

Vacating Fourth Street for a Bucks plaza would be drastic and risky

The city's proposed funding package for a Milwaukee Bucks arena complex includes the ceding of North Fourth Street between Highland and Juneau Avenues. Subsidies will be voted on by the Common Council on Tuesday, September 22.

Vacating any downtown street involves major ramifications for current and future transportation and land use. An amendment introduced by Ald. Bob Bauman, which passed in committee, would remove the proposed stipulation allowing the permanent closing of one block of Fourth Street. We urge the Common Council to approve this amendment so that transparent planning and more study can proceed around this important civic issue.

The City of Milwaukee can then explore options to accommodate pedestrian and vehicular traffic near a new arena. That includes possibly permitting closures of Fourth Street during arena and some special events. This is commonly done near sports venues in Indianapolis, Seattle and Boston. A *temporary* pedestrian plaza can thus be created while otherwise retaining an open roadway for vehicles. New Orleans does this nightly with Bourbon Street. Milwaukee routinely does it for street festivals, Wisconsin Avenue night markets and Cathedral Square events.

We recommend commissioning an independent traffic study to analyze potential impacts and routing options. For example, with Fourth Street closed to vehicles at Highland, all northbound traffic would reach a dead-end there. That would require a right turn and then a left or right turn on Old World Third Street, a narrower street partially paved in brick. On weekend and event nights, there already is congestion on Third Street. Funneling more cars there could create bottlenecks in this historic district. It would be prudent to thoroughly examine implications of either temporarily or permanently increasing traffic there.

Southbound, Fourth Street traffic would dead-end at Juneau. Vehicles could proceed either east or west and then access either Third or Sixth streets, which could further overwhelm Third Street.

How might a street closure impact Fourth Street north of Juneau into Bronzeville, since traffic would be diverted from there? How might it affect that area's developing prospects? The Ace Hardware complex at Fourth Street and McKinley Avenue is being repurposed as offices and a tavern. Adjacent Park East land will eventually be developed. Retail enterprises there and northward will benefit from Fourth Street remaining a thoroughfare that connects to the Milwaukee Intermodal Station.

When pedestrian malls are created, cities reconfigure streets without permanently ceding ownership and right-of-way. Long-term flexibility within the city grid is essential for urban planning. Successful pedestrian malls in the U.S. are the exception, not the rule. Of all pedestrian malls created since 1960, a whopping 89 percent have failed. They consistently have depressed downtown retail, not enhanced it, including along Chicago's now-abandoned State Street mall. Most pedestrian malls have been restored as streets with vehicular traffic. It would be costly and complicated to try to reclaim Fourth Street once it has been foolishly given away and converted into a plaza for the Bucks.

Manhattan urban designer and planner Jessica Schmidt analyzed the issue: “For a pedestrian mall to be successful, a number of factors needs to be in place....It is a highly contentious, complex legal and financial undertaking that demands serious long-term research and planning.” None of that happened in Milwaukee before a top-down decision was made to forever vacate Fourth Street.

Schmidt continues: “Newly-opened pedestrian malls at Times Square and Herald Square in New York City have been successful because of their location in highly trafficked areas and the lack of nearby outdoor seating.” A few others have succeeded in university settings or in areas with intense tourism or high-density housing. Pedestrian malls have not become “destinations” when created in low-traffic areas, however.

We look forward to more development in Westtown. We want the entire convention and arena district to become more welcoming for everyone--pedestrians, bicyclists, and those using other modes of transportation. That new inclusive, flexible approach is called “Complete Streets,” in which no single mode dominates. To this end, we believe that major transportation decisions should be made within a comprehensive planning framework. That must include community engagement, full transparency and consistency with city policies and procedures. For example, a public notice is required before a Milwaukee street or alley can be vacated. Waiving that mandate up-ends fairness.

It’s unwise for arena deal-makers to try to railroad the development process. However, there’s plenty of time to make well-reasoned decisions regarding Fourth Street. Arena construction will not begin before Spring 2016. Scant details have been presented for the Bucks proposed entertainment mall, which they want to build across from the arena on Fourth Street. The city proposes handing over a block-long garage to be razed for that purpose. Architects can creatively design within whatever parameters are established.

The City of Milwaukee should not vacate downtown streets unless no other option is available. The city should use sound planning to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for the Milwaukee Bucks and for all residents and visitors who travel to and through downtown.

The above letter was signed by the following:

Barbara Aho, landscape designer

Gerry Broderick, Milwaukee County Supervisor

Michael H. Carriere, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Milwaukee School of Engineering; Director, MSOE University Scholars Honors Program

Dawn McCarthy

James Godsil, cofounder, Milwaukee Preservation Alliance, Milwaukee Renaissance Wiki Magazine

Geoffrey Grohowski, board member, Sherman Park Community Assn. and Milwaukee Preservation Alliance

Lane Hall, co-founder, Overpass Light Brigade; educator and activist

Jamie M. Harris, Ph.D., Associate Director, Urban Studies Programs, UW-Milwaukee

Linda Keane, AIA, Professor, Architecture and Environmental Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Mark Keane, Professor, Architecture, UW-Milwaukee

Julilly Kohler, developer

Aims McGuinness, Associate Professor, History, UW-Milwaukee

Patricia Obletz, artist, activist, author and editor

Joseph A. Rodriguez, Professor, History and Urban Studies, UW-Milwaukee; *author, Bootstrap New Urbanism: Design, Race and Redevelopment in Milwaukee*

Peggy Schulz, public-space and transit advocate

Virginia Small, researcher and writer

Walter Wilson, FAIA, retired Principal Architect, Milwaukee County

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Research Notes:

Recently, the Downtown Fresno Partnership published the report, "**American Pedestrian Malls: Trends Analysis, Necessary Indicators for Success and Recommendations for Fresno's Fulton Mall.**" The report (to be released soon) finds that Fresno's Fulton Mall will be most successful as a Main Street, given the 89% failure rate of American pedestrian malls and the fact that Fresno does not have any of the indicators of success that the 11% successful pedestrian malls possess. The major findings of the report are:

Pedestrian malls in the United States have an 89% rate of failure. Most have been removed or repurposed. Only 11% have been successful.

Of the 11% successful pedestrian malls, 80% are in areas with populations under 100,000.

- **Certain indicators need to be present for a pedestrian mall to be successful in the United States:**
 - Attached to a major anchor such as a **university** (i.e. Boulder)
 - Situated in close proximity to a **beach** (i.e. Miami, Santa Monica)
 - Designed to be a short length in terms of blocks (**1-4 blocks long**)
 - Located in a community with a **population under 100,000** (i.e. New Bedford, MA)
 - Located in a **major tourist destination** (i.e. Las Vegas, New Orleans)
- Cities that have transformed their abandoned pedestrian malls into "Complete," "Main" Streets have experienced turnarounds in their downtowns with more investment, higher occupancy rates and more pedestrian traffic. **90% of these cities see significant improvements in occupancy rates, retail sales, property values and private sector investment in the downtown area when streets are restored.**

Links provided by UWM SARUP faculty:

http://nacto.org/docs/usdg/revisiting_pedestrian_malls_schmidt.pdf

<https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/13018/Bates%20Masters%20Project%20-%20Kai%20Bates%20-%20FINAL.pdf?sequence=1>

Value of closing temporarily -- good opportunity for 4th Street.

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2015/06/26/Merchants-divided-on-Open-Streets-road-closings/stories/201506240050>

Merchants divided on Open Streets road closings | Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Open Streets PGH, part of a national movement to foster outdoor activity, closed more than 25 city intersections from 8 a.m. to noon May 31.

[Read more...](#)

To be successful they are usually very dense areas, campuses, etc. (e.g. downtown Madison)

<http://www.city-data.com/forum/urban-planning/2024974-pedestrian-only-streets-almost-always-fail.html>

Pedestrian only-streets almost always fail (in the U.S.) (metro, downtown, transportation)
- Urban Planning -Urban, city, town planning, land use, zoning, transportation and transit, environmental issues, urban design, community development, subdivisions, revitalization
- City-Data Forum

I was on another forum, and someone cited interesting links here and here . The bottom lines are as follows, from the second link.
Pedestrian malls in

[Read more...](#)

<http://www.city-data.com/forum/urban-planning/2024974-pedestrian-only-streets-almost-always-fail.html>

<http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2013/07/25/16th-street-among-a-rare-breed-most.html>



Many cities have tried pedestrian malls, but most have failed - Denver Business Journal

The idea of a downtown pedestrian corridor didn't begin with the 16th Street Mall. It wasn't even the first in Colorado.

[Read more...](#)

<http://www.governing.com/columns/urban-notebook/trouble-with-pedestrian-malls.html>