

La Crosse County Economic Development Plan: 2025 - 2030



LA CROSSE COUNTY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Crosse County's economy is diverse and resilient. Strong high school and higher education institutions, core anchor industries such as healthcare and manufacturing, and a centralized location between major metropolitan hubs contribute to the strength of the local economy. The La Crosse County Economic Development Strategic Plan establishes the framework for achieving local economic development goals from 2025 -2030.

Our Mission:

To bring people, partnerships, and possibilities together for a strong and vibrant La Crosse County.

Our Vision:

La Crosse County will be a thriving economic hub recognized for its vibrant business community, high-quality jobs, and a strong quality of life.

Purpose of Plan:

1

To develop an understanding of La Crosse County's current economic position. The existing conditions identified in this plan offer key metrics that can be generated year-over-year. These metrics will allow for comparisons to be made, and thus, assist La Crosse County and our partners in developing annual workplans that address current and future economic development needs. This plan's goals include metrics that, collectively, all economic development organizations can achieve.

2

To ensure a clear and consistent understanding of the role of all economic development partners in the county, including local units of government, non-profit organizations, and quasi-governmental agencies. Understanding the gaps and barriers in economic development services being offered is crucial, as it helps us understand our limitations and opportunities as a community.

3

To provide La Crosse County staff and leadership with an understanding of which areas within economic development should be prioritized for workplan and budgetary purposes. As economic conditions inevitably change, so too should our focus of work. La Crosse County aims to be nimble, while maintaining focus on the overarching goals established within this plan.

The Four Pillars of the Strategic Plan:

Business Climate

Foster collaboration between the business community and the public sector to meet industry needs and support the aspirations of workers.

Education, Talent, & Workforce

Cultivate a pipeline of next generation workers. Staff works closely with community and business leaders, education institutions, and community partners to recruit and retain talent.

Economic Infrastructure

Using our location to strategically enhance our economic base and create a competitive advantage through supporting our infrastructure.

Quality of Life

Address housing affordability, environmental sustainability, and equity and belonging by sharing knowledge and best practices that help our community move from awareness to action.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Throughout the planning process, La Crosse County staff met with our economic development partners to learn more about the opportunities and challenges they face and identify service gaps that we can collectively aim to fill. The organizations include:

Figure A

Economic Development Partners (Page 2)	Local Units of Government (Page 5)
The 7 Rivers' Alliance	City of La Crosse
The La Crosse Area Development Corporation (LADCO)	City of Onalaska
The La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce	Village of West Salem
The Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (WWWDB)	Village of Holmen
The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC)	Town of Shelby
Explore La Crosse	
La Crosse Area Planning Committee	

Primary Takeaways from Economic Development Partner Meetings:

- Consistent and sustainable funding is crucial for our non-profit economic development partners.
Each of the economic development partners listed above rely on funding from a combination of private industry membership dues, fundraising efforts, and government contributions. These uncertain and often inconsistent forms of revenue can pose a risk to organizational sustainability and capacity.
- There is a lack of consistent marketing practices to promote the important work being accomplished.
It is vital to ensure that the work of our economic development partners is acknowledged and promoted throughout the region. Developing a shared vision and strategy will not only help our partners validate the investments made by public and private industry members but will also help educate the public about the critical work that directly impacts our collective success and well-being.
- There is a lack of understanding of what our economic development partners do.
There is often a lack of understanding or a misconception that our economic development partners are duplicating work. Consistent with Takeaway #2, further marketing practices with a shared voice are necessary.
- There is a need for grant specialists.
Particularly in our less populated communities, local units of government and other community supporters lack the capacity to identify and apply for crucial grant funding, which often results in necessary projects not taking place. There is a significant need to provide further technical assistance to support our local units of government.
The business community also lacks technical support in identifying and applying for grants. Navigating the ever-changing federal, state, local, and private foundation programs can be daunting, yet, without well-written applications, millions of dollars are being left on the table.
- Additional planning support is needed.
Planning is a critical element of economic development. In fact, having updated plans can provide the opportunity for state and federal funding opportunities. Many of our communities lack the capacity and expertise to perform planning initiatives without assistance.

6. A formalized Business Retention and Expansion program is needed.

As outlined by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), “business retention and expansion should be the core program of any economic development plan” (IEDC, 2024). Business retention and expansion programs offer economic developers timely and relevant feedback on the local business ecosystem. A formalized program that includes public, private, and non-profit representation is needed.

7. An intentional effort to uplift our underrepresented populations should be developed.

According to the 2023 Tri-State Workforce Survey, administered by a group of local economic development organizations, over 41% of area businesses currently employ “English as a Second Language (ESL)” individuals. As the workforce shortage continues to pose a challenge for local employers, it is reasonable to assume that employers will continue to recruit employees from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. Retention of the next generation of workforce should be a primary focus. To retain people of diverse backgrounds, diverse-owned businesses should be supported and invested in.

8. There is a lack of shovel-ready commercial and industrial land.

While La Crosse County has a plethora of undeveloped acreage that is designated as non-residential in future land-use maps, as seen in [Appendix A](#), land with proper infrastructure in locations that fit the needs of business are limited. Commercial and industrial development benefits a local economy in a variety of ways, including increasing jobs and local tax base. An effort to establish a new business park with shovel-ready opportunities should be a priority.

9. The lack of housing negatively impacts many facets of our local economy.

La Crosse County is expected to generate demand for over 8,000 new housing units over the next 20 years (American Community Survey, 2020). The housing shortage La Crosse County is experiencing is not a unique issue, but the consequences are significant. Median rent rose 51.7% and the median home value increased 157.1% from 2000 – ’21. Meanwhile household income has only increased by 1.1% during the same time period (American Community Survey, 2020). The drastic increase in housing costs without a similar increase in median income is putting a significant cost burden on households, not only forcing residents to cut back on spending in other areas of the economy, but also preventing people from finding new housing that better fits their needs and desires. La Crosse County, in conjunction with other public, private, and non-profit partners should perform a housing study and identify ways to increase construction of new housing and rehabilitation of existing housing.

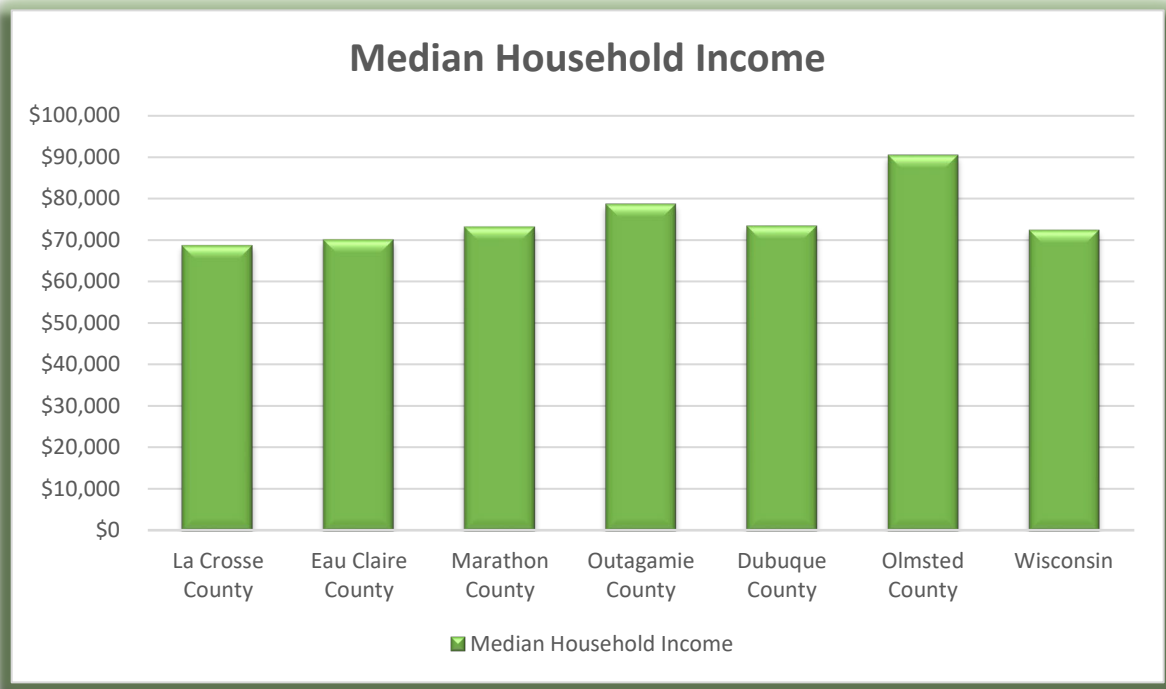
10. The La Crosse area should find ways to encourage further entrepreneurial activity.

The La Crosse area is fortunate to have a host of partners who assist entrepreneurs in starting their business. The UW-La Crosse Small Business Development Center (SBDC), WWBIC, and Couleecap each offer business planning support. Most of our lending institutions and WWBIC offer small businesses financing opportunities. The Coulee Region Business Center offers below-market rental spaces and wrap-around support services. The Idea Fund of La Crosse offers equity investment opportunities. SCORE provides 1:1 technical assistance from individuals who have started and ran successful businesses. The La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce and other organizations offer networking and growth opportunities. There are plenty of opportunities for entrepreneurs in La Crosse County to make their dreams come true. La Crosse County should be marketed as a community where entrepreneurs find success.

11. The median household income in La Crosse County (\$68,731) is lower than comparable communities.

As seen on the next page in [Figure B](#), La Crosse County’s median household income is lower than that of Eau Claire, Marathon, Outagamie, Dubuque, and Olmstead counties, all of which have similar populations and industry makeup, and is roughly \$9,000 below the state average.

Figure B

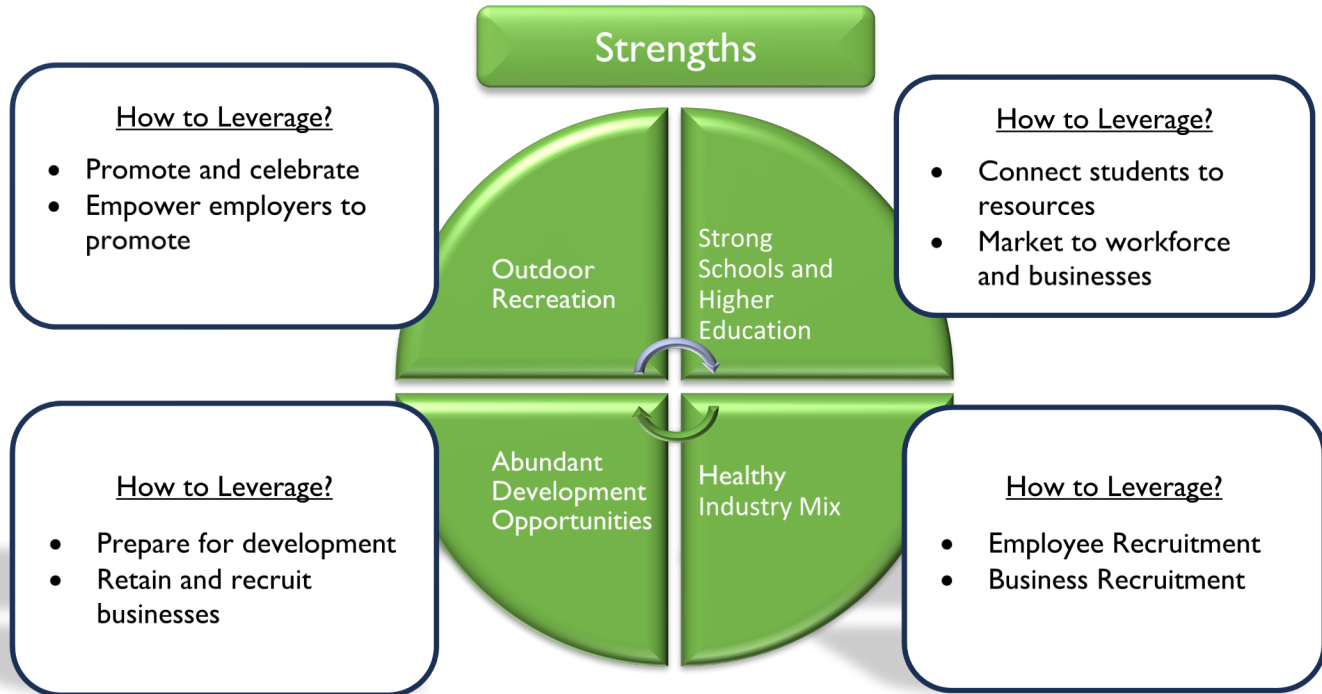


Source: ACS, 2018-2022

Primary Takeaways from Local Units of Government:

La Crosse County staff engaged the administrators of our local units of government to determine the priorities, challenges, and opportunities we have as a greater community. Feedback was provided by the City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, Village of Holmen, Village of West Salem, and the Town of Shelby. While our communities are all separate and face unique challenges and opportunities, many similarities were identified that could lead to future partnerships resulting in a stronger La Crosse County. The following is a summary of the information garnered.

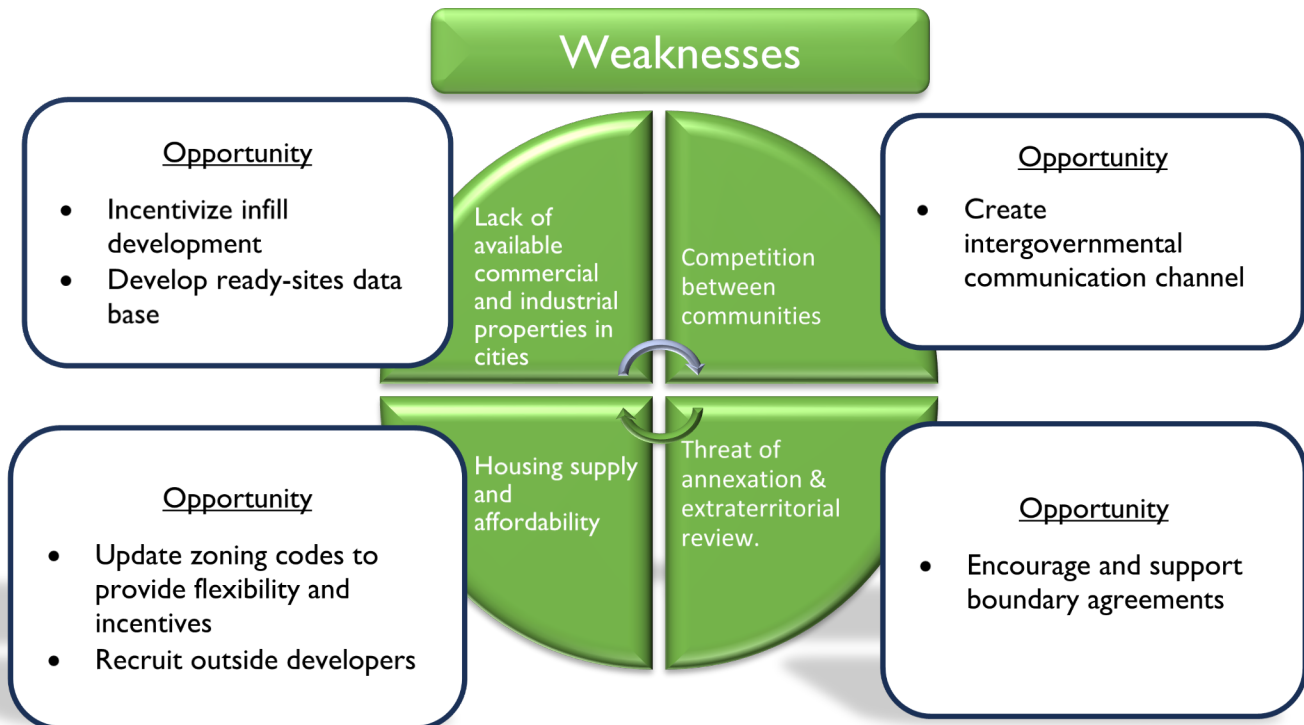
Figure C



Local administrators were asked what they viewed as being strengths of their communities. Each community offers some strengths that are unique to them, but county-wide strengths were also identified, as seen in **Figure C**. The group also identified ways to leverage these strengths. The group agreed that a uniform marketing effort, whether it be targeted towards the workforce, families, businesses, or the general public; promoting and celebrating our strengths will be a key factor in the future success of our region.

Other strengths identified include: an educated workforce, strong infrastructure and highway access, strong downtowns, and a healthy mix of urban and rural communities.

Figure D



The local administrators were also asked what they viewed as weaknesses of their communities. Similar to the strengths, each community has some weaknesses that are unique but do impact the county as a whole. While the concept of abundant development opportunities was identified as a strength, the City of La Crosse and City of Onalaska, particularly, lack shovel-ready commercial and industrial properties. Many of the commercial and industrial properties that are available will likely take a significant amount of investment before being ready for a new user. Meanwhile, the Village of Holmen has abundant greenfield development opportunities for commercial and industrial uses.

Municipal boundary agreements are very important. They can provide a stable foundation for future growth and can foster collaboration and cooperation. If they are not established, costly disputes can result as developments are initiated. The Village of Holmen and the Town of Holland recently adopted a boundary agreement that can provide a good example for other communities to consider.

Other weaknesses identified include: challenges to provide municipal water/sewer, lower day-time population (in some communities), and declining school enrollment (in some communities).

Figure E



Figure E illustrates the top priorities and strategies identified by the group of local administrators.

Figure F

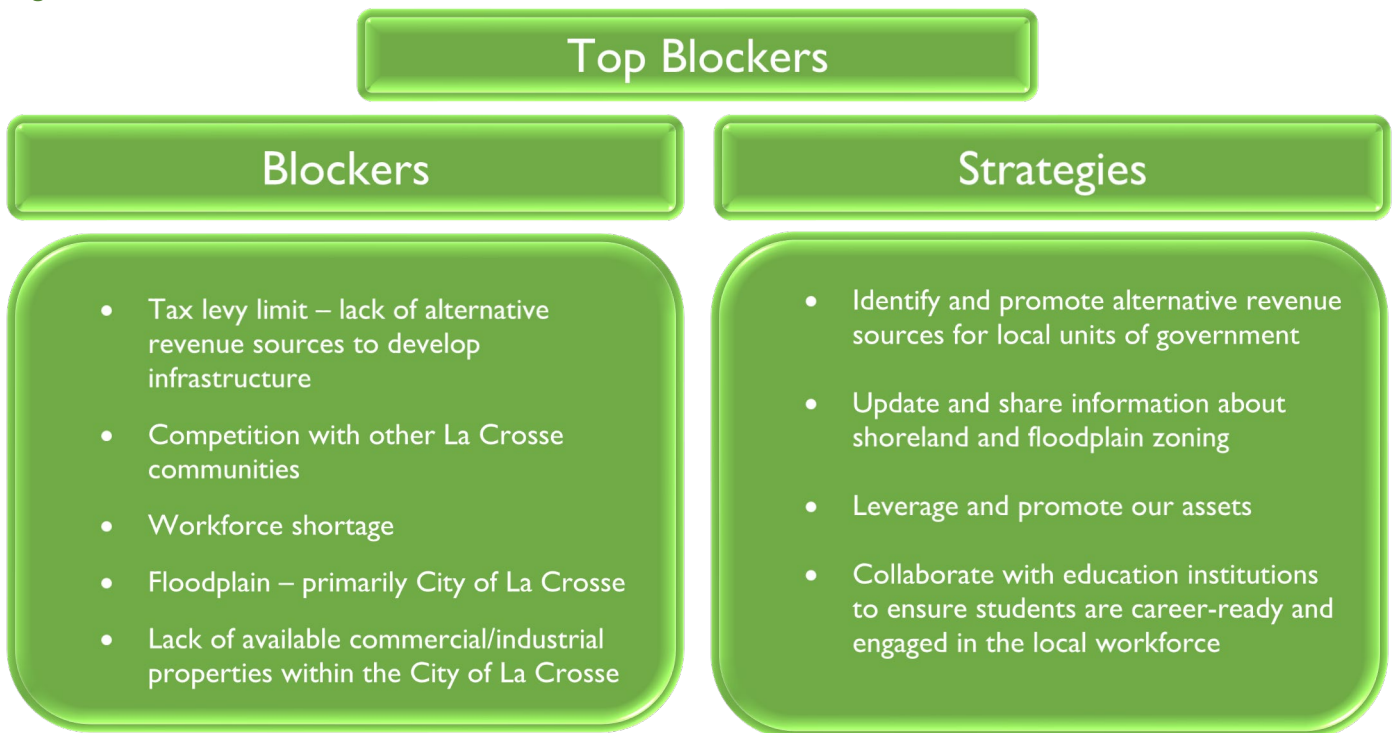


Figure F illustrates what is blocking our local communities from addressing their priorities.

Figure G



The group of local administrators were asked which efforts they would like to partner with La Crosse County on. The five opportunities are identified above in **Figure G**.

Adopted Plans

It is important we keep in mind many of our local communities and partner organizations have adopted plans related to economic development. Incorporating elements of those already established plans was a critical component in the development of this plan. Below is a synopsis of local plans identified. You can visit the entity's website to view the plans.

- a. **La Crosse County Strategic Plan:** The County Board Strategic Plan outlines the five-year vision for La Crosse County. The plan seeks economic growth and vitality, engaged and empowered employees, environmental stewardship, intentional and sustainable infrastructure that will ensure overall access and safety, an inclusive community, a robust support network, and sustainable and affordable housing through continued improvement, data-driven decision making, exceptional communication, investing in staff, and growing future leaders.
- b. **WISE Plan:** The driving focus of this plan is to grow and improve the workforce in the Seven Rivers Region, which consists of 14 counties in Southwest Wisconsin, Southeast Minnesota, and Northeast Iowa. The three main goals of this plan are talent preparation, talent retention, and talent recruitment. Preparing talent by educating workers to serve in in-demand fields. Retaining talent by increasing diversity, raising wages, increasing access to childcare, and providing more affordable housing. Recruiting talent by retaining graduates from local education institutions and recruiting the next generation of workers from outside of the region.
- c. **City of Onalaska 2024 Housing Affordability Report:** The City of Onalaska 2024 Housing Affordability Report provides an analysis of the City's housing stock, as well as housing goals, objectives, and policies, particularly the Unified Development Code. The main focuses of this plan are to increase the general housing stock by creating higher density projects where appropriate and rehabbing the aging housing stock, creating a more walkable and bikeable community, and encouraging the development of affordable senior housing.
- d. **La Crosse County Envision 2050 Comprehensive Plan:** The Envision 2050 plan aims to create a framework for sustainable growth that can build a resilient, thriving, and equitable La Crosse County for future generations. The plan was developed by county staff and community members. The core values of this plan include sustainability, collaboration, equity, forward thinking, and respect. Key elements and associated goals are related to sustainability, agricultural resources, natural resources, cultural resources, economic development, housing, land use, and transportation. The future land use map provides direction for development in unincorporated La Crosse County.

- e. **The City of La Crosse Imagine 2040 Downtown Plan:** This plan focuses on helping downtown La Crosse meet its maximum potential through 5 core themes; *Market for Development*, *Network of Strong Neighborhoods*, *A Connected City*, *Destination for All People*, and *A Confluence of Nature*. *Market for Development* focuses on maximizing the potential of the finite downtown real estate. *Network of Strong Neighborhoods* focuses on creating vibrant welcoming and livable neighborhoods through increased housing density and the rehabilitation of present homes. *A Connected City* focuses on connecting all parts of the city, from the river to the bluffs, by creating a more walkable and bikeable downtown. *Destination for all People* focuses on creating an inclusive community for all people by continuing to add to the artfulness of downtown and creating more public spaces. *Confluence of Nature* focuses on creating a downtown that values the natural environment by creating a greener and more sustainable downtown.
- f. **City of La Crosse 2040 Comprehensive Plan:** The 2040 Comprehensive Plan provides a long-range vision for local land use, future planning, and community decisions. The plan focuses on land use by creating higher density land uses, building housing of all densities, and rehabbing old homes to ensure that residents of all incomes and ages can secure housing. Economic development will be achieved by focusing on economic growth in high-impact economic clusters, transportation by improving transit and expanding ridership, enhancing natural resources by increasing habitat protection, and improving utilities and community facilities by reserving access to sanitary sewer and water service for future growth.
- g. **Village of Holmen Comprehensive Plan:** The Village of Holmen Comprehensive Plan, “Chapter two”, identifies the vision to guide Holmen over the next 10 to 20 years. The plan focuses on housing for all residents that fits their needs, mobility and transportation opportunities that connect neighborhoods throughout the community, economic prosperity, agricultural and natural resources, land use, community facilities, community services, and community character.
- h. **Village of West Salem Comprehensive Plan 2023-2043:** This plan suggests that the Village of West Salem will continue to support variety of quality housing options for all residents and their needs. This idea is similar to the Village of Holmen and City of La Crosse Comprehensive Plans suggestions. Some suggested objectives to reach this goal include developing housing dedicated to senior citizens and increase availability of new affordable housing for people who live and work in the community, such as multi-family housing. West Salem is also focused on supporting transportation strategies that will improve the economic vitality, encourage biking and the use of local trail systems, and provide safe and efficient transportation options. Additional focuses include utilities and community facilities, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, economic development, and land use. The Village also mentions that they will collaborate with La Crosse County and other neighboring jurisdictions to meet these goals and build new relationships while maintaining municipal independence.
- i. **La Crosse County Broadband Report:** The Broadband Report recognizes the diversity of La Crosse County, comprising of both densely populated urban and suburban areas, as well as lower density rural areas which represents a majority of the county’s geographical footprint. Internet service in rural areas often face significant challenges while urban areas benefit from widespread availability of fiber-connected internet service. The report targets to have affordable and reliable high-speed internet services available to most homes and businesses in the county by 2030. The ways to achieve this goal will be through availability (sufficient infrastructure needed to deliver service), affordability (ability to pay for the total cost of being connected), and adoption (the training, skills, and knowledge needed to obtain access to reliable high-speed internet). The County can help to achieve this by pursuing grant opportunities, expanding county capacity to support broadband initiatives, and develop partnerships with internet services providers.
- j. **La Crosse County Climate Action Plan:** The County Comprehensive Plan and Resolution #21-8/20 identify sustainability and climate action as community priorities. La Crosse County is drafting a two-part climate action plan. **Part 1** is a guide to carbon neutral County government operations. It establishes goals and recommended actions to reduce environmental impacts resulting from County operations. Implementation of recommended actions will reduce carbon emissions from buildings and fleets, increase building energy efficiency, and reduce waste. **Part 2** of the climate action plan is the Community Sustainability Plan, which recommends actions to protect the environment in the unincorporated towns. Recommended actions in Part 2 are related to land conservation, diverting waste from the landfill, supporting green industries, environmental hazard mitigation, and removing barriers to renewable energy.
- k. **City of La Crosse Climate Action Plan (CAP):** The City of La Crosse CAP has an overall goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40-50% below 2019 levels by 2030. Addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions can result in a greater financial impact, quality of life/natural resources, and reduction of health risks. This plan also points out how the actions taken to address climate resilience are often interconnected and result in returning benefits in other areas. The changes to the climate in La

Crosse brings potential risks such as extreme heat/weather, poor air quality, increased extreme precipitation resulting in flooding, food insecurity, and failure of infrastructure. Strategies to reach these goals include decreasing vehicle miles travelled, creating more energy efficient buildings, designing buildings to be more resilient in the face of extreme weather, decreasing waste, promoting increased water conservation, promoting increased tree cover, and preparing the community's vulnerable population for climate hazards.

- i. Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):** The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission is a planning agency that aims to foster economic development in nine Counties in Western Wisconsin. The goal of this plan is to foster regional economic development through the following five goals.

 - Goal 1:** Improve the region's transportation, telecommunication, renewable energy, and public facility infrastructure by supporting solar projects and furthering broadband availability.
 - Goal 2:** Identify and address the workforce gap between available positions and qualified workers.
 - Goal 3:** Encourage Business retention and expansion to maintain and increase employment strategies.
 - Goal 4:** Promote and increase communication between regional and county economic development organizations.
 - Goal 5:** Enhance the quality of life in the region – housing, childcare, recreation.
- m. La Crosse Area Planning Committee Transportation Improvement Program:** The La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) is the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for La Crosse, La Crescent/MN Urbanized Area. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a four-year program of transportation improvements. The LAPC looks to prioritize projects that support economic vitality of the metropolitan area, increase security and safety for motorized and non-motorized users, increase accessibility for all, protect the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, increase efficiency, improve reliability, and enhance travel and tourism.

Pillar I: BUSINESS CLIMATE

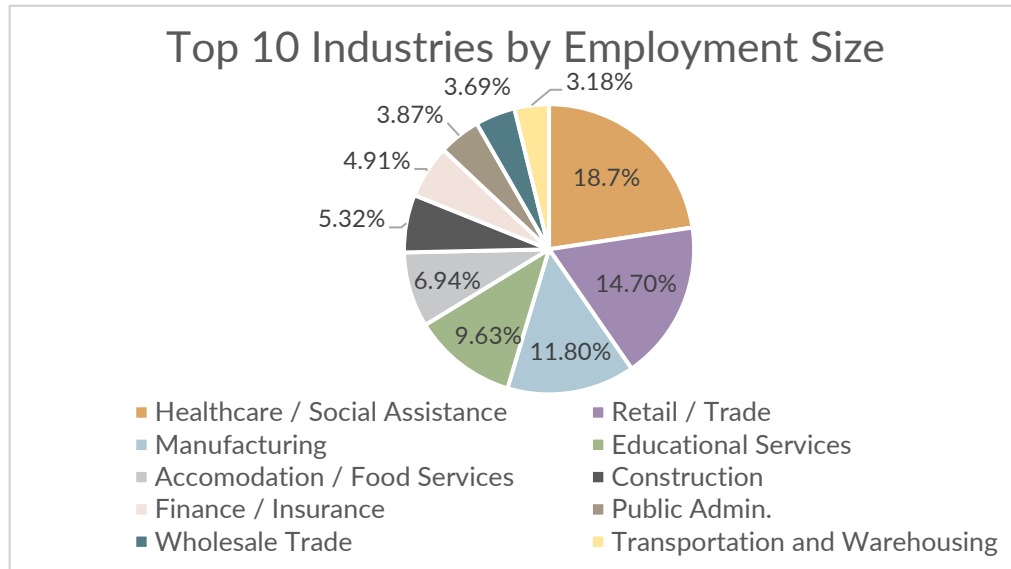
Employers/Industries



La Crosse County's economic landscape is shaped by a diverse range of industries that contribute to its overall prosperity. Understanding the existing employers and their industries is essential for identifying growth opportunities, supporting existing businesses, and attracting new investments.

This section looks at La Crosse County's top industries by employment size and median earnings, and among others, top occupations.

Figure 1.1



Source: US Census Bureau 2022 5-yr. estimates

While healthcare and social assistance provide the most employment opportunities in La Crosse County, the construction industry is projected to grow by 9.47% and the manufacturing industry is expected to grow by 4.72% in the coming years (Wisconsin DWD, 2022). Growth projections indicate there will be further demand for construction and manufacturing professionals in the years to come.

As seen in **Figure 1.2**; healthcare, manufacturing, and construction each rank in the top 10 of highest paying industries. These jobs and industries should continue to be supported to allow for further growth in household income and overall economic stability.

Figure 1.2



Source: Lightcast Q3 2023

Figure 1.3

La Crosse County Top Ten Occupations by Total Employment			
Occupation Title	2020 Employment	Projected 2030 Employment	% Change
Office and Administrative Support	17,292	17,116	-1.0%
Production	15,688	16,180	3.1%
Transportation and Material Moving	15,429	17,393	12.7%
Sales and Related	13,256	13,696	3.3%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	11,352	13,106	15.5%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	11,142	11,840	6.3%
Education, Training and Library	9,683	9,879	2.0%
Management	9,391	9,418	0.3%
Business and Financial Operations	7,759	8,554	10.2%
Healthcare Support	7,717	8,554	10.8%
Total All Occupations	154,728	164,757	6.5%

Source: US Census Bureau 2020 10-yr. estimates

Figure 1.3 shows the top 10 concentrated jobs in La Crosse County and makes a comparison to the 2023 projections. As you can see, healthcare and production drive our community's employment. Production includes manufacturing and food and beverage production. These jobs create opportunity for other jobs listed such as Sales, Transportation and Material Moving, Management, and Office and Administrative Support. Another industry supporting a high level of jobs is Educational Instruction and Library, which is no-surprise, considering our two universities, technical college, and school districts throughout La Crosse County.

Top Private Sector Employers by Employee Size

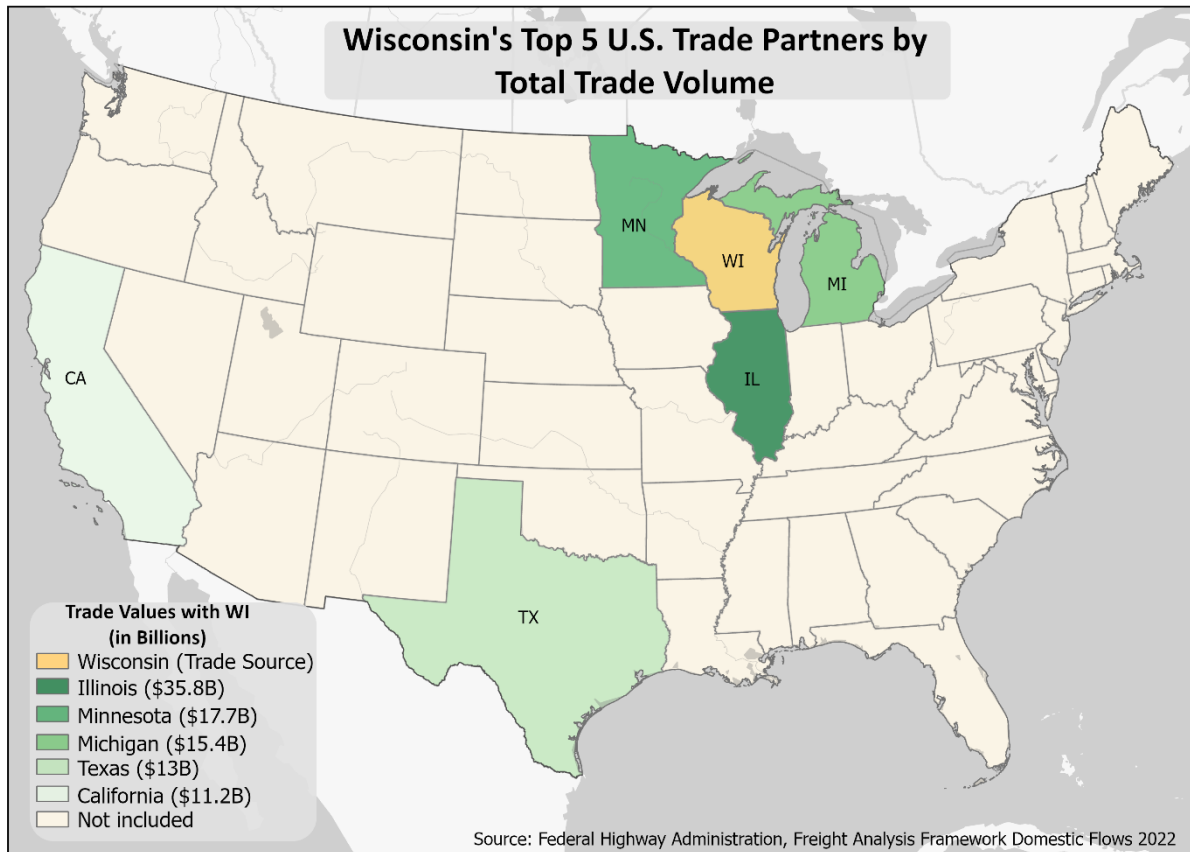
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Kwik Trip | 6. Mathy Construction Co. |
| 2. Festival Foods | 7. City Brewing Co. |
| 3. Emplify Health (Gundersen) | 8. JF Brennan Co. |
| 4. Trane Technologies | 9. Chart Energy & Chemicals |
| 5. Mayo Clinic Health System | 10. Walmart |

Source: US Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey

Top Domestic Trade Partners for the State of Wisconsin

Understanding the Top 5 Domestic Trade Partners for the State of Wisconsin is important as it pertains to **Pillar 3 – Economic Infrastructure**. Ensuring transportation that supports trade between regions is key in supporting sustainability and growth of our existing and future businesses. See **Figure 1.4** on the following page for Wisconsin's top 5 trade partners.

Figure 1.4



Agriculture

Farming and agriculture remain a significant element of the economy in La Crosse County, with a 2022 value of agriculture products sold of over \$81M. While we have seen an increase in new and beginning farmers over the last decade, we have also seen a decrease in net farm income, average farm size, and land in farms. Some of this can be attributed to urban development; as developable land within urban areas become limited, commercial and residential development has encroached on what has traditionally been farmland. As market challenges continue to pose a threat to the financial side of running a farm, farm-owners are increasingly seeking alternative sources of revenue that include, but are not limited to offering event venues, building solar farms, and selling land for development opportunities.

To combat the challenges the farming industry is facing, the State of Wisconsin and its counties have adopted programs and initiatives that include the Farmland Preservation Program, conservation easements, agriculture-related tax benefits, and others.

Figure 1.5

Census Category	2012	2017	2022	10-year % Change
Number of Farms	748	667	676	-9.7%
Average Farm Size (Acres)	212	216	204	-3.8%
Net Cash Farm Income (\$1,000)	\$22,591	\$19,619	\$19,150	-15.3%
New and Beginning Farmers	n/a	203	344	+59% (5-year % Change)
Market Value of Ag. Products Sold (\$1,000)	\$86,522	\$74,614	\$81,740	-5.6%

Source: US Agriculture Statistics Svc. Census of Agriculture, 2012, 2017, 2022

The agriculture Industry has a significant direct impact on our local economy. According to the 2020 American Community Survey estimates, 520 residents (0.8% of the local employed workforce) work directly in the “Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining” industry in La Crosse County. 6,776 jobs in La Crosse County are in some way linked to agriculture, spanning roles from farmers and veterinarians to processors and machinery sellers or renters.

The agricultural industry has been and continues to remain a significant element of our local economy for a variety of reasons. Efforts to preserve farmland, ensure sustainable farming practices, and support the industry should be prioritized.



Tourism

The tourism industry within La Crosse County is incredibly important to the local economy. Not only does it have a direct and measurable economic impact, which was roughly \$502M in 2023, but it is also a major workforce and business attraction tool. Attracting people to our community through tourism has the potential to result in direct investment from individuals and businesses seeking a great quality of life.

i. La Crosse Region Direct Visitor Annual Spending:

1. 2023: \$307,300,000 - Record Year
2. 2022: \$304,600,000
3. 2021: \$262,000,000
4. 2020: NA (COVID)
5. 2019: \$281,000,000

ii. Tourism-Related Jobs:

1. 2023: 3,931 Jobs
2. 2022: 3,980 Jobs
3. 2021: 3,854 Jobs
4. 2020: NA (COVID)
5. 2019: 4,534 Jobs

iii. The La Crosse Area is among the top 10 areas of Wisconsin for Tourism Economic Impact at \$502 Million in 2023.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Tourism



Through engagement with Explore La Crosse, two opportunities to further boost tourism throughout La Crosse County were identified.

1. **Indoor Sports Complex** – While La Crosse County has several facilities that can accommodate outdoor and indoor sporting events, La Crosse County continually misses out on larger opportunities. The organizers of major events are typically looking for venues with 8-10 playing surfaces (courts, fields, rinks, etc.). For swimming-related events, organizers typically look for an Olympic-sized pool (50 meters). Regardless of the event, organizers also seek facilities with ample seating (capacity of at least 1,000 to 2,000 patrons), locker rooms, and other site amenities required to host such events.
2. **Resort-style Hotel** - A premier retreat on the Mississippi River would draw guests seeking unparalleled views of the water and seamless access to boating adventures. The ideal hotel would feature a blend of contemporary elegance and rustic charm, with large windows and expansive terraces to ensure that the river's beauty is always in view. Amenities would include:
 - **Full-Service Marina:** Adjacent to the hotel, the marina includes state-of-the-art slips to dock boats of all sizes, complete with fuel services.
 - **Spa & Wellness Center:** The spa offers signature treatments using locally sourced botanicals.
 - **Fine Dining:** The on-site restaurant with outdoor seating would allow guests to dine under the stars with river views.
 - **Rooftop Lounge:** The lounge offers panoramic views of the Mississippi.

Tourism takes many different forms. From people visiting for a vacation, to work-related conventions and conferences, organized sports and other related events, concerts and shows, and of course our locally held festivals like Oktoberfest and Irish Fest. Explore La Crosse spearheads the recruiting and organizing of such events, with the assistance of many other partners such as the La Crosse Center, Omni Center, and others.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship and small businesses are a key element of our state and local economies. According to the SBA, roughly 48% of Wisconsin residents are employed by small businesses, and according to the US Census Bureau, roughly 39% of La Crosse County workers are employed by small businesses. The SBA considers a small business as firms with fewer than 500 employees.

Source: US Small Business Administration and US Census Bureau

La Crosse County has several partners assisting with entrepreneurial and small business development. Services range from business planning to financing. Below are the resources available within La Crosse County.

1. **UW-La Crosse Small Business Development Center** – The Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is part of a statewide network of SBDCs working with business owners and entrepreneurs to facilitate business growth and improvement, and to launch successful new companies. Through no-cost consulting, low-cost entrepreneurial education, and strategic facilitation, SBDC experts serve as resources for small and emerging mid-size companies. The Wisconsin SBDC is hosted by the Universities of Wisconsin Administration and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration.
2. **WWBIC** – The Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC) is a leading-edge economic development corporation that has been encouraging entrepreneurship, opportunity, and success for over 35 years. WWBIC’s regional office in Onalaska serves emerging and existing small business owners (women and men) by providing quality business education, 1:1 business assistance, direct loans and access to other capital, financial awareness and asset-building programming. In 2023, WWBIC served 5,735 clients, approved nearly 130 loans and closed \$10 million in small business loans – state-wide.
3. **Couleecap** – The Couleecap Business Development programs helps aspiring business owners turn their business idea into a reality. The program can help with developing a strong business model, writing a business plan, learning necessary business skills and more. Couleecap also hosts the Collective on Main, a small business retail incubator located in Downtown La Crosse.

4. **Small Business Lending** – The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers two primary financing programs for small businesses.
 - a. 7(a) – provides loan guarantees to lenders that allow for traditional lending agencies (banks and credit unions) the security they need to lend to small businesses, which are often riskier loans. Most lending institutions within La Crosse County offer small business lending programs that are backed by this program. 7(a) loans provide funding for working capital, purchasing equipment, or refinancing existing debt.
 - b. 504 – loans provided by Certified Development Companies (CDC) who are non-profit partners that promote economic development within their communities. 504 loans provide financing for fixed assets like commercial real estate, building improvements, or purchasing equipment.
5. **La Crosse County Programs** – La Crosse County offers the Innovation & Diversification grant, Micro-loan program, and Participation loan program, all of which offer funding opportunities for small businesses.
6. **Coulee Region Business Center (CRBC)** – Located on the northside of La Crosse, the CRBC offers reduced overhead costs and below-market lease rates while providing professional assistance and access to local resources to start-up businesses.

Funding Programs

La Crosse County's economic development efforts are significantly influenced by the availability of funding programs. These programs offer essential financial resources to support business growth, infrastructure development, and community initiatives. By strategically leveraging funding opportunities, La Crosse County can foster a vibrant and sustainable economy. This section will identify the various funding programs available to businesses and organizations.

1. **TIF Programs:** City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, Village of Holmen, Village of West Salem, Village of Bangor, Village of Rockland
2. **La Crosse County**
 - a. Innovation and Diversification Grant – created in 2012 to assist small businesses rebound from the Great Recession of 2008, this program provides grants of up to \$10,000 for La Crosse County-based businesses who are making investments to make their businesses more viable.
 - b. Acquisition & Demolition Grant – created in 2016 to provide capital for housing projects. This program was originally created to revitalize the housing stock in select neighborhoods within the City of La Crosse but has since been expanded county-wide. The program provides funds to assist with the acquisition, demolition, and site preparation work for properties with low assessment values that would otherwise have trouble gaining financing from traditional lenders.
 - c. Arts & Culture Grant – created in 2017 to support arts and culture related investments throughout La Crosse County. Grants of up to \$5,000 are provided to local organizations, artists, and others.
 - d. Micro Loan Revolving Loan Fund – created in 2014 to support entrepreneurs and start-up businesses; particularly those who are not bankable. Loans between \$1,000 and \$20,000 with a maximum amount of \$30,000. Funds can be used for, but are not limited to new working capital, inventory/supplies, equipment/furniture, and technology upgrades.
 - e. Participation Loan Revolving Loan Fund – created in 1992 to provide gap financing to businesses proposing a project that will result in job creation. Loan sizes between \$10,000 and \$120,000, with a maximum loan amount of \$200,000. A minimum of 1 job created or retained is required. For every job created or retained, the applicant is eligible for a loan between \$10,000 and \$15,000.
 - f. Community Development Block Grants Small Cities (CDBG SC) – La Crosse County receives biennial allocations of approximately \$3,500,000 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The funds cover the Southwest Wisconsin Housing Region, which includes 11 surrounding counties: Crawford, Lafayette, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, Vernon, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jackson, and La Crosse counties. La Crosse County engages with a third-party to administer these funds through a biennial RFP process. Recently, Couleecap has been the organization that has won the bid and has administered the funds throughout the 11-county region. These funds assist current homeowners to remodel their homes with loans that do not accrue interest and are paid back when the property changes ownership.

3. City of La Crosse

- a. Architectural & Engineering analysis Program
- b. Elevate Downtown Façade Grant Program
- c. CDBG Partner Funding – For the past 5 years, The City of La Crosse has committed an average of \$50k annually in CDBG funding towards small business development assistance. This has taken the form of funding local partners who are the “boots on the ground” doing the actual work (i.e. Couleecap, WWBIC). What specific programs are funded each year changes, as the partners propose what they see as the biggest need for the small business community at that time. Thus far the City of La Crosse has funded loan funds, technical assistance programs, pass-through grants, and education opportunities.

4. Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)

- a. Community
 - 1. MainStreet and Connect Communities
 - 2. Community Development Investment Grant
 - 3. Idle Site Redevelopment Grant
 - 4. Site Assessment Grant
 - 5. Brownfield Grant
 - 6. Capacity Building Grants
 - 7. Historic Tax Credit Program
 - 8. Diverse Business Development Program
 - 9. Office of Rural Prosperity
- b. Business
 - 1. Business Development Tax Credits
 - 2. Certified Sites Program
 - 3. Enterprise Zone Tax Credit
 - 4. Industrial Development Bonds
 - 5. QNBVC
 - 6. Technology Development Loan Program
 - 7. Capital Catalyst Program
 - 8. Entrepreneurial Partnership Grant
 - 9. International Business Development
- c. International Business Development
 - 1. ExporTech
 - 2. Export Technical Assistance
 - 3. Global Business Development Grants
 - 4. Global Trade Ventures
 - 5. Global Trade Network

5. WHEDA

- a. Small Business Guarantees
- b. Participation Lending Programs
- c. First Mortgage and Down Payment Assistance Programs
- d. Multi-family Housing Development
- e. Restore Mainstreet Loan Program
- f. Infrastructure Access Loan
- g. Vacancy-to-Vitality Loan

Business Climate: Goals & Recommendations

Goal	Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
<p>1.1: Provide local businesses with the resources to assist them in overcoming barriers to develop and expand their businesses within La Crosse County.</p>	<p>R1: Create a robust Business Retention and Expansion program in conjunction with community partners that can be replicated year-over-year.</p> <p>R2: Update public investment strategies to drive public-private development projects.</p> <p>R3: Align County incentives and programs with private funding gaps to support “family wage” jobs and drive private sector investment.</p> <p>R4: Collaborate with the WEDC, WHEDA, and other state/federal agencies to bring outside dollars to support local projects.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Met with 75 local businesses within first year. Established data base where results of meetings are saved and analyzed.</p> <p>KPI 2: Publicized “new” county programs.</p> <p>KPI 3: Established criteria for “family wage jobs” and awarded projects that meet said criteria.</p> <p>KPI 4: Identified five projects in need of funding injection and worked with state and federal partners to identify and apply for funding.</p>
<p>1.2: Proactively prepare for and work to attract or develop employers in innovative and emerging industries.</p>	<p>R1: Complete a detailed analysis to identify emerging industries and their feasibility in, and compatibility with, the local economic context.</p> <p>R2: Identify sites and incentive programs to market La Crosse County to potential businesses that have been identified as an ideal fit for the region.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Supported the expansion or recruitment of at least one identified emerging business that resulted in physical expansion and the creation and/or retention of family wage jobs.</p>
<p>1.3: Identify opportunities to support and expand upon local comparative advantages while ensuring the local economy is diversified enough to withstand unpredictable market shocks.</p>	<p>R1: Study the local food system to identify local opportunities related to agriculture, food processing, food transportation, and food service.</p> <p>R2: Research sectors and industries that support healthcare, manufacturing, and construction and work to recruit or develop those businesses through our entrepreneurial avenues.</p> <p>R3: Pursue opportunities to partner with our education systems and services to draw more talent (domestic and international) to La Crosse County for area businesses.</p> <p>R4: Communicate with large employers in the most prevalent local industries to understand their needs and support their ambitions.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Increased the level of locally sourced agriculture product being served by our local schools/universities, hospitals, hotels, grocers, and other institutions who serve large quantities of food.</p> <p>KPI 2: Organizations focused on supporting entrepreneurs launched programming tailored toward supporting innovation in our highest-growing industries.</p> <p>KPI 3: Increased the level of “non-local” students in our community by 5%.</p>
<p>1.4: Establish partnerships and opportunities for collaboration that accelerate local entrepreneurship and economic innovation.</p>	<p>R1: Work with the entrepreneurial-support organizations to ensure small businesses have a physical location and the support needed to successfully incubate start-up businesses.</p> <p>R2: Attempt to replicate biohealth innovation models from other parts of the state and country to encourage and support innovation from the local pool of healthcare workers.</p> <p>R3: Connect first-time business owners and entrepreneurs with partners that assist with business</p>	<p>KPI 1: Established data base that tracks entrepreneurial data year-over-year.</p> <p>KPI 2: Pilot event held.</p> <p>KPI 3: Held event to educate emerging businesses about trade opportunities and navigation practices.</p>

	<p>planning services and financing.</p> <p>R4: Expose first-time business owners and entrepreneurs to data and resources pertaining to trade opportunities and seek new trade opportunities in emerging industries.</p> <p>R5: Hold a pilot event that invites municipalities and major employers to present their most urgent unsolved problems in need of an innovative solution to a group of local entrepreneurs and investors.</p>	
<p>1.5: Collect and analyze data to make informed decisions regarding local planning and economic development. Make La Crosse County the local economic data hub.</p>	<p>R1: Create an inventory of local employers with several data points that assist with future analysis.</p> <p>R2: Create a contact list of regional real estate brokers, developers, site selectors, and venture capital investors.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Inventory of local employers created.</p> <p>KPI 2: Contact list of regional developers, site selectors, and venture capital investors created.</p>
<p>1.6: Pursue tourism-related development opportunities.</p>	<p>R1: Partner with Explore La Crosse to research the feasibility of, and pursue the development of, a large-scale sports complex and/or a resort-style hotel.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Feasibility study completed.</p> <p>***Further KPI's developed based on results of study.</p>
<p>1.7: Communicate and collaborate with local partner agencies to reduce duplication of efforts and promote our work and organizational stability.</p>	<p>R1: Create a shared communication plan with partners. Publicize positive economic outcomes.</p> <p>R2: Deploy high-impact external marketing campaigns to raise the county's profile, increase tourism, and attract investment.</p> <p>R3: Coordinate presence from involved partners at ground-breakings and ribbon-cuttings. Utilize local media to publish the impact of work completed by economic development partners.</p> <p>R4: Educate and support our partners with funding opportunities that lead to greater stability.</p> <p>R5: Explore local unit of government partnership opportunities with economic development support organizations. Pursue the CEDA model (Community and Economic Development Associates).</p>	<p>KPI 1: Platform to share data between partners created.</p> <p>KPI 2: Structure and focus of marketing campaign determined.</p> <p>KPI 3: Partnerships established to coordinate presence and messaging at ribbon cuttings and other major events.</p>

Pillar 1: Business Climate directly supports the outcomes **Economic Growth and Vitality, Engaged and Empowered Employees and Healthy Infrastructure** from the 2024 County Board Strategic Plan Outcomes.

Pillar 2: EDUCATION, TALENT, & WORKFORCE

Demographics/Labor Force



Understanding the population dynamics of La Crosse County is essential for effective economic development planning. This section will provide an overview of the county’s population, household size, race, age distribution, unemployment rates, labor force participation rates, and education levels.

By examining these demographic trends, we can identify potential target markets for businesses, assess the availability of a skilled workforce, and inform decisions relating to housing, education, and other economic development related functions.

As you can see in the data below there are demographic indicators for business and industry to take note of. Our average household size is shrinking, yet, population continues to grow, further exacerbating the housing shortage. La Crosse County will need more housing stock, but smaller more up-to-date products to accommodate this trend. This demographic shift will also impact the education sector resulting in fewer enrollments in the years to come.

Population in La Crosse County:

- 2022 = 120,294 (+4.7% over 12 years)
- 2010 = 114,638
- 1972 = 81,300

Average household size in Wisconsin:

- 2023 = 2.37
- 2010 = 2.43
- 1970 = 3.22

Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 2.1

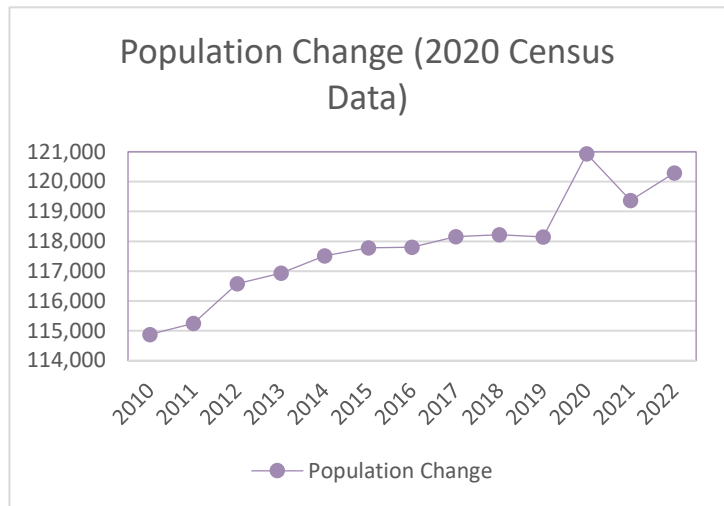
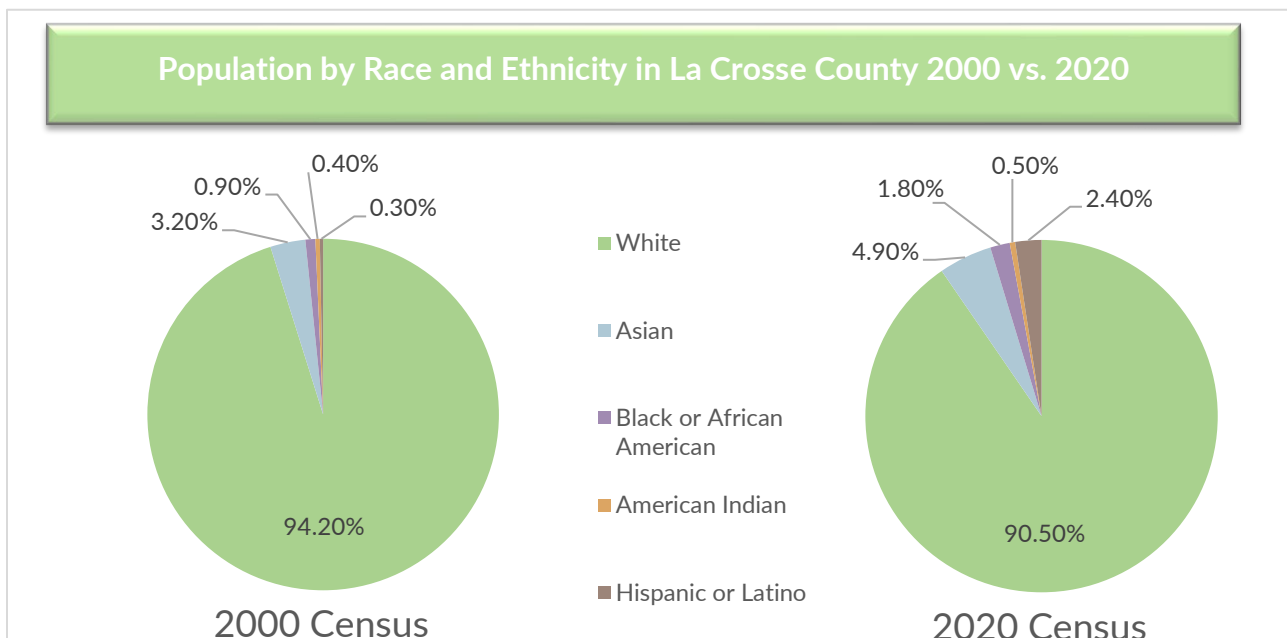
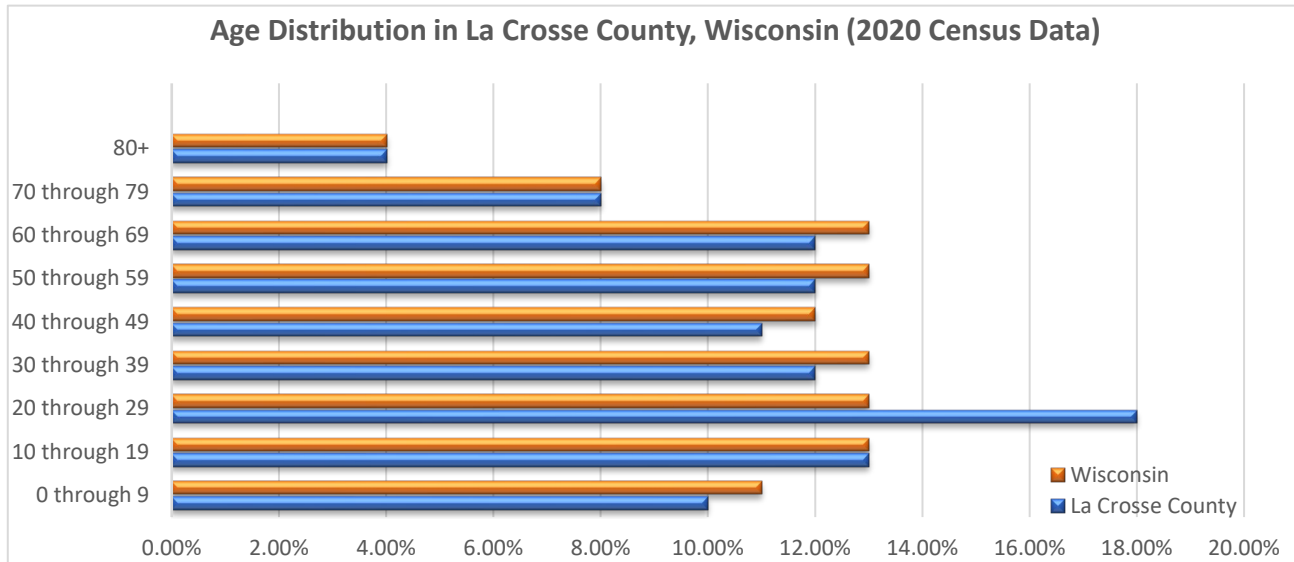


Figure 2.2



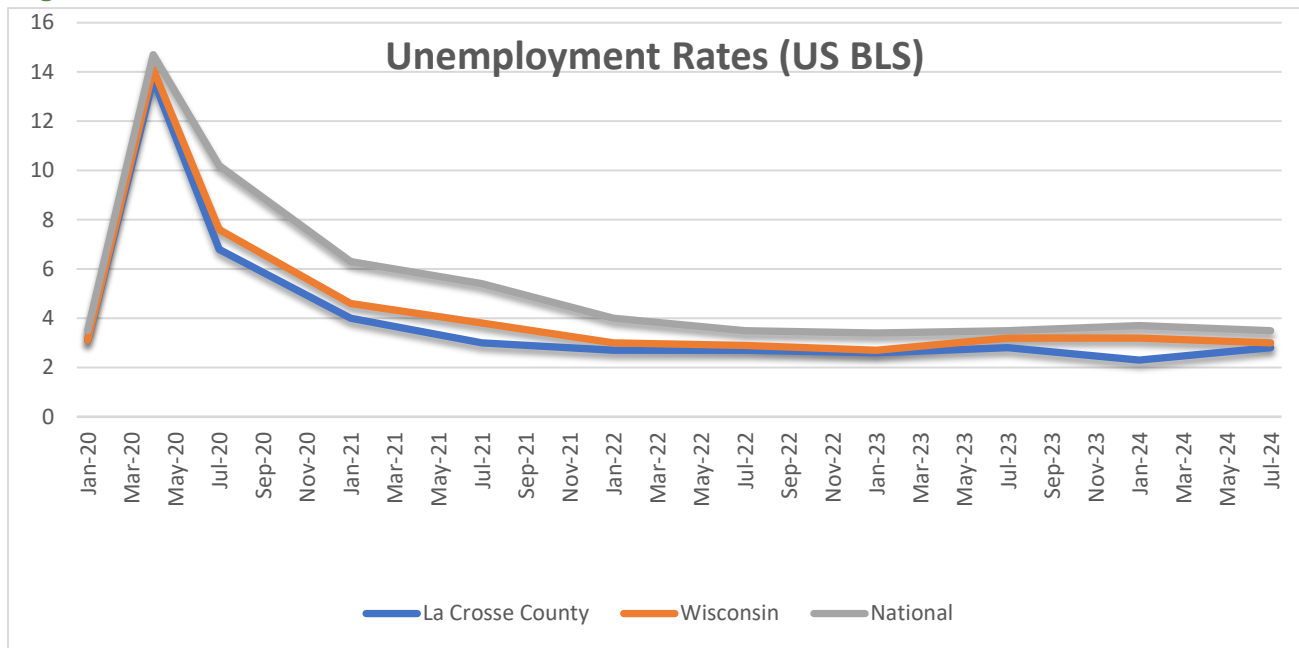
As seen in **Figure 2.2** (previous page), the diversity of La Crosse County is increasing, creating new opportunities for our local economy. In addition, as seen in **Figure 2.3** (below), roughly 36% of La Crosse County’s population is 50 years old or older, but 41% of our population is 30 years old or younger. These two demographic shifts pose opportunities for local employers. Determining the deciding factors held by diverse and younger populations will be crucial as recruitment and retention efforts continue to be at the forefront of employer’s “to-do” lists.

Figure 2.3



Source: US Census Bureau & Census Reporter

Figure 2.4



As seen in **Figure 2.4**, the unemployment rate is a key economic indicator that measures the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed but actively seeking work. A healthy unemployment rate is typically between 3% and 5%, meaning the majority of the population has a job, but there are still a small portion of individuals that can fill job openings. In July of 2024, the unemployment rate in La Crosse County was 2.3%, while the state of Wisconsin’s unemployment rate was slightly higher at 2.6%. Both rates are below the national rate of 3.5%.

Looking at **Figure 2.6** (Labor Force Participation Rate), La Crosse County has historically and continues to see high labor force participation rates as they compare to other similar communities, the state of Wisconsin, and the national average. Yet, we know there are still jobs that need to be filled across all industries.

The problem can realistically be alleviated by employing a combination of the following strategies:

- 1.) Retain the Next Generation of Workforce - Roughly 41% of our population is 30 years old or younger. According to a study completed by Gensler in 2018, the millennial generation, those born between 1981 and 1997 (Frey, 2018), which encompasses roughly 75 million people, seek a mix of housing-stock and price points, ease of mobility, and high-amenity environments, when choosing where to live. La Crosse County should aim to invest into elements that our next generations find compelling.
- 2.) Recruit the Next Generation of Workforce – La Crosse was recently named as one of the 50 best places to live in the U.S., according to *Money*, a personal finance website. This, and other accolades received, should be at the forefront when marketing our area to potential newcomers.
- 3.) Encourage and incentivize the adaptation of technology and automation – While the impacts of automation in the workplace are still being determined, investing in technology that can make processes more efficient can certainly reduce the need for additional workers.

Figure 2.5

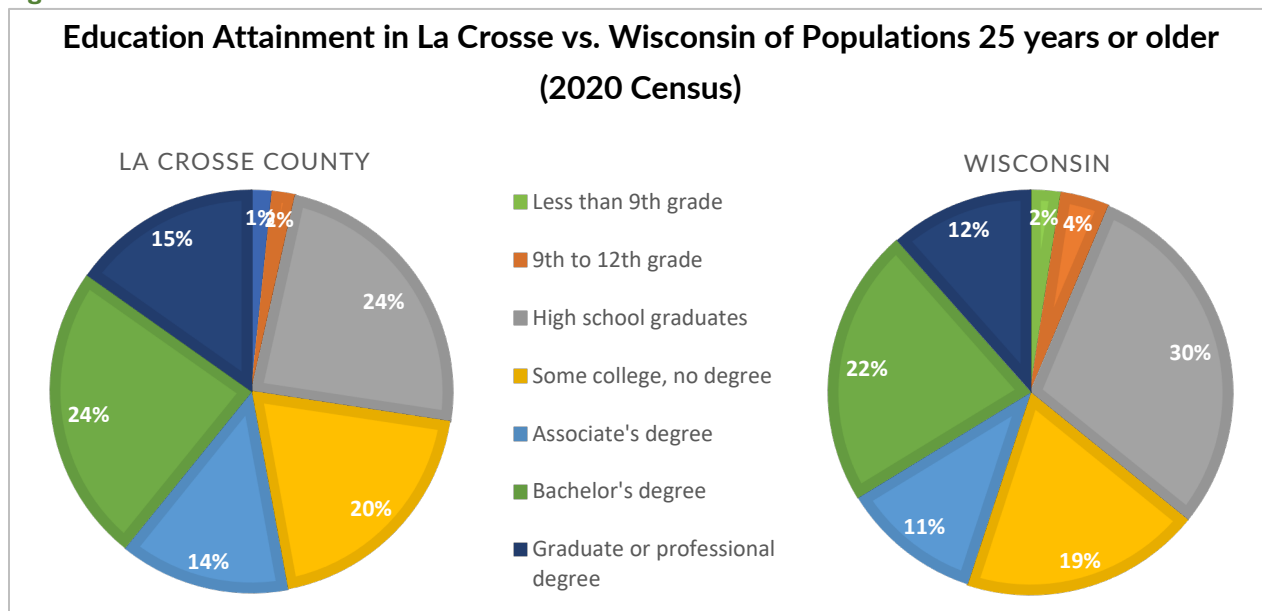


Figure 2.6

Labor Force Participation Rate

- La Crosse County – 66%
- Wisconsin – 65.6%
- National – 62.7%

Source: BLS 2024

Figure 2.7

Other Cultural Demographics

- Veterans: 7,020 or 5.8%
- Persons with a disability, under age 65 – 7.4%

Source: US Census Bureau

Education



A skilled and motivated workforce is essential for economic growth and competitiveness. This section outlines the different pipelines workers take to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Primary Education:

- ii. Public School Districts: Bangor, Cashton, Holmen, La Crosse, Melrose-Mindoro, Onalaska, Westby, and West Salem
- iii. Private School Systems: Coulee Christian School System, Aquinas School System, Luther High School Association, Providence Academy

Regional Institutions of Higher Education

i. University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

- Total enrollment (2023): **10,314**
- Undergraduate: **9,379**
- Graduate: **935**
- 102 undergraduate programs, 30 graduate programs, and 2 doctoral programs
- **Top Programs:** Exercise Sports Science (1,204), Biology (1,045), Education (889)
- **Retention Rate of Graduates that remain in La Crosse Area:** 29% (462 of 1,598) – 343 employment, 117 continuing education, 2 military
- 2022/2023 Degrees Conferred:
 - **Undergraduate: 1,998**
 - **Graduate: 373**
 - 13 graduate certificates
 - 42 Doctor of Physical Therapy
 - 8 Doctor of Education
 - 10 Education Specialist
 - 183 Master of Science
 - 8 Master of Software Engineering
 - 105 Master of Science in Education

Source: UWL Factbook and 2022-2023 First destination Survey



ii. **Viterbo University**

- Total enrollment (2023): **2,456**
- Undergraduate: **1,485**
- Graduate: **971**
- 40+ undergraduate programs, 10 graduate programs, and multiple certificate and licensure programs
- **Top programs:**
 - **Undergraduate:** Bachelor of Science in Nursing; 436; Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, 81; Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music and Theatre, 78
 - **Graduate:** Master of Arts in Education, 177; Doctor in Nursing Practice, 96; Master of Business Administration, 75
- **Retention Rate of Graduates that remain in the La Crosse Area:** 32% (88 of 275 – numbers reflect students who responded to a post-graduation survey and are not inclusive of those who did not respond)
- 2023 Degrees Conferred:
 - Undergraduate: **365**
 - Graduate: **272**
 - Graduate level certificates: **248**

Source: Viterbo University Assessment and Institutional Research



VITERBO
UNIVERSITY

iii. **Western Technical College (WTC)** – WTC offers several education and training opportunities to individuals of any age, skillset, or background. Opportunities offered can be broken-down into two pathways:

Traditional Pathway:

- Students pursuing a one-year technical diploma or a two-year associate’s degree
- Total Enrollment: **3,963**
- 1,557 full-time and 2,406 part-time
- 89 total programs (combination of degree and certification programs)
- **Top Degree Programs:** Nursing Associate Degree, Liberal Arts – Associate of Science, Business Management
- **Top Certificate Programs:** Nursing Assistant, Emergency Medical Technician, Plumbing Apprentice
- **Retention rate of graduates that remain in the La Crosse Area:** 71% of graduates are employed in WTC’s district
- 2023/24 Academic Year graduates:
 - Degree programs – 664
 - Certificate programs – 653

Non-Traditional Pathways:

- Apprenticeships:
 - Apprentice: A person who is learning a trade, art, or skill under the direction of someone already skilled in a specific subject area
 - Apprenticeships result in a Journeyman status and sometimes a degree.
- Pathway into Apprenticeship:
 - Local employer
 - Committee (union or non-union)

- WTC currently offers 6 apprenticeship options:
 - i. Construction Electrician
 - ii. Industrial Electrician
 - iii. Plumbing
 - iv. Maintenance Tech (Mechanic)
 - v. Tool and Die
 - vi. Precision Machining
- Currently, additional apprenticeship programs are offered through other technical colleges within the Wisconsin Technical College System. However, from 2025 through 2028 Western has received federal grant funding to double their apprenticeship offerings and will expand apprenticeship opportunities across multiple industry sectors.
- **Industry Training** – local businesses contract with WTC to train new employees or upskill existing employees. Annually, WTC Business & Industry Services works with a minimum of 200 employers to upskill and reskill the region’s incumbent workforce.
- **Industry Credential** – voluntary process where individuals are assessed and credentialed by an independent third-party, certifying entity using predetermined standards for knowledge, skills, and competencies. WTC will provide the education and training associated with a third-party’s established industry standard.
- **Micro-credentials** - breaking up traditional curriculum into smaller and shorter segments, resulting in more attainable credentialing for those who don’t have capacity to fully enroll in a college pathway.

Western Technical College

iv. **Winona State University:**

- Total Enrollment: 6,165
- Undergraduate: 5,421
- Graduate: 744
- 80 undergraduate programs, 40 graduate programs, and a variety of adult and continuing education programs
- Top programs: Health Professions & Related Programs, Education, Business, Management, Marketing

Source: US News, Winona State University Academics

v. **St. Mary's University:**

- Total Enrollment: 1,000
- Undergraduate: 1,000
- Graduate: most graduate programs are hosted at Minneapolis or Rochester campus
- 120+ undergraduate and graduate programs
- Top programs: Business Administration & Management, Business Analytics, Psychology

Source: St. Mary's University of MN, Academics

vi. **Minnesota State College-Southeast Technical:**

- Total Enrollment: 1,838
- 662 Full-time and 1,176 Part-time
- Top Programs: Business & Management, Education & Human Services, Engineering/Manufacturing & Trades, Health Sciences, Information Technologies, Liberal Arts & Sciences, Musical Instrument Repair & Building, and Transportation careers

Source: US News Education, MN State College Southeast in Winona

Within a 30-mile radius, La Crosse County has two public universities, two private universities, and two technical colleges, that collectively educate over 25,000 students on an annual basis. This is a unique asset that very few communities with similar populations have. The top fields of education include healthcare or healthcare-related, education, and business.

Workforce Development Pipeline

- **Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (WWWDB)** – A non-profit organization that serves La Crosse, Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties, with a mission to develop demand-driven and innovative workforce strategies that cultivate a skilled and competitive workforce that meets the needs of employers in the region. Programs include:
 - **E3 Works** – assists individuals aged 14-24 explore potential careers with a career planner. Participants can qualify for paid education and training, paid work experiences with local employers, cash incentives, mentoring, financial literacy, and supportive services.
 - **Worker Advancement Initiative** – serves those whose employment was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Services include employment, skills training, and supportive services.
 - **Windows to Work** – operates the Department of Corrections' Windows to Work program in the Jackson Correctional Institution Job Center.
 - **WIOA Adult & Dislocated Worker** – assists adults searching for jobs with self-sustaining wages. Programming helps with training assistance, work readiness skills, and support services.
 - **Early Childhood Education (QUEST)** – provides funding for individuals to pursue a career in early childhood education. Funding can assist with removing barriers, training, and other key elements needed to work with children.
 - **Rapid Response** – program designed to assist people who lose their job due to layoffs or business closure.

- **BGC Youth Career Exploration** - La Crosse County is partnering with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse (BGC) to support greater career exploration, skill development, and work-based learning for youth throughout the County. With a membership of over 4,000 youth, and clubs in La Crosse, West Salem, Holmen, and coming soon to Onalaska, the ability of the BGC to connect with kids in our community is unparalleled. BGC is in the process of building a Life and Workforce Readiness Center on the northside of La Crosse, which will serve as the hub for this work, but programming will stretch throughout the County and will connect to a wide variety of businesses across the spectrum of career clusters. The Center will have various lab spaces to encourage hands on learning and exploration, and the programs will be delivered in partnership with area businesses and industry organizations. This model will not only provide bright futures for area youth, but will also help build a strong, sustainable local economy.
- **CESA 4** – The Cooperative Educational Service Agency #4 (CESA 4) facilitates and offers a variety of work-based learning opportunities for students enrolled in the public-school districts in and around La Crosse County. These opportunities are designed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experience. Opportunities include Youth Apprenticeships, volunteering, job shadowing, internships/trainings, employability skills trainings, and school-based enterprise programs.
- **DVR** – The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is a federal/state program designed to obtain, maintain, and advance employment for people with disabilities by working with DVR consumers, employers, and other partners. Work of the DVR consists of:
 - Provide employment services and counseling to people with disabilities
 - Provide or arrange for services to enable an individual to get to work
 - Provide training and technical assistance to employers regarding disability employment issues
- **Workforce Connections** – Workforce Connections is a local organization that serves 9 regional counties with a mission to connect people, work, and training. Workforce Connections offers several different programs, seen below.
 - **FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET)** – a free voluntary program for all FoodShare members ages 16 and older who want to build job skills and find employment.
 - **Wisconsin Works (W-2)** – assists individuals in meeting their employment and career goals. Individualized services are provided to each participant through Workforce Connections staff, partner agencies, and Wisconsin Job Centers.
 - **Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** – provides connections to training and support services to strengthen the workforce. This program provides relevant career training and guidance tailored to the local job market.
 - **Emergency Assistance (EA)** – a one-time payment that can help income-eligible individuals with minor children that are homeless or have an eviction or foreclosure notice or who have experienced a flood, fire, or other natural disaster, or energy crisis.
 - **Wisconsin Senior Employment Program (WISE)** – provides adults, age 55+, with training and part-time paid work experience in community service-based organizations. The on-the-job experience helps to develop and improve skills necessary for permanent employment.
 - **Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)** – provides classrooms with senior volunteers for children with special needs or who are at an academic or social disadvantage.
 - **Health Insurance Navigator** – designed to help consumers as they look for health insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Workforce Recruitment

- Workforce recruitment efforts are primarily accomplished through the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce and the private sector business community. The Chamber hosts three platforms that actively promote the Coulee Region, our resources, and employment opportunities for those who have an interest in moving to La Crosse.
 - **ChooseLaCrosse.com** – The Chamber historically printed relocation guides that provided newcomers with information relevant to moving to a new community. The Chamber has since created the ChooseLaCrosse website to serve as the digital version of the relocation guide. Resources include information about the area, schools, where to live, and among other elements, where to have fun.
 - **ThriveinLaCrosse.com** – Through a partnership with La Crosse County and many other local investors, the Chamber developed a website focused on recruiting individuals in other markets within a 600-mile radius to live and work in the La Crosse area. Resources include general information on the area, top employers, and direct connections to HR departments who are actively looking to fill employment positions. Locations currently being targeted include Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Chicago.
 - **First Friend** – In addition to the ChooseLaCrosse and ThriveinLaCrosse platforms, the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce also offers the First Friend program, which provides customized 1:1 engagement to potential new hires of Chamber investors. The program aims to sell the La Crosse Community while the business sells the job.

Education, Talent, & Workforce: Goals and Recommendations

Goal	Recommendation	Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
<p>2.1: Prepare workforce for employment in emerging and in-demand industries.</p>	<p>R1: Collaborate with local employers to project who they will hire and when. Share data with local educational institutions to identify employment trends and projected employment opportunities by industry and occupation.</p> <p>R2: Assist education institutions with establishing and marketing education tracks by collaborating with local employers. Connect with business to identify skills and curriculum needed to upskill incumbent workforce.</p> <p>R3: Connect more of the student population to local businesses and further integrate institutions into the greater community. Identify and address barriers to workforce retention post-graduation.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Platform established to house data year-over-year, and communication platform established with education/training organizations.</p> <p>KPI 2: Education/skills training opportunities are promoted by local partners to private industry members.</p> <p>KPI 3: Increased adoption of Handshake by area employers by 25% (platform used by higher education institutions to place students in internship or apprenticeship opportunities).</p>
<p>2.2: Increase the retention rate of our high school and college graduates.</p>	<p>R1: Partner with organizations who work with students and private industry members to engage students in an exciting and enlightening way to expose them to careers offered throughout La Crosse County.</p> <p>R2: Partner with community-focused organizations to expose students to the quality of life La Crosse County offers.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Increased retention rate of college graduates from 44% to 50%.</p>
<p>2.3: Become an example community where individuals of ALL backgrounds can thrive.</p>	<p>R1: Provide education and resources for companies seeking to employ English as a Second Language (ESL) populations.</p> <p>R2: Partner with Explore La Crosse and others to recruit or create events for cultures and backgrounds not traditionally represented.</p> <p>R3: Develop programming to support diverse-owned businesses creation or expansion.</p> <p>R4: Direct job-creating economic investments to distressed places. These investments would relieve concentrations of long-term unemployed persons including under-represented populations, developmentally disabled, and the aging, and encourage the redevelopment of land and buildings within distressed areas.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Identified businesses seeking to employ ESL populations and determined barriers.</p> <p>KPI 1a: Provided 10 businesses with education and resources to overcome identified barriers.</p> <p>KPI 2: Grant and loan programs are developed to provide support to diverse-owned business creation or expansion. Programs are promoted to eligible applicants.</p>

<p>2.4: Collaborate with local governments and partner agencies to ensure the county has the culture, amenities, and infrastructure needed to retain and attract employers and employees. Increase workforce population in La Crosse County by 5% by 2029.</p>	<p>R1: Coordinate with health agencies to market La Crosse County as an exceptional community for healthcare employees.</p> <p>R2: Continue to support the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce’s efforts to attract people to La Crosse County. Expand on those opportunities.</p> <p>R3: Identify and support public projects, such as community spaces, that could support workforce attraction.</p> <p>R3: Partner with organizations who support underrepresented populations to spur cultural innovation, e.g. support the development of an Indian grocery store.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Launched marketing campaign to attract healthcare workers, particularly those displaced from their previous employer.</p> <p>KPI 2: Identified cultural business needs and developed business(es) to fill those needs.</p> <p>KPI 3: Increased the median household income beyond the state median.</p>
<p>2.5: Expand and strengthen partnerships between employers, municipalities, and institutions of higher education. Support our institutions of higher education with the goal of increasing enrollment.</p>	<p>R1: Explore opportunities to bring majors and programs to institutions of higher education that support local, existing industries, such as education, finance, engineering, and healthcare industry employers.</p> <p>R2: Make connections with graduating students to offer employment opportunities prior to graduation.</p>	<p>KPI 1: 10% of graduating students have post-graduation job opportunities locally, prior to graduation (high school and higher ed.).</p>

Pillar 2: Education, Talent, and Workforce supports the following 2024 County Board Strategic Plan Outcomes: **Economic Growth and Vitality, Engaged or Empowered Employees, and Robust Support Network.**

Pillar 3: ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation – Commuting Patterns



Commuting Patterns:

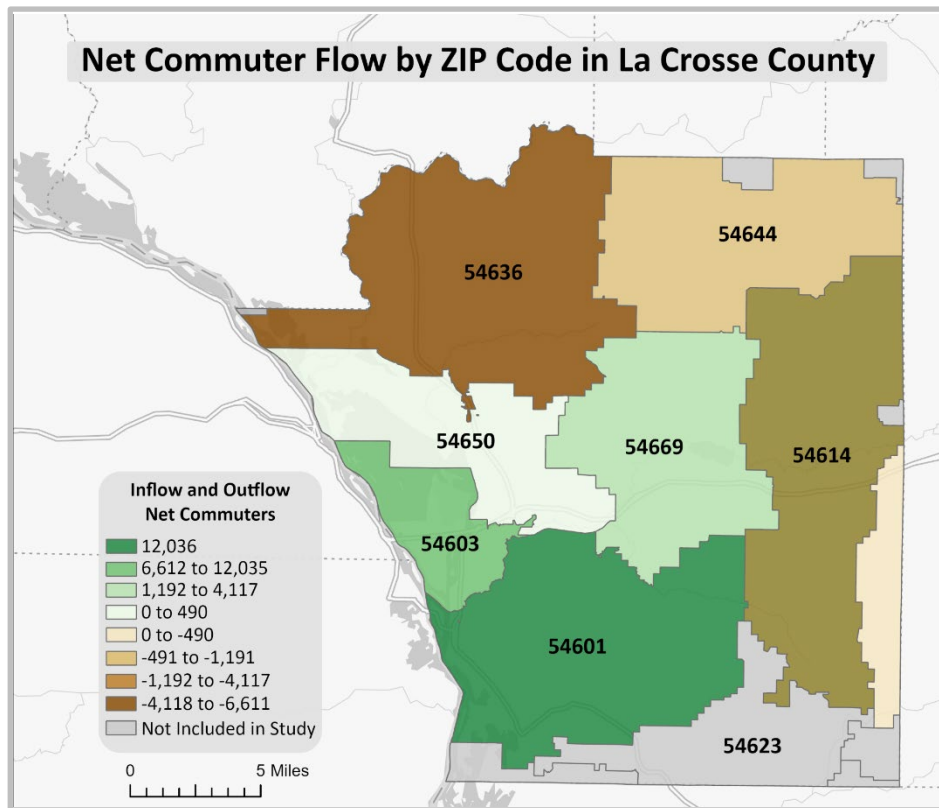
- i. 11% of residents of the La Crosse-Onalaska Metro area travel outside La Crosse County for work.
- ii. 7.7% of those that work in the county reside in another county.
- iii. 87.4% of employed county residents rely on a car to get to work.
- iv. 77.4% of drivers drive alone
- v. The average daily commute time is 18.6 minutes
- vi. In 2022, residents telecommuting (working from home) increased from 3.8% of the population, to 8.7% of the population

Source: American Community Survey (ACS)

Place of Work vs Place of Residence:

Understanding where talent in La Crosse County currently works compared to where talent lives can help the understanding of workforce priorities.

Figure 3.1

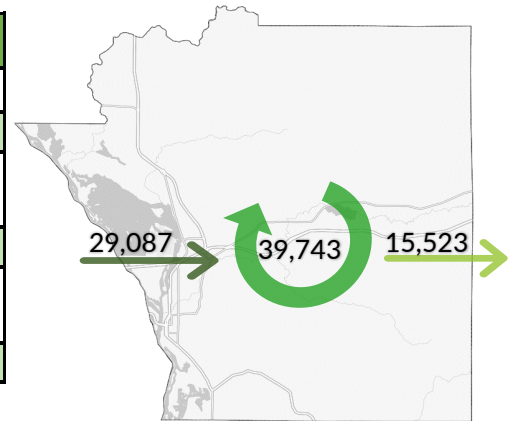


Source: Lightcast Q2 2024 Data Set lightcast.io

Figure 3.1 shows zip codes 54636, 54644, and 54614 have lower day-time populations compared to their total residential population. Meanwhile, zip codes 54601, 54603, 54669, and 54650 experience higher day-time populations compared to their total residential population. While this figure does not determine the reason for commuting patterns, we can realistically assume, based on other factors that include concentration of jobs, that the primary reason is commuting for work.

Figure 3.2

Inflow/Outflow Job Counts in 2021		
	Count	Share
Employed in the selection area	68,830	100%
Employed in the selection area but living outside	29,087	42.3%
Living in the selection area	55,266	100%
Living in the selection area but employed outside	15,523	28.1%
Living and employed in the selection area	39,743	57.7%



Source: Lightcast Q2 2024 Data set lightcast.io

Traffic Counts along arterials indicate that many in-commuters who are non-residents are most likely travelling from the incorporated areas in:

- Vernon County (Coon Valley, Stoddard, Viroqua, Westby)
- Monroe County (Sparta, Tomah)
- Trempealeau County (Trempealeau, Galesville)
- Houston County, Minnesota (La Crescent, Hokah, Caledonia, Houston)
- Winona County, Minnesota (Winona)

Figure 3.3

Means of Transportation to Work by Mode, La Crosse County, Wisconsin		
	2019	2022
Label	Estimate	Estimate
Workers 16 years and over	61,648	62,724
Means of transportation to work		
Car, Truck, or Van	88.3%	84.5%
Drove alone	80.8%	77.4%
Carpooled	7.6%	7.1%
In 2-Person carpool	5.9%	5.5%
In 3-Person carpool	1.3%	1.3%
In 4-or-more person carpool	0.3%	0.4%
Workers per car, truck, or van	1.05	1.05
Public Transportation (excluding taxicab)	0.8%	0.8%
Walked	4.6%	4.1%
Bicycle	1.3%	1.0%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	1.0%	0.9%
Worked from home	3.8%	8.7%

Source: US Census Bureau, Means of Transportation to Work by Mode, ACS 5-year estimates

Local Commuting Patterns – Key Findings:

- 87.9% of jobs in La Crosse County are located in the City of La Crosse or the City of Onalaska (*OnTheMap.com/Census*).
- 47.9% of jobs within 35 miles of La Crosse County are in La Crosse County. 54% of jobs within 35 miles of La Crosse County are located in the La Crosse-Onalaska-La Crescent metropolitan area (*OnTheMap.com/Census*).
- As seen in **Figure 3.2**, 42.3% of people employed in La Crosse County commute from outside the county, and 28.1% of people who live in La Crosse County commute to job locations outside of the county (*ACS 2022*).
- The mean commute to work is 19 minutes; 21.9% of residents live less than a 10-minute drive from their place of employment; and 51.5% of county residents live less than 10 minutes from private-sector employment opportunities (*S0802 ACS*).
- 77.4% of workforce residing in La Crosse County commute to work alone in a personal vehicle (**Figure 3.3**, *ACS B08541*); 2.4% of La Crosse County workforce does not have access to an automobile (*ACS Census B08014*).



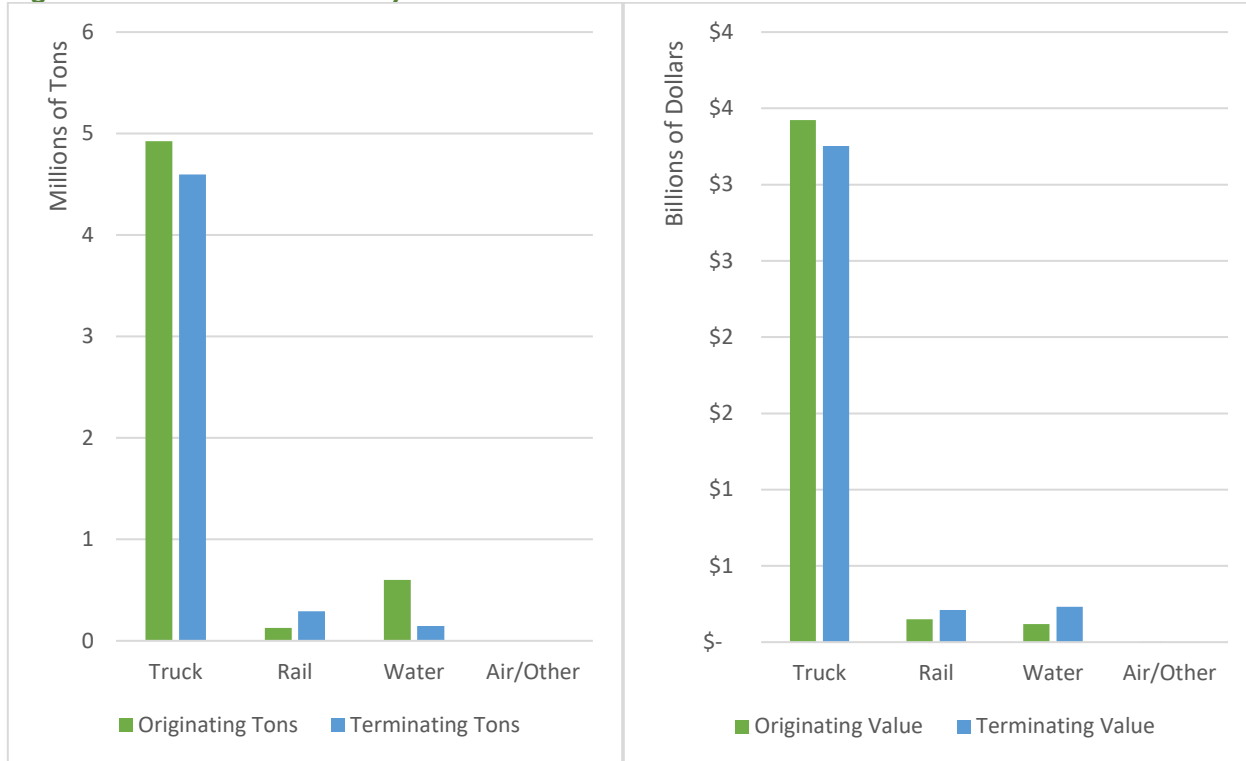
Public Transit Opportunities:

- **La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility (MTU)** – operates six core routes, two circulator routes, and on weekdays, four other routes that provide connections to neighboring communities (Onalaska, French Island, & La Crescent) and safe transportation between the campuses and downtown La Crosse.
- **Safe Ride** – MTU offers a state-funded service designed to reduce drinking and driving by college students. The service offers rides between the higher-education campuses and downtown La Crosse on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights during the spring and fall semesters.
- **Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT)** – intercity rural regional bus service operating in Crawford, Vernon, Monroe, and La Crosse Counties.
- **DriftLink** – Onalaska-Holmen-West Salem Public Transit provides door-to-door, shared-ride van transportation. Riders must call to arrange a ride and must have a valid transfer pass.
- **La Crosse County Minibus program** – operated by the La Crosse County Aging and Disability Resource Center, the program offers curbside bus transportation to La Crosse County residents who are age 60 and older and/or have a disability.
- **Managed Care Organizations (MCO's)** – Inclusa and My Choice Family Care-Care Wisconsin, Inc., arrange transportation with private providers like Abby Vans, Coulee Trails, and Coulee Region Taxi for their Medicaid clients.
- **Drift Cycle** – A non-profit organization that provides easy-to-use rental bikes at select locations around the City of La Crosse.
- **Other Services** – La Crosse County is served by other paid services, including taxi's, Uber, and Lyft.

Freight Transportation

Freight transportation represents a significant economic development opportunity for La Crosse County, leveraging its strategic location, multimodal infrastructure, and potential for enhanced logistics and distribution networks. Despite multimodal connectivity, most of the freight is shipped in and out of the County by truck. **Figure 3.4** shows a summary of freight measured by tonnage and value, reflecting the region's reliance on road-based logistics for shipping and distribution.

Figure 3.4. Goods Movement by Mode - Overview



Source: WisDOT/2021 Transearch Database Query

Key highlights include:

Strategic Geographic Position

- La Crosse County sits at a pivotal crossroads in the Upper Midwest, providing natural advantages for freight transportation.
- Proximity to major metropolitan areas such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, Madison, and Chicago.
- Access to key highways, including Interstate 90, which connects the East and West coasts, and other regional routes that facilitate efficient over-the-road freight movement.

Multimodal Infrastructure

La Crosse County is equipped with diverse freight transportation modes that support cost-effective and efficient goods movement:

- **Rail** – Rail service in La Crosse County is provided by two Class I railroads: BNSF Railway and CPKC Railway. The combination of the railroads connects La Crosse County to major markets to the South, West, and North. La Crosse County, in conjunction with other parties, partnered with the CPKC Railway to develop an industrial lead track with individual rail spurs to private industry properties at Lakeview Business Park in West Salem.
- **Water** – The Port of La Crosse allows access to barge transportation, a highly efficient method for moving heavy bulk materials. Waterborne freight service is provided by Marine Highway 35, a Federally designated corridor representing the Upper Mississippi River. According to 2019 data, La Crosse, one of three commercial Mississippi River Ports in Wisconsin, handled 954,889 tons and nearly \$661 million worth of cargo. Primary commodities include bulk products such as caustic soda, cement, coal, cottonseed, distillers grain fertilizer, gypsum, pig iron, potash, salt, and highway construction materials.

- **Air** – La Crosse Regional Airport offers limited air cargo service as the La Crosse market is primarily served by Rockford, IL and Rochester, MN. Integrated carriers like UPS, FedEx, and DHL serve all of Wisconsin's commercial service airports except those in Eau Claire and La Crosse. In these two cities, air cargo is either transported by passenger airlines or moved by truck to other locations. Wisconsin's air cargo market has seen little growth due to several factors, including strong alternatives like trucking and rail, the proximity of large cargo airports in neighboring states, higher costs associated with air freight, and limited carrier availability.

Growth in Logistics and Warehousing

La Crosse County is well-positioned to attract logistics and warehousing industries:

- The area's connectivity and transportation assets make it a natural hub for regional distribution centers.
- Opportunities exist to capitalize on e-commerce growth, which requires robust warehousing and last-mile delivery systems.
- Developing industrial parks and zoning for logistics hubs near key transportation corridors can further attract investment.

Support for Key Industries

Freight transportation is critical for the success of several key industries in the region, including:

- **Manufacturing:** Efficient transport systems help local manufacturers reduce costs and remain competitive.
- **Agriculture:** The county's agricultural sector benefits from reliable access to rail and river transport for exporting grain, dairy, and other products.
- **Construction and Mining:** The movement of construction materials and aggregate relies heavily on freight transportation options.

Economic and Employment Benefits

Investments in freight transportation infrastructure can:

- Create direct jobs in transportation, logistics, and warehousing.
- Support indirect job creation in industries such as manufacturing, retail, and agriculture.
- Generate tax revenue from new business activities and property development.

Sustainability and Resilience

Promoting multimodal freight transportation (e.g., rail and barge) aligns with sustainability goals by reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to road transport. Additionally, diversifying transportation modes enhances supply chain resilience.

Opportunities for Investment and Collaboration

La Crosse County can further enhance its freight transportation potential by:

- Collaborating with regional planning agencies like the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) to identify and prioritize freight-related infrastructure investments.
- Pursuing state and federal grants, such as BUILD or INFRA, for freight infrastructure improvements.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships to expand freight handling facilities and technology.

La Crosse County is a vital hub for the region's economy and freight movement, with most goods transported by truck, underscoring the importance of maintaining and improving the road network. The significant volume of agricultural and food products shipped highlights the county's strong ties to regional and national markets. With its strategic location, diverse industries, and dependable transportation infrastructure, La Crosse County is well-positioned for continued growth in both freight operations and economic development.

Real Estate Analysis

Prior to looking at future commercial and industrial real estate opportunities, it is important to look at the primary existing business parks to gain an understanding of the impact and elements that make these developments successful. **Figure 3.5** below identifies the existing Industrial/Business parks throughout La Crosse County.

Figure 3.5

La Crosse County Industrial/Business Park Data			
Name	Number of businesses	Total Employee Count	Estimated Tax Base (2024)
Lakeview Business Park (West Salem)	9	250	\$58,693,700
Holmen Combined	29	375	\$32,283,900
International Business Park (La Crosse)	13	214	\$31,571,600
Airport Industrial Park (La Crosse)	27	444	\$40,262,900
Interstate Industrial Park (La Crosse)	6	99	\$42,261,200
Interchange Industrial Park (La Crosse)	3	49	\$19,487,400
Total	87	1,431	\$224,560,700

Business/industrial parks in La Crosse County support a large portion of our jobs and generate a significant tax base. These development opportunities are typically located on or near major transportation corridors and near residential areas. Sites available within these already established locations are limited to Holmen. To accommodate the needs of our existing and future employers, La Crosse County will need additional developable real estate opportunities.

Economic Development Real Estate Gaps

- a. Lack of industrial land, especially larger parcels, 15 acres or more – inquiries 2-3 times/month
- b. Inventory of Industrial/Commercial buildings available for sale or lease
- c. Shortage of sites that have access to high usage of Sewer and Water
- d. Lack of Rail Served industrial parcels

To evaluate local economic development opportunities, suitable areas for future commercial and industrial development must be analyzed. Businesses often select their locations based on several factors including, but not limited to:

- Proximity to transportation infrastructure, such as roads, rails, ports, and airports.
- Proximity to compatible industries and industry partners.
- Proximity to local industry competition.
- Proximity to demand for goods and services.
- Accessibility and visibility to customers.
- Water and sewer capacity required.
- Access to high-speed internet.
- Proximity to a sufficiently sized, skilled workforce.
- Presence of local amenities that attract skilled workforce.
- Regulatory obligations related to specific local conditions.

Commercial & industrial development greatly benefits municipalities by providing jobs and tax base to support urban services. Municipalities that possess the necessary workforce and infrastructure must consider suitable locations for development based on several additional factors. Certain areas are more appropriate for certain land uses. Many commercial and industrial uses rely on public services to conduct their operations. Areas without sufficient public road, water, and sewer capacity often are not ideal locations for large-scale, intense commercial activities. Before municipalities invest in infrastructure for commercial and industrial uses, several factors must be considered including, but not limited to:

- Proximity to historic and cultural resources.
- Proximity to natural resources, such as shorelands and wetlands.
- Proximity to hazards such as floodplains and contaminated soils.
- Potential erosion and stormwater impacts.
- Water and wastewater system impacts.
- Transportation system impacts, such as congestion, safety, and road conditions.
- Police, fire, and emergency services impacts.
- Tax base creation and the “highest and best use” of certain locations.
- Public benefits resulting from certain land uses.
- Potential nuisances to existing residents resulting from proposed uses, such as noise, dust, smoke, and odors.
- Impacts to public health, safety, and general welfare.
- General compatibility with adjacent, existing uses.
- Consistency with community plans.

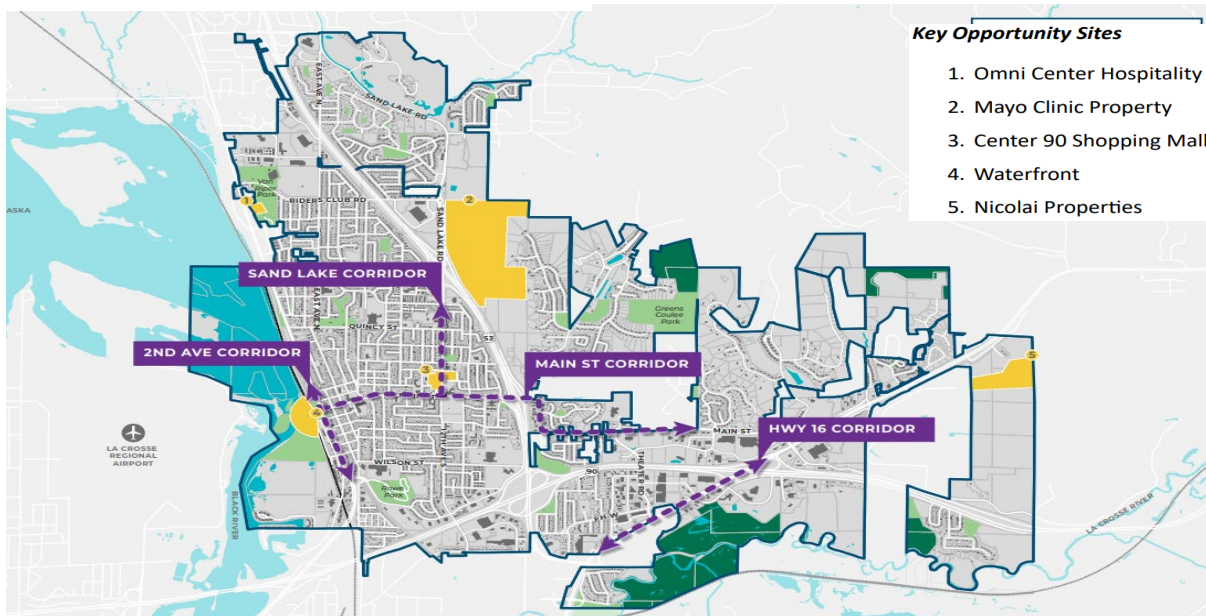
La Crosse County and other local municipalities have created future land use maps that provide insight as to where communities view as ideal locations for commercial and industrial development. Future land use maps depict a 10-to-20-year vision of future land uses in communities. Certain properties may require “rezoning”, which requires approval from public officials, in accordance with Wisconsin State Statutes. If a requested rezoning is consistent with a community’s future land use map and long-term plans, elected officials are more likely to approve the request and allow a change in land use. A summary of desirable locations for future commercial and industrial development are included below:

- **City of La Crosse**
 - 70.7% of jobs in La Crosse County (2021)
 - Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 101/100
 - In 2023, the City of La Crosse updated its comprehensive plan which expresses its vision for future land uses. The future use table outlines desirable, allowable, and unacceptable future uses by neighborhoods, corridors, and districts.
 - Small-scale Neighborhood Retail/Commercial and Low-Intensity Mixed-Use Commercial is identified as desirable or allowable in nearly all neighborhoods, districts, and corridors.
 - High-Intensity Mixed-Use is desirable or allowable in the densest areas of the city, including Downtown, UW-L, Valley View Mall, Hwy 14 Corridor, and Hwy 53 Corridor.
 - General Commercial uses are allowable in about half of the city’s neighborhoods and undesirable in the other half. It’s an allowable use in most districts and desirable along most corridors.
 - Refer to the *City of La Crosse’s Comprehensive Plan* for more detail on suitable locations for future land uses.

- **City of Onalaska**

- 17.2% of jobs in La Crosse County, (2021)
- Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 74:100
- In 2024, the City updated its *Live Ona 2040 Onalaska Comprehensive Plan*. Its future land use map identifies small industrial and commercial nodes interspersed throughout the City, which mostly reflect existing commercial and industrial uses.
- Most of the Commercial and Industrial uses in Onalaska’s future land use map are in existing commercial and industrial areas, along the I-90 and Hwy 16/I-90 Alternate corridors. The latter is the primary retail commercial corridor in the county.
- The City’s plan identifies areas highlighted in yellow as opportune sites for future commercial and industrial:

Figure 3.6



Source: *Live Ona 2040 City of Onalaska Comprehensive Plan*, Pg. 70.

- **Village of West Salem**

- 4.24% of jobs in La Crosse County (2021)
- Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 73:100
- In 2023, West Salem updated its comprehensive plan. The future land use map identifies the WI Highway 16 and CTH B/I-90 corridor as suitable for future commercial development. Industrial development is most suitable in the Lakeview Industrial Park south of Garland St E.

- **Village of Holmen**

- 4.23% of jobs in La Crosse County (2021)
- Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 34:100
- Relative to other local municipalities, Holmen has been experiencing high levels of residential (~300 housing starts in 2023), commercial, and industrial development in recent years.
- Commercial/Industrial along CTH XX
- Commercial sporadically along most of Holmen Drive, with some manufacturing 2 blocks west of Holmen Drive

- A variety of commercial and industrial opportunities in large greenfield areas in northern Holmen, west of Hwy 53 and north of Hwy 35.
- **Village of Bangor**
 - 0.05% of jobs in La Crosse County (2021)
 - Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 28:100
 - The most suitable areas for future commercial and industrial development are likely east of the existing village boundary, north of CTH U, west of the existing village boundary or downtown and north of the train tracks.
- **Village of Rockland**
 - 0.01% of jobs in La Crosse County (2021)
 - Jobs in municipality to workforce aged population ratio: 21:100
 - The most suitable areas for future commercial and industrial development are likely east, north, and west of the existing village boundary. Land adjacent to the southwest of S Commercial St, north of I-90, and south of the train tracks is a particularly suitable location.
- **La Crosse County**
 - The County’s comprehensive plan was updated in 2022. La Crosse County created a geographic information system (GIS) model to analyze several of the variables listed above and produced the future land use map in its comprehensive plan. The County’s future land use map applies to 10 towns and ~65% of the entire land area of the county.
 - Continued agricultural use is planned for a vast majority of unincorporated La Crosse County.
 - Higher intensity industrial uses are likely more compatible with existing uses near primary transportation corridors, such as US Highway 53 and I-90.
 - 3.63% of jobs in La Crosse County are in unincorporated areas, and 3.1% of those jobs are, from most jobs to least jobs, in the census designated places (CDPs) of French Island (1.7% of total jobs in the County, Town of Campbell), Brice Prairie (Town of Onalaska), St. Joseph (Town of Greenfield), and Mindoro (Town of Farmington).
 - **Appendix A** identifies the primary areas suitable for commercial or industrial uses in the unincorporated areas.
 - Unincorporated towns have future land use maps of their own, which, in most cases, are very similar to La Crosse County’s. There is limited public water and sewer system service area in unincorporated La Crosse County, which limits development of some businesses in these areas. Increasing connections to existing rural sanitary district systems is recommended by La Crosse County’s comprehensive plan. Commercial and industrial use may be encouraged in the rural sanitary districts that do have public water and sewer systems in:
 - St. Joseph (Town of Greenfield)
 - Mindoro (Town of Farmington)
 - Maple Grove (Town of Hamilton)

Broadband

The efforts to expand access to broadband (internet) closely reflects those that were made to bring electricity to rural America in the 1930's. Internet has become an ever-increasingly vital aspect of our everyday lives. Whether it be educating our future generations or providing healthcare, the internet is integral to our daily lives. La Crosse County has recognized this fact of life and has thus made significant investments to accomplish the 2024 County Board of Supervisor's goal of ensuring "99% of La Crosse County residents have access to reliable high-speed internet by 2029". To accomplish this goal, La Crosse County has:

- 1.) Adopted Ordinance #201-01/23 – certifying La Crosse County as a *Broadband Forward! Community*
- 2.) Approved Resolution #35-12/22 – certifying La Crosse County as a *Telecommuter Forward! Community*
- 3.) Completed and approved a *Broadband Study (2024)*
- 4.) Formed a La Crosse County Broadband Committee
- 5.) Hired a Broadband Specialist

La Crosse County will continue to work to improve access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet by working with internet service providers on infrastructure development projects, promoting programs aimed at keeping internet affordable, and reviewing policies that could lead to further development.

Economic Infrastructure: Goals and Recommendations

Goal	Recommendation	Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
3.1: Plan and prepare future development areas to support business expansion, development, and attraction.	<p>R1: Certify sites to drive recruitment and expansion of businesses.</p> <p>R2: Analyze potential projects' consistency with existing local plans and work to mitigate identified issues before they become conflicts.</p> <p>R3: Complete a GIS analysis to identify ideal sites for future commercial and industrial development opportunities. Score site suitability and identify work that must be done to prepare sites.</p> <p>R4: Create a GIS model or spreadsheet to estimate the fiscal impact of projects, such as business and public infrastructure expansion and development, when they are in the planning phase.</p> <p>R5: Promote and support the establishment of municipal boundary agreements and intergovernmental cooperation during infrastructure planning.</p> <p>R6: Seek opportunities to provide grant writing support for high-impact projects in communities without staff capacity.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Certified five sites (land and buildings).</p> <p>KPI 2: Identified an additional five sites through the GIS analysis that can be certified.</p> <p>KPI 3: GIS model or spreadsheet identifying fiscal impact of projects completed.</p> <p>KPI 4: Municipal boundary agreements have been finalized and adopted.</p> <p>KPI 5: Grant writing support for high-impact projects in communities without staff capacity has been provided.</p>
3.2: Evaluate opportunities for adaptive reuse or redevelopment of vacant buildings and lands that are already served by public infrastructure.	<p>R1: Communicate with property owners to assist in marketing underutilized properties for reuse or infill.</p> <p>R2: Identify opportunities for public projects in redevelopment areas that could catalyze surrounding development.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Five sites suited for reuse or redevelopment have been identified and planned for highest and best uses.</p> <p>KPI 2: Commercial corridors in need of revitalization have been identified and public</p>

	<p>R3: Evaluate the local impacts of decreased use of office buildings, particularly due to the increased popularity of working remotely/telecommuting following the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>R4: Promote mixed-use development with pedestrian-scale amenities that attract customers and increase the vibrancy of commercial areas.</p> <p>R5: Explore the potential for Town TID’s in areas that are already supported by public services such as sewer and water.</p>	<p>investments to catalyze private investments have been planned.</p> <p>KPI 3: At least one Town TID has been created spurring private investment and development in an area of La Crosse County already being supported by public services.</p>
<p>3.3: Maintain and improve transportation infrastructure.</p>	<p>R1: Support multiple modes of transportation to serve and attract a variety of workforce. Transit, bicycle, and EV infrastructure may be viewed as amenities to prospective workforce.</p> <p>R2: Leverage the Northern Grain Belt Ports designation to provide funding for necessary port and harbor improvements.</p> <p>R3: Partner with the LAPC to create and maintain a funding matrix of grants that local municipalities may pursue for infrastructure projects. Pursue external grant funding for road infrastructure maintenance or reconstructions.</p> <p>R4: Partner with the La Crosse Regional Airport (LSE) to increase flight options, reduce ticket prices, and pursue additional forms of revenue to ensure long-term sustainability of the airport.</p> <p>R5: Investigate long-term financial support opportunities for the SMRT Bus program that provides in-demand workforce from outside La Crosse County.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Traffic engineers have been provided with local data providing input on the importance of offering multi-modal transportation infrastructure as they are planning and designing the reconstruction of major transportation corridors.</p> <p>KPI 2: A study and plan have been developed to improve the port systems allowing for increased use.</p> <p>KPI 3: A matrix of funding opportunities for public infrastructure projects has been developed and published for municipal consideration.</p> <p>KPI 4: The La Crosse Regional Airport has added additional flight options with one or more additional carriers resulting in the reduction of ticket prices and the capture of additional travelers within LSE’s catchment area.</p> <p>KPI 5: The La Crosse Regional Airport has explored and pursued alternative funding mechanisms, including, but not limited to, attracting additional freight carriers, selling or leasing surplus land, and developing revenue-driving businesses such as hotels and restaurants.</p>
<p>3.4: Ensure 99% of County residents and businesses have access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet by 2029.</p>	<p>R1: Support internet service providers’ applications for BEAD and other funding that will lead to further infrastructure development, especially in areas that currently lack access.</p> <p>R2: Provide outreach and education to populations facing internet affordability concerns.</p> <p>R3: Pursue external funding to support initiatives that will lead to or result in 99% of La Crosse County residents having access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet by 2029.</p>	<p>KPI 1: 99% of La Crosse County residents and businesses have access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet.</p> <p>KPI 2: La Crosse County residents have easy access to financial assistance and training resources pertaining to their access to internet.</p>

Pillar 3: Economic Infrastructure supports the following 2024 County Board Strategic Plan Outcomes: **Healthy Infrastructure, Economic Growth and Vitality, and Engaged or Empowered Employees.**

Pillar 4: Quality of Life

Housing

Housing affordability has become a significant challenge nationwide. Every public participation activity ranks this issue as one of the top five concerns of our residents. Although this issue has not typically been addressed in economic development work plans, due to its importance to our workforce, and ability to recruit said workforce, the issue must be addressed. The data attached in this section highlights this concern.

Figure 4.1

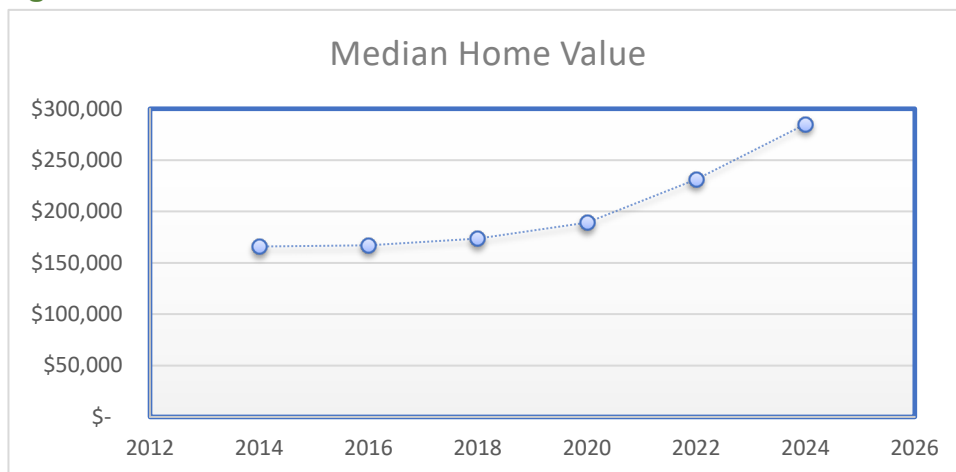
Regional Housing Statistics (2022)						
Category	Vernon	Monroe	Eau Claire	Outagamie	La Crosse	Statewide
Housing Units	13,874	19,804	46,530	80,476	52,777	2,727,726
Households	11,991	17,992	45,173	78,706	50,179	2,491,121
Renter Occupied	17.5%	25.9%	37.0%	28.6%	36.0%	31.9%
Median Value	\$192,800	\$184,000	\$245,700	\$250,400	\$226,600	\$263,900
Median Monthly Rent	\$785	\$919	\$992	\$969	\$984	\$1,070
Median Household Income	\$67,866	\$62,742	\$70,127	\$78,705	\$68,731	\$72,458

Source: 2022 ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles

- ii. 6% of WI homes are entry-level in 2019; this number was 34% in 1980
- iii. Median Home Value has increase more than 33% in the past four years
- iv. Construction of new housing units is meeting less than 50% of the annual demand
- v. Current housing stock is aging rapidly, over 50% of the current stock is more than 40 years old
- vi. 21.6% of County Households spend >30% HH income on mortgage and other housing expense
- vii. County population is projected to increase by 12-15% by 2040

Source 2014-2022 ACS 1 Year Estimates Data Profiles

Figure 4.2



Source 2014-2022 ACS 1 Year Estimates Data Profiles

According to the Envision 2050 La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan, La Crosse County is expected to generate demand for over 8,000 new households by 2040.

Sustainability

Sustainability contributes to the quality of life of La Crosse County’s residents. Sustainability is the practice of managing consumption of natural resources to avoid destabilization of the planet’s ecological balance, while meeting present global needs without compromising humanity’s ability to meet future needs. There is a limited supply of many resources, such as land, water, fertile soil, minerals, and hydrocarbons that La Crosse County’s private residents and employers rely upon. Local governments must also act sustainably to maintain adequate services for residents. The quality of public services impact residents’ quality of life. Negligent consumption of natural resources affects the global ecological balance and proliferates the negative impacts of climate change.

Part 2 of the La Crosse County Climate Action Plan, the Community Sustainability Plan, includes a chapter related to business sustainability called “Green Economy”. The chapter includes the following key takeaways:

- A Harvard Business Review survey found that 65% of consumers want to buy brands that advocate for sustainability (White et al., 2019).
- According to IBM’s Institute for Business Value (IBM, 2021b):
 - 64% believe that companies that do not act sustainably will experience increased public scrutiny in the future. Prioritizing sustainability helps businesses’ bottom-line and gives them a competitive edge in pursuing skilled workers.
 - 48% of personal investors consider environmental sustainability of corporations while buying and selling holdings, and 21% who do not consider sustainability currently said they are likely to consider it in the future.
 - 54% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable brands.
- According to IBM’s Institute for Business Value, 71% of employees and employment seekers believe that companies that prioritize sustainability are more attractive than companies that do not (IBM, 2021a). Two-thirds of those surveyed stated they are more likely to apply for and accept jobs with environmentally responsible employers, and nearly half of respondents would accept lower salary to join such organizations (IBM, 2021a).
- It is estimated that commercial and industrial operations are the source of 21% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Project Drawdown, 2022). Some local businesses, such as Emplify Health (formerly Gundersen Health) and Trane Technologies, have prioritized sustainability and emissions reductions for more than a decade.

The Climate Action Plan provides several recommendations relating to economic development, and most of them are consistent with the goals and recommendations of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. Implementation of the Climate Action Plan is based on a “triple bottom-line” framework. This framework outlines the “3 P’s”, which are referred to as the “3 E’s” in variations of the model; People (Equity), Planet (Environment), and Prosperity (Economy). Realistic goals related to sustainability can be achieved by balancing the 3 P’s.



Triple Bottom-Line of Sustainability. Source: University of Iowa Office of Sustainability & the Environment, <https://sustainability.uiowa.edu/about-us/what->

Quality of Life: Goals and Recommendations

Goal	Recommendation	Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
<p>4.1: Educate businesses and property owners on the financial benefits of making investments to improve the environmental sustainability of their operations.</p>	<p>R1: Provide information on programs that assist businesses in reducing their energy use, solid waste, and emissions.</p> <p>R2: Market the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) loan program. Assist business owners with pursuit of PACE funds for energy-related updates.</p> <p>R3: Require stormwater management practices for new developments to reduce the potential of flooding adjacent properties.</p> <p>R4: Update existing incentive programs to include energy efficiency improvements as eligible costs. Update application scoring rubrics to include bonus points for project components related to energy efficiency and sustainability.</p> <p>R5: Establish a grant specifically tailored to support businesses in implementing energy efficiency and sustainability-related projects.</p> <p>R6: Promote La Crosse County Community Development programs to all entrepreneurs, particularly those focused on climate sustainability initiatives.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Private industry members have received educational information pertaining to the benefits and opportunities available to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability practices.</p> <p>KPI 2: La Crosse County has developed programing aimed at alleviating the financial burden imposed by making energy efficiency and sustainability investments.</p>
<p>4.2: Support initiatives that result in housing for all residents in the workforce or entering the workforce.</p>	<p>R1: Promote and pursue state and federal funding that results in the construction of more housing.</p> <p>R2: Reevaluate and update the La Crosse County Neighborhood Revitalization Acquisition and Demolition grant program. Fund, at minimum, five projects per year with a focus on retaining the 30% single-family minimum threshold.</p> <p>R3: Complete a county-wide or regional housing study to identify local housing market conditions and actions that increase housing affordability, locally.</p> <p>R4: Leverage tax delinquent real estate to produce more housing.</p> <p>R5: Continue to work with the Village of West Salem and other stakeholders to move forward the Neshonoc Neighborhood plan (County Farm).</p> <p>R6: Update municipal zoning and subdivision ordinances to increase housing supply and variety by increasing flexibility and removing barriers to development. Engage builders to identify other barriers that restrict and impede new designs and concepts.</p>	<p>KPI 1: The La Crosse County Neighborhood Revitalization Acquisition and Demolition grant program has been refreshed to accommodate modern needs with a focus on all of La Crosse County.</p> <p>KPI 2: A county-wide housing study has been completed with firm and clear recommendations.</p> <p>KPI 3: Identify the highest and best residential use of County properties to benefit local workforce.</p> <p>KPI 4: Municipal zoning and subdivision ordinances have been updated allowing for further density and creativity in areas suited for such development.</p>

<p>4.3: Identify public demand that is not currently being met for products and services.</p>	<p>R1: Conduct a spatial analysis to identify communities or neighborhoods which are located the furthest from needed goods and services, such as grocery stores, schools, healthcare, transit stops, and parks.</p> <p>R2: Support mixed-use development that results in more commercial and residential units increasing customers’ access to goods and services, increasing businesses’ proximity to customers, and reducing pollution and traffic congestion.</p> <p>R3: Follow state policies and programs that may increase the supply of public, public-private, and employer-operated models of childcare.</p>	<p>KPI 1: Locations that have been identified from recommendation one (R1), have received a combination of public and private investment to create a well-rounded neighborhood offering services and opportunities for residents.</p>
<p>4.4: Leverage the region’s unique outdoor recreation opportunities to attract tourists and new workforce to La Crosse County.</p>	<p>R1: Continue to fund and administer the La Crosse County Arts and Culture grant program. Prioritize cultural representation within this program. Promote to ALL communities throughout La Crosse County.</p> <p>R2: Continue to support outdoor recreation and conservation projects that provide opportunities for ALL. Promote outdoor opportunities to tourists, newcomers, and prospective new residents.</p>	<p>KPI 1: La Crosse County has seen an increase in cultural amenities, including, but not limited to: public art, outdoor recreation, and tourism opportunities.</p>
<p>4.5: Increase the quality of life, workforce, and entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals and families with diverse backgrounds.</p>	<p>R1: Align programming with the La Crosse County Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Report 2024.</p> <p>R2: Restructure La Crosse County’s economic and community development grant and loan programs to prioritize diverse-owned businesses and projects.</p>	<p>KPI 1: La Crosse County’s community and economic development grant and loan programs have been restructured to prioritize diverse-owned businesses and projects.</p>

Pillar 4: Quality of Life connects to the outcomes: **Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Infrastructure, and Sustainable and Affordable Housing** from the 2024 County Board Strategic Plan.

Implementation

Plan Adoption

This plan will act as a frame of reference for general economic development decisions over the next five years. This plan will also serve as a tool for communicating and coordinating the community's economic development policies and actions.

Plan Use, Evaluation, and Amendments

- 1.) La Crosse County will utilize this plan to direct updates and new projects/programs over the next five years.
- 2.) La Crosse County will analyze economic trends and bring amendments to the County Board of Supervisors for consideration on an annual basis.
- 3.) La Crosse County, in conjunction with partner organizations, will determine priorities to develop a workplan.
- 4.) Implementation progress will be analyzed in conjunction with the KPI's and updates will be provided annually. KPI's established within this plan may apply to multiple recommendations within each goal.

Implementation Action Plan		
Action	Who is responsible?	Schedule
Restructure and retool La Crosse County Economic Development Fund.	La Crosse County staff and Economic Development Fund.	Q1 - 2025, and Ongoing
Utilize La Crosse County's Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and other locally adopted plans to prioritize goals set forth.	La Crosse County staff and Economic Development Fund, partner organizations, and local units of government.	Q2 – 2025, and Ongoing
Analyze results from 2025 and promote successes.	La Crosse County staff and Economic Development Fund, partner organizations, and local units of government.	Q4 – Annually
Prepare priorities and develop implementation guide for coming years.	La Crosse County staff and Economic Development Fund, partner organizations, and local units of government.	Q4 - Annually
Prepare amendments to plan for La Crosse County Board of Supervisors based on current economic climate and trends.	La Crosse County staff and Economic Development Fund, partner organizations, and local units of government.	Q4 - Annually

Conclusion

With a strong and diverse industry representation, quality high school and higher education institutions, and a community filled with individuals and organizations that work to benefit the community, La Crosse County is poised for continued growth and prosperity. Opportunities to create more housing, generate additional entrepreneurial activity, recruit and retain quality workforce and jobs, and develop infrastructure to support all walks of life are within reach, but will require a collective and cohesive effort by all partners. This plan is intended to illustrate the economic development priorities of La Crosse County by analyzing existing and anticipated conditions while remaining agile enough to address unanticipated challenges.

The success of this plan will be based on the accomplishments associated with the goals and recommendations described within. Implementation will require a clear vision agreed upon by all partners, and consistent monitoring accompanied by the ability and willingness to pivot as circumstances inevitably change.

Our partners, public, private, and non-profit, will all play a crucial role as this plan is implemented. La Crosse County is fortunate to have a plethora of economic development partners all working to enhance the strong economic base that currently exists. Aligning and promoting our partners' work will lead to an even stronger community in years to come.

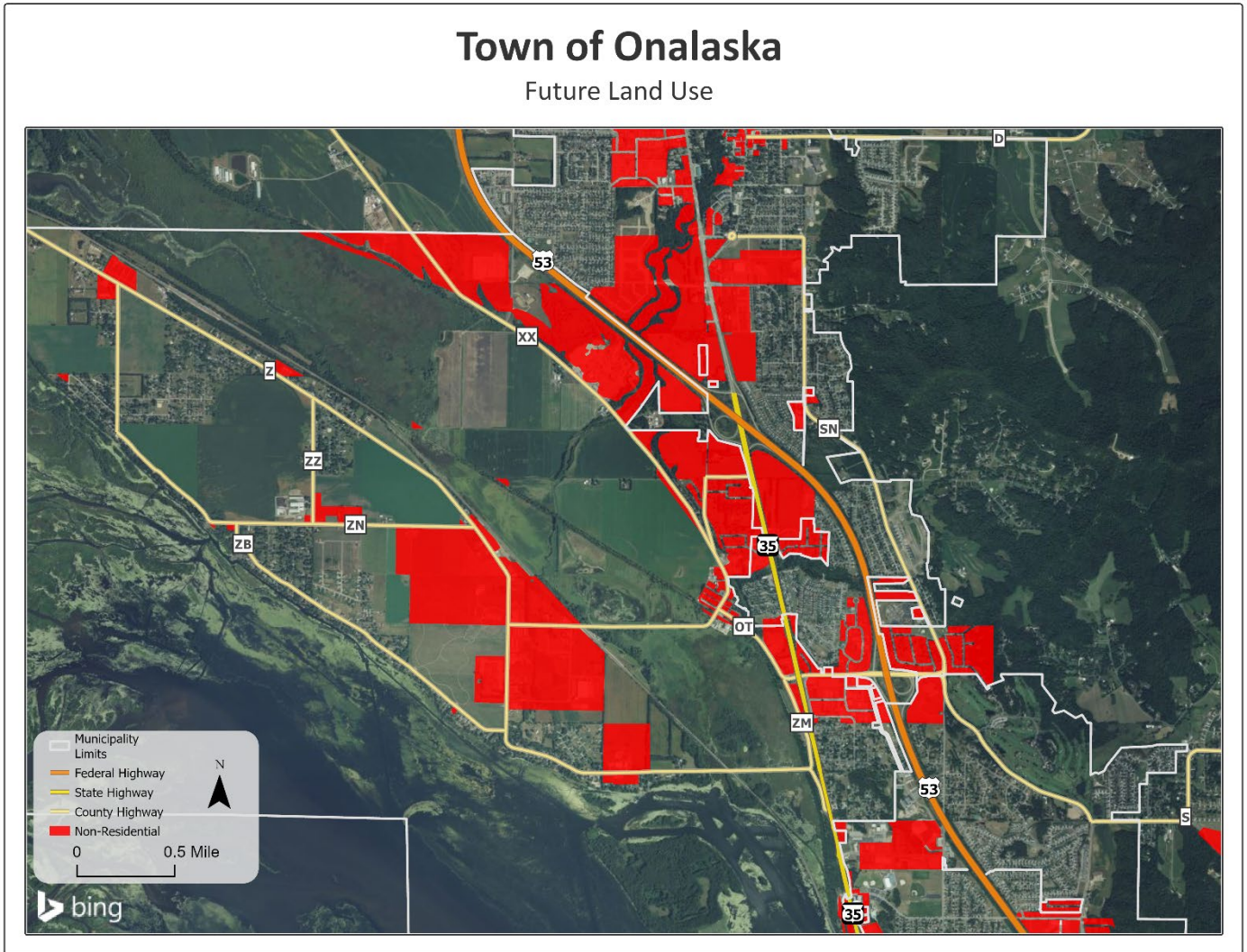
La Crosse County will share this plan with all partners and work to create the infrastructure required to implement, adjust, and retool to ensure this plan remains the foundation of future economic development work.



Appendix A.

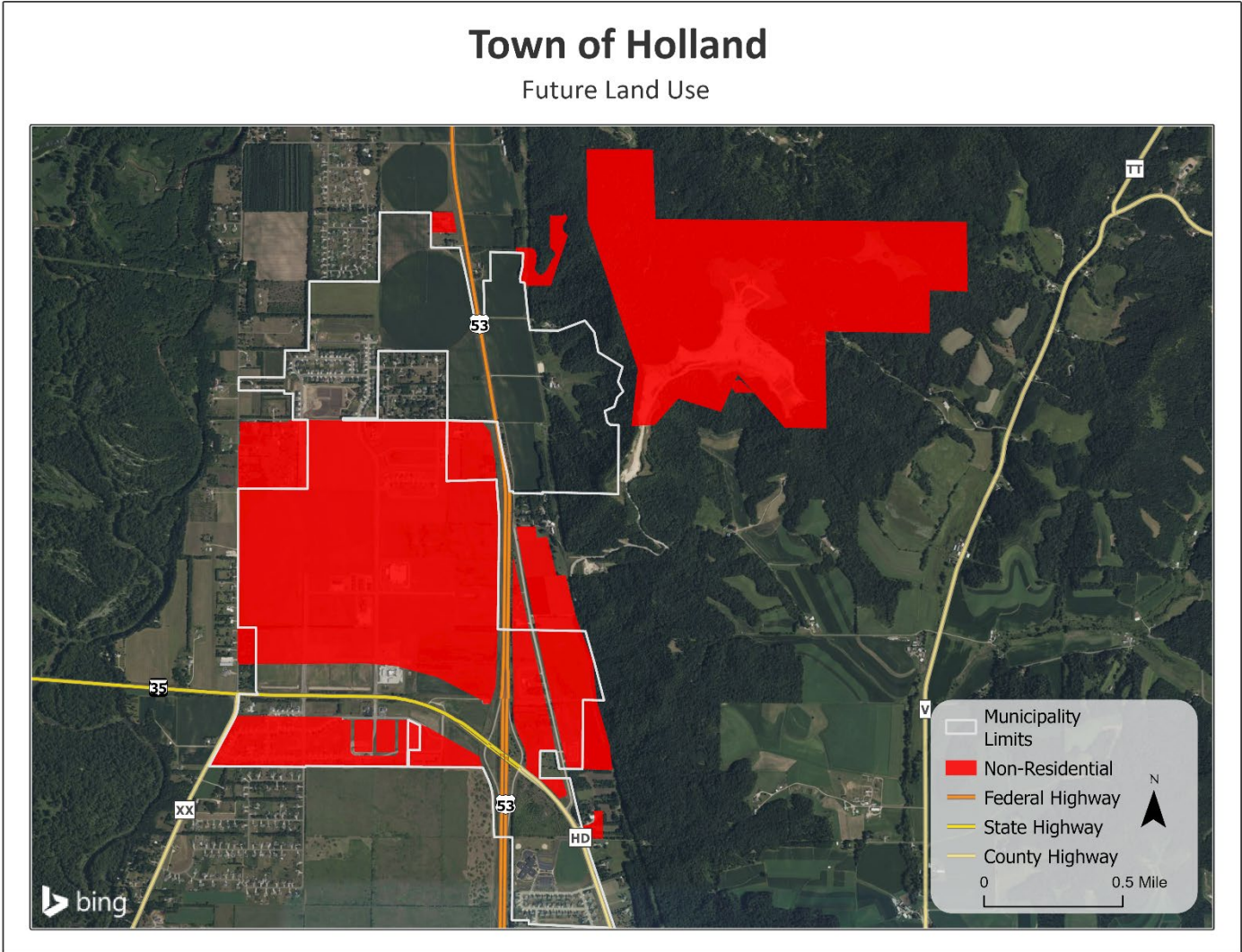
Future Commercial/Industrial Development Areas:

The following maps identify locations in the unincorporated areas of La Crosse County deemed as being opportune sites for future commercial and/or industrial development (show in red).



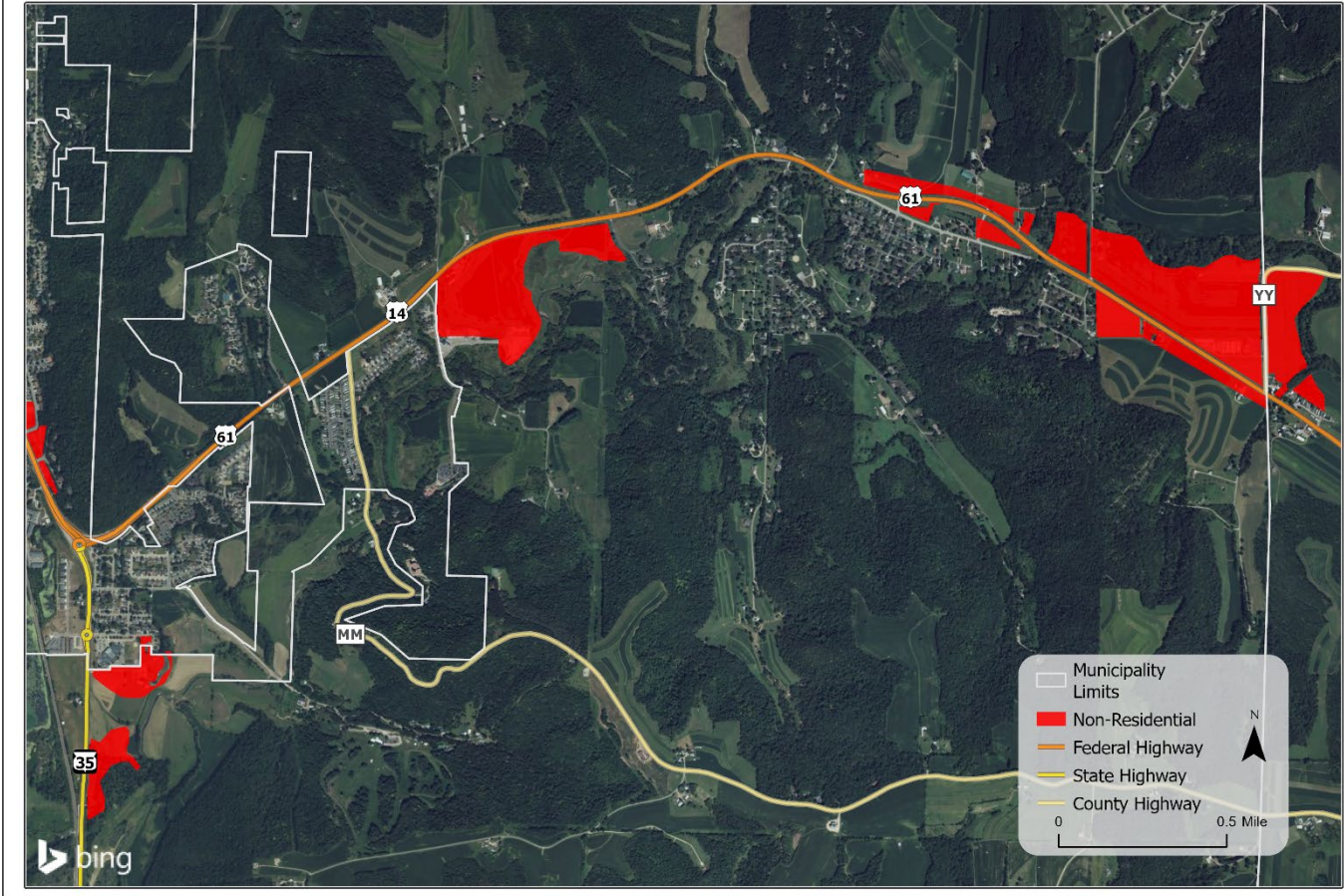
Town of Holland

Future Land Use



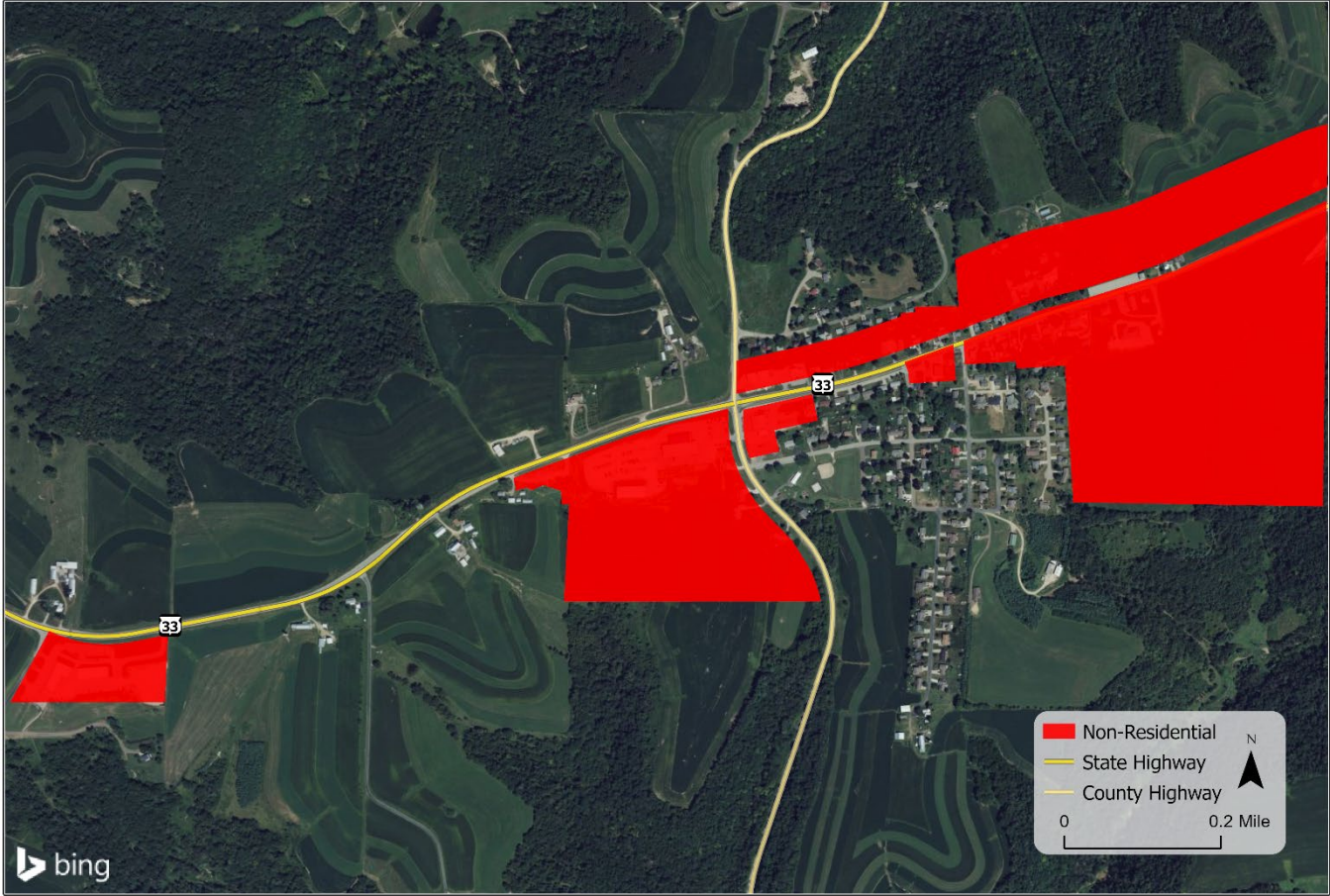
Town of Shelby

Future Land Use



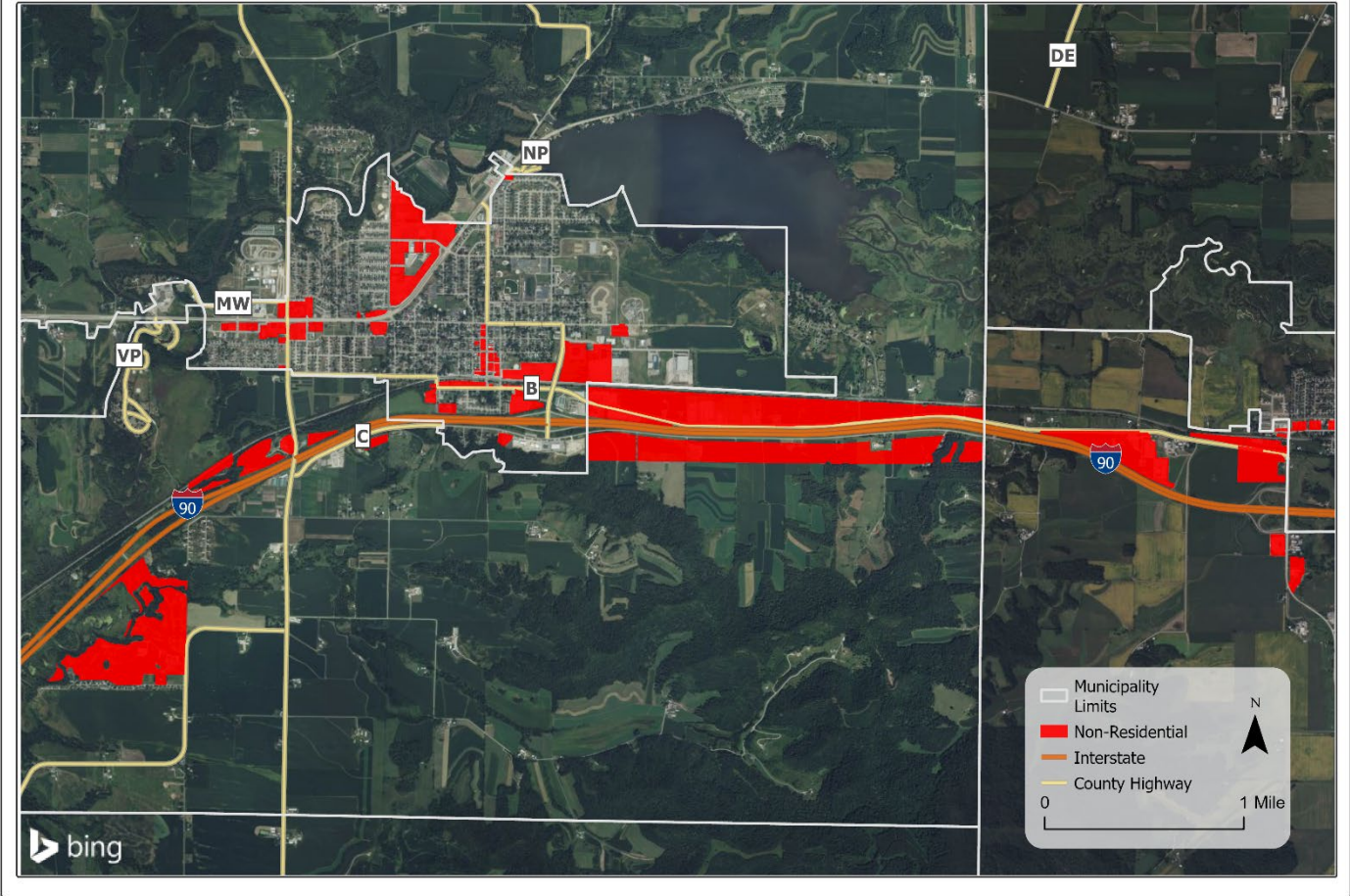
Town of Greenfield

Future Land Use



Town of Hamilton

Future Land Use



Town of Farmington

Future Land Use

