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## Downtown transformation, housing drive Ladysmith's growth *Local leaders welcome Secretary Missy Hughes, highlighting strength of community partnerships*

**LADYSMITH, WI. MARCH 13, 2025** – Renovating a historic building. Creating a downtown gateway. Replacing underground utilities.

Separately, all three projects would have a major impact on a community.

In Ladysmith, the city's 3,100 residents have seen what happens when leaders decide to tackle all three projects at the same time. The result is a lasting impact that has transformed the downtown into an engaging location where residents want to gather.

"Together, these components contributed to a more attractive and welcoming downtown," said Alan Christianson, city administrator. "In a small community like ours, any one of these project components would have been a major accomplishment on its own, so to have the opportunity to tackle all three as part of a larger project by leveraging funding through a variety of sources and the collaboration of a number of community partners was huge."

The project is one of the finalists for the Connect Communities Revitalization Award-Small Community at the 34th Wisconsin Main Street Awards Thursday night in Menomonie.

The city undertook a complete rebuild of Miner Avenue, replacing underground utility lines that had been in place since 1911, ensuring modern infrastructure for the future.

It also restored an 80-year-old retail building that stood vacant for two decades. The building now provides essential services through the Indianhead Community Action Agency (ICAA) and houses Connections Thrift Store, the ICAA-Rusk County Food Pantry, and a retail incubator.

Finally, the city constructed a new pavilion and pedestrian-friendly space that creates a vibrant downtown gateway and permanent home for the Rusk County Farmers Market.

Businesses and residents are already seeing the effects of the revitalization.

Visitor traffic downtown has increased, with approximately 1,900 visitors since the Connections Thrift Store opened five months ago. Sales at the Rusk County Farmers' Market are estimated to have increased by one-third over the previous year, and two new businesses are expected to open along Miner Avenue in 2025, Christianson said.

"Downtowns are commercial and cultural centers of communities," Christianson said. "They are places where residents and visitors get together to socialize, dine, and shop. Downtown

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provides one of the strongest ties to the history of the community. A healthy and vibrant downtown reflects well on the community as a whole.”

WEDC Secretary Missy Hughes was in Ladysmith Thursday to see first-hand the impact the downtown project, which WEDC supported through Vibrant Spaces and Community Development Investment grants.

“It’s really exciting to see the commitment community leaders in Ladysmith have to creating a welcoming community while also looking forward to the future,” Hughes said. “This is great example of how taken together, multiple projects can combine to have a greater impact on a community.”

Hughes also visited the Lindoo School Apartments, a solution to the city’s lack of affordable workforce housing. With the help of an Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant from WEDC, the city transformed the former Ladysmith Elementary School—which closed in 2017—into apartments.

The nearly \$13 million project created 33 housing units—a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom units—all of which provide affordable rates for renters earning less than the prevailing median income. The project also includes seven townhomes, a community center, a commercial kitchen, business incubator, meeting rooms, gym, and an ADA-accessible playground.

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