

The shared vision for revitalizing downtown Wausau is moving closer to reality now that the Wausau Center Mall is razed and 7.5 acres await redevelopment.

“This is a true gift to our community,” said Dave Eckmann, president of Wausau Opportunity Zone Inc. (WOZ). “Most downtowns would love to procure this amount of space for future opportunities.”

T. Wall Enterprises is working with WOZ for the mall redevelopment project, with a projected \$44 million investment from the developer going into the initial plan of Block 4.

The dynamic mixed-use plan includes development of the 7.5-acre plat that once housed the Wausau Center Mall. In addition, the five-part development will ultimately include close to 500 units of affordable market rate housing, as well as small retail, restaurants, dining areas, bike paths and green spaces.

“The opportunity before us is incredibly unique and will create a place where people will be drawn to live, work and create memories for generations to come,” said Chuck Ghidorzi, managing director of WOZ. “In order to attract people to our community, we must invest in creating spaces and places such as this that will act as a magnet for the entrepreneurs, major employers, and others who will fuel the economic and also the

cultural growth of the Greater Wausau area.”

The initiative to reimagine the site was organized and funded by the Dwight & Linda Davis Foundation and Judd S. Alexander Foundation in a partnership with the City of Wausau.

WOZ collaborated with the City of Wausau, local businesses, downtown stakeholders, and community members to ensure that the demolition went smoothly, and downtown storefronts and summer events were still accessible.

“Labor shortages are plaguing the employers in our region and some won’t survive if they can’t fill job openings,” Eckmann said. “This is why we must focus on placemaking to create quality places that people want to live, work and play in. We want to create a quality environment that’s culturally rich, visually attractive and socially inviting.”

“The incredible commitment and partnership thus far from public and private entities has positioned our community for success,” said Ghidorzi. “This collaboration will be imperative as we take the next steps to get this project across the finish line.”

He added that demographics and needs are changing in central Wisconsin. “Transforming downtown Wausau will draw people in and attract greater innovation and economic activity,” Eckmann said.

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After it reopened in August 2021 following a 17-month pandemic shutdown, the Grand Theater in Wausau capped off the year with a spot in the 2021 Top 200 Theatre Venues Worldwide as compiled by Pollstar. The Grand ranked 120th according to the publication's Year End Edition with 11,951 tickets sold. This marks the fifth straight year The Grand has appeared in the Top 150 rankings, and the second-

highest placement ever in the annual rankings for The Grand.

In addition to finishing in the Top 150 overall, The Grand shined in comparisons with similar markets and venues, finishing first in terms of similar market size for the third consecutive year and ranking third

overall for theatres under 1,300 seats.

"It's been incredible to reopen our historic theater and bring the magic of live entertainment back to The Grand. To be recognized in Pollstar's Top 150 worldwide for the fifth consecutive year is a tribute to the hard work done by our entire team," said Sean Wright, Executive Director. "To once again have the highest finish of similarly-sized markets is especially gratifying, because it demonstrates just how incredibly supportive this community is of the performing arts. It's certainly quite an accomplishment, and we are absolutely thrilled."

Pollstar is the worldwide trade publication for the concert and performing arts industry. The Grand has been ranked alongside world-renowned theaters such as Radio City Music Hall (New York, NY), Ryman Auditorium (Nashville, TN), and Royal Albert Hall (London, UK).

"We have our outstanding patrons to thank for our success," Wright said. "We have incredibly loyal season subscribers, plus we're excited to see how many new patrons from throughout the entire region are experiencing The Grand for the first time. It's great to be recognized with some of the elite venues in the world, and it motivates us to continue to present the best in the performing arts for our audiences to enjoy."

new season:
The Grand's 2022/23 season of 30-plus shows features nationally touring Broadway musicals, international performers, country music stars, rock concerts, jazz, comedians, and more. Visit the Ticket Office at 401 N. Fourth St. in downtown Wausau or online at grandtheater.org to learn more.

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