



# 2025-2030 WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN

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## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



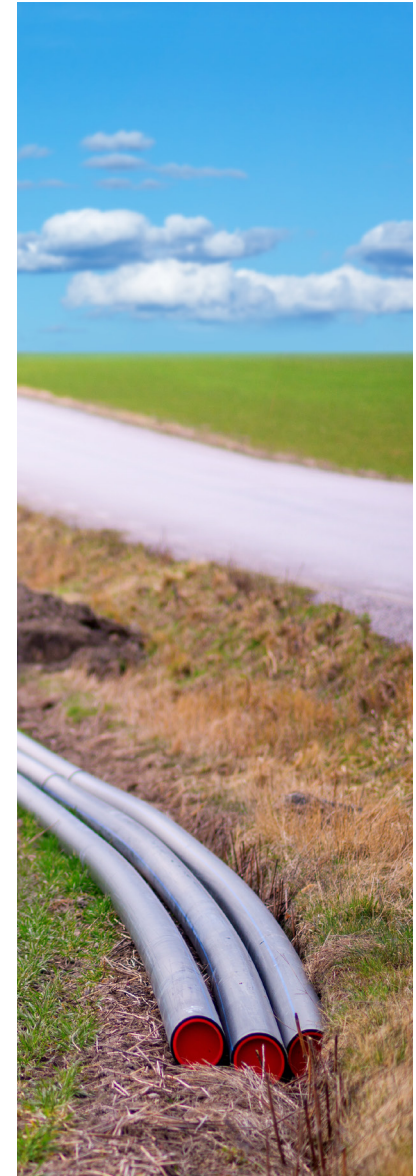
Barron • Chippewa • Clark • Dunn  
Eau Claire • Polk • St. Croix

(Draft Copy - July 25, 2025)



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# Prepared by:

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**Adopted by Resolution: Month DD, 2025**



D R A F T



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# Adoption Resolution

**D R A F T**



# CEDS 2025 Strategy Committee

County	Name	Affiliation
Barron	Patti Anderson	Public Sector/Health Care
Barron	Craig Fowler	Higher Education/Economic Development Corporation
Barron	Louie Okey	Public Sector/Banking & Finance
Chippewa	Chuck Hull	Public Sector/Workforce Development/Planning
Chippewa	George Rohmeyer	Public & Private Sector
Chippewa	Joel Seidlitz	Public Sector
Clark	Peter Kaz	Manufacturing/Economic Development Corporation
Clark	Chuck Rueth	Public Sector
Clark	Joe Waichulis, Jr.	Public Sector/Workforce Development/Housing
Dunn	Diane Morehouse	Public Sector/Planning
Dunn	Carl Vandermeulen	Public Sector/Higher Education
Dunn	Adam Accola	Higher Education/Economic Development Corporation



# CEDS 2025 Strategy Committee

County	Name	Affiliation
Eau Claire	Loralee Clark	Public Sector
Eau Claire	John L. Frank	Higher Education/Chamber of Commerce
Eau Claire	Dane Zook	Public Sector
Polk	Terry Hauer	Economic Development Corporation
Polk	Keith Karpenski	Public & Private Sector
Polk	Sharon Kelly	Public Sector
St. Croix	Paul Berning	Public & Private Sector
St. Croix	Daniel Hansen	Public Sector
St. Croix	Ryan Sicard	Public & Private Sector





# SECTION I. INTRODUCTION



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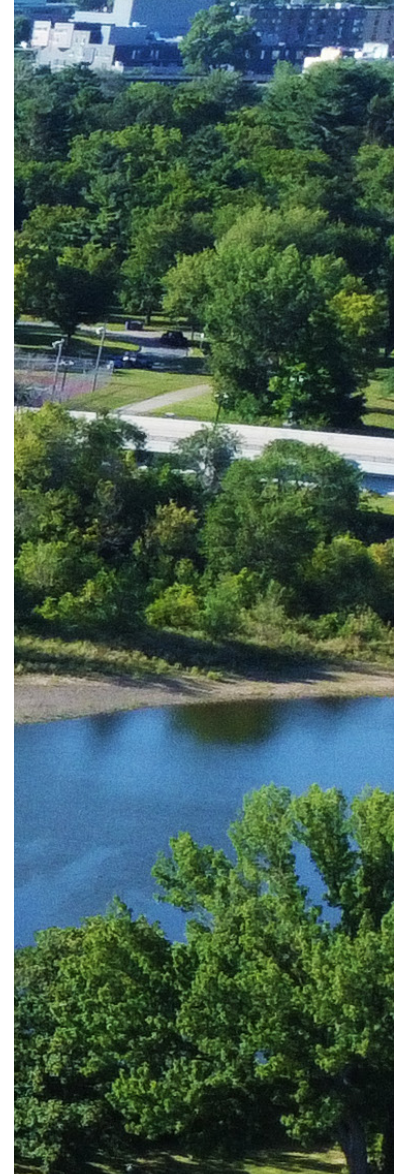
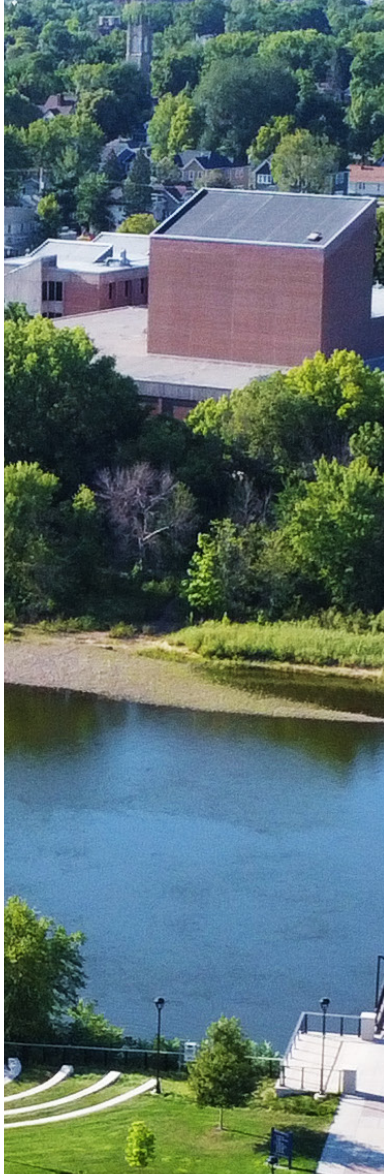
# About WCWRPC

In March 1980, the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC) was designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The WCWRPC is a multi-county planning agency serving county and local governments in the Wisconsin counties of Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Polk and St. Croix.

The Commission was created in 1971 by the seven aforementioned counties and derives its authority from Wisconsin Statute 66.0309. The Commission's governing body consists of three representatives appointed by the respective county board chairperson from each of the seven counties in the Region. The WCWRPC serves as the governing board and planning organization for the seven-county EDD.

This document is the result of continuing economic development planning. It includes broad-based community input from the public sector, community leaders, local and regional economic development organizations, institutions of higher education, workforce development, and private individuals.

Through continued planning and improved coordination, there are several opportunities for the West Central Region to make economic development improvements that can have a lasting regional impact. By engaging key public & private partners and stakeholders throughout the 2025 CEDS Update process, WCWRPC has formulated a Vision Statement, which is supported by Guiding Principles that inform the EDD's Regional Goals for the next five years.





# Key Partners Engaged Throughout The CEDS Development Process

## Public Partnerships

- West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- County Economic Development Corporations
- Local Economic Development Corporations
- Regional Business Fund, Inc.
- Momentum West Wisconsin
- West Central Works (Workforce Development Board)
- University of Wisconsin-Extension
- University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
- University of Wisconsin-River Falls
- University of Wisconsin-Stout Discovery Center
- University of Wisconsin-Stout
- Chippewa Valley Technical College
- Northwood Technical College
- Local Governments (County, City, Village, Town)
- Regional, County and Community Housing Organizations
- Small Business Development Center

## Private Partnerships

- Banking Institutions
- Chambers of Commerce
- Main Street Organizations





# CEDS Vision Statement

Over the next five years, the CEDS will engage partners and provide support to communities throughout the Economic Development District in order to contribute to the region's growth and prosperity.

## CEDS Guiding Principles

- » Continue WCWRPC's work on business development initiatives
- » Focus on worker recruitment and retention activities
- » Partner with efforts to develop quality of place amenities
- » Engage with initiatives to secure regional energy needs and to drive the innovation of the future
- » Collaborate on projects to expand or improve the region's infrastructure

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# Resiliency

## IDENTIFYING THREATS TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

As communities in the Region grow economically and physically, ongoing collaboration among economic development professionals, planners, and emergency managers is essential for establishing economic resilience goals and strategies. This coordination strengthens communication channels to address vulnerabilities effectively.

Beyond natural disasters, the Region faces economic threats with significant potential to disrupt its economy, including supply chain disruptions, inadequate or aging critical infrastructure, closures or relocation of key industries, economic downturns, and shifts in federal priorities or funding.

Recent federal policy shifts have introduced both opportunities and challenges, such as increased investment in infrastructure and workforce development alongside heightened competition for resources. Combined with supply chain vulnerabilities and uncertainties in trade markets, these dynamics highlight the importance of proactive resiliency planning and robust communication networks with local, state, and federal economic partners.

## ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) is based on nine core principles, one of which is Resilience and Sustainability.

*A successful recovery process promotes practices that minimize the community's risk to all hazards and strengthens its ability to withstand and recover from future disasters, which constitutes a community's resiliency. A successful recovery process engages in a rigorous assessment and understanding of risk and vulnerabilities that might endanger the community or pose additional recovery challenges.*

With regards to economic recovery, the NDRF found that “effective economic recovery following a disaster is positively influenced by pre-disaster community planning including mitigation actions that increase community resilience.” By focusing on the resilience of the community as a whole, the community’s adaptive capacity to recover from all kinds of change is enhanced, whether that risk has been identified or not.



*The resilience of a community or an economy is measured by the level of vulnerability present before a disaster, the capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster, and the degree of community preparedness to both reduce vulnerabilities and increase capacities.*

Based on this research, three assumptions can be drawn regarding resilience. First, resilience assumes a pre-disaster baseline that is the “normal” state of a community. This is both an operating baseline that predisposes communities to certain effects of a disaster, and also a reflective baseline by which communities measure their return to normalcy. Second, resilience is a function of the gap between vulnerabilities and capacities.

The relative amount of exposure that a government, business, or household carries compared to their ability to mitigate or correct that exposure determines its resiliency in the face of a disaster or economic disruption. The greater the gap, the less resilient the community or economy is.

Third, in order to close this gap (and thus increase resilience) these entities must be actively engaged in preparation—both by reducing the vulnerabilities or exposure that magnify a disruption or disaster’s effects and by developing capacities and assets that will aid in a recovery.

Consequently, economic development agencies that integrate resilience thinking or methodologies into their planning processes are ones that do the following:

- 1. Promote ongoing learning and analysis of current vulnerabilities, capacities, and the state of the economy.** Economic developers must continually understand their own resilience gap in order to effectively mitigate threats and strengthen response and recovery processes. Equally important is the need to have rich data sets of the organizations and economic variables that compose an economy. This is necessary in order to accurately measure disaster/disruption losses, rapidly craft a recovery strategy, and successfully envision a new “normal.”
- 2. Systematically address weaknesses and threats in the local economy.** Communities must use their learning to mitigate vulnerabilities in the economy. This usually involves expanding the variety of industries, enriching the education and flexibility of the workforce, facilitating (or removing barriers to) finance and other enterprise supports, maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, and encouraging entrepreneurship in industries that are necessary in times of disaster or disruption. Business continuity planning is similarly critical; individual firms and households should be encouraged to prepare so that they can adapt to and recover from various hazards.
- 3. Increase capacities and networks of relevant organizations and agencies.** Local governments, chambers of commerce, banks, and non-profit organizations should all be active participants in promoting economic resilience and managing economic recovery after a disaster or economic disruption. This may include governance and operational planning, economic recovery program planning, technical assistance training and capacity building for staff and per-



sonnel resources. Continuity planning is critical, as is networking and the development of reciprocal agreements with other agencies in the region or state to provide economic recovery support when local organizations are unable to do so.

4. **Maintain an iterative process that responds to changes.** Resilience is an ongoing awareness of strengths and weaknesses that requires up-to-date knowledge, procedures, and assets. Communities that make static plans, which are shelved away, are generally less resilient than those that proactively update their protocols and keep abreast of evolving vulnerabilities.

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT & ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The following section identifies a regional approach to developing economic resilience that includes both natural and economic disruptions. This framework does not replace or supersede adopted hazard mitigation or emergency management plans, but is meant to complement existing plans at the state, county, or local level to provide overarching regional context.

### PHASE 1: MITIGATION

Mitigation is the first step in pre-emergency preparedness. In the West Central Region, hazard mitigation plans address mitigation through several categories that are meant to prepare communities for hazard risks.

Efforts for mitigation include:

- Planning & Regulatory Activities
- Physical Construction Activities
- Emergency Preparedness & Communication Activities
- Educational Activities
- Strategic Partnerships

Mitigation planning is meant to be proactive, individualized, and if done properly, is expected to reduce damages to persons, property and the economy. In relation to economic resilience, mitigation planning also provides the opportunity to address the concept of business continuity planning. This involves the preparation of operating procedures that will ensure businesses receive the appropriate assistance either for recovery or continuity during unforeseen emergencies.

The role of WCWRPC is to assist local communities in building the necessary partnerships between agencies, communities and the public to engage in effective mitigation planning. This will help establish the level of risk identified within each community, and lead to objectives that work to reduce or eliminate risks to persons, property, or major business as a result of disruptions in the Region.

### PHASE 2: PREPAREDNESS

Preparedness is defined as any activity taken in advance of an emergency that facilitates the implementation of a coordinated response. Preparedness can include several types of local or regional strategies or plans that identify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, government officials or other designated authorities during or following a hazard event.



Some examples of preparedness activities may include:

- » Efforts to define the responsibilities of individuals involved in preparing people and businesses for disasters
- » Identifying resources at the disposal of communities or businesses and how partners can work together as part of an overall emergency strategy
- » Engaging citizens and businesses in preparation exercises through seminars or presentations that develop awareness of natural or economic threats and help communities prepare for events through proactive planning and coordination

### PHASE 3: RESPONSE

Response involves any action taken before, during or after a hazard event that can save lives, minimize property damage or improve physical or economic stability through effective recovery efforts. Response involves a great deal of evaluation to assess the scale of disaster impacts to people and/or the economy.

One significant aspect of response includes pre-planning, preparation and assurance that essential community or business functions continue, regardless of the disaster type. This includes developing a recovery timeline that helps stakeholders define the tasks, procedures and priority of recovery efforts immediately following a disaster.

### PHASE 4: RECOVERY

Recovery includes both short-term and long-term activities that ultimately bring a community or region back to normal levels of activity. At the onset of a disaster, initially the community affected will be heavily reliant on local governments or stakeholders to meet the immediate needs of the people in that community.

Depending on the type and scale of the emergency, businesses or communities may also look to additional resources at the state or federal levels to assist with long term recovery plans.

Some examples of recovery efforts or activities may include:

- » Identifying the severity and urgency of the disaster and/or the economic impact
- » Engaging businesses and the workforce in rebuilding the economy
- » Identifying sources of funding or programs to meet current and future community needs
- » Developing metrics and/or assessment tools to learn from the disaster and prepare for similar future events
- » Updating or revising strategy plans or procedures from information gathered through responding to past disasters or economic disruptions in the Region

# SECTION II. SUMMARY BACKGROUND



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# Regional Profile

## POPULATION

**447,952**

## EMPLOYMENT

**235,552**

## HOUSEHOLDS

**180,048**

## PER CAPITA INCOME

**\$40,466**

## AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

**\$78,330**

## MEDIAN AGE

**40.1**

## LARGEST INDUSTRIES

**Manufacturing**

**Health Care & Social Assistance**

## SIZE/AREA

**6,205 Square Miles**

*Sources: ESRI, Lightcast*

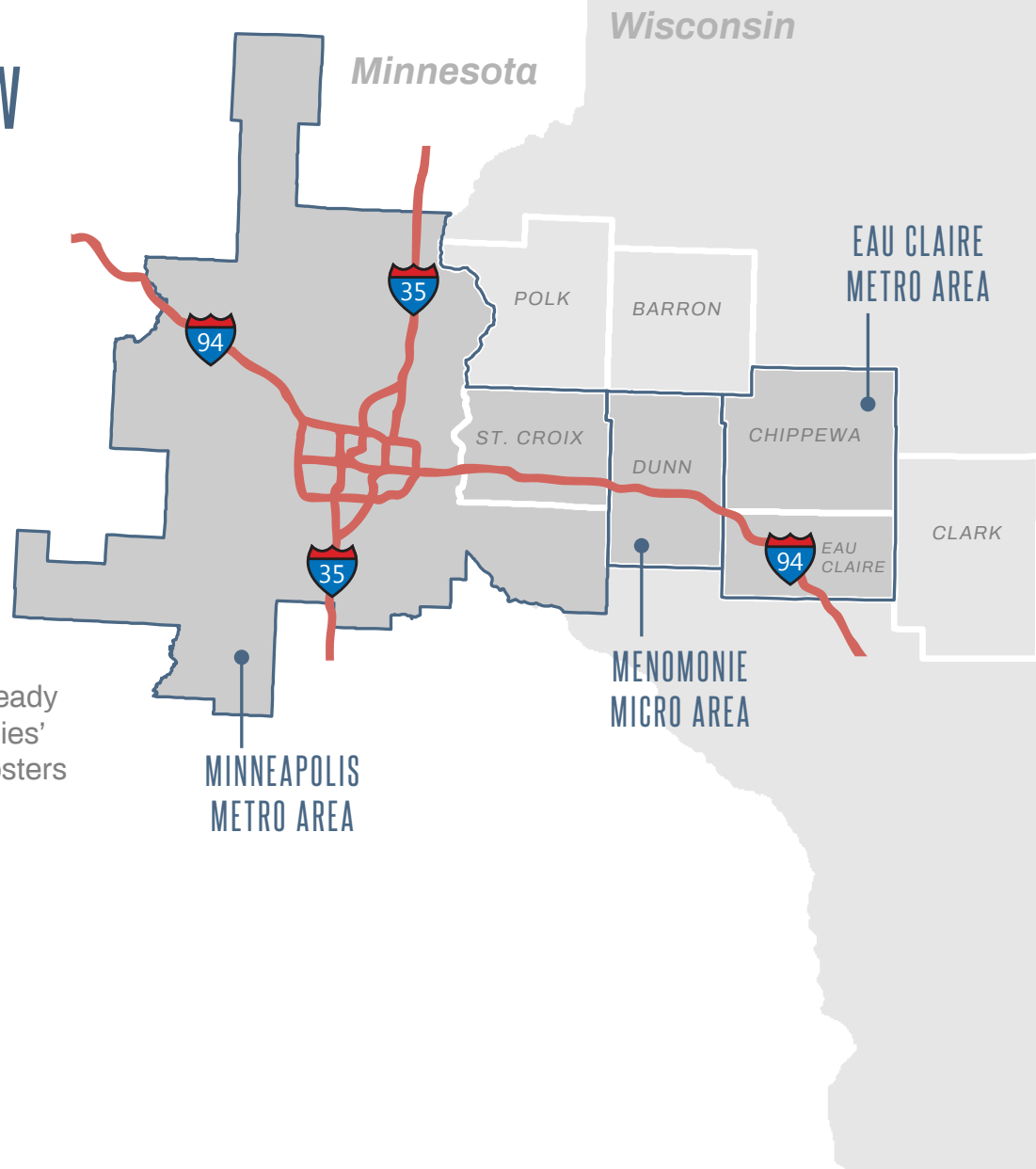


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# Regional Overview

The West Central Region of Wisconsin, encompassing seven counties—Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Polk, and St. Croix—spans 6,205 square miles, representing approximately 11.5% of Wisconsin's land area while housing about 7.4% of the state's population, estimated at around 437,330 in 2020.

Anchored by the Eau Claire Metropolitan Area, the Menomonie Micropolitan Area, and the western counties' close proximity to the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan Area, the region is a dynamic economic hub experiencing steady growth and deepening ties to the Twin Cities' robust economy. This strategic position fosters opportunities for innovation, industry, and sustainable development.



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# Summary Background



CEDS 2025

## BARRON

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **47,252**  
2050 Population - **43,630** **-7.7% Decline**

## CHIPPEWA

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **67,720**  
2050 Population - **65,990** **-2.6% Decline**

## CLARK

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **34,734**  
2050 Population - **37,690** **8.5% Growth**

## DUNN

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **45,730**  
2050 Population - **42,475** **-7.1% Decline**

## EAU CLAIRE

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **108,762**  
2050 Population - **118,625** **9.1% Growth**

## POLK

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **45,692**  
2050 Population - **35,050** **-23.3% Decline**

## ST. CROIX

Current/Projected Population

2024 Population - **98,062**  
2050 Population - **102,980** **5.0% Growth**

Sources:

2024 Population Estimate - ESRI

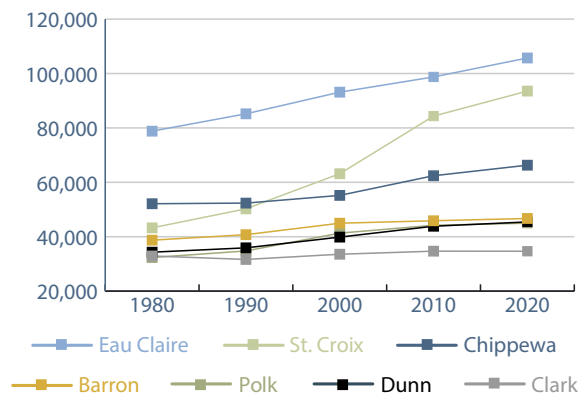
2050 Population Projection - Wisconsin Department of Administration.

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# Population

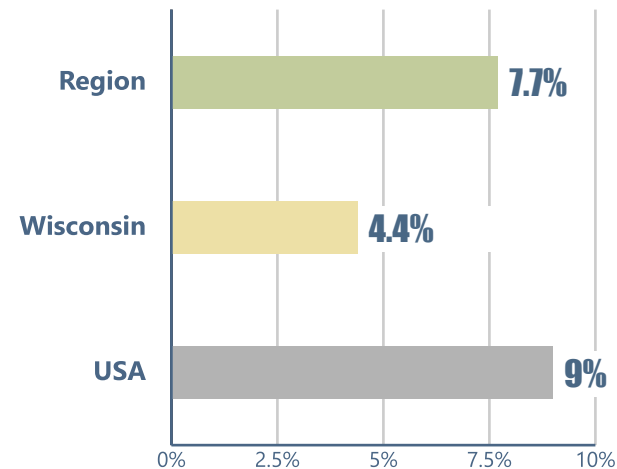
Eau Claire County has the highest population in the Region followed by St. Croix County, which is currently experiencing the highest growth rate (4.8% from 2020 to 2024). However, based on 2050 population projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), Eau Claire and Clark Counties are expected to see the highest growth rates over the next twenty five years, with some counties projected to experience population declines. A summary of findings from the Wisconsin DOA suggests - *"Higher fertility rates in the past indicate that the older population is larger today. Below-replacement Total Fertility Rates for the last 45 years indicate that the younger generations are smaller today. Therefore, unless in-movers outnumbered out-movers by unexpected margins, projected population increases would be unlikely."*

DECENNIAL POPULATION GROWTH  
BY COUNTY  
1980 - 2020



Source: U.S. Census

POPULATION GROWTH RATE  
2010 - 2024

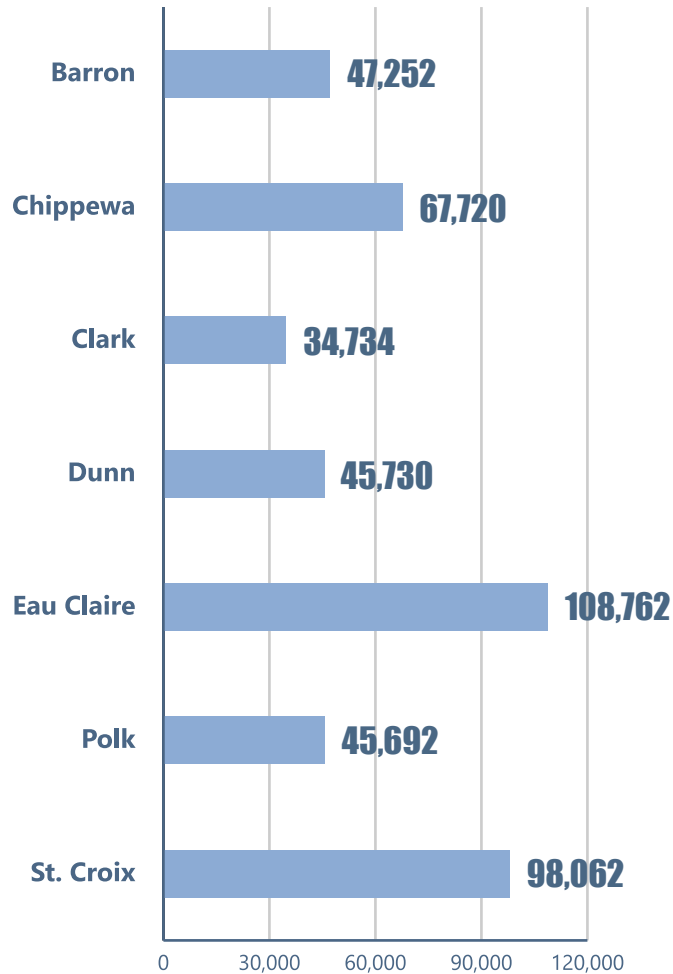


Source: Wisconsin DOA, U.S. Census



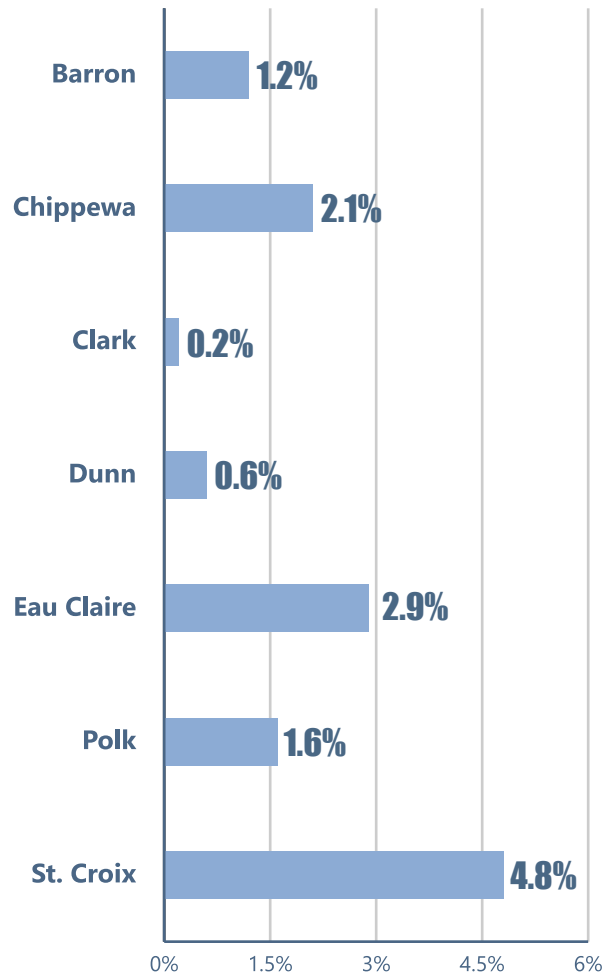


**TOTAL POPULATION  
BY COUNTY  
2024**



Source: ESRI

**POPULATION GROWTH RATE  
BY COUNTY  
2020 - 2024**



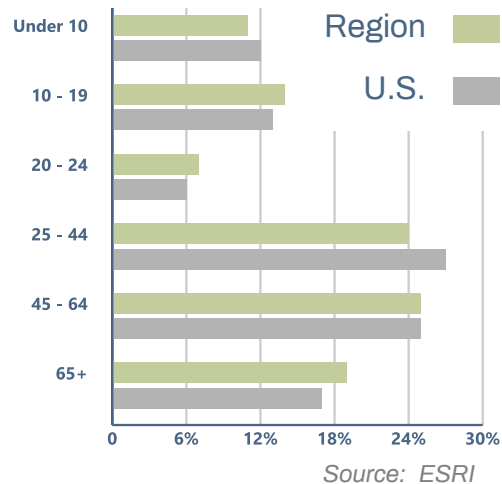
Source: ESRI

# Age

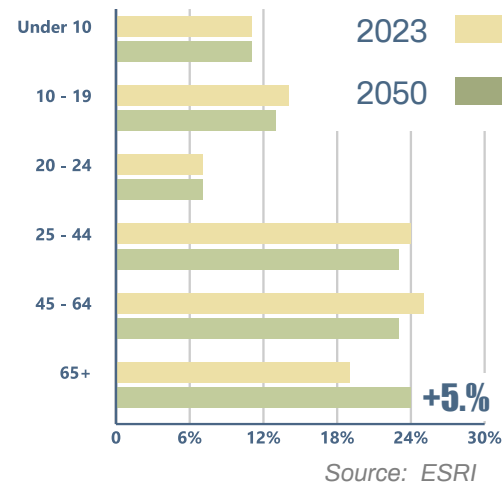
Like much of the U.S., median age is on the rise in the West Central Region. In 2011, the Baby Boom generation (people born from 1946 to 1964) began to turn age 65. As the large Baby Boom cohort ages, the Region is expected to experience rapid growth in both the number aged 65 and older and their share of the total population.

Age is an important component of economic development. Many companies employ a high concentration of "young professionals" who are between the ages of 25 to 44. While this portion of the population remains high today based on current estimates, the percentage of the population in this demographic is expected to decrease over time. By the year 2050, the Region is expected to see a dramatic shift in the aging population, especially those individuals age 65 and older.

## POPULATION BY AGE 2023



## WCWRPC POPULATION BY AGE 2023 & 2050



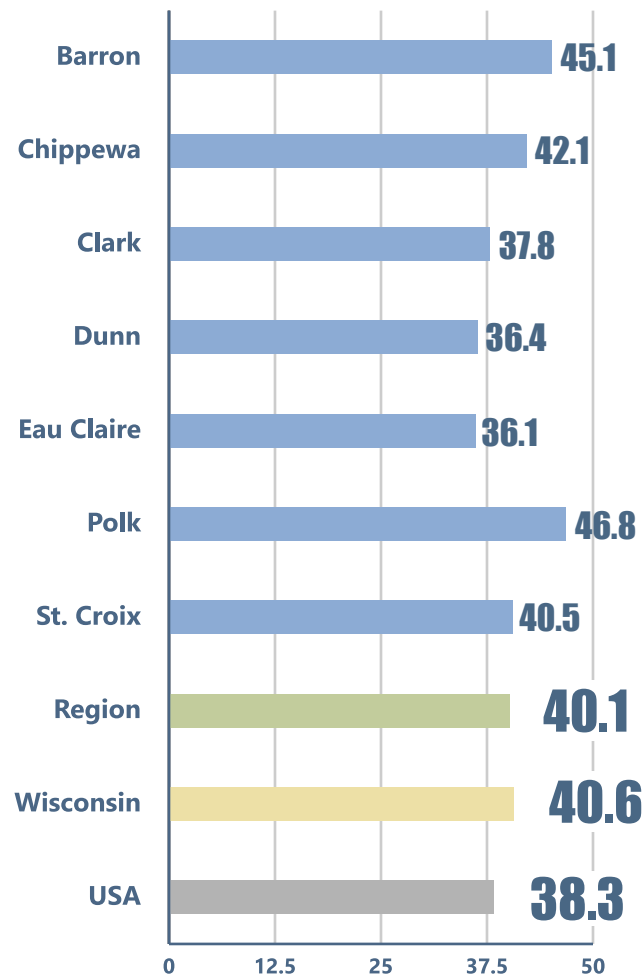
*The older population increased by 50.9 million, from 4.9 million (or 4.7% of the total U.S. population) in 1920 to 55.8 million (16.8%) in 2020. This represents a growth rate of about 1,000%, almost five times that of the total population (about 200%).*

*In 2020, about 1 in 6 people in the United States were age 65 and over. In 1920, this proportion was less than 1 in 20.*

Source: U.S. Census

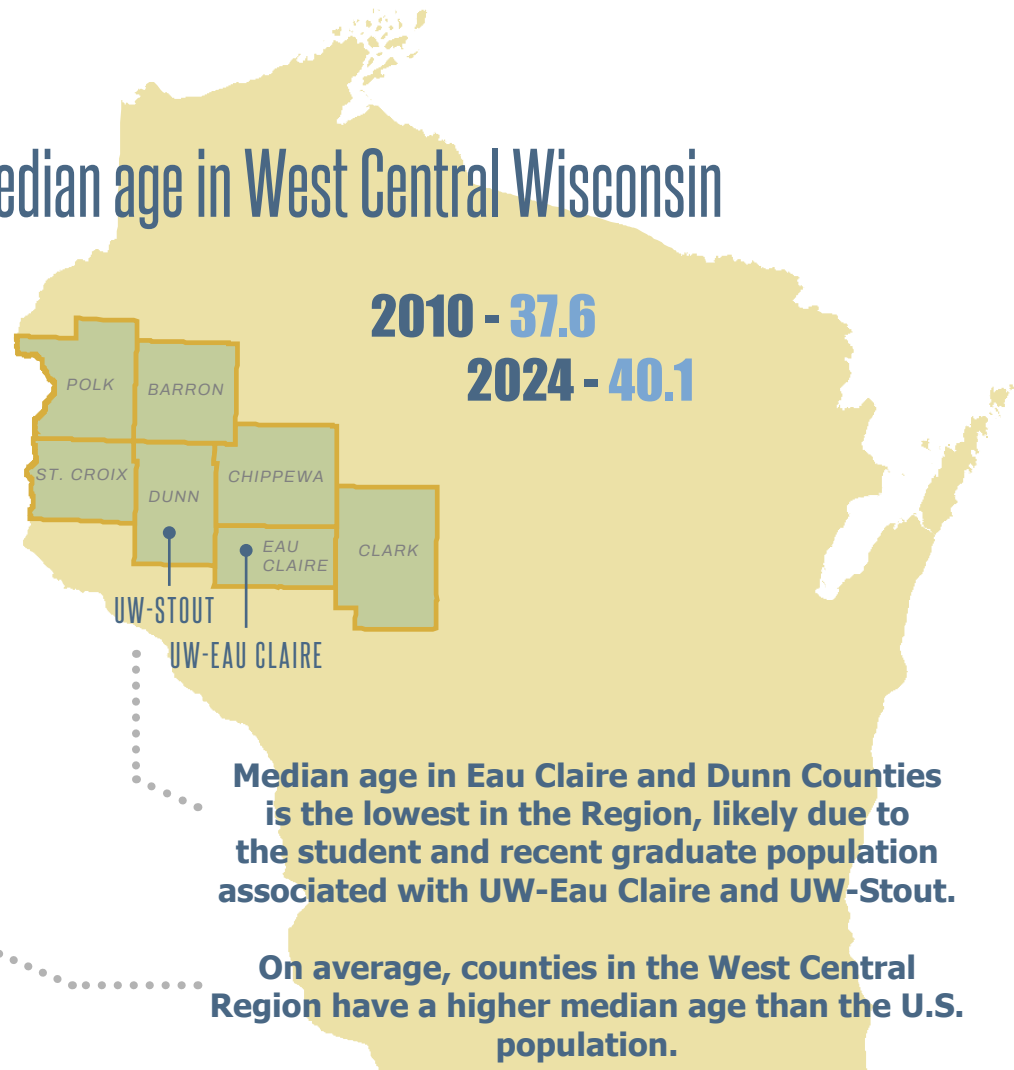


## MEDIAN AGE BY COUNTY 2024



Source: ESRI

## Median age in West Central Wisconsin

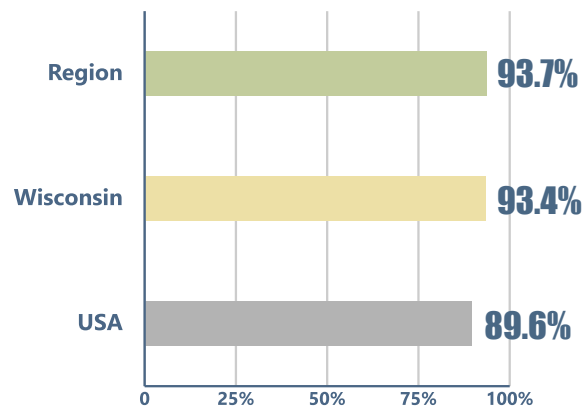


# Education

Educational attainment is an important component of economic development. Having a talented workforce with strong educational assets helps to attract businesses and contribute to the growth and economic prosperity of a region. Nearly all counties in the Region have a higher number of residents with high school diplomas than the national average. This helps to identify a key strength in the Region which is the value of local secondary schools that leads to high school completion.

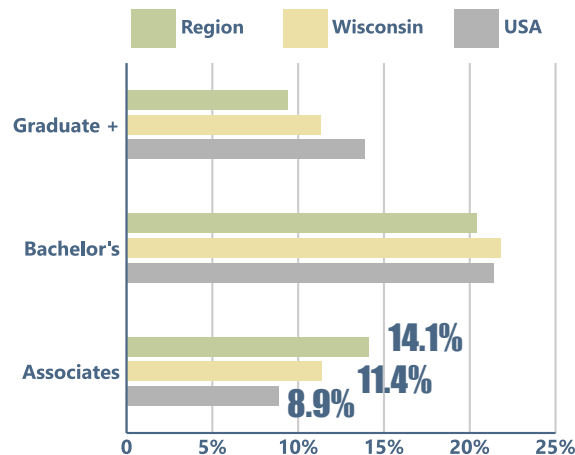
Also of regional significance is the higher than average Associate's level educational attainment which is much higher than the state or national average. While there are fewer residents with a bachelor's degree or higher at the regional level, the two most populous counties of St. Croix and Eau Claire each have a university campus and show higher post-secondary attainment than both the state and the U.S. averages.

## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES 2024



Source: ESRI

## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION 2024



Source: ESRI

**“Wisconsin’s technical colleges are the backbone of many of Wisconsin’s thriving industries. They are critical in keeping hospitals and clinics staffed, manufacturing at the cutting edge, commerce moving efficiently, and police, fire, and emergency responders prepared for action. These colleges also support farmers in maintaining productivity, ensuring power and electricity flow, and keeping IT systems online.**

**Simply put, our technical colleges deliver Wisconsin’s essential, front-line workforce.”**

*Wisconsin Technical College System*





There are numerous colleges and universities in West Central Wisconsin that draw new residents to the Region and provide skilled graduates entering the workforce each year. However, in the past few years, the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) have seen declines in enrollment, particularly at branch campuses. This is impacting their budgets and forcing difficult decisions like program cuts and campus closures.

### Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in the Region

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

2024 Enrollment: 9,465 students

UW-Eau Claire-Barron County

2024 Enrollment: 535 students

University of Wisconsin-Stout

2024 Enrollment: 6,914 students

University of Wisconsin-River Falls

2024 Enrollment: 5,273 students

Chippewa Valley Technical College

2024 Enrollment: 17,125 students

Northwood Technical College

2024 Enrollment: 14,108 students

**UW System:** Overall enrollment in the UW System has decreased, with a more significant drop in two-year branch campuses. Some campuses, like UW-Stevens Point at Marshfield, have seen dramatic drops, with nearly 45% fewer students than in the fall of 2023. Six branch campuses have already closed, and others are considering online-only models.

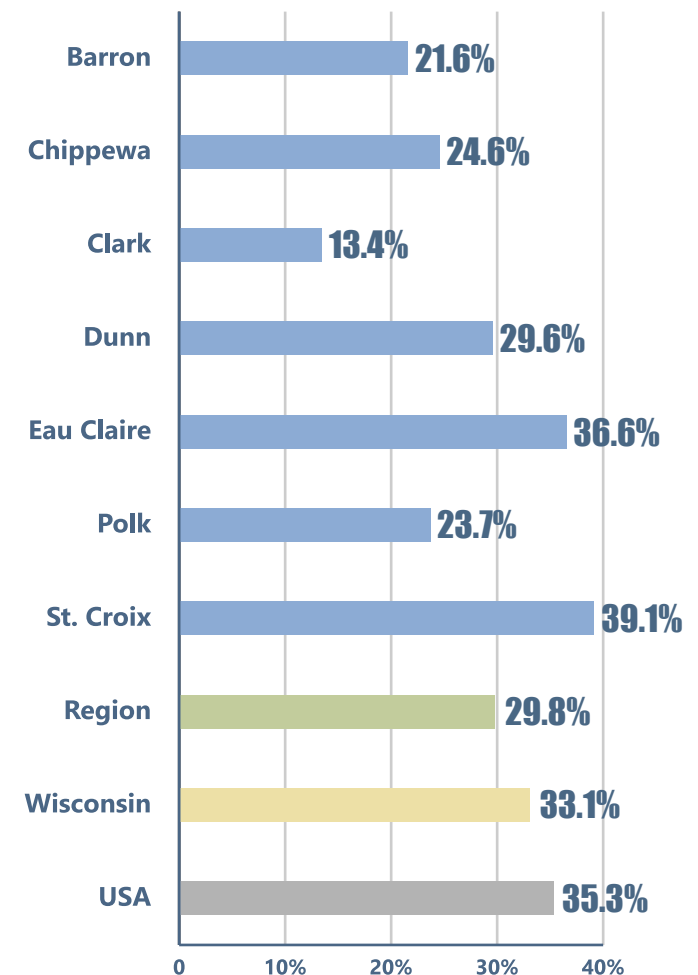
**Technical Colleges:** The Wisconsin technical colleges have also experienced a decline in head count enrollment since 1992, with a more substantial decrease in the number of individual students enrolled compared to the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment.

**Causes:** Declining birth rates, fewer high school graduates, and a growing number of graduates choosing to enter the workforce directly are cited as contributing factors to these declines.

Sources: Universities of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Technical College System - Fact Book

Sources: Inside Higher Ed, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Universities of Wisconsin.

### BACHELOR'S OR HIGHER 2024



Source: ESRI

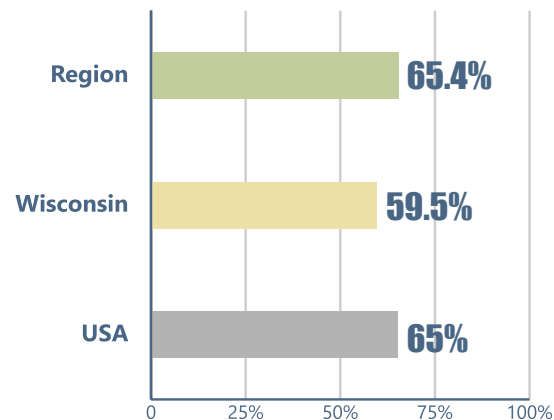
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# Housing

Homeownership rates are an important measure of regional prosperity. High homeownership indicates the ability and commitment of residents to purchase homes in their community. High median home value is also a sign of prosperity as high income earners tend to have a positive impact through higher sources of tax revenue at the local level. However, high median home values may also indicate a barrier to younger, less wealthy families looking to buy or rent homes in an area.

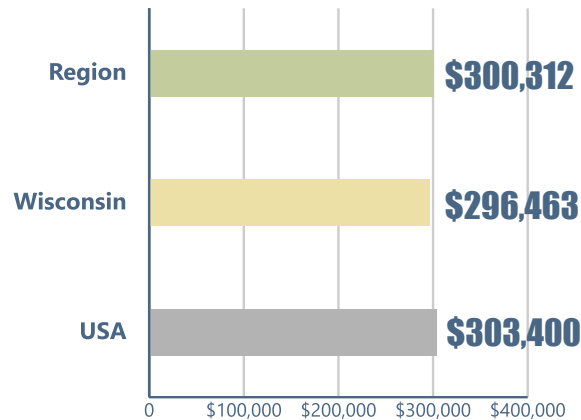
Housing availability is an important consideration for businesses who are trying to assess the ability to attract and retain a talented workforce. High housing costs relate to the need for relatively higher salary rates and can be a barrier to attracting new businesses or encouraging existing businesses to expand operations in their current location. Overall, homeownership rates are high in the Region (65.4 percent) with slightly higher median home values than Wisconsin, and lower median rent values than Wisconsin and the U.S.

## HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE 2024



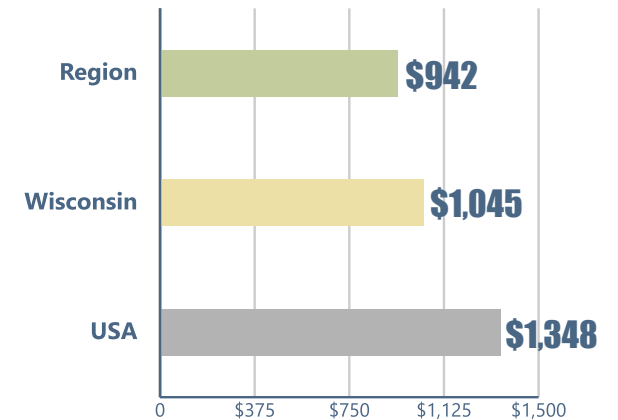
Source: ESRI

## MEDIAN HOME VALUE 2024



Source: ESRI

## MEDIAN GROSS RENT 2019-2023



Source: U.S. Census

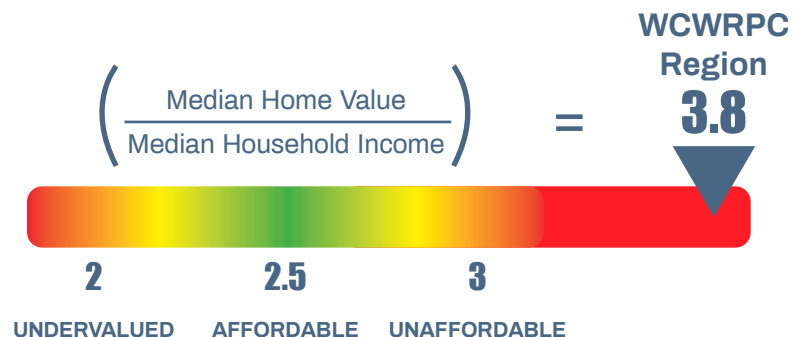


## Overall, housing costs are outpacing household incomes throughout the region, state, and nation.

One quick way to assess housing affordability within the owner market is to compare a community's median value of owner-occupied homes to median household income. Housing is considered affordable if this ratio is between 2 and 3. If the ratio is 2 or less, the housing is considered to be undervalued (i.e., homes are valued less than the average household can afford). If a community's ratio is 3 or greater, the housing stock is considered to be unaffordable.

Based on 2024 housing forecasts, the Regional Housing Affordability Ratio was 3.8, indicating that the median home value is unaffordable for those households earning the Region's median household income or less.

## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY RATIO 2024



## 2024 Housing Stats

(per ESRI Forecast for WCWRPC Counties):

### Total Housing Units:

**199,454**

### % Occupied Housing Units:

**90.3% - 180,048 units**

### % Owner-Occupied Housing Units:

**65.4% - 130,395 units**

### % Renter-Occupied Housing Units:

**24.9% - 49,653 units**

Median owner-occupied home value ranges from **\$197,612** (Clark County) to **\$419,372** (St. Croix County)

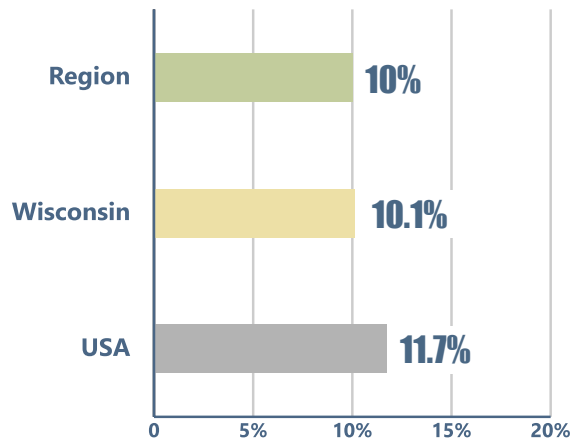
Median gross monthly rent ranges from **\$786** (Clark County) to **\$1,478** (St. Croix County)



# Transportation

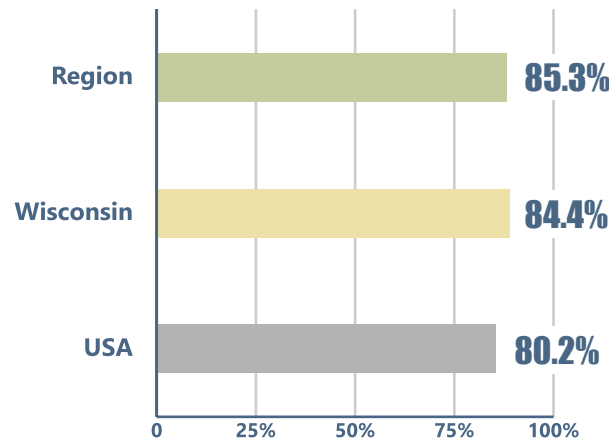
In the Region, transportation patterns reflect a mix of commuting behaviors, with recent data highlighting key trends. Approximately 10% of employed workers now work from home, closely aligning with Wisconsin's rate of 10.1%, though slightly below the national average of 11.7%. Local commute times vary, with most residents relying on driving or carpooling to reach their workplaces. Public transit usage remains limited, reflecting regional infrastructure and preferences. These patterns underscore the need for targeted investments in transportation options to enhance connectivity and accommodate evolving work trends.

WORKED AT HOME  
2018-2022



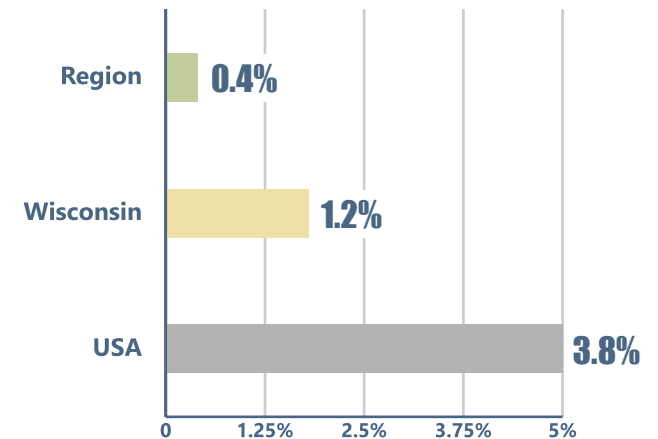
Source: American Community Survey

COMMUTERS DRIVING OR  
CARPOOLING TO WORK  
2018-2022



Source: American Community Survey

COMMUTERS TAKING PUBLIC  
TRANSPORTATION TO WORK  
2018-2022



Source: American Community Survey



**NUMBER OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN THE REGION 189,288**

RESIDENTS LEAVING THE REGION  
EACH DAY FOR WORK  
**72,252**

WORKERS ENTERING THE REGION  
EACH DAY FOR WORK  
**51,094**

RESIDENTS THAT LIVE & WORK  
IN THE REGION  
**138,194**

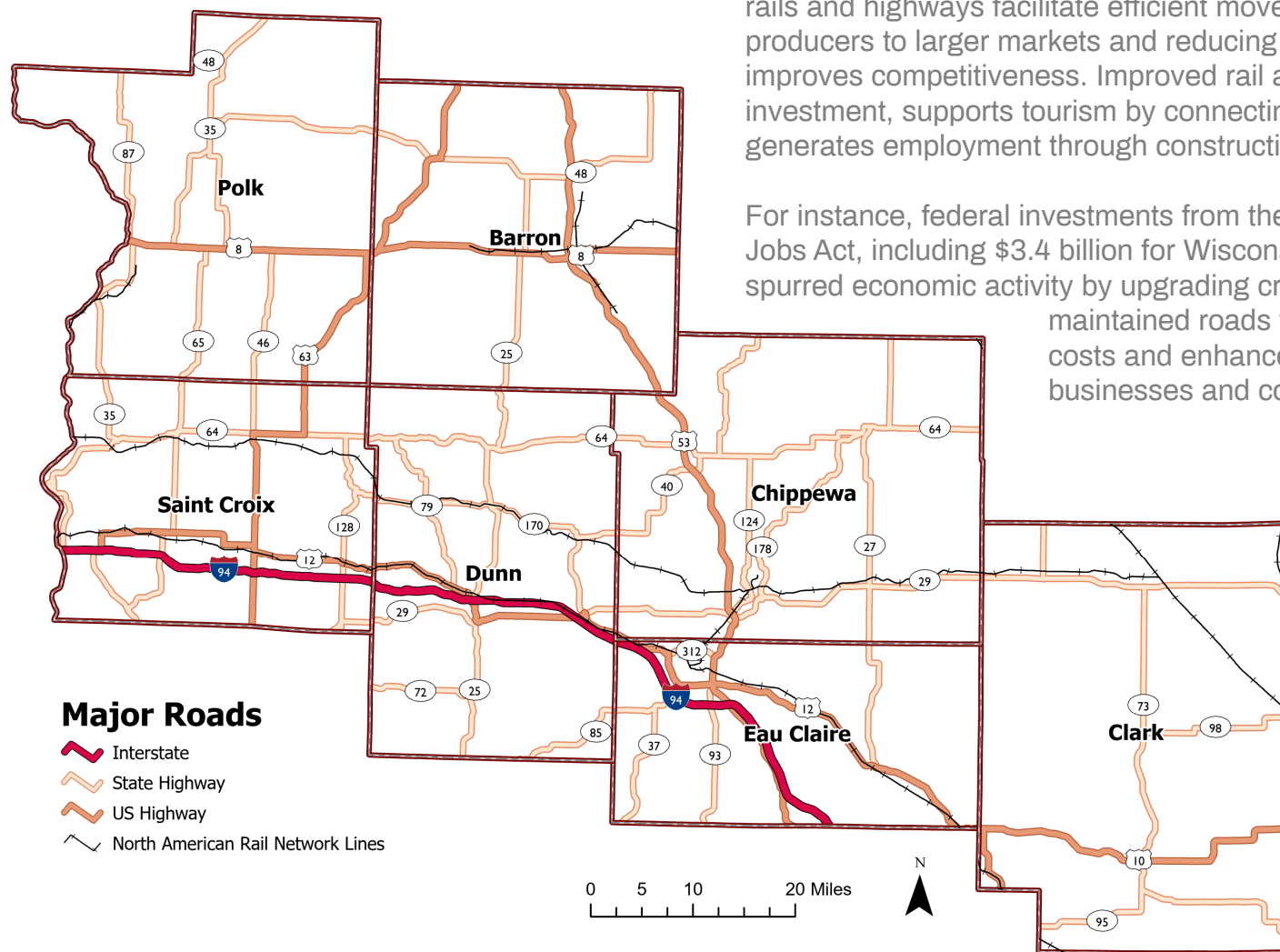
Many workers travel outside of their resident city or county each day for work. In 2022, at least 38.2 percent of residents travelled outside the region for their jobs, as compared to 33.6 percent in 2017.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics.

# Transportation Network

Major road and freight rail networks in Western Wisconsin significantly boost the regional economy by enhancing connectivity and accessibility, particularly for its agricultural and manufacturing sectors. These freight rails and highways facilitate efficient movement of goods, linking rural producers to larger markets and reducing transportation costs, which improves competitiveness. Improved rail and road infrastructure also attracts investment, supports tourism by connecting scenic and historic sites, and generates employment through construction and maintenance projects.

For instance, federal investments from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including \$3.4 billion for Wisconsin's roads and bridges, have spurred economic activity by upgrading critical routes and creating jobs. Well-maintained roads further reduce vehicle operating costs and enhance safety, indirectly supporting local businesses and communities.



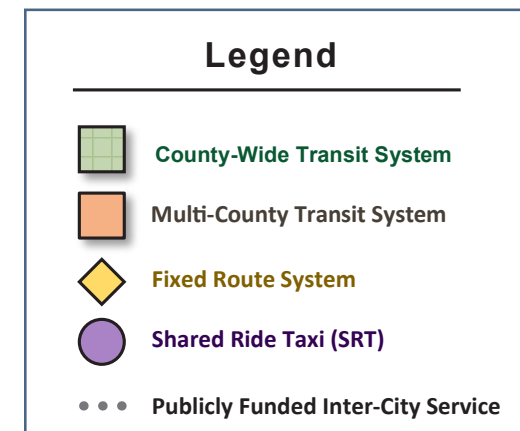
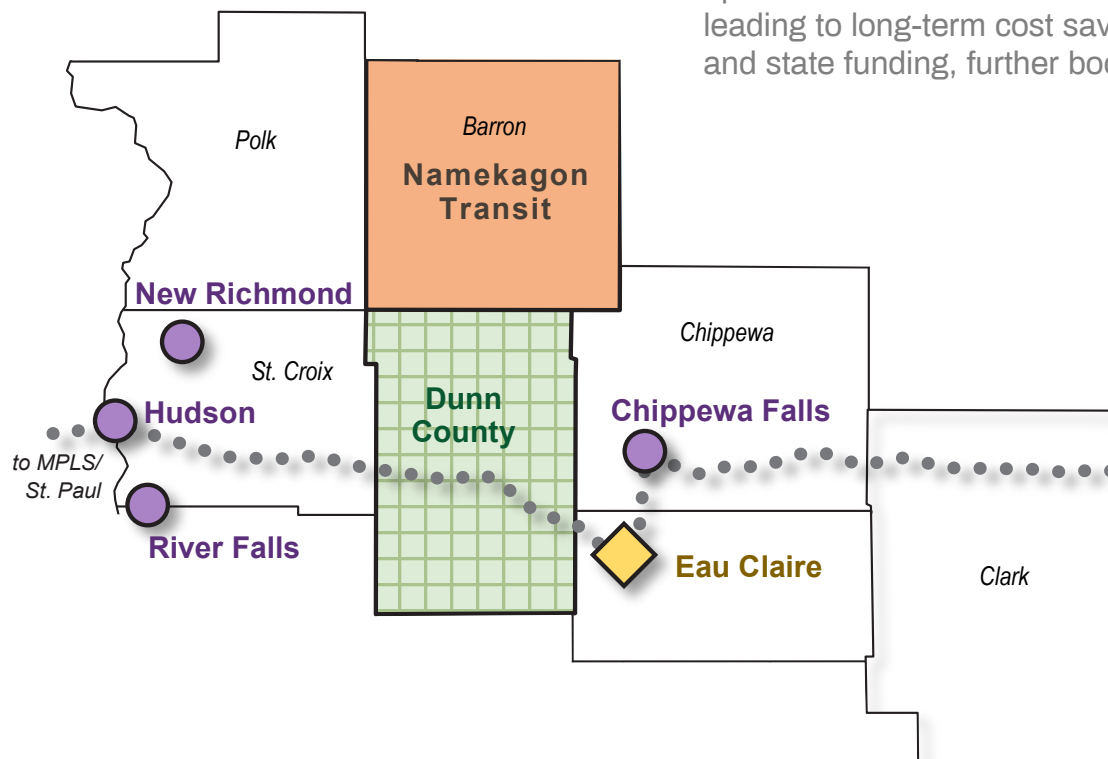




## Public Transit Systems 2025

Public transportation options in western Wisconsin, including county-wide transit, multi-county transit, fixed-route systems, shared-ride taxis, and publicly funded inter-city services, provide significant economic benefits to the region. These services enhance access to employment, healthcare, and education, enabling residents to participate more fully in the workforce and local economy. By reducing reliance on personal vehicles, they lower transportation costs for individuals, freeing up disposable income for other expenses. Businesses benefit from a more reliable workforce and increased customer access, particularly in rural areas where mobility can be a barrier.

Additionally, public transit stimulates local economies by creating jobs in transportation operations and maintenance while reducing traffic congestion and infrastructure wear, leading to long-term cost savings for communities. These systems also attract federal and state funding, further boosting regional economic development.



*This map identifies the general coverage areas of public transit systems within West Central Wisconsin. For specific route information, contact transit systems directly. For Intercity Bus Service, additional information is at:*  
<https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/travel/pub-transit/bus-service.aspx>

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# Income

Median Household Income (MHI) is one of many indicators of the overall prosperity of a region. In West Central Wisconsin, median household income (MHI) grew from \$66,758 in 2011–2015 to \$74,740 in 2019–2023, reflecting economic progress. This 12% increase aligns closely with state and national trends, where Wisconsin’s MHI rose from \$71,544 to \$77,940 (9%) and the U.S. MHI increased from \$72,257 to \$80,894 (12%).

The rising MHI in the region signals enhanced economic vitality, enabling households to afford higher living standards, invest in education, and contribute to local businesses. This growth fosters greater economic resilience, supports community development, and attracts new industries, positioning West Central Wisconsin as a competitive and thriving region.

## CHANGES IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (MHI)

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2015 Five-Year Estimate (INFLATION ADJUSTED)

Regional MHI - **\$66,758**

Wisconsin MHI - **\$71,544**

U.S. MHI - **\$72,257**

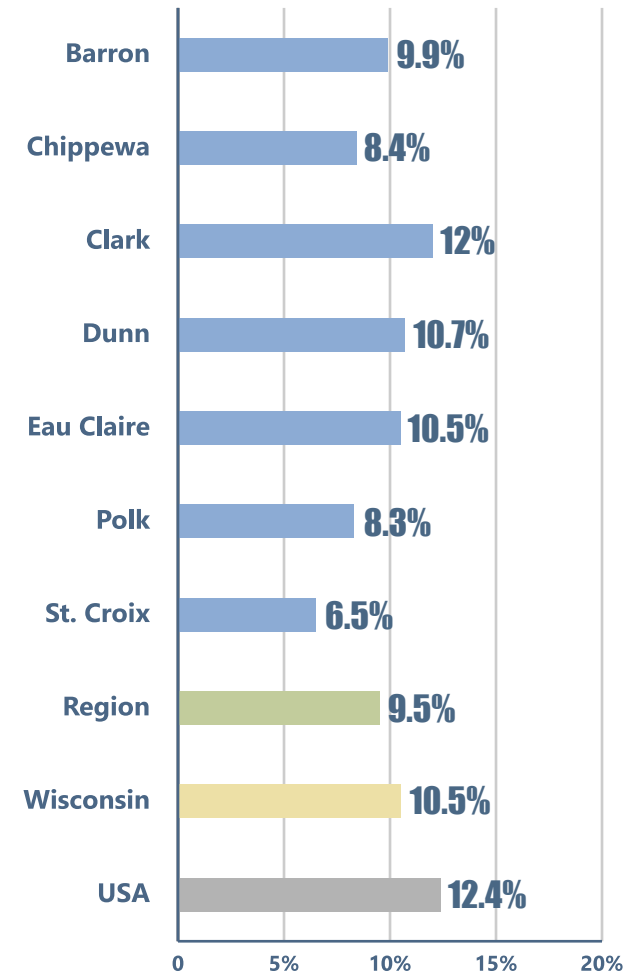
### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2023 Five-Year Estimate (INFLATION ADJUSTED)

Regional MHI - **\$74,740** **\$7,982** (Difference from 2015)

Wisconsin MHI - **\$77,940** **\$6,396**

U.S. MHI - **\$80,894** **\$8,637**

## PERCENT BELOW POVERTY 2019-2023



Sources: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2011-2015 & 2019-2023

Source: U.S. Census

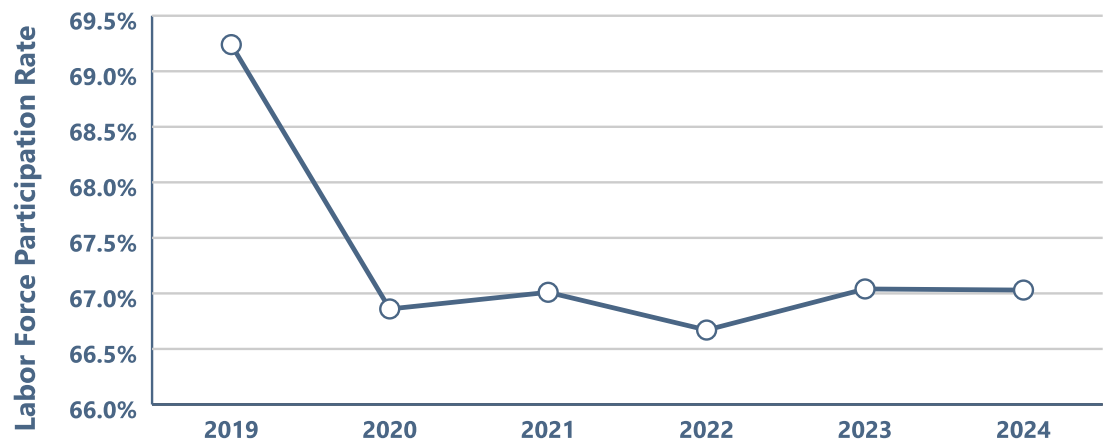
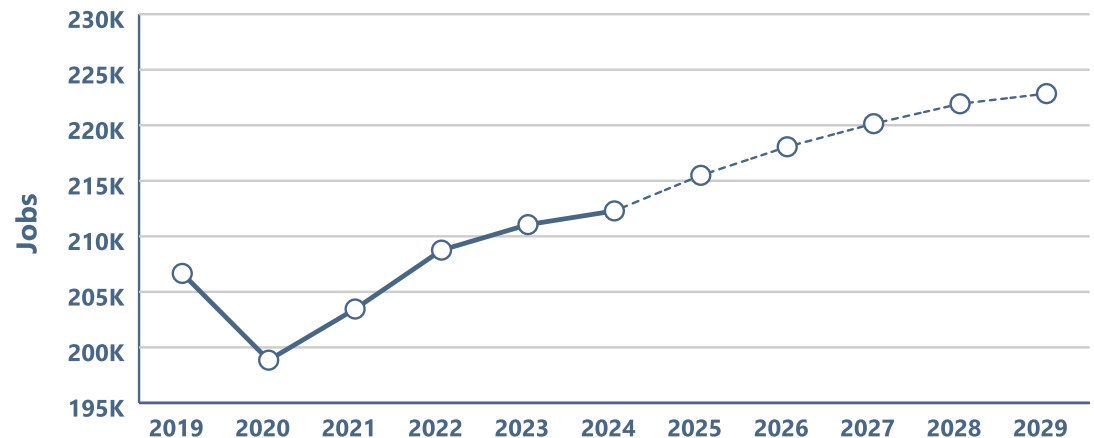


# Employment - 2019 to 2024

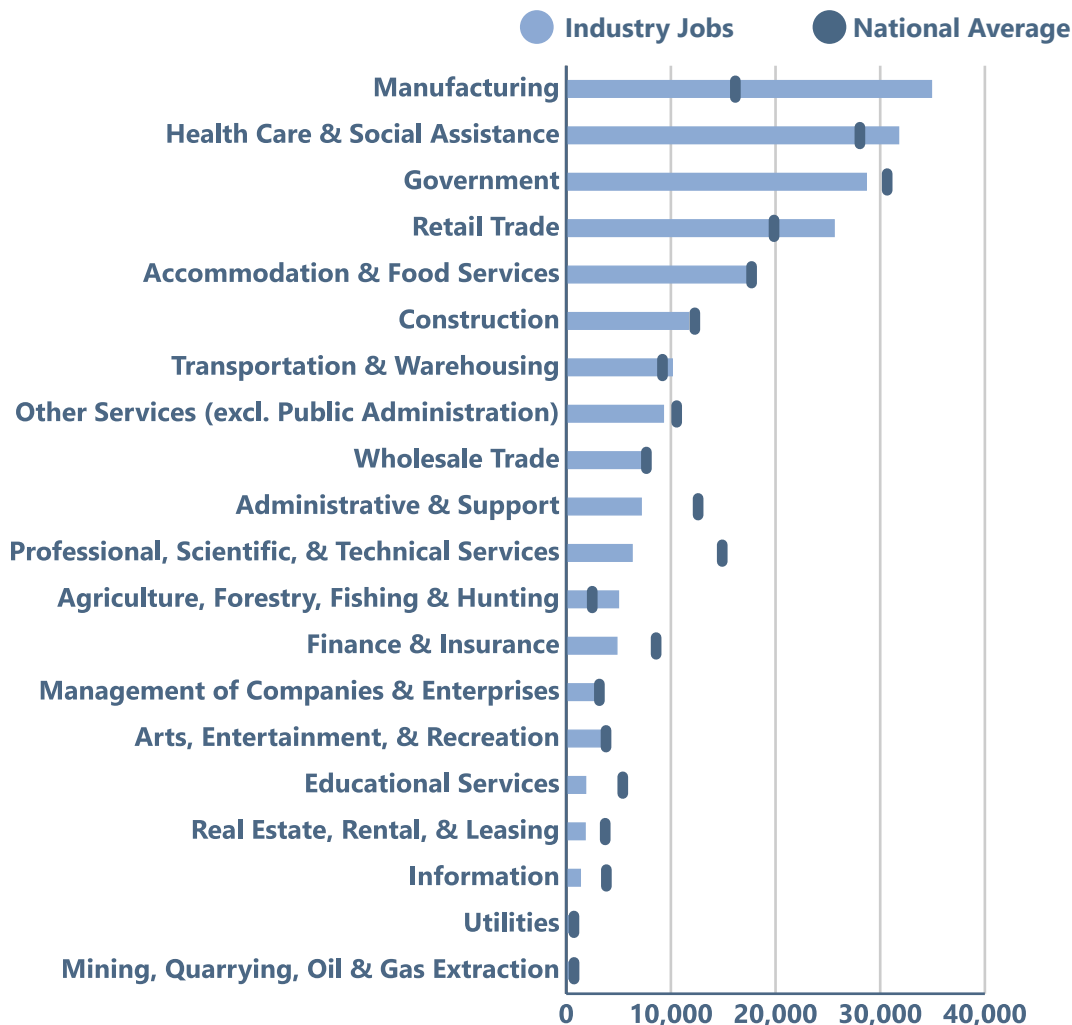
The economic situation of the Region is similar to what many individuals and families are experiencing across the state of Wisconsin and the U.S. As demand for workers continues to increase, employers are concerned about the inability to attract talent and workers in general. As Baby Boomers exit the workforce, this life cycle event is expected to complicate employers' ability to find workers and talent, which extends beyond the Region, Wisconsin, and the U.S. as a whole.

From 2019 to 2024, jobs increased by 3.0% in West Central WI RPC from 206,637 to 212,920. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 4.1% by 1.1%. As the number of jobs increased, the labor force participation rate during the same period has remained between 66 and 67 percent, which is higher than the national average during the same time (between 61 and 63 percent).

As the Region looks to improve employment prospects for its communities and residents, the most critical undertaking should be on attracting and retaining talent. Investing in training and attracting a talented workforce provides a competitive advantage in producing higher-margin products and also raises the quality of life in communities.



# Largest Industries - 2019 to 2024



In West Central Wisconsin, the economy is driven by a wide range of industries, with manufacturing leading as the largest sector, employing 34,897 individuals. Health Care and Social Assistance follows closely with 31,757 workers, reflecting the region's strong healthcare infrastructure. Government employs 28,673 people, underscoring its role as a stable economic pillar. Retail Trade, with 25,599 employees, and Accommodation and Food Services, with 17,201, highlight the region's vibrant consumer and service-oriented economy.

Other notable sectors include Construction (11,675), Transportation and Warehousing (10,135), and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (4,993), which reflect the region's industrial and rural character. Smaller but significant industries such as Wholesale Trade, Professional Services, and Finance and Insurance further contribute to the economic variety in the region.

Source: 2-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast





# Largest Occupations - 2019 to 2024

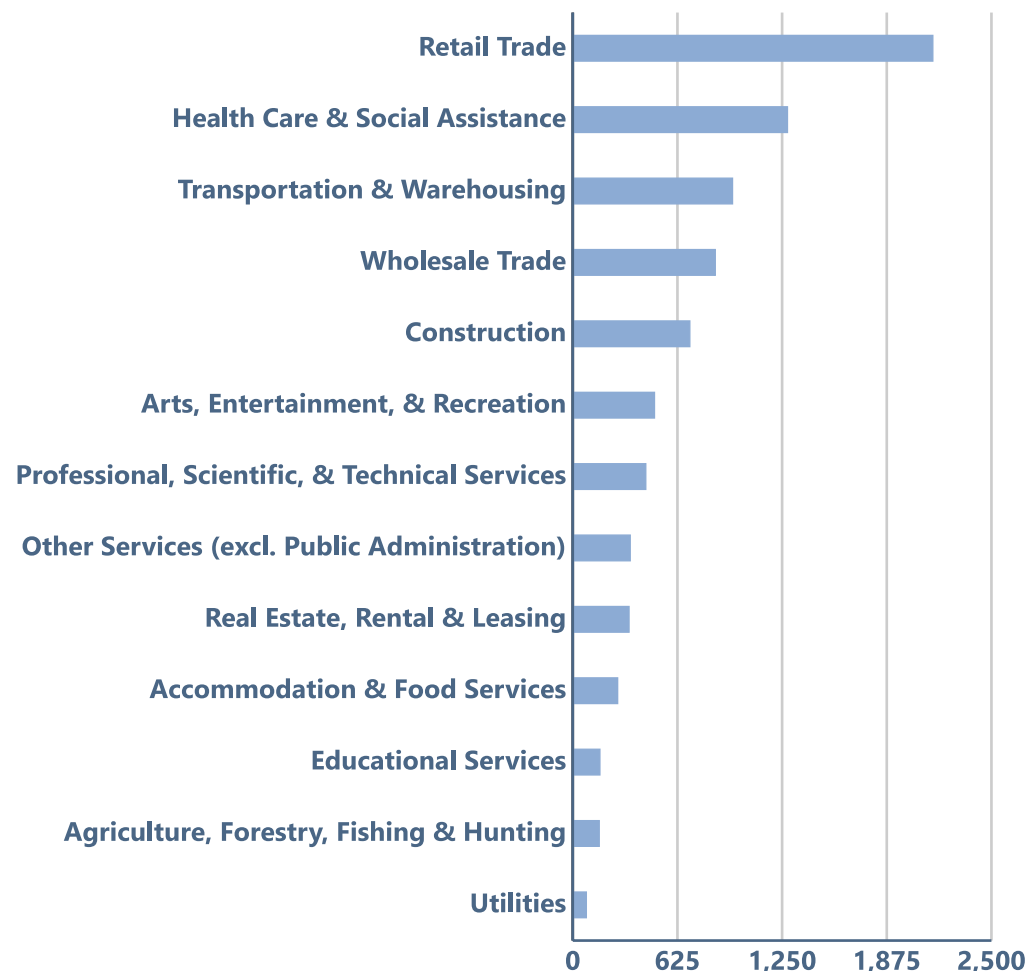


In West Central Wisconsin, the occupational landscape is led by Production occupations, employing 23,667 individuals, reflecting the region's strong manufacturing base. Office and Administrative Support follows with 22,387 workers, supporting the administrative needs of various sectors. Transportation and Material Moving, with 21,265 employees, and Sales and Related occupations, with 19,415, highlight the region's active logistics and retail sectors. Food Preparation and Serving Related occupations employ 18,475 individuals, underscoring the importance of hospitality.

Other significant occupations include Educational Instruction and Library (12,984), Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (12,767), and Management (11,688), which demonstrate the region's robust education, healthcare, and leadership sectors. Additional key occupations such as Healthcare Support (10,137) and Construction and Extraction (9,583) further illustrate the varied economic activity in the region.

Source: 2-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast

# Top Growing Industries - 2019 to 2024



The top growing industries in West Central Wisconsin are significantly shaping the region's economic landscape. Retail Trade leads with a growth of 2,150 jobs, reflecting strong consumer demand and commercial activity. Health Care and Social Assistance, with 1,282 new jobs, underscores the region's expanding healthcare needs and infrastructure. Transportation and Warehousing, growing by 954 jobs, and Wholesale Trade, with 851, highlight the region's increasing role in logistics and distribution. Construction, adding 699 jobs, supports infrastructure development, while Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (488 jobs) and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (436 jobs) indicate a varied economy with rising demand for creative and specialized services.

Other Services (343 jobs), Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (336 jobs), and Accommodation and Food Services (268 jobs) further contribute to economic vitality, alongside smaller but notable growth in Educational Services (162 jobs), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (158 jobs), and Utilities (81 jobs), collectively driving job creation and economic resilience in the region.

Source: 2-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast



# Top Growing Occupations - 2019 to 2024



The top growing occupations in West Central Wisconsin are significantly bolstering the region's economic vitality. Transportation and Material Moving leads with a growth of 2,067 jobs, reflecting the region's expanding logistics and distribution sectors. Management occupations, with 2,057 new jobs, indicate a rising demand for leadership roles across industries. Business and Financial Operations, growing by 1,506 jobs, and Computer and Mathematical occupations, with 1,011, highlight the increasing need for specialized and technical expertise.

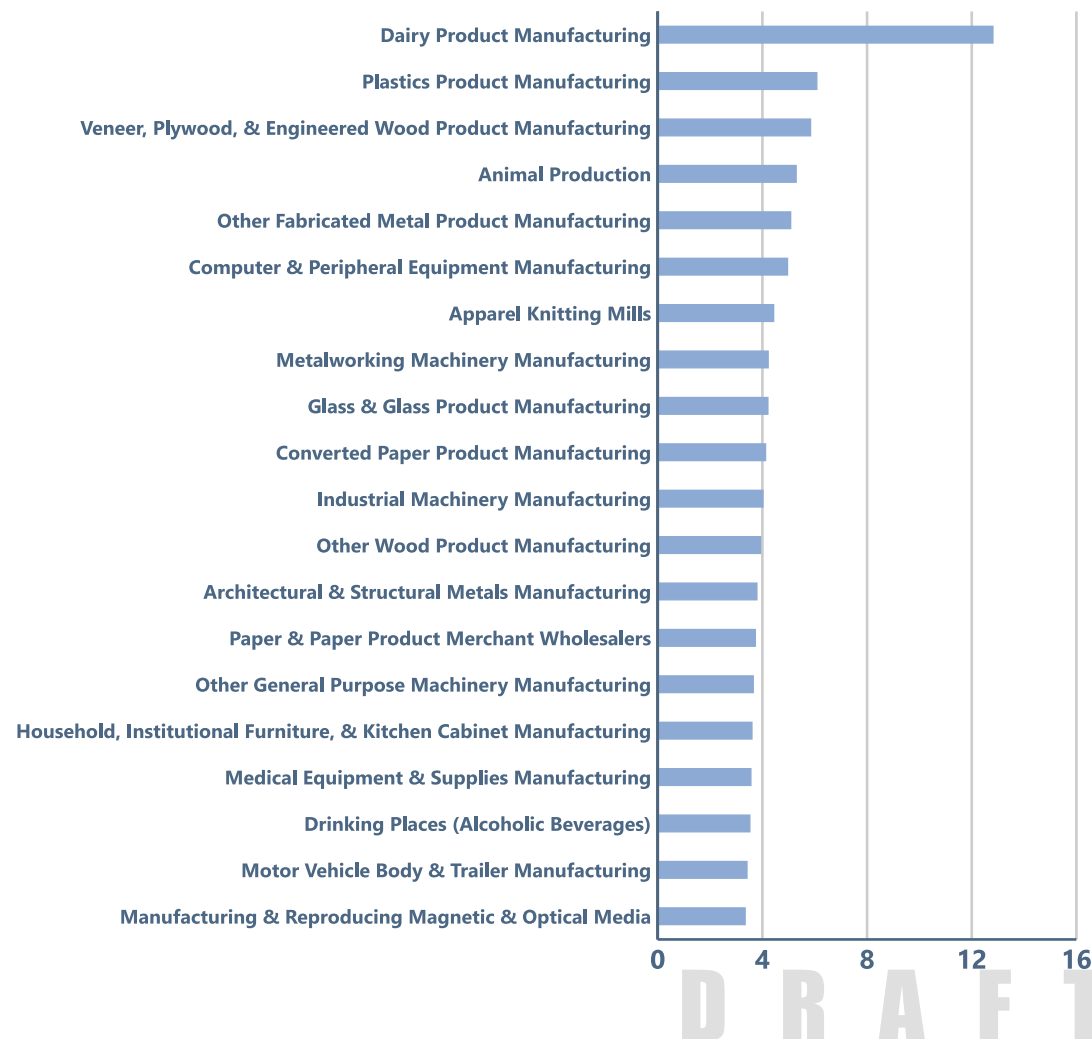
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical occupations, adding 848 jobs, and Community and Social Service, with 451, underscore the region's growing healthcare and support systems. Educational Instruction and Library (337 jobs), Healthcare Support (311 jobs), and Installation, Maintenance, and Repair (305 jobs) further contribute to economic growth, alongside Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance (272 jobs), Construction and Extraction (191 jobs), and Food Preparation and Serving Related (144 jobs), collectively driving job creation and supporting the region's broad economic landscape.

Source: 2-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast

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# Top Industry Employment Concentration - 2019 to 2024

(also referred to as Location Quotient, is used here to identify unique industries)



West Central Wisconsin exhibits a strong industry employment concentration, particularly in manufacturing and agriculture. Dairy Product Manufacturing leads with a location quotient of 12.81, reflecting a highly specialized regional strength.

Other key industries include Plastics Product Manufacturing (6.08), Veneer, Plywood, and Engineered Wood Product Manufacturing (5.84), and Animal Production (5.29), showcasing the region's robust manufacturing and agricultural base.

Additional high-concentration sectors include Other Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing (5.08), Computer and Peripheral Equipment Manufacturing (4.96), and various machinery and wood product industries, all with location quotients above 3.5, underscoring the region's economic specialization in these areas.

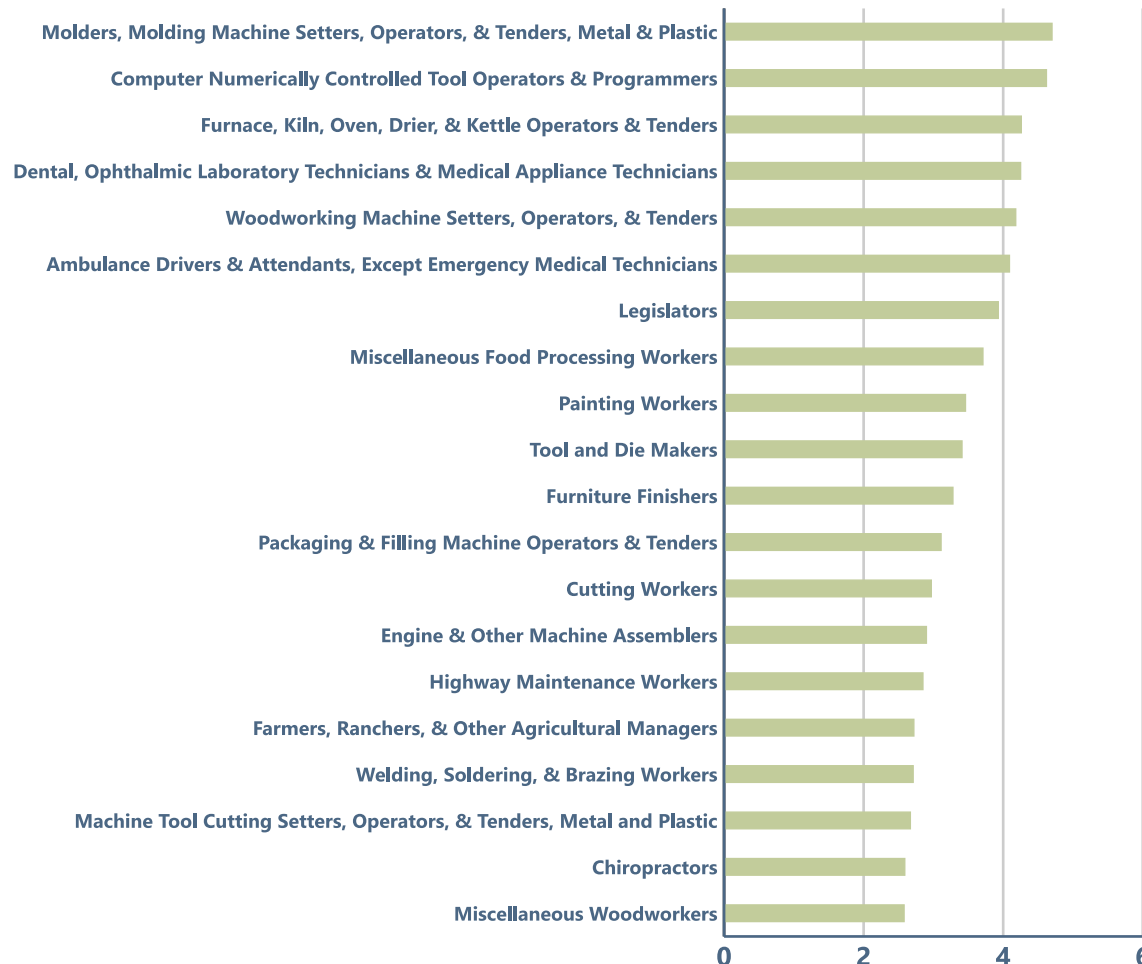
Source: 4-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast





# Top Occupation Employment Concentration - 2019 to 2024

(also referred to as Location Quotient, is used here to identify unique occupations)



West Central Wisconsin demonstrates strong occupational employment concentration in specialized manufacturing and technical roles. Molders and Molding Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic lead with a location quotient of 4.7, followed closely by Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Operators and Programmers (4.62).

Other high-concentration occupations include Furnace, Kiln, Oven, Drier, and Kettle Operators and Tenders (4.26), Dental and Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians (4.25), and Woodworking Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders (4.18).

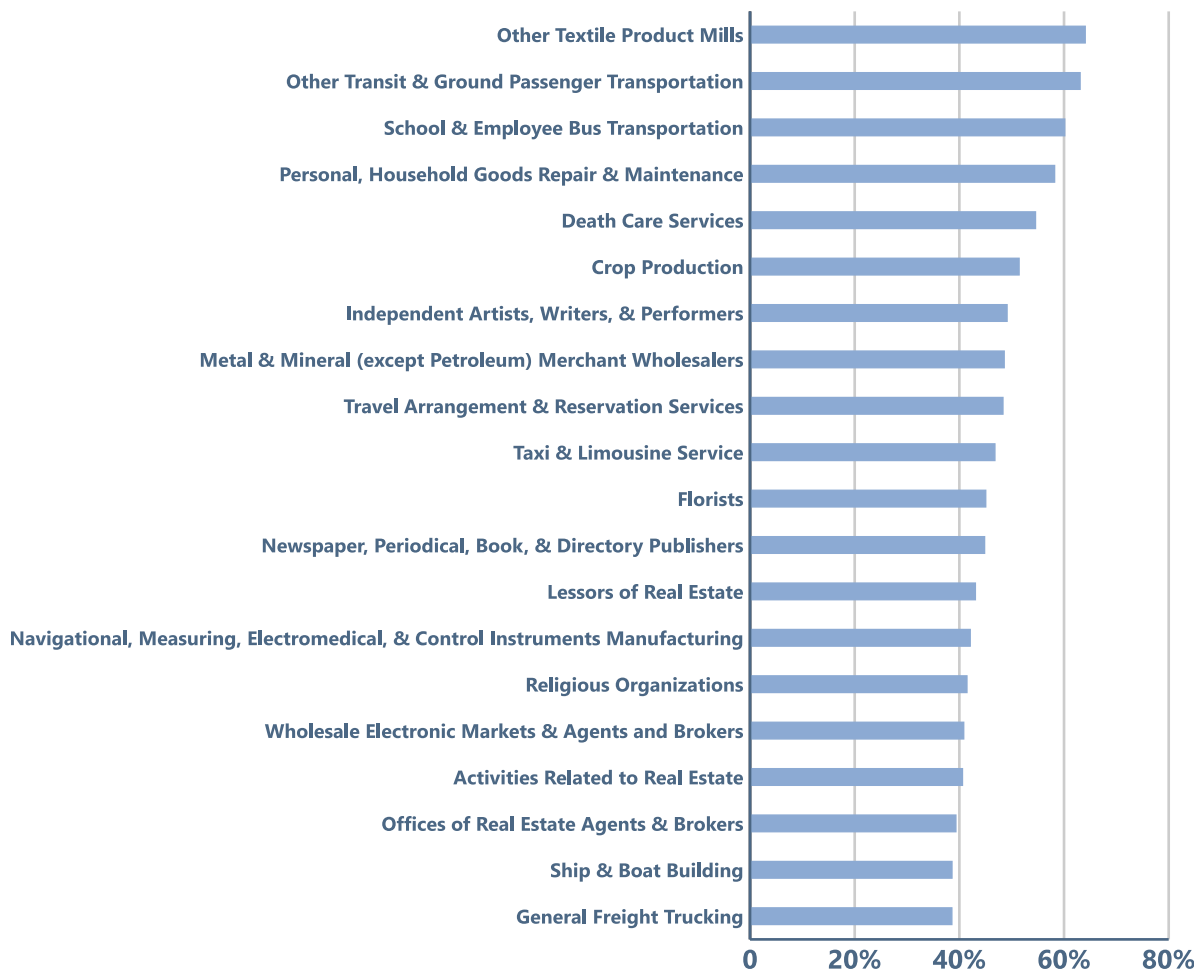
Additional notable occupations, such as Miscellaneous Food Processing Workers (3.71), Tool and Die Makers (3.41), and Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers (2.72), reflect the region's specialized manufacturing and agricultural workforce.

Source: 4-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast

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# Aging Industries - 2019 to 2024

(industries facing a higher rate of job vacancies in the near future)



In West Central Wisconsin, several industries face significant aging workforce challenges, with a high percentage of older workers nearing retirement. Other Textile Product Mills lead with 64.05% of workers at or near retirement age, followed by Other Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation (63.07%) and School and Employee Bus Transportation (60.14%), indicating potential labor shortages in these sectors. Personal and Household Goods Repair and Maintenance (58.20%) and Death Care Services (54.55%) also show high concentrations of older workers. Crop Production (51.42%), Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers (49.12%), and Metal and Mineral Merchant Wholesalers (48.57%) further highlight the aging workforce in agriculture and niche industries.

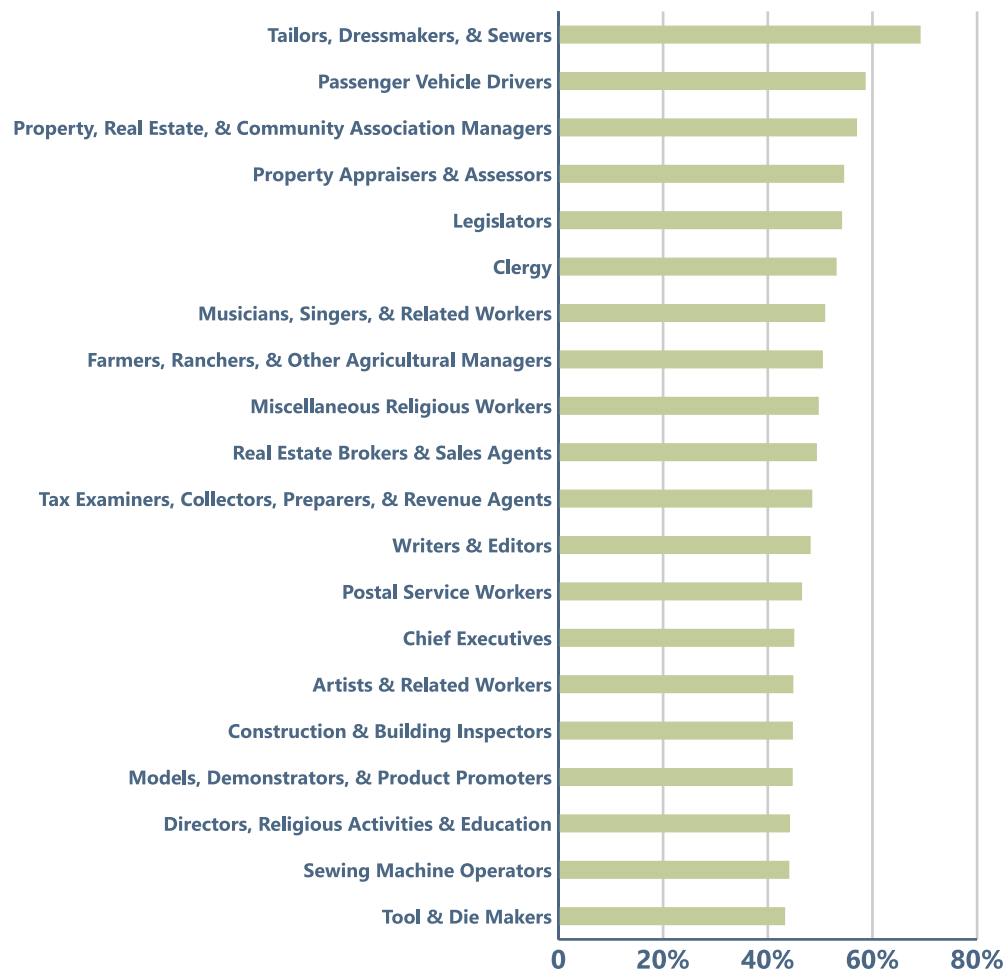
Additional sectors like Newspaper, Periodical, Book, and Directory Publishers (44.82%) and General Freight Trucking (38.57%) face similar challenges, signaling a need for workforce transition planning across these industries.

Source: 4-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast



# Aging Occupations - 2019 to 2024

(occupations facing a higher rate of job vacancies in the near future)



In West Central Wisconsin several occupations face challenges from an aging workforce nearing retirement. Tailors, Dressmakers, and Sewers lead with 69.08% of workers at or near retirement age, followed by Passenger Vehicle Drivers (58.58%) and Property, Real Estate, and Community Association Managers (56.92%), indicating potential labor shortages in these roles. Other aging occupations include Property Appraisers and Assessors (54.47%), Legislators (54.08%), and Clergy (53.03%), reflecting high concentrations of older workers in specialized and community-focused roles.

Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers (50.40%), Musicians, Singers, and Related Workers (50.85%), and Real Estate Brokers and Sales Agents (49.26%) further highlight the aging workforce in agriculture, arts, and real estate.

Additional occupations like Postal Service Workers (46.43%) and Tool and Die Makers (43.19%) underscore the need for workforce planning to address impending retirements.

Source: 4-Digit NAICS Codes, Lightcast

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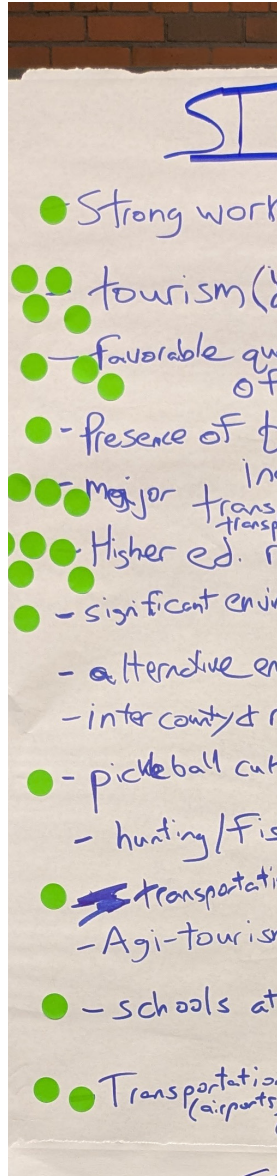
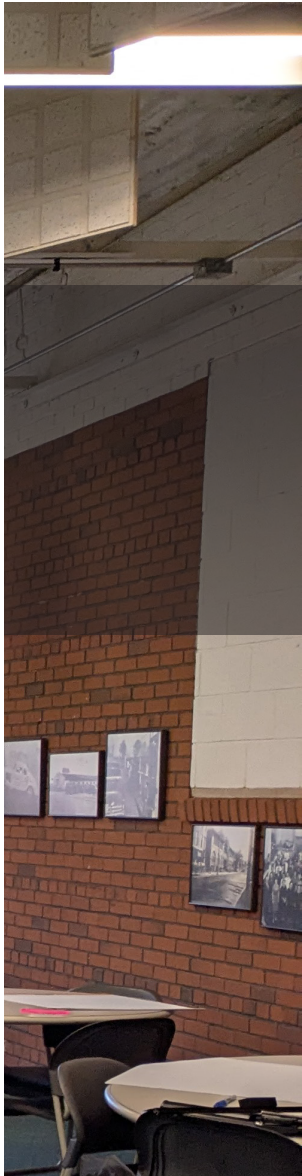


# SECTION III. SWOT ANALYSIS



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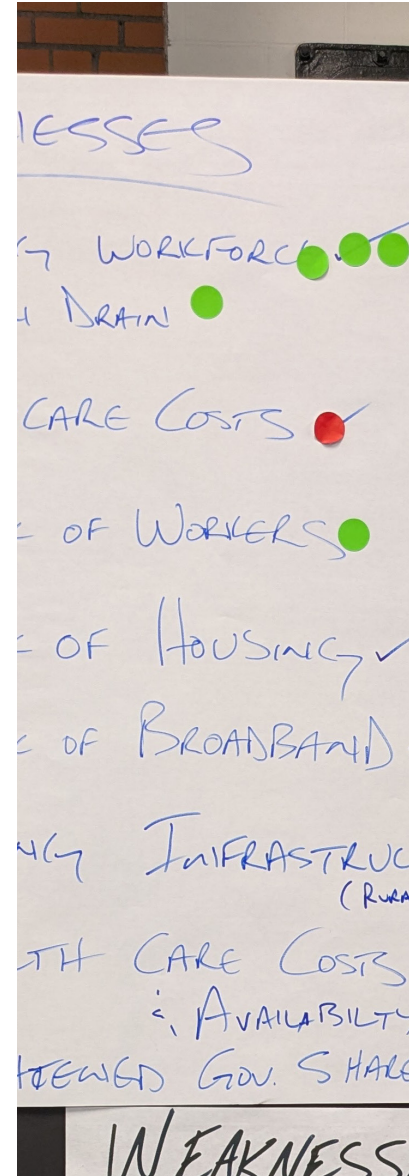




# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This section provides a summary of the West Central Region's SWOT analysis. The analysis combines information from a variety of different data sources including the Summary Background (Section I), tours of the Region, WCWRPC staff observations and the completion of a SWOT exercise with the CEDS Steering Committee. Online surveys were also completed by the Steering Committee and outside partners, with representatives from the areas of economic development, healthcare, workforce development, and education, to name a few.

From this information, the regional priorities were developed for a five year period from 2025 to 2030. This includes the development of goals, objectives, and action plan (key actions) presented in Section IV.



## WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN - SWOT ANALYSIS

### Strengths

- Higher education resources/systems
- Tourism
- Favorable quality of life
- Major transportation routes/transportation expansion
- Strong chambers/metros
- Surface waters
- Transportation options
- Tax Increment District (TID), financing
- Strong work ethic
- Presence of business incubators
- Significant, abundant environmental and natural resources; rural scenery
- Recreation assets
- Infrastructure maintenance
- Schools at all levels
- Top level medical care
- Proximity to draw new business/industry
- Regional interest in housing studies, including housing first initiatives
- Technical assistance for entrepreneurship development
- Varied economic base (manufacturing, service, healthcare, agriculture, tourism)

### Weaknesses

- Lack of child care
- Aging workforce
- Workforce shortages
- Aging population/stagnation
- Aging resources/infrastructure
- Cost of living vs. stagnant wages
- High cost of healthcare
- Shrinking agriculture
- Poverty, unhoused
- Lack of housing
- Low paying jobs
- Lack of business parks
- Poor/damaged water quality
- Lack of comprehensive recycling programs
- Untrained workforce
- Higher tax rates
- Economic knowledge deficit
- Lack of local public transportation in most communities
- Heterogeneous counties/communities have different priorities



## WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN - SWOT ANALYSIS

### Opportunities

- Public-private partnerships
- Shovel-ready sites in numerous areas in our region
- Recruitment opportunities with technical colleges, participation in economic development
- Support of public officials and planning organizations for economic development
- Focus on alternative energy, build on resources
- Area is less vulnerable to the impacts of changing/long-term weather patterns relative to other regions
- Education
- Need for unified media source for economic development messaging
- Expanded rail
- Expanded broadband
- Recognition by smaller communities that they may be a part of the housing solution
- Outdoor recreation amenities
- Data centers
- New regional experts and resources
- Available land, resources
- Suitable land for modular housing
- Transportation advocacy groups

### Threats

- Deteriorating infrastructure, especially bridges & rural roads
- Declining availability of rural health services
- Declining state and federal funding support to local governments for economic development
- Government overspending
- Loss of workforce to Twin Cities
- Poor understanding of finance
- Aging population/workforce
- Declining funding, federal uncertainty
- Rising costs, especially infrastructure, energy, education
- Cost of living, property valuation
- Weather patterns/trends
- Unfunded government mandates
- Lower school enrollment
- PFAS, micro-plastic pollution
- Economic downturn/recession
- Artificial Intelligence
- Political climate
- Fading small towns
- Economic development competition between communities
- Farm succession planning





# SECTION IV. REGIONAL PRIORITIES 2025-2030

D R A F T



## TOP 10 COMMON THEMES FROM ONLINE SURVEYS

### Questions

### Strategy Committee Themes

### Stakeholder Themes

Based on your professional opinion, what is the most important thing to consider in developing regional goals for the 2025 CEDS?

- Workforce
- Housing
- Rural Environment
- Economic Growth
- Demographic Shifts
- Education
- Agriculture
- Youth Engagement
- Public/Private Partnerships
- County Administration

- Housing
- Workforce
- Economic Development
- Business Attraction/Retention
- Demographic Shifts
- Regional Collaboration
- Infrastructure
- Child Care
- Quality of Life
- Regional Business Fund (RBF)

In addition to the standard social and economic data or information typically included in the CEDS, what other big issues or topics would like to see addressed in a more specific way?

- Tourism
- Healthcare
- Workforce Issues
- Aging Population
- Economic Development
- Education
- Brain Drain
- Agriculture
- Local Pride
- Township Challenges

- Tourism
- Industrial Development
- Resiliency
- Agriculture
- Economic Development
- Child Care
- Energy/Power Demand
- Quality of Life
- Healthcare Access
- Strategic Coordination

# CEDS Goals, Objectives & Action Plan

Leading from the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles, the Regional Goals establish a strategic direction for economic development work in the 7-county region for the rest of the decade. These goals are characterized under two regional frameworks: People-Centric Goals and Place-Centric Goals.

People-Centric Goals focus on activities that attract workers and businesses to the region, while also ensuring workers have the skills that employers need. Place-Centric Goals emphasize infrastructure and business investments required to move the region forward in the years and decades to come.

## PEOPLE CENTRIC

The People-Centric framework includes Goals in 3 areas:

- » *Business & Worker Attraction*
- » *Workforce Training*
- » *Quality of Place*



**GOAL #1: Business & Worker Attraction** – *Support the recruitment and retention of businesses and workers through initiatives that strengthen or stabilize housing, childcare, education and healthcare.*

Like many other parts of the country, the West Central Region has faced a shortage of workers in key industries due to factors such as demographic change, advancements in technology, and competition with other regions. A 2025 analysis by the University of Wisconsin-Extension indicates that Wisconsin has been facing labor shortages since early 2017. Although the COVID-19 pandemic created a short-term spike in unemployment, the longer-term trends point to having more job openings compared to the numbers of unemployed. This reality impacts the ability of businesses to recruit the workforce they need, and in turn, can determine whether businesses will be able to remain in the Region, much less open new operations.

While the Region may have limited control over some factors influencing workforce and business recruitment & retention - such as statewide and national demographic trends - it still has meaningful opportunities to shape its economic future. One important way to do this is by investing in key amenities that enhance the Region's appeal to both workers and employers. In particular, targeted investments in housing, childcare, education and healthcare need to be made at levels that attract and retain talent and businesses in the West Central Region.

D R A F T



Overall, initiatives that maximize support for these amenities will strengthen the economic development fabric of the Region, and therefore, help to increase the Region's attractiveness to businesses and workers.

## **Objectives**

- » Work with communities and local organizations to assess needs in the areas of housing, childcare, education and healthcare
- » Identify roles and responsibilities that key stakeholders have in furthering the development of housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources
- » Partner with other entities to prioritize projects that make housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources more available in the Region

## **Key Actions**

- » Work with partners to inventory currently-available resources and services that meet needs related to housing, childcare, education and healthcare and to identify gaps therein
- » Participate in advocacy efforts to highlight the need for housing, childcare, education and healthcare-related amenities in the Region
- » Stay up to date on potential funding resources for projects that further develop housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources and provide

relevant information to communities as requested

- » Conduct studies or formulate plans, as appropriate, that make recommendations for strategic directions to take in order to maximize the availability of housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources

**GOAL#2: Workforce Training – Focus on strategies to increase the likelihood that workers in the Region have the skills required to meet employer needs in a 21st century economy.**

A 2023 report from the National Skills Coalition, in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, found that, nationally, 92% of jobs require digital skills; however, one-third of workers do not possess these skills. This fact emphasizes to regions throughout the country that workforce training should be at the top of their economic development priority lists.

The West Central Region can make progress in this critical area by capitalizing on one of the Region's strengths, which is its number and variety of educational opportunities. Notably, the Region is home to three universities and two vocational/technical college systems. With the presence of these important educational resources, the Region has a unique opportunity to continue to make investments that ensure its workforce has the skills necessary for the jobs of tomorrow. At the same time, the Region will become more economically resilient by workers broadening their skill sets.

As technology advances rapidly in fields like robotics or Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), keeping the skills of workers up to date can help local companies remain competitive throughout all economic sectors. To ensure these skills are acquired and utilized, the EDD will explore ways to deepen its collaboration with the universities and colleges of the Region, and therefore, bring their resources to bear in building the skills of the workforce over the next 5 years. In addition, the EDD will continue to prioritize and grow its relationship with workforce development organizations in the Region, such as the West Central Works (Workforce Development Board), to make new opportunities available to expand a highly-skilled workforce.

### **Objectives**

- » Explore potential partnerships with universities and technical colleges that would meet the needs of those institutions to train the workforce of the future
- » Increase engagement with organizations, such as the West Central Works (Workforce Development Board), to help develop a highly-skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers
- » Target workforce development efforts by working with partners to develop an assessment of the most sought-after skills in the Region

### **Key Actions**

- » Coordinate strategy sessions with universities, colleges, and workforce-related organizations to determine training needs in the Region

- » Conduct data analyses to support the workforce training efforts of partners
- » Assist the West Central Works (Workforce Development Board) in reaching its workforce training goals by helping it to identify grant opportunities and apply for funds with a view toward reducing dependency on federal funds
- » Collaborate with partners to determine the structure of a workforce skills assessment

**GOAL #3: Quality of Place – Engage with partners to highlight and strengthen amenities that showcase the Region as an ideal location to live, work and play.**

Quality of Place could be described as the attributes of a location that make it a desirable place to live or visit. Such attributes may include economic factors, but also other amenities that add value to the experience of being there.

For West Central Wisconsin, one of those factors is its abundance of outdoor recreation amenities. Natural resources such as rivers, lakes, streams, and wooded areas, along with numerous trails for hiking, biking and other pursuits, offer users a landscape of unique beauty with bountiful opportunities for exploration and learning.

The Region is also well-known for a wide variety of arts,



entertainment and other festive opportunities, with numerous concerts, fairs, carnivals, festivals and sporting events throughout the year. In the eastern part of the Region, major music events include the Blue Ox Music Festival and Country Jam, while the west features River Falls Days, a family-friendly festival over 4 days every summer. These events are but a few examples of the cultural offerings the Region has available on an annual basis.

These amenities and events combine with an affordable standard of living to make the Region attractive to residents and visitors alike. The EDD will seek opportunities to strengthen these assets and to broaden their appeal to a wide variety of users, both local to and more distant from the Region. Working in tandem with the “Business and Worker Attraction” goal above, the “Quality of Place” goal aims to build upon the Region’s existing amenities to further entice economic development throughout the EDD.

## Objectives

- » Determine individual sectors that need specific support to cultivate the Region’s tourism economy
- » Participate in efforts to target recreational and other assets for investment that enhance the Region’s “Quality of Place”
- » Explore linkages between “Quality of Place” amenities in the Region and businesses that could support those resources

## Key Actions

- » Continue planning work in support of local recreational amenities, such as county and community outdoor recreation plans, and county bicycle/pedestrian plans
- » Support the efforts of partners to develop a regional “brand” that will facilitate investments in outdoor recreation amenities
- » Participate in the stakeholder group that will implement the 2025 Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan to support the development of “Quality of Place” amenities and identify related business sectors that should be targeted for growth
- » Study possible strategies to uplift the agri-tourism industry

## PLACE CENTRIC

**The Place-Centric framework includes Goals in 3 areas:**

- » *Infrastructure*
- » *Energy & Innovation*
- » *Business Support & Development*





**GOAL#4: Infrastructure – Maintain involvement in efforts to expand or improve the Region's infrastructure as a means to entice investment and development.**

Fundamental to the strength of any regional economy is the quality of its infrastructure. Such infrastructure is the collection of roads, rail systems, transit services, airports, sewer and water systems, stormwater systems, broadband services, lighting and other similar appurtenances that allow workers to live their lives with relative ease and businesses to function efficiently. While infrastructure may not always be top of mind when people go about their daily affairs, they know when infrastructure is absent or not working well.

According to the Wisconsin Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2024 Infrastructure Report Card, Wisconsin received a C+ grade for its infrastructure. Though this grade is not out of line with the rest of the country, it still shows a need for improvement. At the regional level, West Central Wisconsin has had well-developed infrastructure for many decades; however, time has taken a toll on its usability.

As years pass, more roads and bridges are in need of repair, while water and sewage systems must continually be updated. When it comes to present-day conveniences, such as the availability of broadband, much progress has been made to make this resource more widely available. It is also a key component of the Region's economic resiliency strategy, in that broadband that is accessible will make the Region more

able to recover and/or withstand the effects of economic disruptions and disasters. Still, work must be done to maximize its potential as an economic development amenity and to ensure that pockets of the Region have not been left behind as broadband has expanded in recent years.

As long as WCWRPC has existed, providing support for infrastructure projects has been among its core services. The EDD must continue to help communities implement infrastructure projects to keep the Region competitive in the modern age. Doing so will increase the chance that businesses will choose to locate or expand in the Region and workers will elect to move to or remain in West Central Wisconsin. Moreover, high-quality infrastructure will contribute to the identity of the EDD and will send a signal that the Region is not only a reliable and safe place for business but also a prime location to pursue a career, raise a family, retire, or simply enjoy life.

**Objectives**

- » Partner with communities to update infrastructure necessary to meet local economic development goals
- » Further the development of infrastructure that meets health and safety needs as an economic development strategy
- » Assess next steps to support broadband development in the Region, whether through continued expansion or other initiatives that help maximize its benefits



## **Key Actions**

- » Provide grant application and administration services to communities for infrastructure project development
- » Help communities acquire funding to complete infrastructure projects that protect and strengthen the local workforce, and thereby, allow the Region to become more responsive and resilient in the face of disruptions/disasters, e.g., FEMA Community Safe Rooms
- » Evaluate funding sources for infrastructure projects proposed by communities to determine potential competitiveness
- » Continue to work with the West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance to formulate strategies that optimize the installation and use of broadband throughout the Region

**GOAL #5: Energy & Innovation – Assist regional efforts to meet the energy needs of the future and to invest in innovation that will chart the course of business development and the workforce in the decades to come.**

Rapid changes in technology have brought unprecedented convenience to businesses and consumers in recent years. People can access information instantly, work remotely and carry out tasks with A.I. that previous generations could do only manually.

With these changes come increasing needs for energy; however, many communities are not ready to accommodate the energy demands of the future. One prominent example of this reality is the increasing prevalence of data centers. While data centers have the potential to be an economic boon for the Region, they also place pressure on utilities to deliver the energy that is needed for data centers to function.

Indeed, meeting the energy needs of the future will be critical for the Region to stay competitive. The Region must also account for the changing nature of work and industry itself. Businesses, and even agricultural producers, are turning to advanced technologies, such as automation or robotics, to increase efficiency and productivity. In particular, A.I. is expected to significantly shape what the economy of tomorrow will look like and even how people will work. While A.I. and other new technologies will help businesses get things done more quickly and potentially more affordably than ever before, what other impacts will they have? For example, what innovations will they lead to? What do these changes portend for the future of the labor force?

The EDD will work with partners over the next 5 years to help position the Region to meet increasing energy demands and to take advantage of innovation and opportunities brought about by technological change. Certainly, the coming period will be a time of exploration to determine how benefits can be maximized for both businesses and workers in the Region. While solutions may not always be clear, collaboration across sectors and keeping up to date with advancements will increase the chances for long-term success region-wide.

Engaging in this work will also help the Region to improve its economic resilience by putting a focus on growing sectors of the economy to develop a broader base of local industries.

### **Objectives**

- » Support efforts to enhance the capacity of communities to provide for the energy needs of major technological investments, e.g., data centers
- » Explore the role that WCWRPC can play in supporting initiatives in the Region to develop or make use of emerging technologies, e.g., A.I., robotics, automation, electric vehicles, etc.
- » Identify infrastructure needs that help further the capacity of communities to undertake new technology projects

### **Key Actions**

- » Engage with communities to explore infrastructure needs and potential funding resources for project development related to energy and innovation
- » Participate in regional interest groups or discussion forums to improve regional energy capabilities and advance developments that lead to innovations in manufacturing
- » Supply data to communities upon request that will inform the needs of potential energy and technology projects

- » Coordinate with statewide groups to develop strategies that raise awareness of future energy needs in the Region

**GOAL #6: Business Support & Development – Continue initiatives that support new local entrepreneurial ventures, the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new businesses to the Region.**

West Central Wisconsin is a dynamic area for business growth and development. The Region is known for larger businesses with international reach that employ many workers, as well as small businesses that may be a family start-up with a few employees. These businesses can be found in industrial parks on large tracts of land at the edge of communities, in downtown corridors in the Region's villages and cities, and on farms spread throughout the Region near and far.

Per the data described earlier in this document, manufacturing and healthcare are strengths of the region in terms of employment numbers. It should be noted, however, that with recent closures of many hospitals and clinics in the Eau Claire-Chippewa Falls area, healthcare is an industry in need of additional support. Historically, agriculture has been predominant in the Region, and tourism is taking on increasing importance. These industries are among many examples that the EDD will aim to support to ensure business growth stays strong in the coming years.



One of the most successful programs for business development that the EDD has administered is the Regional Business Fund (RBF). By taking advantage of this program, budding entrepreneurs can directly obtain financial resources, and leverage others from banks and credit unions, to make new business ventures occur that otherwise would not happen. In 2024 alone the RBF closed 63 business loans for a total dollar amount of \$4,080,550. As a result, 375 jobs were created or retained, and \$36,943,838 in private funds was leveraged. WCWRPC will continue to support this program that is vital to the success of entrepreneurs in the West Central Region.

In addition to the RBF, the EDD will maintain its involvement in other successful programs for business development, such as the EDA-funded St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center (SCVBIC) in River Falls. This program and similar initiatives provide the information and resources necessary for new and expanding businesses to prosper. The EDD will examine whether its resources can be better utilized to assist these efforts and, as appropriate, will seek opportunities to grow new programs.

## Objectives

- » Evaluate new opportunities to provide the support mechanisms for business expansion and growth in the Region
- » Assist in the marketing of regional economic assets in the ag/rural economy through planning support and referrals to potential funding sources

- » Prioritize support for the Regional Business Fund

## Key Actions

- » Refer businesses to service organizations such as the Small Business Development Center, the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center and in particular, the Regional Business Fund
- » Provide data and mapping services to identify resource gaps and marketing potential for smaller businesses in the ag/rural economy of the Region
- » Maintain representation on the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center Management Committee to ensure this facility remains a vital resource for business development
- » Work with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to explore how investments from outside the region and state can benefit communities and existing firms/clusters in West Central Wisconsin

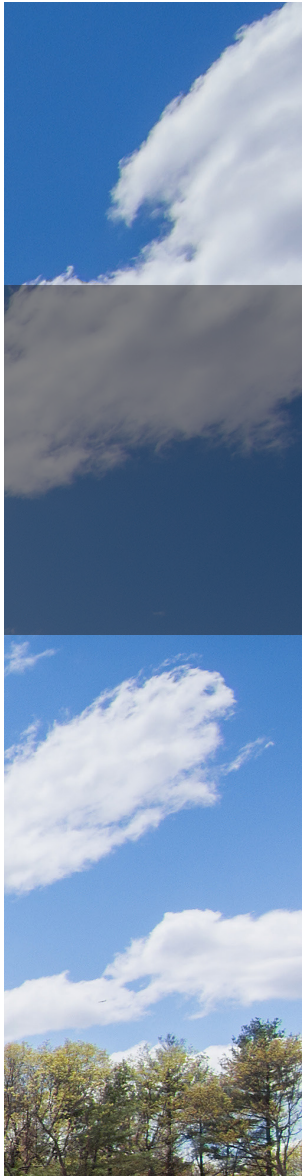




# SECTION V. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

D R A F T





# Performance Indicators

The list of performance indicators included in this section help to provide additional support to the 2025 CEDS goals. The purpose of establishing performance metrics is to encourage measurable implementation of CEDS goals and strategies across the Region. They also serve as a way to assess the performance and success of economic development efforts in West Central Wisconsin.

While it is not always clear who is responsible for accomplishing specific goals or strategies outlined in this document, continued coordination and use of established strategies of the CEDS are meant to help guide professionals in the Region to address specific action items based on their own agency needs, knowledge or expertise.

Major partners in the Region will employ a variety of performance measures to evaluate implementation of the 2025 CEDS Update. Several agencies maintain an extensive resource library of regional resources, up-to-date demographic and economic data, along with planning and regional business support through various plans and programs. This allows partners or agencies to continually assess the economic health of the Region and track the progress of CEDS implementation.





# People-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<b><u>GOAL #1 - Business &amp; Worker Attraction:</u></b> Support the recruitment and retention of businesses and workers through initiatives that strengthen or stabilize housing, childcare, education and healthcare.	Work with partners to inventory currently-available resources and services that meet needs related to housing, childcare, education and healthcare and to identify gaps therein
<b><u>Objectives:</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Work with communities and local organizations to assess needs in the areas of housing, childcare, education and healthcare</li><li>» Identify roles and responsibilities that key stakeholders have in furthering the development of housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources</li><li>» Partner with other entities to prioritize projects that make housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources more available in the Region</li></ul>	Participate in advocacy efforts to highlight the need for housing, childcare, education and healthcare-related amenities in the Region
	Stay up to date on potential funding resources for projects that further develop housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources and provide relevant information to communities as requested
	Conduct studies or formulate plans, as appropriate, that make recommendations for strategic directions to take in order to maximize the availability of housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources



Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
Broad-based inventory completed that identifies resources and gaps in each area and related roles & responsibilities of stakeholders	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	West Central Works (Workforce Development Board); Momentum West Wisconsin; County Economic Development Corporations; county and municipal governments
Attendance at legislative days with advocacy groups, such as area chambers of commerce, and use of "tools" (e.g., letter/e-mail writing) to advocate to policy makers, as appropriate	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Chippewa Valley chambers of commerce; St. Croix Valley chambers of commerce; county and municipal governments; other regional planning commissions in Wisconsin
Information on funding resources maintained as evidenced through internal documentation; information is conveyed to communities, as demonstrated by e-mails sent or notes from phone conversations, as appropriate	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Wisconsin Housing & Economic Development Authority; other state and federal funding agencies; county and municipal governments
Studies and plans that include strategies to further develop housing, childcare, education and healthcare resources are completed, as appropriate	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County Economic Development Corporations; county and municipal governments



## People-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<p><b>GOAL #2 - Workforce Training:</b> Focus on strategies to increase the likelihood that workers in the Region have the skills required to meet employer needs in a 21st century economy.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Explore potential partnerships with universities and technical colleges that would meet the needs of those institutions to train the workforce of the future</li><li>» Increase engagement with organizations, such as West Central Works (Workforce Development Board), to help develop a highly-skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers</li><li>» Target workforce development efforts by working with partners to develop an assessment of the most sought-after skills in the Region</li></ul>	Coordinate strategy sessions with universities, colleges & workforce-related organizations to determine training needs in the Region
	Conduct data analyses to support the workforce training efforts of partners
	Assist West Central Works (Workforce Development Board) in reaching its workforce training goals by helping it to identify grant opportunities and apply for funds with a view toward reducing dependency on federal funds
	Collaborate with partners to determine the structure of a workforce skills assessment





Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
Sessions with partners completed	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Universities, technical colleges, West Central Works (Workforce Development Board)
Data collected and transmitted to partners, as requested	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Universities, technical colleges, West Central Works (Workforce Development Board)
Grant applications for funding identified and completed	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	West Central Works (Workforce Development Board)
Structure is finalized and assessment is completed/utilized, as needed	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Universities, technical colleges, West Central Works (Workforce Development Board)



## People-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<p><b>GOAL #3 - Quality of Place:</b> Engage with partners to highlight and strengthen amenities that showcase the Region as an ideal location to live, work and play.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Determine individual sectors that need specific support to cultivate the Region’s tourism economy</li><li>» Participate in efforts to target recreational and other assets for investment that enhance the Region’s “Quality of Place”</li><li>» Explore linkages between “Quality of Place” amenities in the Region and businesses that could support those resources</li></ul>	<p>Continue planning work in support of local recreational amenities, such as county and community outdoor recreation plans, and county bicycle &amp; pedestrian plans</p>
	<p>Support the efforts of partners to develop a regional “brand” that will facilitate investments in outdoor recreation amenities</p>
	<p>Participate in the stakeholder group that will implement the 2025 Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan to support the development of “Quality of Place” amenities and identify related business sectors that should be targeted for growth</p>
	<p>Study possible strategies to uplift the agri-tourism industry</p>



Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
County and community outdoor recreation plans, and county bicycle & pedestrian plans, completed, as appropriate, for counties and municipalities	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments
Regional "brand" for outdoor recreation marketing is developed and deployed	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network (USDA Rural Partners); Visit Eau Claire; county and municipal governments
Plans formulated by the Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network to pursue infrastructure improvements and promote business investments that support "Quality of Place" amenities in the Region's outdoor recreation sector	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network (USDA Rural Partners); Visit Eau Claire; county and municipal governments
Studies or other analyses completed that make recommendations on policies, strategies or similar efforts to improve the awareness or marketability of the agri-tourism industry in the Region	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Wisconsin Department of Tourism; Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection; UW-Extension; universities



## Place-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<b>GOAL #4 - Infrastructure:</b> Maintain involvement in efforts to expand or improve the Region's infrastructure as a means to entice investment and development.	Provide grant application and administration services to communities for infrastructure project development
<b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Partner with communities to update infrastructure necessary to meet local economic development goals</li><li>» Further the development of infrastructure that meets health and safety needs as an economic development strategy</li><li>» Assess next steps to support broadband development in the Region, whether through continued expansion or other initiatives that help maximize its benefits</li></ul>	Help communities acquire funding to complete infrastructure projects that protect and strengthen the local workforce, e.g., FEMA Community Safe Rooms
	Evaluate funding sources for infrastructure projects proposed by communities to determine potential competitiveness
	Continue to work with the West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance to formulate strategies that optimize the installation and use of broadband throughout the Region





Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
Grant applications completed and grant administration services provided to communities for funded infrastructure projects that promote local economic development	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments; state and federal funding agencies
Grant applications completed for health & safety infrastructure projects, such as FEMA Community Safe Rooms, and grant administration services provided to funded projects	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments; state and federal funding agencies
Grant or loan funding sources are identified for communities to help further local economic development	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments; state and federal funding agencies
Strategies that further the installation or adoption of broadband throughout the Region are developed.	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance



## Place-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<p><b>GOAL #5 - Energy &amp; Innovation:</b> Assist regional efforts to meet the energy needs of the future and to invest in innovation that will chart the course of business development and the workforce in the decades to come.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Support efforts to enhance the capacity of communities to provide for the energy needs of major technological investments, e.g., data centers</li><li>» Explore the role that WCWRPC can play in supporting initiatives in the Region to develop or make use of emerging technologies, e.g., A.I., robotics, automation, electric vehicles, etc.</li><li>» Identify infrastructure needs that help further the capacity of communities to undertake new technology projects</li></ul>	<p>Engage with communities to explore infrastructure needs and potential funding resources for project development related to energy and innovation</p> <p>Participate in regional interest groups or discussion forums to improve regional energy capabilities and advance developments that lead to innovations in manufacturing</p> <p>Supply data to communities upon request that will inform the needs of potential energy and technology projects</p> <p>Coordinate with statewide groups to develop strategies that raise awareness of future energy needs in the Region</p>



Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
Meetings with communities occur to explore infrastructure needs related to energy and innovation, and potential funding sources are identified	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments; state and federal funding agencies
WCWRPC will have participated in groups or forums related to regional energy initiatives and/or innovation, which will have put forward recommendations for action or further study	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Manufacturers Alliance; county and municipal governments; UW-Stout Manufacturing Outreach Center; utility companies (e.g., Xcel Energy); Wisconsin Technology Council
Data supplied to communities, as appropriate	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County and municipal governments
Strategies formulated that raise awareness of future energy needs or help further the development of regional energy capabilities	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Public Service Commission; utility companies (e.g., Xcel Energy); Wisconsin Technology Council; county and municipal governments



## Place-Centric Goals

Goal/Objectives	Action Plan
<p><b><u>GOAL #6 - Business Support &amp; Development:</u></b></p> <p>Continue initiatives that support new local entrepreneurial ventures, the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new businesses to the Region.</p> <p><b><u>Objectives:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evaluate new opportunities to provide the support mechanisms for business expansion and growth in the Region</li> <li>» Assist in the marketing of regional economic assets in the ag/rural economy through planning support and referrals to potential funding sources</li> <li>» Prioritize support for the Regional Business Fund</li> </ul>	<p>Refer businesses to service organizations such as the Small Business Development Center, the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center and, in particular, the Regional Business Fund</p> <p>Provide data and mapping services to identify resource gaps and marketing potential for smaller businesses in the ag/rural economy of the Region</p> <p>Maintain representation on the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center Management Committee to ensure this facility remains a vital resource for business development</p> <p>Work with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to explore how investments from outside the region and state can benefit communities and existing firms/clusters in West Central Wisconsin</p>





Performance Indicators	Status	Major Partners
Emerging businesses continually referred to organizations providing resources for their development throughout the 5-year CEDS period, which especially includes the Regional Business Fund to build on the success of that organization (measured by number of businesses assisted)	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Small Business Development Center; St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center; Regional Business Fund
Data and mapping services provided, which offers information to allow smaller businesses in the ag/ rural economy to obtain more resources, funding or other inputs to support their growth and market reach, with referrals to potential funders, as appropriate	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	County Economic Development Corporations; county and municipal governments; local chambers of commerce
WCWRPC continues to serve on the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center Management Committee during the 5-year CEDS period, and the Center continues to see growth during that time	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center
Consultations with WEDC take place resulting in recommendations for action or further study regarding pathways to enhance investment from outside the region or state (e.g., international exports)	TBD during 2025-2030 CEDS implementation	Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

# APPENDIX I. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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## WCWRPC 2025-2030 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & ADOPTION

The 2025 CEDS Update was developed with input and guidance from a wide variety of regional partners and a regional CEDS Strategy Committee. Surveys were distributed to members of the Strategy Committee and to key partners throughout the Region to allow comments regarding Regional Goals for the 2025 CEDS Update. Over 50 responses were received, which provided valuable input when establishing the Regional Goals.

Additional forms of outreach included an extensive Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise conducted with the Strategy Committee, which formed the basis for the SWOT included in the CEDS document. Other meetings with partners were held as well, including Momentum West Wisconsin, West Central Works (Workforce Development Board), and economic development partners including directors of county economic development corporations, Chippewa Valley Technical College, municipal officials, the Regional Business Fund and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

Finally, a 30-day comment period was also advertised through local media outlets in each county of the Region in an effort to help collect public input regarding the draft plan.

**The final 2025 CEDS Update was approved by the Commission of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission on MM DD, 2025.**

# APPENDIX II. DATA & METHODOLOGY

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## DATA & METHODOLOGY

Information used to create this document is available upon request from the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. This includes any numbers, figures, charts, tables, surveys or methods of analysis used to highlight and summarize key demographic, summary and background information for the Region.

A formal request for any information related to this document may be submitted by telephone, mail or email at:

**West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission**

800 Wisconsin Street  
Mail Box 9  
Building D2, Suite 401  
Eau Claire, WI 54703  
Phone: 715-836-2918

Email: [wcrpc@wcrpc.org](mailto:wcrpc@wcrpc.org)  
Website: [www.wcrpc.org](http://www.wcrpc.org)

# APPENDIX III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

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## 2025 WCWRPC CEDS VISION STATEMENT, GUIDING PRINCIPLES & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK DEFINITIONS OF TERMS (listed in alphabetical order)

### *Vision Statement & Guiding Principles Definitions*

**Guiding Principles** – Overarching concepts that provide support to the strategic direction established by the Vision Statement. While the “Guiding Principles” are not goals or objectives, they set up the principles on which the Goals & Objectives in the CEDS are established.

**Vision Statement** – Organizing statement for the CEDS that describes the strategic direction of WCWRPC’s economic development work over the next 5 years.

### *Terms found in WCWRPC’s CEDS Evaluation Framework*

**2025 Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan** – As an initiative born out of the USDA’s Rural Partners Network, the Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network, as of 2025, was developing a USDA-funded Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan (RORP) for an 8-county area in Western Wisconsin. The scope of the Plan includes inventorying and mapping existing recreational opportunities and businesses, creating a strategic plan to guide the future development of outdoor recreation assets and amenities for economic growth, and marketing the region under its own branding as an outdoor recreation destination.

Four of the eight counties (Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire) are in the service area of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and the other four counties (Buffalo,

Jackson, Pepin, Trempealeau) are in the service area of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission.

**Action Plan** – Outlines tasks that will be completed in support of the implementation of the Goals & Objectives in the CEDS.

**Agri-tourism** – According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, agri-tourism “is a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch or other agricultural businesses for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch or business owner”. Examples of agri-tourism include tours of dairy-making facilities, pizza farms, or berry-picking fields.

**Ag/Rural Economy** – The portion of the regional economy situated in rural areas or within agricultural contexts, as opposed to urban areas,. In particular, references to the “Ag/Rural Economy” are found within CEDS Goal #6: Business Support & Development and refer to smaller businesses in rural or agricultural settings that could potentially realize increased growth or market reach as a result of additional resources, funding or other inputs.

**Amenities** – Similar to an asset, amenities are features of a location in the West Central Region that provide added value to the experience of living or visiting there, such as parks, lakes, trails or sporting facilities.

# APPENDIX III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

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**Artificial Intelligence, or A.I.** – Refers to the use of computer systems that are designed to think, reason, learn and act autonomously or semi-autonomously, and to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence.

**Asset** – Similar to an amenity, an asset in an economic development context in the West Central Region is a feature of a particular place that provides value to the user or to those affected by its use. It can include things like recreational facilities, but it also might encompass a broader array of items compared to an “amenity”, such as businesses or industries that provide employment or financial wealth in a community. Government or nonprofit services might also be considered an asset within a regional context.

**Automation** – Refers to the use of technology to carry out tasks with minimal or no human input, and which historically would have been performed by humans. A supermarket checkout counter with no human cashiers is a good example of automation.

**Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan** – A strategic document developed by a community to guide the development of safe, accessible and connected infrastructure for people who walk, bike or use other non-motorized transportation. A Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan could also recommend policies that promote or help to further these alternative forms of transportation.

**Brand** – A feature of a product, service, community or particular location, such as a name, symbol or other distinguishing element that gives it an identity or makes it distinctive.

**Data Center** – Facility that houses a large number of computer systems and related components where organizations store,

manage and distribute their data and applications. Data centers are generally regarded as becoming a major element of the modern economy upon which many entities will increasingly rely to conduct business. These centers also create challenges for communities and regions because they require large volumes of energy to operate.

**Economic Development Corporations** – Nonprofit organizations that support the development of a local economy by promoting business expansion and retention, providing assistance to entrepreneurs, assisting in site selection for companies, carrying out workforce/talent initiatives, and similar activities. In the West Central Region, economic development corporations are generally formed to serve an entire county under their respective jurisdictions.

**Goals & Objectives** – Forms the basis for the CEDS Action Plan and establishes milestones to evaluate progress on the implementation of the CEDS. As noted in EDA’s CEDS Content Guidelines, goals are broad outcomes or general intentions that build upon the vision and are often intangible. Each goal should have a rationale that is clearly understood and publicly supported. Objectives are more specific, measurable, concrete and support the attainment of the Goals.

**Grant Administration** – Services provided to the awardees of grant funds that help to ensure all requirements of the grant are followed. These services could include regular reporting to the funding agency, payroll monitoring during a construction project, assistance with procurement, and other important compliance activities. Often, WCWRPC will provide grant administration services to communities in the 7-county region that are recipients of such grants.



# APPENDIX III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

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**Innovation** – As defined by McKinsey & Company, innovation in a business context is “the ability to conceive, develop, deliver, and scale new products, services, processes and business models for customers.” In particular, innovation is the process by which enterprises take advantage of emerging technologies that allow for new economic growth in communities.

**Major Partners** – Organizations that will work in collaboration with WCWRPC to implement the Goals & Objectives in the CEDS.

**Manufacturers Alliance** – Support organization in the West Central Region for the manufacturing sector that provides manufacturers and partners with information, resources, recruitment, communications and access to educational institutions and talent initiatives.

**Momentum West Wisconsin** – A regional economic development organization serving 10 counties in Western Wisconsin, specifically focused on marketing the region to businesses. By providing technical assistance and spearheading talent attraction and development initiatives, Momentum West Wisconsin is drawing attention to West Central Wisconsin and helping to drive regional growth. The counties it serves include Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk and St. Croix.

**Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network** – Grouping of counties in Western Wisconsin designated as the “Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network”, which was born out of the USDA Rural Partners Network. The intent of the program is for the counties within the network to work collaboratively to bring federal resources to important projects in the area.

As of 2025, its signature project was the Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan (RORP), covering an 8-county area in Western

Wisconsin. The Network initially consisted of 4 counties within the service area of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire) and three counties within the service area of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (Buffalo, Pepin, Trempealeau). An additional county within the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission footprint was added as a participant in the RORP.

**Outdoor Recreation Plan** – A plan developed by a community or a county that identifies current local or regional resources that support outdoor recreation, as well as additional needs that will further develop the outdoor recreation sector. Usually, outdoor recreation plans have goals, objectives, strategies and an action plan to help the community or county realize its aspirations for local outdoor recreation.

**People-Centric Goals** – CEDS Goals that are focused on attracting workers and businesses to the region, while also ensuring workers have the skills that employers need.

**Performance Indicators** – Measures progress on the Goals, Objectives and Action Plan in the CEDS.

**Place-Centric Goals** – CEDS Goals emphasizing infrastructure and business investments required to move the region forward in the years and decades to come.

**Quality of Place** – Describes the attributes of a location that make it a desirable place to live or visit. Such attributes may include economic factors, but also other amenities that add value to the experience of being there.

**Region** – Refers to the 7-county region that comprises the service area of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning

# APPENDIX III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

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Commission. The counties include Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Polk & St. Croix.

**Regional Business Fund** – Offers low-interest loan funds within WCWRPC’s service area to businesses that expand, develop a broad-based economy, add new technology, revitalize buildings in the region’s downtowns, create or retain quality jobs, and leverage private capital. The Regional Business Fund is a non-profit economic development corporation working in close partnership with WCWRPC and is housed at the Commission’s offices in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

**Resilience/Resiliency** – According to EDA, in an economic development context “resilience” or “resiliency” refers to better preparing “regions to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption or stress it may experience”, whether natural or human-generated.

**Robotics** – Refers to the use of robots or robot-type machines or applications to conduct functions in fields such as engineering, manufacturing or construction.

**Sector** – A defined segment of a local economy, which includes related businesses or an industry composed of like enterprises. This definition may also encompass entities that are similar to each other within the sphere or government or within the realm of nonprofit organizations. Additionally, a sector may include businesses, government agencies and nonprofits that function together to affect or serve a particular segment of the economy.

**Small Business Development Center** – With locations in WCWRPC’s region at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC) and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF), the Small Business Development Center exists to offer no-cost,

confidential consulting and business education to prospective entrepreneurs. The UWEC office primarily serves Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Rusk and Taylor counties, while the UWRF location serves Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties.

**St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center** – Business incubator based in River Falls, Wisconsin that provides incubation space, training and support to local businesses. Business services provided through the Center include: 1) Incubator Program; 2) Coaching and Advising; 3) Workshops and Seminars; 4) Networking; 5) Conference and Training Rooms; 6) Mail Service. The incubator was funded by a grant from EDA’s Public Works program.

**Stakeholder** – A person, community or organization that has an interest in, is involved in, or is affected by economic development work in the West Central Region, whether that work includes a project, a decision or some other related activity.

**Status** – Reporting mechanism within the CEDS Evaluation Framework that describes progress on the implementation of the CEDS Goals, Objectives & Action Plan as measured by the Performance Indicators. The Status column will be updated throughout the 5-year CEDS period.

**UW-Stout Manufacturing Outreach Center** – Based at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin, the Manufacturing Outreach Center assists small and mid-sized manufacturers to enhance efficiency, foster innovation, and achieve sustainable success. Whether helping firms to implement or utilize lean methods, quality management, supply chain strategies, or advanced technologies, the Center provides tailored solutions through technical assistance, training and workforce

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development efforts to help businesses improve processes, strengthen leadership, and optimize operations.

**Visit Eau Claire** – Local organization based in Eau Claire, Wisconsin to promote recreation and tourism in the City of Eau Claire and several surrounding communities. Visit Eau Claire works in close cooperation with its target municipalities, and it is responsible for selling to and servicing convention delegates, sports travelers, family leisure travelers, hotels, restaurants, attractions, and concertgoers 365 days a year.

**West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance** – Collaboration of business, educational, governmental, nonprofit, and citizen partners who meet regularly to advocate for broadband expansion and adoption in the region. With WCWRPC coordination support, Alliance members have met regularly since 2011 to advance broadband investment, to connect resources and partners, to share lessons learned, and to provide a roadmap to help expand broadband access throughout the region.

**West Central Works (a/k/a West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board)** – Similar to other Workforce Development Boards throughout Wisconsin, West Central Works exists to deliver services, build community partnerships and establish relationships for the purposes of helping employers secure the workforce they need and assisting workers to gain life-sustaining employment. Among its activities include helping workers pay for training, subsidizing salaries and paying for workforce relocations. Counties served include Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix.

**Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation** – Established by the State of Wisconsin but operating as a public-private

hybrid, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation provides resources, operational support and financial assistance to help businesses and industry grow in the State of Wisconsin. It provides a wide variety of grants to support economic development, helps Wisconsin businesses export their products, provides educational opportunities and training to businesses, and many other activities that help businesses prosper and communities to become vibrant places to live and work.

**Wisconsin Housing & Economic Development Authority** – an independent public corporation created by the Wisconsin Legislature to provide funding for housing and economic development programs in the State of Wisconsin, such as affordable housing financing, homebuyer mortgage loans, small business and agriculture lending, and more recently, other innovative housing programs. It is a self-supporting entity, and it issues its own bonds rather than using state appropriations to fund its work.

**Wisconsin Technology Council** – Established by an act of the Governor and Legislature in 2001, the Wisconsin Technology Council provides policy guidance on science and technology matters to lawmakers, the governor, state agencies and other institutions in Wisconsin. It also serves an important networking role for its membership and as an economic catalyst through a variety of different programs.

**Workforce Development** – Policies, programs and initiatives designed to improve the skills, knowledge and abilities of workers to meet the current and future needs of employers in the labor market. Workforce Development helps employers hire the workers they need, but it also helps workers be able to obtain and maintain employment.

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**Workforce Skills Assessment** – Program to be initiated as part of the CEDS Goal #2: Workforce Training by which WCWRPC and partners will aim to determine the most sought-after skills by employers in the West Central Region.



