

Built on Sawdust?

Recently I attended an Idea Lounge meeting on the Confluence Project. While the idea of a theatre downtown is exciting, I fail to see why we cannot utilize those buildings with historical significance into the plan as they do in other cities. A representative of Commonweal stated that these buildings can't be repurposed because they did not have good foundations and were "built on sawdust." While I realize that Eau Claire, our "Sawdust City" was important in the lumbering business, I can't imagine anyone building on sawdust. So, I decided to do some research.

The geology department of UWEC has done extensive mapping of the Eau Claire area. Their maps show the foundation of Eau Claire is shale and granite. Talk to anyone who works in the geothermal business and they will tell you how difficult it is to drill through granite. So, where does the sawdust come in? I talked to a woman who is a lifetime resident of Eau Claire and can remember all of the flooding in the confluence area. She said that often sawdust was brought in because it would soak up the water and was easy to remove after it was used.

At the end of the meeting, one of the occupants of the downtown buildings in question stated that she had a survey done of her building and found the foundation was good. Because of the lateness of the evening, there was not much response to this woman. It would be interesting to know what her survey really stated. It would also be interesting to know if other buildings in that area were inspected by someone who did not have an interest in destroying them. It would be most interesting to know how, if the foundation is not good, Commonweal can build a huge theatre, a high rise student dorm and an underground parking lot on all that sawdust.