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## Look at What UWEC Has Planned for Its Huge New Arena/Rec Center

Wednesday Oct. 28th, 2015

by [Tom Giffey](#)



An artist's rendering shows a preliminary design concept for the Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex to be built on land donated between the Chippewa River and Menomonie Street in Eau Claire. [Closer look.](#)

In case you've forgotten, the Confluence Project isn't the only major collaborative, multiuse facility on the drawing board in Eau Claire. UW-Eau Claire and the Eau Claire YMCA are working together on an even bigger project, and now you can feast your eyes on drawings of a major event facility and recreation center to be built between Menomonie Street and the Chippewa River. On Wednesday, preliminary renderings were unveiled of the John H. and Carolyn O. Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex, which is slated for the former County Materials and Student Transit-Eau Claire site not far from Carson Park and the Hobbs Ice Arena.

The images, while far from final, provide an idea of what the huge complex will look like, both from Menomonie Street and the river. The plan includes a 130,000-square-foot major event center, which will seat 4,500 to 5,000 people (with a standing-room-only capacity of 6,000); a wellness, aquatics, and rec facility that would be shared by UWEC and the YMCA, with Mayo Clinic Health System partnering with them for programming; as well as plenty of parking and adjacent land suitable for private, complementary development.

Kimera Way, executive director of the Blugold Real Estate Foundation and the UWEC Foundation, said the design concepts were created to help with the fundraising process, "and also to help the community to see what our vision is, how we want to embrace the river."

For decades, a major event center to replace UWEC's outdated Zorn Arena has been on the Chippewa Valley's wish list. The idea moved closer to reality back in August 2014, when John and Carolyn Sonnentag, both UWEC alums, and their business, County Materials, announced a donation of \$10 million of money and property to the university. Since then, the Blugold Real Estate Foundation has taken ownership of the site and hired program management firm Brailsford and Dunlavey to conduct a market analysis.



The Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex renderings, as seen from Menomonie Street. *Image: Ayres & Associates.*

[Closer look.](#)

“To determine the size of the event center, it was important to first understand the market potential,” Way said. “Brailsford and Dunlavy interviewed stakeholders and potential users of the event center to determine what types and how many events it might host, then used benchmarking data from other venues and markets to recommend capacity ranges for the center.” Way acknowledges that some in the community have called for a facility that could seat 10,000 people or more, but she said the university has to focus on building an arena with a size the community can sustain.

According to a [press release](#), “The event center concept calls for a highly versatile design that would accommodate multiple types of events and activities, including serving as a home for UW-Eau Claire men’s and women’s basketball games, men’s hockey games, basketball and other athletics tournaments, large indoor concerts and other entertainment or sports events.”

Way said the Sonnentag Center could become a hub for university, community, and family activity. “Imagine any weekend scenario ... where because of the versatility of what we’re envisioning, you could have a Marlins swim meet, an ice hockey tournament, and an AAU basketball tournament all at the same site,” Way said.

During the coming year, demolition and preparation work will begin on the site, which for decades has been used for concrete manufacturing and school bus storage. County Materials is transitioning its operations to another site, although its retail office will remain on Menomonie Street for the foreseeable future, Way said.

While there have been no additional financial pledges toward the project, the UWEC Foundation and the YMCA have had preliminary discussions with potential donors, Way said. “Please know that there’s a tremendous amount of work that’s gone on in the last year and a few months, and a lot of work ahead of us,” she said, adding the university hoped to begin building within five years.



The Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex as seen by birds. [Closer look.](#)

**This was made by**



**Tom Giffey** *author*

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## Comments

JohnWednesday Oct. 28, 2015

Looks like there is parking for only about 300 cars?

[reply](#)

AaronWednesday Oct. 28, 2015

Of course, let's build a multi-million dollar faucility on floodplain. Which also is not large enough to compete with the twin cites for events and has a pethetic amount of parking space. Looks cool, but not worth it.

[reply](#)

Eau SnapTuesday Nov. 3, 2015



Was that a misspelling or are you coining a new term - "Faux-cility." I'd like to think you were, but your misspelling of pathetic leads me to believe otherwise.

[reply](#)

Sherry McConnell Wednesday Oct. 28, 2015

This event center will be a wonderful addition to Eau Claire. Done right, it will be a hub of activity all week long. Thanks for the foresight!

[reply](#)

Melvin\_Blubber Wednesday Oct. 28, 2015

Now you just have to build up some collegiate athletic programs that will fill those seats.

[reply](#)

Flux Thursday Oct. 29, 2015

Like the approach overall but I agree with John about the parking - where exactly do they plan to put a couple of thousand cars for a concert or other sold-out event?

[reply](#)

[glasseye](#) Thursday Oct. 29, 2015



Well, many UWEC students can simply walk. The trail is right there.

[reply](#)

[crispinpierce](#) Friday Oct. 30, 2015



Building stronger connections between UW-EC, the community (YMCA), and medical community (Mayo).

[reply](#)

Concerned Eau Claire citizen Saturday Oct. 31, 2015

This building and parking footprint is way too small. La Crosse holds 7500 and their planning an expansion/remodeling. This is Eau Claire's competition regionally. If you are planning a big event such as a concert or regional game, would you rather play at a rinky dink center or one that has decent capacity and parking. Just spend the money and do it right the first time. They need to generate more revenue and build it bigger.

[reply](#)

 [larryms](#) Saturday Oct. 31, 2015

Concerned EC citizen raises a good question about the size and its comparison to the La Crosse Center. It appears to me that this maybe a repeat of the Downtown EC Convention Center.....waaaaaay to small. How much floor space available for trade shows, conventions, concerts, etc. compared to La X or some of the other cities in WI & MN of similar size? Anyone know?


[reply](#)

aaron Sunday Nov. 1, 2015

I don't think this is supposed to be a convention center. It's supposed to replace Zorn Arena.


[reply](#)

[Melvin Blubber](#) Saturday Oct. 31, 2015

 Yes, just what we need...more pavement. And let's do something about all this wildlife invading human habitat, too.

[reply](#)

[Snayte](#) Wednesday Nov. 4, 2015

 I agree this is too small to be competitive. We need something that seats about 10000 to bring in large acts and boost the tourism economy in Eau Claire.

[reply](#)

Concerned Eau Claire citizen Wednesday Nov. 4, 2015

Did anyone see the gifted Menards YMCA tennis center design and location? Plans are preliminary, but its going next/across from Dairy Queen in the empty dirt parking lot. It looks like a cheap pole building and it will occupy land in which I thought would be utilized for UW event center/YMCA and Carson parking. Let me do some simpleton math here: an UW event (6000 cars, full capacity) + YMCA cars (average 200) + Carson park (marathon w/2000 cars)= NO PARKING anywhere. Where are you going to put these vehicles? Buy more land for parking? This is not being planned out at all. I took a worse case scenio snapshot, but it is very true to all 3 things happening at the same time. It is going to be trouble.

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7:30pm

Tue11/10



## [Chippewa Valley Corvettes](#)

6pm



## [B.J. Hollars](#)

6:30-8pm

*Wed* 11/11



## [Dulce et Decorum Est: An Evening of Songs and Poetry for Peace in the Spirit of Armistice Day](#)



## [Veteran's Day 2016](#)

9:45am-1pm



## [3rd Annual Women's Business Celebration](#)

5:30pm

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