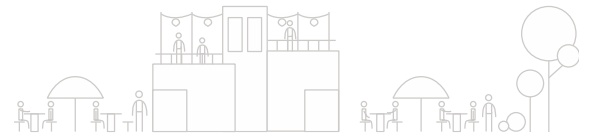




# the Urban Weaver



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It's abundantly clear that "monthly" does not mean what I thought it did. We last published in March, and we're on the doorstep of June - having unofficially passed into summer on Memorial Day. Our frequency is down, but we're still always thinking about the kinds of issues we write about here.

Since we last wrote, we're thrilled to be able to announce our [exciting work in beautiful La Crosse, Wisconsin](#). We think, objectively, that the site is compelling. But, that alone was not enough to take us from Milwaukee across the state to La Crosse.

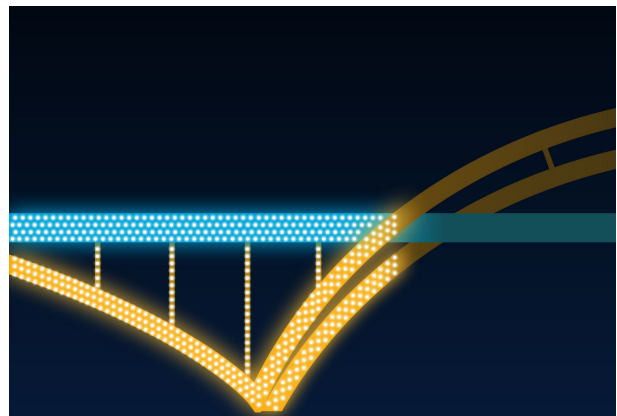
Here at WiRED we remain entirely committed to community creation - to the cultivation of productive collisions between people. In La Crosse, we see an unparalleled opportunity to work with a fully engaged municipality and community in order to forge an entirely new social ecosystem walking distance to downtown. For us, this wasn't a question of whether we should consider La Crosse. Rather, this was us recognizing that we simply couldn't afford not to.

In this issue of the Urban Weaver, we get lit and Hoany, continue our dive into consideration of the socio-economic inclusiveness of development in this real estate cycle, dream of a cabin in the city, and Chris Steinhafel extols the virtue of bikes in the city.

## **Light the Hoan - team WiRED**

It's not all that often that a group of private citizens is able to activate and accomplish something that truly and meaningfully provides identity to an entire city. But there's a group working to accomplish that [right here in Milwaukee](#).

The Daniel Hoan Foundation has now entered into a public-private partnership with the Wisconsin DOT in an effort to use crowdfunding to raise \$1.5 million of the total ~\$5 million budget to install LED lights onto the iconic Hoan Bridge. Folks can make donations and claim a light, make a dedication and even add a photo to the database of dedicated lights.



To be sure, Milwaukee won't be the first city to have an LED lit bridge. Edmonton used a similar model for their [High Level Bridge](#) and had great success. San Francisco's [Bay Bridge](#) is all lit up. [London's bridges](#) are going to get all lit up. Everyone's getting lit. And we're getting lit and Hoany.

Your initial reaction may be that this is weird. Or unnecessary. We ask you to think about it a little bit. The Hoan Bridge is amongst Milwaukee's most iconic structures. It is unmistakably Milwaukee. To light it is to call attention to it at night; to create imagery that is compelling and that can add a layer of contemporary identity to the city. And, by crowdfunding the lights and facilitating dedications they are giving Milwaukeeans a true sense of ownership of their icon. If you really want to understand, then go to [www.lightthehoan.com](http://www.lightthehoan.com) and view the dedications and watch the video. We think it's pretty cool.

## InclusiviCity 2 - blair williams

All the way back in our [inaugural issue](#), we wrote about the new typology of American cities. Milwaukee (along with Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, Columbus and several others) was identified as "Persistent Black Poverty." In cities like these, patterns of racial segregation started with the Great Migration, and became entrenched as both racial and socio-economic segregation as the industrial economy declined.

James Causey wrote a [terrific series of articles](#) for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Most of these numbers come from him. And, let's be clear, the numbers matter here.

In 1950, Milwaukee's black population numbered approximately 22,000 and was only 3.4% of the total population. By 1970, that number had risen to over 100,000 and 15% of the population. Those folks came here for our strong industrial economy, good jobs, and affordable quality homes in our northwest side neighborhoods.

In 1970, more than 85% of Milwaukee's black men between 25-54 had jobs, and 40% of all African-American adults in Milwaukee worked in manufacturing. We had the second highest median household income in the country. Our newest residents bought quality homes in walkable neighborhoods. They climbed the ladder of the middle class. We were the promised land.

But when it changed, it changed quickly and catastrophically. Milwaukee lost 25% of its industrial jobs in the 5 years following 1978. Milwaukee's black population was caught dead in the crosshairs of that job loss. It was an absolutely crushing blow.

Between 1970 and 2000 overall wages dropped 12%, and black household incomes dropped almost 29%. Black unemployment grew from 15% to almost 50%. The pattern deepened through 2010 - when fewer than 53% of all black men had jobs, while 85% of white men did. That was the biggest gap in the country.

It wasn't just about economics. This was a social and cultural disruption without peer in Milwaukee's history. From 1970 to 1990, the white population in Milwaukee declined by a third and in some of the neighborhoods on the northwest side the white population dropped by more than 90%. Milwaukee's Raisin in the Sun happened in full.

As unemployment and generational poverty took root, so too did those neighborhoods fall almost entirely out of the pipeline for ongoing market-driven real estate development and infrastructure investment. It wasn't just the people who lived there who became impoverished - so too did their built environment. This was disinvestment on a staggeringly comprehensive scale.

A fascinating project from Trulia and the National Fair Housing Alliance uses Yelp and Census data to dig into the impact of segregation on citizens' access to neighborhood amenities such as grocery stores, banks, medical centers and parks. CityLab has an ongoing series looking at the cityhood movement in Atlanta, and they published a [great article](#) looking at Trulia's study.

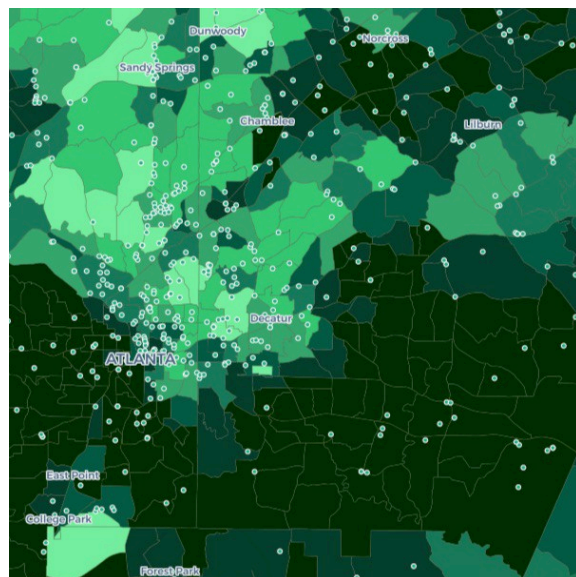
Sit back and think for minute: what amenities are legitimately convenient to where you live, and that you believe are fundamental to making your built environment comfortable for you? The list is pretty predictable (obviously dependent on family status and personal preference): grocery store; drugstore; bookstore/library; neighborhood school; place of worship; green space/park;...

Would you choose to live someplace that does not have those amenities?

In Atlanta, it turns out that those amenities are in large part just as segregated as the neighborhoods. That is to say, majority black neighborhoods in Atlanta have far less commercial real estate, and less space for fitness and outdoor activities, and less healthy food options.

Getting back to numbers: "In Atlanta, majority-white tracts have 25.3 health care providers [per 10,000 people], compared to 9.8 [per 10,000 people] in majority-black tracts." Perhaps it's not surprising that those under-served neighborhoods suffer from some of the highest rates of diabetes, premature deaths, and poor newborn health.

And it's not just Atlanta. In Detroit, Oakland, and Houston (and I'm profoundly certain of it here in Milwaukee) - segregation works its insidious broad game the same way. "Across all four metros they found that census tracts where people of color are the majority have 35.1 percent fewer traditional banking institutions, twice as many alternative banking establishments (check-cashing and pay-day loan centers), 38.4 percent fewer healthcare facilities, and 33.9 percent fewer fitness and outdoor amenities, when compared to majority-white tracts."



In the image at right, that lower right area is south DeKalb County. It's majority black and those sparse dots represent the fitness and outdoor activities available to its residents. Contrast that to the majority white areas to the northeast. Stark.

The built environment doesn't win de facto. There are incredible communities of people in these neighborhoods across the country and here in Milwaukee. But they are able to develop that community despite the built environment and the segregation of the amenities that support communities in neighborhoods.

This is the start of our conversation on this topic. We'll continue to come back to how we believe the built environment supports community, and how we need to find mechanisms to break the vicious cycle of segregation of those basic amenities we all demand in our communities.

In the meantime, go listen to Juli Kaufman [accept her well-deserved award](#) as Woman Executive of the Year. She provides one of the best presentations we've ever heard about how real estate can offer multiple bottom lines, and how real estate can act as both problem and solution. She's one of our heroes.

## Cabin in the City? I'm in. - *blair williams*

[This. Is. Amazing.](#)

I'm in lust. Living here in the city, I'm largely unabashedly urban. Those real estate taxes and [lacking] services? I call them urban amenity fees. Walkability matters to us. So do diversity and density. We mostly like other people.

But that doesn't mean we don't long for the quietness of the outdoors. And our 100-year-old Georgian colonial doesn't mean we don't long for the warmth of natural materials and the expressiveness of post and beam architecture.



I'm a big fan of the north woods. And we're blessed to have incredibly generous friends who share their wonderful home with us there. I love Door County. And I absolutely love the mountains of the American west. That relationship to the outdoors is fundamental to me - and I think to us as people.



Without strong parks and green spaces, city living runs the risk of overwhelming our ability to connect to our world. And, a lack of connection there can profoundly alter our perspective on our place in the world (see InclusiviCity 2 above). This house hits incredible marks for its interaction with the land on which it sits.

And that's where this gets amazing. Yes, its green roof and photovoltaic array are cool. But those rooftops on three sides? This home is in the city. It is an incredible natural oasis in an urban environment.

As we consider how we can shape our communities in the built environment, we are paying newfound attention to single family living. And, we will be thinking about what this cabin in the city represents, and how we can incorporate it in what we do.



## Bikes. Bikes. Bikes. - *chris steinhafel*

Like every large metropolitan area, transportation issues plague Milwaukee. Because new roads and thoroughfares are so difficult to create, it's fundamental we solve for diversity of use and transit options on our existing infrastructure. The City nears completion of construction on a limited route street car through downtown with the potential for future phases. This represents a dedicated effort to provide solutions for both the quality and availability of transit throughout the city. This route will likely transform the downtown and the neighborhoods it connects. In considering the potential value of such a system, [stakeholders should always consider how we can influence consumer preferences for transit options](#).

**Biking is the next mode of transportation Milwaukee should champion; it should be included with all future streetcar planning and construction.**

Millennials want progressive cities that will meet their needs now and in the future. To attract and retain talent in Milwaukee, public infrastructure needs to be a primary focus for both public and private institutions. Among the many benefits to building a robust biking infrastructure is attracting talent. As infrastructure increased and improved over the past decade, [the number of people commuting to work by bicycle is up more than 60%](#). Simply having the option to bike to work safely helps companies attract talent. After all, [bike-friendly cities are often healthier and more livable for urbanites](#).

Milwaukee needs to take the leap and become a progressive city, aggressively implementing bike infrastructure. The City has a Bicycle & Pedestrian Task Force which put out a "Milwaukee by Bike Plan" in 2010 with their vision of neighborhoods full of diverse peoples riding bicycles on innovative bicycle facilities. Despite these good intentions, Milwaukee has yet to realize this plan nearly a decade later.

**Biking in Milwaukee is neither innovative nor safe.** There are more than 120 miles of bike lanes in Milwaukee and none of these lanes are protected. A recent American study confirms [physically separated bike lanes are crucial for safety](#). Generally, there is plenty of room to make way for protected bike lanes. The dangers of sharing the road with cars are easily visible on the north side of Milwaukee. Drivers often speed up in bike lanes to pass cars and run red lights. And, over the last few years, the Milwaukee Police Department decided not to pursue high-speed chases - leading to a drastic increase in criminals attempting to out-run the police and put more lives at risk. I rarely see residents in these neighborhoods jeopardize their lives by riding bikes on the road, even in the bike lane.



There are numerous ways to build biking infrastructure beyond protected lanes on roads. Bike trails, bike highways, and bike bridges are just as essential. Whether being used for transportation or recreation, bike use depends on the existing infrastructure. Our Milwaukee County Park System has incredible trails. Unfortunately, these trails are shared by bikers and pedestrians alike. Separating bike paths from walking paths is an important step to improving the park experience and bike transportation routes. There are a few different ways to create this separation and we can look to America's most bike-friendly city, Minneapolis, for help.

The Stone Arch Bridge, pictured above, connects downtown Minneapolis to Northeast and the Dinkytown: home of the University of Minnesota. Bike paths occupy the center of the bridge and pedestrians are free to roam the sides.

Trails around Lake Harriet, pictured on the right, The left path is a dedicated one-way bike path. The right, a path for dog-walkers and runners. Pedestrians and bikers are safely separated from one another (image from [here](#)).



One of the biggest problems with driving in urban landscapes is the lack of available parking. Biking helps ease the burden of parking. More cars off the street means reduced congestion and reduced parking demand. Milwaukee requires less supply with reduced demand. If fewer parking lots and structures are needed, land may be freed up for new developments. These developments in turn would increase the tax base and generate additional revenue to the City in property taxes.

The economic benefits of strong biking infrastructure are substantial, raising property values and increasing economic activity. According to a University of Wisconsin-Madison study, bike tourism contributes and estimated \$1.5 billion to the state's economy each year. When residents bike around cities, consumer spending stays local. Bikers are more likely than drivers to stop and spend. Bike parking is far cheaper than car parking, requires less space, and brings in more revenue - [according to multiple studies](#). Biking infrastructure even [creates more jobs per dollar than roads](#).

Most importantly for the folks over at City Hall, biking infrastructure has the potential to save the city substantial money. The cost for the best type of protected bike lane is between \$170,000 and \$250,000 a mile while maintenance costs are considerably less than car lanes. According to the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, replacing a car trip with a bike trip saves both individuals and society \$2.73 a mile. The City may also attract federal funding for bike infrastructure thanks to the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, passed by Congress in 1991. In its first year, 50 bike projects received federal funding. In 2010, more than 2500 projects received federal funding.

Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons to implement bike infrastructure is its potential to be used as a catalyst for social change. Protected bike lanes may safely connect neighborhoods, specifically low-income neighborhoods with the rest of the city. Cars are expensive. Really expensive. Biking is an affordable means of transportation. Elly Blue, activist and author of *Bikenomics: How Cycling Can Save The Economy*, says "households earning less than \$70,000 spend nearly 20% of their income on transport."

**Milwaukee is up for the challenge and demands social change. Let's improve our biking infrastructure and invest in our communities.**