

Spooner, WI, the largest city in Washburn County, is seeking \$3.5 million in funding from WisDOT for restoration of the unique Chicago and Northwestern Railroad (C&NW) roundhouse and turntable. Plans are to turn this currently unused historic property, which is easily accessible by walking, bicycle, horseback, skiing, ATV, snowmobiling, train, and auto, into a distinct event center and a landmark touring site within the developing Railroad Park. The C&NW is the reason Spooner exists. In the late 1800s, the railroad was searching for a suitable location in the area for a switching yard and maintenance facility. The site chosen and developed by railroad employees was named after John Coit Spooner, the railroad attorney and U.S. senator from WI who was instrumental in early community development.

The City owned the land which included the railroad sand tower and weigh station that surrounded the roundhouse/turntable property. The Railroad Park Board (RPB) was formed by Mayor Gary Cuskey in 2009, and tasked with developing the area into a safe, welcoming park. In 2016, the City acquired the roundhouse and the turntable, took steps to remove/remediate hazardous materials, repair structural timbers, and restore the roof of the roundhouse. The restoration was entrusted to the RPB to plan and the Friends of the Railroad Park (FORRP) to implement. The empty historic building requires 100% remodeling and restoration. The rare, original turntable requires extensive rehabilitation. FORRP contracted DBS Group to develop preliminary design information: Site Plan, Floor Plan, Exterior 3-D Fly-Around, and Interior 3-D Fly-Through. Through private funding, FORRP installed a parking lot base adjacent to the roundhouse, renovated the decaying weigh station, and will complete a picnic pavilion in March of 2020. FORRP will install five signs describing the historic sites crucial to train operation as well as add additional walking trails throughout the Railroad Park. Furthermore, plans for the Park include a railroad-themed playground, band shell, splash pad, benches, and extensive landscaping. The Park currently includes a skating rink, picnic tables, sand volleyball courts, and hosts the annual Jack Pine Savage Dash.

The economic, educational, and connectivity impact this project would have on Spooner, the County, and the area is significant. The centrally located site is one block from the thriving downtown shopping district; one block away from a hotel with 3 others nearby; the Railroad Memories and WI Heritage Canoe Museums are adjacent to the site. There is an active railroad track, the terminus of the WI Great Northern Railroad (WGN) located onsite. The WGN is involved in helping the Park, and will bring a dining car into the roundhouse. The old railroad right of way is now the Wild Rivers Trail, connecting to hundreds of miles of ATV and snowmobile trails. Restoring the historic roundhouse and turntable would establish a safe and exciting start and end point for ATV, snowmobile, skiing, horseback riding, hiking, bicycle, road, and recreational trail trips. To the east of the roundhouse is a new thoroughfare, Roundhouse Road. The alternative to this project is demolition which would delete a vital part of local history. Spooner, a two-hour drive from the Twin City metro area, is a tourist destination throughout the year, attracting ATV's, snowmobilers, skiers, fishermen, hunters, bicyclists, sightseers and more, whom spent a total of \$45.7 million in Washburn County last year. The restoration and opening of this site will create jobs and educational, recreational and community opportunities for all ages and interests through the addition of festivals, farmer's markets, art shows, weddings, concerts and more. This project is listed as a priority by the Washburn County Economic Development Corporation for continued economic growth, quality of life management, and will help continue our unique trend of increasing our population in demographics vital to our continued growth in a rural Wisconsin area.