local traffic entering downtown Stillwater via the Lift Bridge.

Additional analysis was undertaken to determine the potential economic impact on downtown Stillwater from changes in traffic patterns. The study determined that the businesses in downtown Stillwater served as a destination, rather than being dependent on drive-by traffic. Thus, Alternative B-1 would not negatively impact downtown from an economic standpoint. Refer to Chapter 5 of the SDEIS for detailed discussion of the economic impacts of Alternative B-1 on downtown Stillwater.

The Section 106 preliminary assessment of effects has indicated that the distance of the new bridge from the Downtown Commercial Historic District would ensure that there would be no effects on the views from the District or the setting of the District under Alternative B-1. The economic study indicated that as a specialty destination, downtown Stillwater would not suffer adverse economic effects from the Alternative B-1 bridge removing through traffic from downtown. It is important to note that downtown Stillwater would be enhanced assuming that appropriate signage to guide visitors to downtown, a direct access route to downtown, sufficient parking, and an easy route back to the highway are all carried out as noted in the economic study. With these provisions, Alternative B-1 would have no adverse effect on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

### **Alternative C**

The benefits and impacts of Alternative C on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be similar to those described for Alternative B-1 above. A beneficial impact would be the reduction in motor vehicle congestion caused by through-traffic. Traffic operations in downtown Stillwater with the Lift Bridge open to local vehicular traffic for Alternative C were not studied as part of this SDEIS. However, the results from Alternative B-1 could be assumed to be similar for Alternative C. If the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility with Alternative C, there would be no local traffic entering downtown Stillwater via the Lift Bridge.

As described for Alternative B-1, Alternative C would not negatively impact downtown from an economic standpoint. Refer to Chapter 5 of the SDEIS for detailed discussion of the economic impacts of Alternative B-1 on downtown Stillwater.

Under Alternative C, the new bridge is more visible from Lowell Park and the Lift Bridge. However, the new bridge would not affect the characteristics that make the District eligible for the NRHP and there would be no effect on the views from the District or the setting of the District. For the same reasons cited above for Alternative B-1, Alternative C would have no adverse effect on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

### **Alternative D**

A beneficial impact of Alternative D on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be the reduction in motor vehicle congestion caused by through-traffic. The Lift Bridge would be converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility with Alternative D, eliminating local traffic entering downtown Stillwater via the Lift Bridge.

Additional analysis was undertaken to determine the potential economic impact on downtown Stillwater from changes in traffic patterns. As noted above with Alternatives B-1 and C, the study determined that the businesses in downtown Stillwater served as a destination, rather than being dependent on drive-by traffic. Thus, Alternative D would not negatively impact downtown from an economic standpoint. Refer to Chapter 5 of the SDEIS for a detailed discussion of economic impacts.

However, the Alternative D river crossing would be located adjacent to the historic district, leaving the Minnesota shore just to the south of the district from the northern portion of the Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property. Views from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be affected by the addition of a new river crossing with Alternative D.

The Section 106 preliminary assessment of effects has indicated that Alternative D would affect the immediate setting and views of and toward the Downtown Commercial Historic District. Roadway changes to TH 95 would also alter the experience of arrival into the District from the south as well. While the economic studies indicated that the loss of through traffic should not affect the destination shopping activity in downtown, the loss of 28 parking spaces could exert a negative effect on downtown retailing. The loss of parking spaces would have a detrimental effect on destination shoppers who have been identified as primary downtown visitors.

Thus under Alternative D, the impact to views toward and from the Historic District, traffic changes, and roadway entrances to the District and loss of parking would have an adverse effect on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

### **Alternative E**

Under Alternative E, westbound traffic from Wisconsin would continue to travel through downtown Stillwater and the Stillwater Commercial Historic District, resulting in increased motor vehicle congestion compared to the other Build Alternatives where the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility.

Capacity improvements are not feasible in downtown Stillwater due to the existing narrow streets, proximity of the buildings to the street, and high levels of pedestrian activity. Thus, Alternative E would result in increased traffic congestion in the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

Construction of Alternative E would itself not result in the direct acquisition of land from Lowell Park, a contributing element of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. However, maintenance, repairs, and rehabilitation of the Lift Bridge may require the temporary use of land from Lowell Park for construction staging. Refer to the Section 4(f) evaluation for Lowell Park for a discussion of temporary impacts to the park as a result of Lift Bridge rehabilitation.

Similar to Alternative D, the Alternative E river crossing would be located adjacent to the historic district, leaving the Minnesota shore just to the south of the district. Views from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be affected by the addition of a new river crossing with Alternative E.

The Section 106 preliminary assessment of effects has indicated that Alternative E would affect the immediate setting, views, traffic patterns, and roadway entrances similar to those described

for Alternative D. However, under Alternative E, 49 parking spaces would be lost in downtown Stillwater. The loss of 49 parking spaces could exert a negative effect on downtown retailing as the loss of parking spaces would have a detrimental effect on destination shoppers who have been identified as primary downtown visitors.

Under Alternative E, the impact on views toward and from the Historic District, traffic changes, and roadway entrances to the District and loss of parking would have an adverse effect on the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

### **C. POTENTIAL MITIGATION ITEMS**

Potential mitigation items applicable to all Build Alternatives are summarized in the introduction to the Section 4(f) evaluations and described in Chapter 14 of the SDEIS. While these mitigation items are intended to address impacts of a new river crossing, the mitigation items themselves may have potential impacts on the Commercial Historic District. Upon identification of a Preferred Alternative, a mitigation package will be identified by the lead agencies from the list of mitigation items as well as additional mitigation items identified by agencies or the public during the SDEIS comment period. Additional potential impacts associated with the mitigation package items for the Preferred Alternative will be presented in the Supplemental Final EIS.

### **III. AVOIDANCE ALTERNATIVES**

All Build Alternatives avoid removal of the Lift Bridge. However, use of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District, as it pertains to FHWA guidelines, would result from the disposition of the Lift Bridge and its impact on Lowell Park, a contributing element of the district. Use of the Lift Bridge, and therefore the Commercial Historic District, would result from conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility and subsequent modifications to Lowell Park (e.g., structures to prohibit vehicular traffic from accessing the Lift Bridge). Conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility would also require a new owner to assume responsibility for the Lift Bridge. Thus, Alternatives B-1, C, and D cannot avoid use of the Commercial Historic District where the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility.

Conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility would minimize some of the congestion impacts associated with traffic using the Lift Bridge.

The Lift Bridge could continue to operate under Alternatives B-1 and C for local vehicular traffic. Operating the Lift Bridge for local vehicular traffic under Alternatives B-1 and C would remove the bridge from the state trunk highway system and would require a change in ownership. Operating the Lift Bridge for local traffic would not result in direct physical impacts to Lowell Park, and therefore avoid use of the Commercial Historic District. However, continued operation of the Lift Bridge for local traffic with Alternatives B-1 and C would perpetuate traffic congestion impacts to Lowell Park and the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

The Lift Bridge would continue to operate under Alternative E for vehicular traffic on the state trunk highway system, thereby avoiding use of the Lift Bridge, Lowell Park, and subsequently

the Stillwater Commercial Historic District. However, operation of the Lift Bridge for one-way westbound traffic with Alternative E would also contribute to traffic congestion impacts to Lowell Park and the historic district.

Views of a new river crossing from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District are unavoidable for all Build Alternatives. The changes to the visual setting would be greatest with Alternatives D and E because of their close proximity to the historic district.

#### **IV. MEASURES TO MINIMIZE HARM**

As noted above, none of the Build Alternatives would result in the permanent use of land from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District.

The visual setting from the Stillwater Commercial Historic District would be affected by Alternatives D and E because of their proximity to downtown Stillwater. However, the bridge type selected will attempt to provide a complementary fit with the surrounding landscape and visual setting of the Stillwater area to minimize harm to the historic district. The design will also attempt to maintain a link to the historic character of downtown Stillwater and the natural features of the St. Croix Valley.

#### **V. COORDINATION**

Extensive agency coordination has occurred throughout the SDEIS process, as described in the Introduction to the Draft Section 4(f) Evaluations. Coordination related to discussion of impacts and proposed mitigation items has occurred with federal, state, and local government agencies and non-governmental groups as part of the Stakeholder Resolution Process. In addition, agency coordination is underway to develop a Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement.