

West Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Planning Project Regional Issues & Opinion Survey Results

Regional Intergovernmental Coordination Group & Technical Advisory Group members were asked to identify their top-5 regional concerns and opinions for each category. A total of 40 surveys were returned, though five votes per category (or page) were not made on all surveys.

Population	# of Votes
Our growing elderly population will continue to increase demands on our health care system and related senior services such as transportation and housing.	30
Many areas have been experiencing significant in-migration of new residents who may have different expectation levels for services, land use, etc.	26
Our aging population and the out-migration of many younger people may result in insufficient workforce numbers in our region in the future.	20
Very high population growth has been occurring in portions of St. Croix and Polk counties and is projected to continue.	17
Loss of identity and sense of community in high growth areas.	17
Our region is growing more culturally and ethnically diverse with unique social, housing, and economic impacts, potential cultural conflicts, and special needs related to these populations.	15
Over 85% of town residents are non-farmers in our region compared to 1970 when the town farm and non-farm population was fairly evenly split.	14
Many of the fastest growing communities in our region are unincorporated towns.	13
Generally, population growth during recent decades has been higher in communities with recreational lakes and this trend may be shifting to rivers as lakefront properties become more scarce.	13
Population in many rural areas is increasing as seasonal homes are converted to year-round homes and more residents are willing to commute farther to their places of employment.	11
With growth, there is concern with spreading crime in the region.	5
Significant numbers of ethnic and racial minorities are moving into specific areas of the region for job opportunities resulting in unique challenges for these communities.	5
Ethnic or minority groups are often under-counted in censuses and population estimates.	3

Housing	# of Votes
Existing regulations may not accommodate or support the growing demand for alternative housing options, such as green building methods, sustainable site design, and multi-generational housing trends (e.g., older parent in an accessory dwelling unit).	23
Increased housing options are needed in the region (e.g., apartments, duplexes, condos, assisted living) and this demand will likely increase as our population grows and ages.	21
The region will need more elderly housing in the future.	21
Increases in travel time and fuel costs may limit future housing in the region if residents are less willing to commute long distances to their places of employment.	20
More low-income and affordable housing is needed in the region.	16
Many of our rural areas are experiencing housing growth higher than incorporated areas.	16
The large amount of high-end construction that has occurred may result in a surplus of this type of housing in the future.	14
Seasonal homes are often increasingly being used full-time after the owner(s) retires.	11
Better communication and coordination is needed between the housing organizations in the region.	12
Available housing assistance programs need to be better advertised so residents are aware of available funding and resources.	11
Higher end housing in rural areas may not have access to nearby services, transportation options, or other higher end housing alternatives as they age.	8
Housing values and property taxes of existing residences are being impacted by the development of new, larger homes or poor maintenance on adjacent properties.	8
Residents often believe that the cost of rental housing should be much less than it is resulting in builders avoiding the rental market and fewer rental units being available.	3
In some areas, adjacent lots are being purchased, combined, then used to construct one very large home and accessory structures.	2
Small resorts are being subdivided and sold in small parcels for residential use resulting in less tourism for the area.	1

Transportation	# of Votes
Revitalization of freight and passenger rail is important for the development of the region, especially given rising fuel prices.	22
Maintenance of our aging transportation infrastructure will be a challenge in light of growth, increasing traffic volumes, and budget challenges.	20
Intergovernmental coordination and other partnerships are important to providing alternative modes of transportation.	20
It is difficult to travel across our region without a car.	18
More transit services to the Twin Cities area and between our region's cities are needed.	17
Additional transit services and the coordination of such services is needed to serve the growing elderly, disabled, and commuter populations.	17
Increased availability and use of alternative modes of transportation could reduce the demand for new roads and highways.	17
A more regional approach to transportation and recreational trail planning is needed, especially for high growth areas.	12
Increased guidance for local governments is needed on transportation-related issues, such as cost-benefits of paving, heavy equipment impacts to roadways, and street planning for development.	11
Our transportation systems need to better accommodate the growing demand for bicycle and pedestrian travel and facilities.	10
Different demands and conflicts on roadways exist between different user types (e.g., vehicles, ATVs, Amish buggies, bicycles, walking).	7
There is a lack of understanding as to the need for roads and rail to transport goods and bring in raw materials to maintain the region's economy.	6
Different demands and conflicts on trail systems exist between different user types (e.g., ATVs, snowmobiles, horseback riding, bicycles, walking).	5
Direct access (e.g., driveways, side streets) has depleted the vehicle capacity of many roadways.	4
Communication and coordination with larger railroads is difficult.	4
Changes in air freight and passenger transportation could include consolidation of large carriers and the growth of smaller niche carriers.	2

Utilities & Community Facilities	# of Votes
Budget limitations for local governments are making it increasingly difficult to provide needed or mandated services.	27
With our aging population, there will be increasing demand for assisted living facilities, nursing home beds, and other related services.	23
Opportunities exist for the sharing of resources between communities.	21
It is increasingly difficult to balance school facility improvements and educational program expenses with costs to taxpayers.	18
More intergovernmental coordination is needed for the expansion of sewer districts and other utilities.	17
Water use in our region has doubled since 1979, while some communities are struggling with water quantity issues and there is a general lack of related data overall.	15
Wider access to broadband is needed within the region.	14
Preservation of right-of-way for utilities and roads in the region and the related expenses and conflicts is a concern as infrastructure demands and development increases.	10
Some areas of the region have significant groundwater quality contamination risks and concerns.	9
Communication systems and emergency services need to be better coordinated and linked between communities and counties.	8
Parks and trails planning is primarily performed at a community or county level, though regional opportunities exist.	7
There is a lack of funding for community activities (e.g., theater, sports) to engage families and children in smaller communities.	4
Emergency services often have long response times in rural areas.	4
Decentralization is contributing to the increasing cost of medical care.	4
Lack of volunteer networking and coordination within our region.	4
Increasing demands are being placed on emergency management and response providers.	4
Consolidation of schools create longer travel times and reduces civic pride.	1

Agricultural, Natural, & Cultural Resources	# of Votes
Farmland is being taken out of production and converted to other uses.	17
Intergovernmental cooperation is essential for the effective protection of valued resources.	16
Increased stormwater management is needed to prevent debris, pollutants, runoff, and sediment from entering surface waters.	16
There is increasing need for shoreland and streambank protection.	15
There are growing threats to agricultural and natural resources from disease and invasive species.	14
Increasing pesticide, herbicide, and fertilizer use in the region and related water quality impacts (e.g., phosphorus loading).	13
Farming costs, fluctuating commodity prices, and low revenues are making it increasingly difficult for many small farms to stay in operation; many small farms are being bought up by larger farm operations.	13
Use conflicts can arise between existing agricultural and new residential development resulting in right-to-farm challenges.	12
Forests are often forgotten as important working lands with a variety of benefits and products such as lumber, maple syrup, recreation, habitat, and aesthetic value.	12
More consistent resource inventory and mapping is needed in the region.	10
Potential conflicts and concerns often arise over large feedlot and large-scale agricultural operations while local control may be limited by State law.	10
The region has experienced a significant loss in the number of dairy farms.	7
Non-metallic mining resources need to be protected for future use, while conflicts often arise from the development and operation of mines and quarries.	7
There is need for more education in order to preserve and revive the culture and history of our region.	6
The inter-generational transfer of farms is becoming increasingly difficult.	6
As our region's demographics, traditional small farm economy, and land use patterns change, there is often a loss of sense of place.	6
Many cultural events in the region struggle with funding and attendance.	5
Productive forest lands are being increasingly fragmented.	5
Taxes are too high on farmland.	0

Economic Development	# of votes
While region has many higher education opportunities, fewer employment options for these graduates contributes to a “brain drain” and loss of a skilled workforce.	27
More regional efforts are needed to analyze strengths, market our assets, and pursue opportunities to attract new industry, while reducing programmatic redundancies and harmful competition between communities and agencies.	17
More efforts should be made to grow existing businesses.	14
More efforts should be made to infill or convert underutilized industrial and commercial areas to targeted industry types or alternative uses.	13
Our region lacks a clear identity and cohesive economic strategy, in part due to the diversity within the region.	13
Many traditional downtown business districts are deteriorating and may not have the same historic function requiring a new definition for “Main Street”.	12
There is no consensus among agencies and stakeholders in the region on regional economic benchmarks and metrics on how best to track, monitor, and utilize such information.	11
Infrastructure improvements (e.g., roads, utilities, broadband, wireless) are needed in the region to support economic development.	11
Most areas of the region have income levels lower than state averages. Pay rate differences exist in the region and with adjacent areas.	9
Lifestyle issues and quality of place are increasingly important factors in attracting and maintaining businesses, though our region lacks a quantitative study of these issues and assets.	9
Different tax and regulatory policies between Wisconsin and Minnesota, as well as in different communities, impacts economic development in our region.	9
Potential future workforce shortages will make it difficult to attract and retain businesses.	8
More information is needed on technology and innovation businesses and resources in our region and the outlook for the future.	7
More business incubators are needed in the region.	7
West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission services are under-utilized and not well defined to its constituents.	6
More economic development efforts should be tied to natural resources and tourism.	5
Momentum West is in its infancy with untapped opportunity and potential.	5
Our region needs a strategy to make it more recession proof.	4
Many smaller communities lack essential businesses, such as grocery stores, gas station, etc.	4

Land Use	# of votes
There is a lack of intergovernmental cooperation on land use, in particular at the urban-rural fringe between cities and towns. More efforts needed to facilitate cooperation and take advantage of untapped opportunities.	22
Transportation systems impact land use, and vice versa. Land use and proposed transportation projects need to be planned concurrently.	17
More education on land use planning trends, issues, and tools is needed in our region.	17
Rural development has a variety of negative consequences such as: undue land consumption, use conflicts, high costs for services, and increased commuter travel.	17
Different land use regulations in adjacent communities and for extra-territorial areas can drive growth towards less regulated areas.	17
More effort should be made to take advantage of redevelopment and infill opportunities, rather than greenfield development.	16
Land use patterns should develop or support the character of the community and a sense of place.	13
It is important to promote the Working Lands Initiative and available innovative tools to preserve farmland and productive forest lands while helping communities achieve their land use objectives.	11
Development can have a detrimental impact on natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas.	11
Land use policies and regulations often conflict with farmland, forest, and open space preservation goals.	10
A more regionally consistent and systemic approach is needed for gathering and distributing land use, resource, and other geographic information.	8
Growing need and interest in walkable neighborhoods and traditional neighborhood design with mixed uses for redevelopment and new development.	8
Land use change is being driven by the influx of new residents from outside the region.	6
There is a need to explore or encourage more socially and economically diverse residential development and neighborhoods.	5
There will be development pressure on high-speed rail stops.	4
County Farm properties are being converted to other uses and taking good land out of agricultural production.	3
New development and infill often occurs in a manner which is inconsistent with nearby existing development.	3
Annexation is decreasing tax revenues for towns and making service delivery difficult.	3

Energy & Sustainability	# of votes
There is a need for more information, education, models, and facts regarding the renewable energy potential (e.g., biomass, geo-thermal, wind, solar) and sustainability opportunities in our region.	25
A regional strategy is needed to assist our communities and the region in meeting the Governor's 25x25 goal of producing 25% of the State's electricity and transportation fuels from renewable resources by 2025.	20
Energy conservation and sustainability is not a priority for many communities in the region and often not part of community planning efforts.	17
Energy demand is increasing in the region and there will be a growing need to consider alternative energy sources.	15
Current regulations and land use policies for many areas of the region do not allow or encourage alternative housing construction or other sustainable concepts (e.g., neighborhood electric vehicles, conservation subdivision design, wind turbines).	15
Increase the region's food independence with food being purchased from local producers.	13
More affordable and efficient energy options need to be made available to residents and businesses.	13
Continued efforts to increase waste reduction, re-use, and recycling is needed.	12
Financial assistance and innovative approaches are needed to assist individuals and businesses in implementing energy efficiency and sustainability efforts.	11
New development and residential construction is typically not designed and developed in a sustainable manner and form in the region.	10
Government decision-making too often focuses on financial cost-benefits, rather than considering environmental and social impacts.	8
Our region lacks a strategy for working towards a green economy.	8
Landfills could be better utilized for energy production.	7
There is a need for a centralized clearinghouse of information on current renewable energy and sustainability projects in the region, as well as opportunities and related plans.	7
Waste from the industrial, commercial, and medical sectors needs to be better addressed.	5
The sustainability concept and market needs to mature before the entire region can utilize many of these concepts.	5
More encouragement to participate in recycling and hazardous waste disposal is needed in some areas, meanwhile budget limitation are potentially cutting back on these programs.	3
Electric policies (net metering) for consumers who own renewable energy facilities is needed in some areas of the region.	0