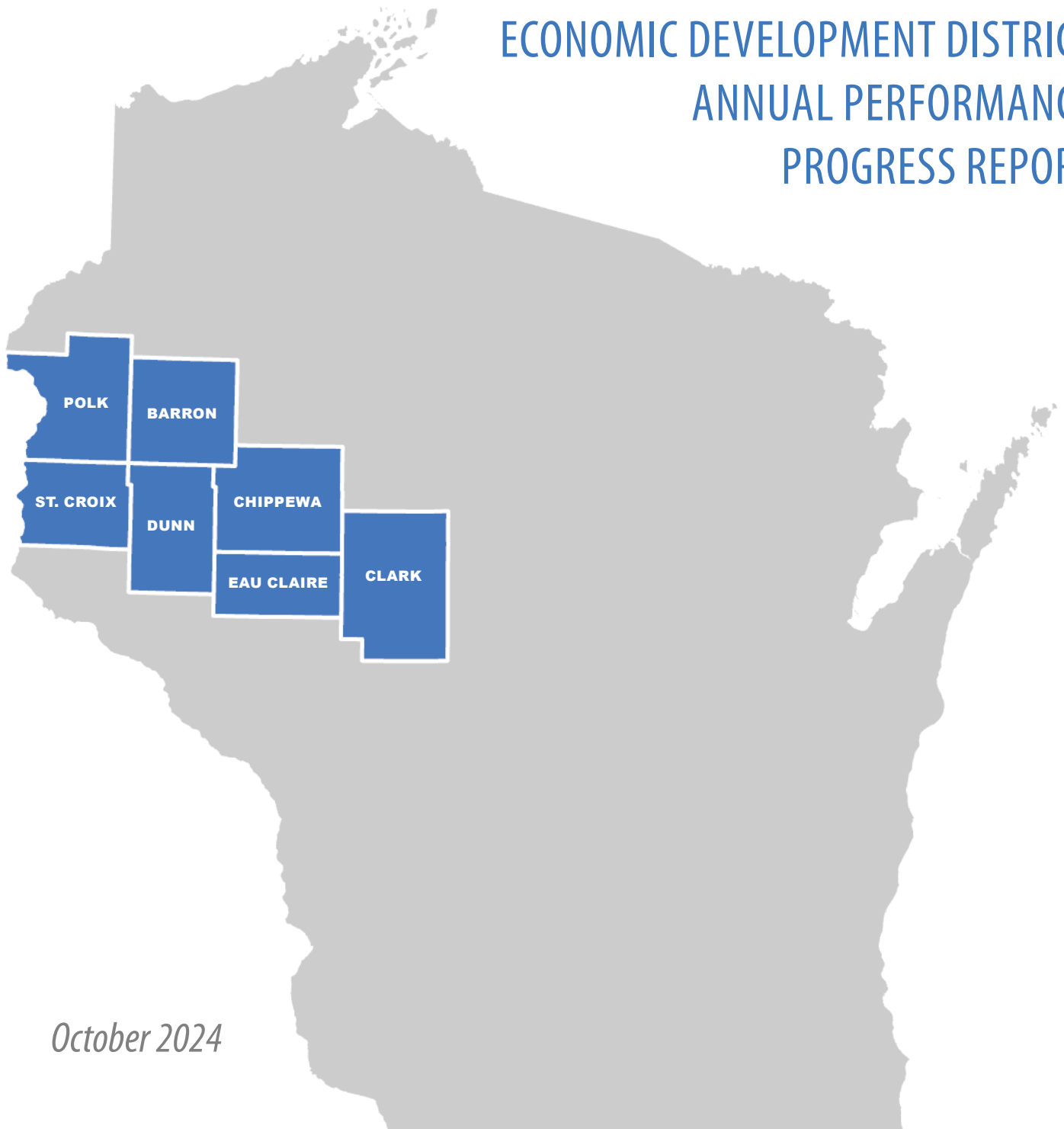




# WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT



*October 2024*

# Prepared by:

## **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)

### **Abstract:**

The West Central Wisconsin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2024 Annual Performance Progress Report is financed, in part, by a planning grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). The Report is being submitted for the time period of November 1, 2023 through October 30, 2024.

Included is a combination of updated regional demographics, activities, and the presentation of continuing and new projects. This document also identifies any changes in the Region which may affect the area's economy or require a program modification. A sample work plan with updates is provided for reference of planned, completed, and ongoing projects.

# Strategy Committee

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (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 from each of the seven counties in the Region.

WCWRPC serves as the governing board and planning organization for the seven-county Economic Development District. The Commission members represent the economic interests of the Region ranging from farmers and business owners to not-for-profit entities and public officials.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

### **BARRON COUNTY**

Patti Anderson  
Louie Okey  
Craig Fowler

### **EAU CLAIRE COUNTY**

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Loralee Clark  
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### **ST. CROIX COUNTY**

Paul Berning  
Daniel Hansen  
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### **DUNN COUNTY**

Diane Morehouse  
Carl Vandermeulen  
Steve Rasmussen

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# SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

In March 1980, West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission was designated as an Economic Development District by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In order to maintain this economic development district designation, and for entities within the Region to qualify for most EDA assistance programs, the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) must be updated at least once every five years and performance reports must be submitted annually to the EDA. The Region's CEDS was last updated in October 2020 and was accepted by the Economic Development Administration as meeting all the requirements as defined within 13 CFR 303.7.

This annual report provides a brief update of economic development activities in the Region and a snapshot of annual changes to the Region benchmarks developed for the 2020 CEDS Update. This includes an update and evaluation of both the Primary Economic Health Indicators and Detailed Performance Measures used to review and assess economic health and performance of the West Central Region. The report also describes progress of the 2020 CEDS Update along with the status and updates of the WCWRPC Work Plan.

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The West Central Region of Wisconsin comprises seven counties with a total landmass of 6,205 square miles. In part from its close proximity to the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metro area, the Region experiences continuous growth with increasing ties to the economic opportunities associated with the Twin Cities. Overall, the Region is mostly rural. However, Eau Claire and St. Croix counties have experienced continued growth over the last twenty years. The Region itself comprises only 7.5% of the State's population while covering around 11.5% of its total landmass.

Along with manufacturing, healthcare, and education - agriculture, recreation, and tourism contribute significantly to the West Central regional economy. Access to lakes, rivers, streams, county forests, state parks and natural areas help drive year-round tourism to the region for Wisconsin residents, visitors, and guests. Wisconsin ranks first in the nation for several agricultural products including snap beans, cheese, cranberries, ginseng, mink pellets, dry whey, milk goats, and corn (Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, 2024).

# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

## KEY REGIONAL METRICS & TAKEAWAYS

<b>447,421</b> Population (2023) Population <b>grew by 20,756</b> over the last 5 years and is projected to <b>grow by 17,195</b> over the next 5 years.	<b>211,014</b> Total Regional Employment Jobs <b>grew by 3,644</b> over the last 5 years and are projected to <b>grow by 9,744</b> over the next 5 years.	<b>\$63.1K</b> Avg. Earnings Per Job (2023) Regional average earnings per job are <b>\$20.2K below</b> the national average earnings of \$83.3K per job.
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### Takeaways

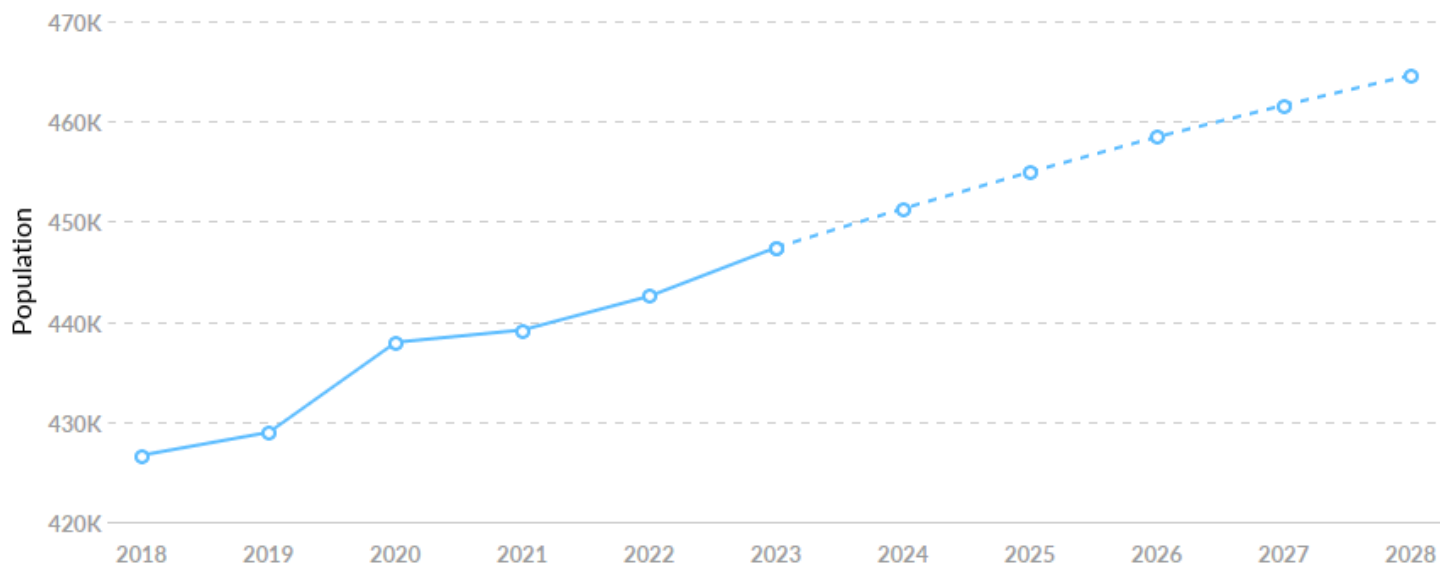
- As of 2023 the region's population **increased by 4.9%** since 2018, growing by 20,756. Population is expected to **increase by 3.8%** between 2023 and 2028, adding 17,195.
- From 2018 to 2023, jobs **increased by 1.8%** in West Central Wisconsin from 207,370 to **211,014**. This change **fell short of the national growth rate of 4.3% by 2.5%**. As the number of jobs increased, the **labor force participation rate decreased from 69.4% to 66.5% between 2018 and 2023**.
- Concerning educational attainment, **20.1% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree** (1.1% below the national average), and **14.0% hold an Associate's Degree** (5.1% above the national average).
- The top three industries in 2023 are Restaurants and Other Eating Places, Education and Hospitals (Local Government), and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.

	Population (2024)	Labor Force (Jun 2024)	Jobs (2023)	Cost of Living	GRP	Imports	Exports
Region	451,304	239,720	211,014	98.7	\$25.07B	\$34.20B	\$28.98B
State	5,940,347	3,177,251	3,241,311	100.2	\$416.85B	\$383.10B	\$414.67B

# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

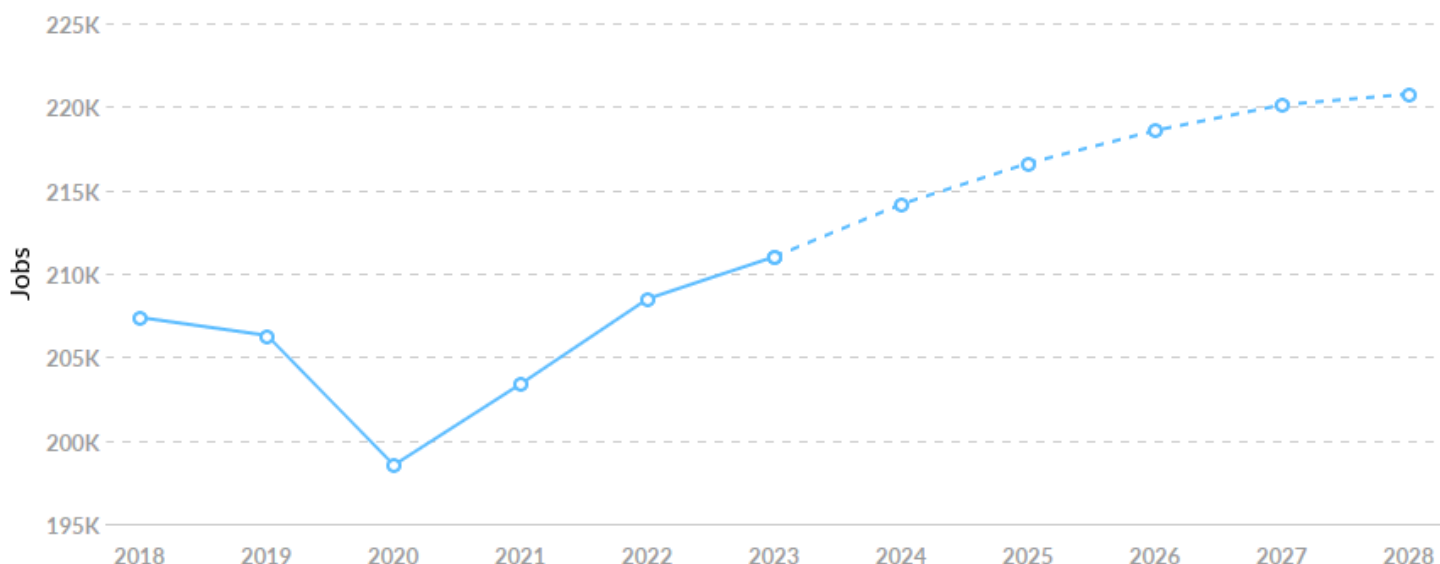
## POPULATION TRENDS

As of 2023 the region's population **increased by 4.9%** since 2018, growing by 20,756. Population is expected to **increase by 3.8%** between 2023 and 2028, adding 17,195 people.



## JOB TRENDS

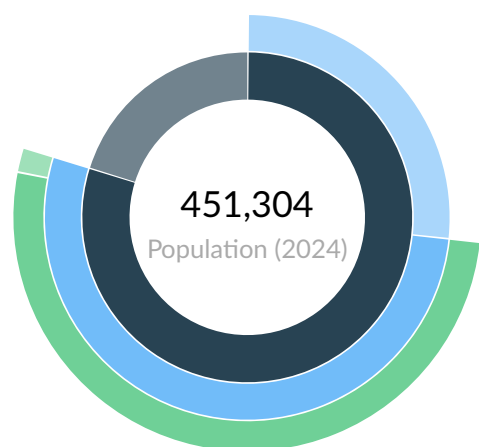
From 2018 to 2023, jobs **increased by 1.8%** in the West Central Region from 207,370 to **211,014**. This change **fell short of the national growth rate of 4.3%**.





# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

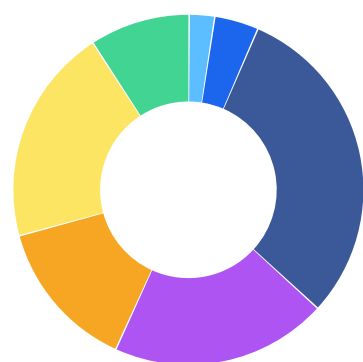
## JUNE 2024 LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN



	Population
● 16+ Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	359,849
● Not in Labor Force (16+)	120,129
● Labor Force	239,720
● Employed	232,029
● Unemployed	7,691
● Under 16, Military, and institutionalized Population	91,455

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

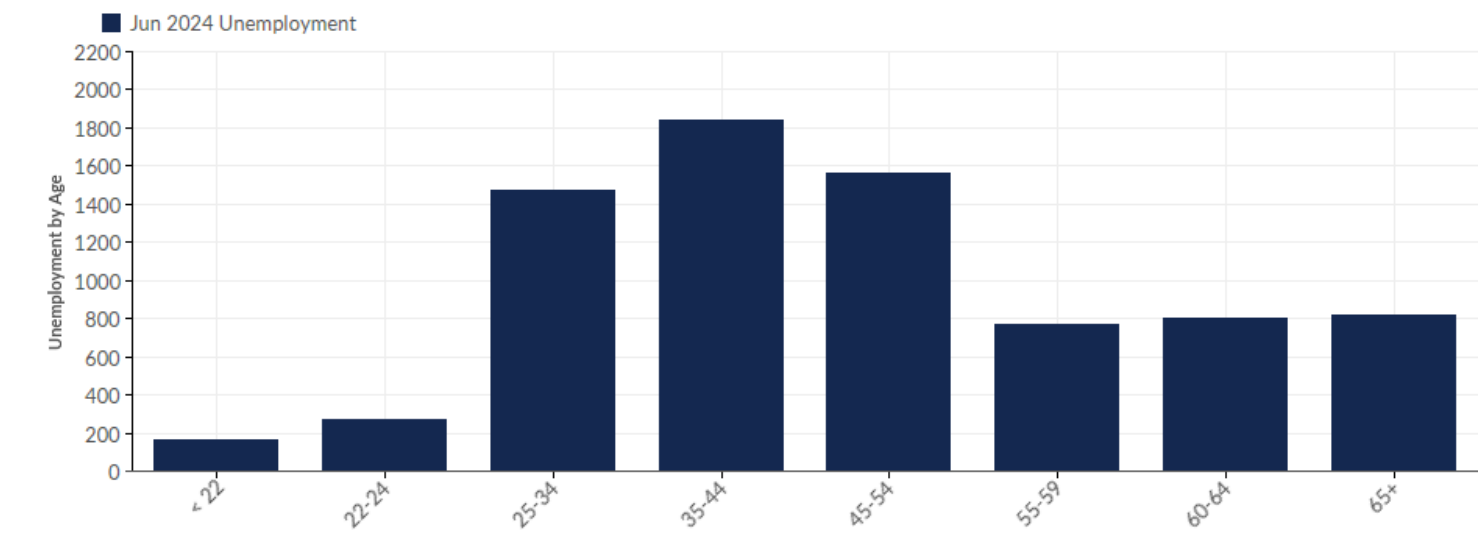
Concerning educational attainment, **20.1% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree** (1.1% below the national average), and **14.0% hold an Associate's Degree** (5.1% above the national average).



	% of Population	Population
● Less Than 9th Grade	2.3%	7,154
● 9th Grade to 12th Grade	4.1%	12,411
● High School Diploma	30.3%	92,385
● Some College	20.0%	60,924
● Associate's Degree	14.0%	42,585
● Bachelor's Degree	20.1%	61,118
● Graduate Degree and Higher	9.2%	28,164

# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

## UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE

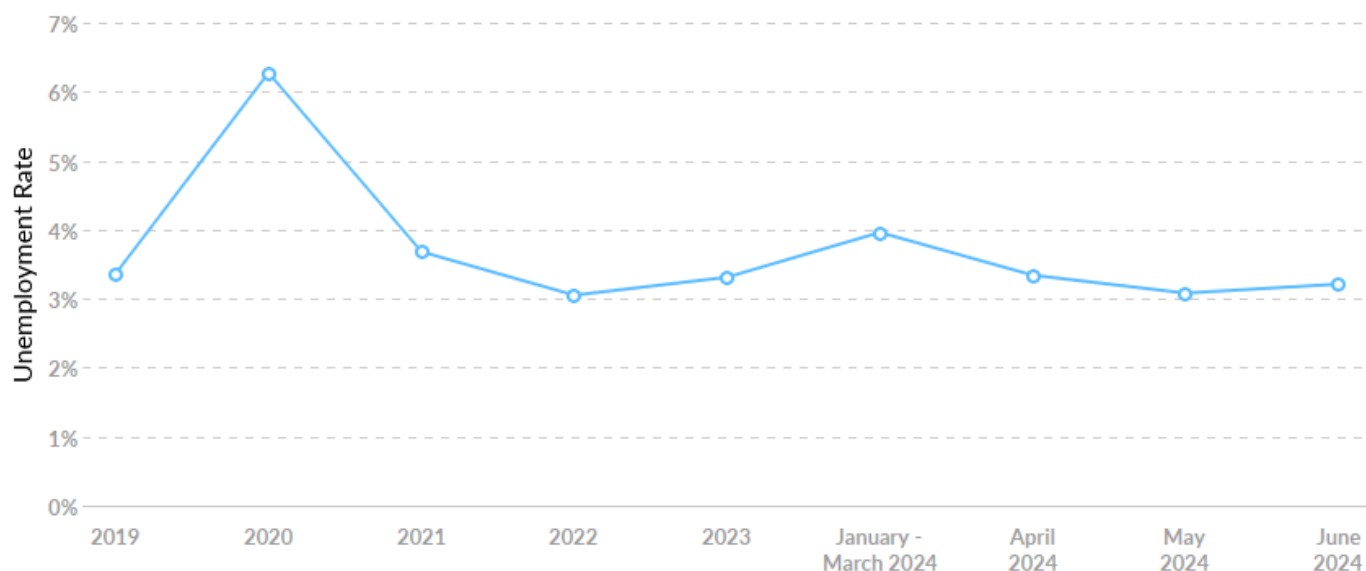


Age	Unemployment (Jun 2024)	% of Unemployed
< 22	160	2.08%
22-24	272	3.54%
25-34	1,472	19.14%
35-44	1,840	23.92%
45-54	1,564	20.34%
55-59	768	9.99%
60-64	800	10.40%
65+	816	10.61%
Total	7,691	100.00%

# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

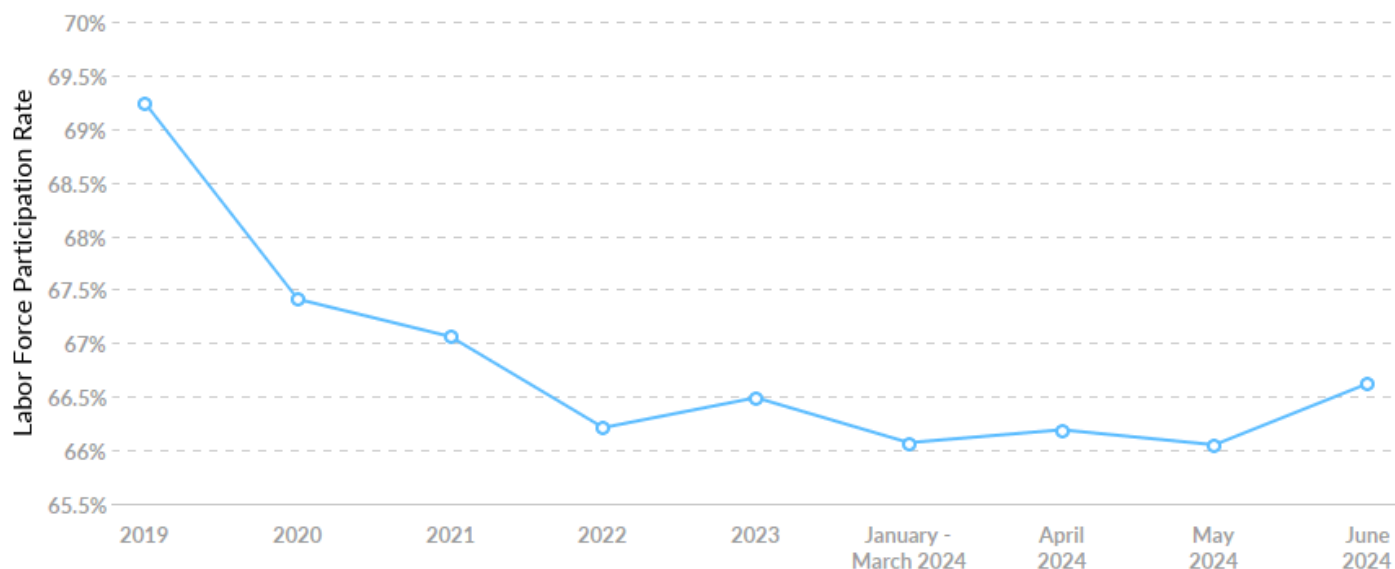
## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE TRENDS

The West Central Region had a 2023 unemployment rate of 3.31%, **decreasing from 6.27% in 2020** during the COVID-19 pandemic.



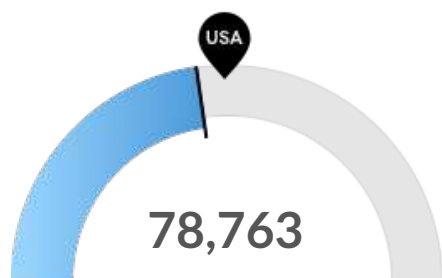
## LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE TRENDS

Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, labor force participation has remained low throughout the West Central Region.



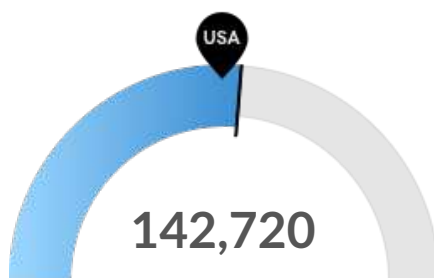
# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS



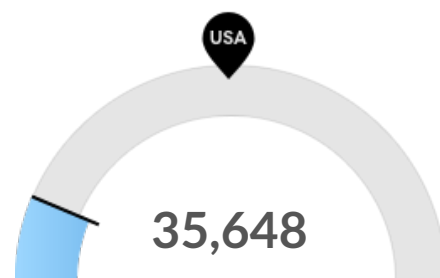
**Millennials**

The West Central Region has 78,763 millennials (ages 25-39). The national average for an area this size is 89,987.



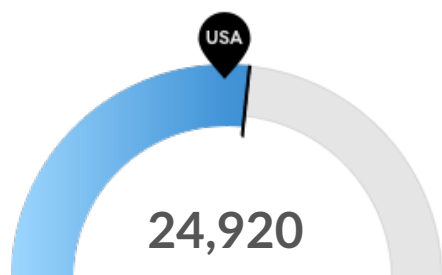
**Retiring Soon**

Retirement risk is about average in the Region. The national average for an area this size is 132,626 people 55 or older, while there are 142,720 here.



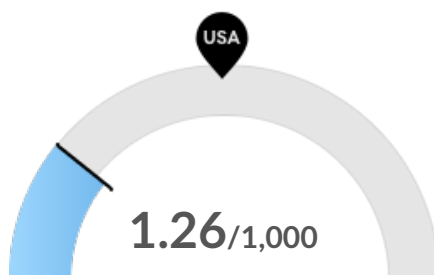
**Racial Diversity**

Racial diversity is low in the Region. The national average for an area this size is 181,997 racially diverse people, while there are 35,648 here.



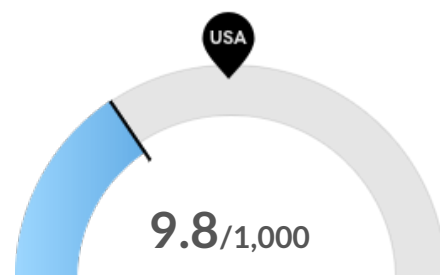
**Veterans**

The Region has 24,920 veterans. The national average for an area this size is 22,625.



**Violent Crime**

The Region has 1.26 violent crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 3.6 per 1,000 people.



**Property Crime**

The Region has 9.8 property crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 18.22 per 1,000 people.

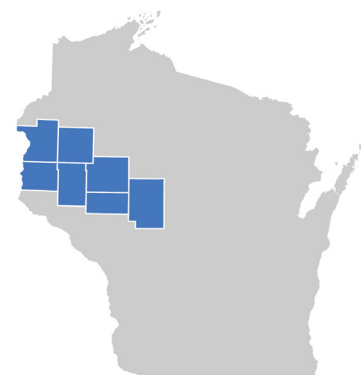
# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

## AGRICULTURE IN THE WCWRPC REGION

Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture

### Farm Overview, 2022 and change since 2017

	2022	% change since 2017
Number of farms	8,662	-74
Land in farms (acres)	2,065,729	-32
Average farm size (acres)	237	+7
<b>Per farm Average</b>	<b>(\$)</b>	
Market value of products sold	251,602	+66
Net cash farm income	75,301	+101



Percent of state agricultural sales  2	Land in Farms by Use (acres)		Land Use Practices (% of farms)	
	Cropland	202,797	No till	25
	Pastureland	18,130	Reduced till	24
	Woodland	52,765	Intensive till	23
	Other	21,413	Cover crop	14

## Wisconsin Experienced a 24 Percent Decrease in Farms between 2002 and 2022

Steven Deller - University of Wisconsin-Division of Extension. *How Off-Farm Employment Sustains Wisconsin's Agricultural Families*, October 1, 2024.

The latest Census of Agriculture reveals the number of farms in Wisconsin is steadily declining, dropping from 77,131 in 2002 to 58,521 in 2022. The decline in dairy farms is even more dramatic, decreasing from 16,886 in 2002 to just 6,216 in 2022. Several contributing factors help to explain this trend, including an aging farm population and high costs associated with starting a farming business.

Historically, farming families relied on off-farm employment to supplement income and gain access to health insurance and other employment benefits. Between 2018 and 2022, the overall rate of farm family income coming off the farm remained relatively stable at 79.3%. When observing the reliance of off-farm income with the size of the farm however, there is an alarming correlation. For example, off-farm income for the largest farms (sales of \$1 million or more) accounts for only 15.1% of total farm income. For smaller farms (sales of less than \$100,000), off-farm income is around 102.5%<sup>1</sup>, showing that off-farm income is not only supplementary, but necessary for supporting the farm enterprise itself.

In Wisconsin, nearly three in four farms have sales less than \$100,000. For sales of \$1 million or more, 3% of farms, and sales of \$500,000 to \$999,999 around 3.7%. Without off-farm income, the small farm enterprise is not sustainable without the creation and maintenance of off-farm employment opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> For smaller farms, off-farm income exceeded the income directly generated from the farm's operations. In simpler terms, these smaller farms relied more on income from jobs or other ventures outside of farming to support their overall household income, including the farm itself. This suggests that off-farm income is not just a secondary source of income, but a crucial component for the survival and sustainability of these smaller farms.

# SECTION II: ECONOMY OVERVIEW

## 2023 TOURISM INFOGRAPHIC

### WISCONSIN TOURISM'S RECORD-BREAKING 2023

**\$25.0 BILLION**

**TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT**

2022 ..... \$23.7 BILLION **+5.4%**

Wisconsin tourism had another record-breaking year, generating a historic \$25 billion economic impact in 2023. This marks back-to-back record years with all 72 counties showing economic impact growth. These historic results were fueled by Wisconsin welcoming a record number of overnight visitors for a second consecutive year, as well as investments tourism businesses made in goods and services. It all added up to a record-breaking year of helping travelers make lifelong memories.

**1 IN 21** JOBS SUSTAINED  
BY TOURISM

**178K+** FULL-TIME &  
PART-TIME JOBS

2022 ..... 174K+

**+2.0%**

**VISITS TO WI**  
**113.0 MILLION**

2022 ..... 111.1 MILLION

**+1.7%**

**STATE & LOCAL TAXES**  
**\$ 1.6 BILLION**

2022 ..... \$1.5 BILLION

**+5.8%**

**FEDERAL TAXES**  
**\$ 1.4 BILLION**

2022 ..... \$1.3 BILLION

**+4.7%**

**AMOUNT EACH WISCONSIN  
HOUSEHOLD** would need to pay  
to maintain the current level of  
government services generated  
by tourism spending.

**\$ 660** 2022 ..... \$620

**+6.9%**

**WISCONSIN**  
— DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM —

**SOURCES**  
Tourism Economics  
Longwoods International

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION PROCESS

This EDA Annual Performance Progress Report is meant to assess work activities completed regionally by WCWRPC and its partners in improving economic conditions in the Region. It is a requirement to maintain EDA planning partnership grant funding for WCWRPC, but more importantly it provides an opportunity to take a step back annually to assess progress on the initiatives that are being implemented. The five regional goals identified in the 2020 CEDS Update continue to be priorities for the region which include:

- 1. Strengthen Community, County & Regional Infrastructure**
- 2. Promote & Assist In Developing Sense-of-Place as an Economic Development Tool**
- 3. Encourage & Support New or Existing Businesses/Industries**
- 4. Address Regional Workforce Development & Attraction Issues**
- 5. Improve Housing Opportunities for All**

While much work is yet to be done in meeting these goals, progress is being made through completed activities and with close collaboration with partner agencies. This progress is apparent when examining annual metrics and indicators of economic health and performance. Some of the key highlights in the Region include:

- Increasing population**
- Growing employment**
- Decreasing unemployment**
- Increased wages in most industry sectors**

Economic development strategies and work activities identified in the 2020 CEDS document will continue to be implemented and modified as necessary into 2024 with the goal of continued success in helping to meet the needs of the Region.

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Economic Health & Performance

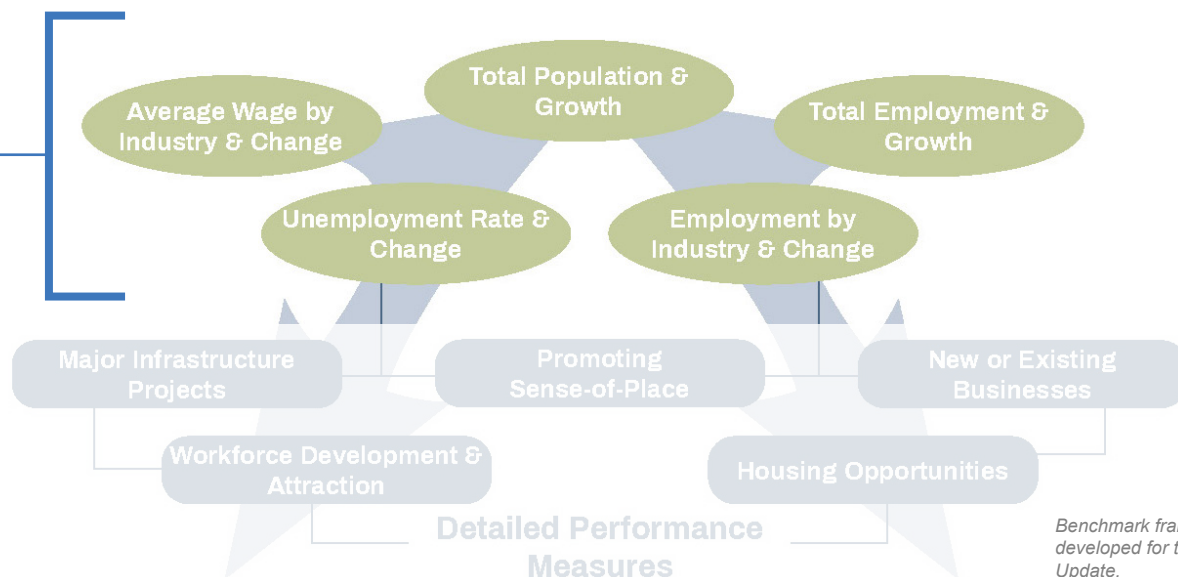
Key partners in the Region employ a variety of performance measures to evaluate implementation of the 2020 CEDS Update. Several agencies maintain an extensive resource library of regional resources, up-to-date demographic and economic data, along with planning and regional business support through a variety of plans and programs. This allows various partners or agencies to continually assess the economic health of the Region, and track the progress of CEDS implementation.

WCWRPC works regularly with partner organizations to implement or provide support for accomplishing goals and objectives of the CEDS. This includes regular meetings and updates of progress related to the five regional goals and how individual partner organizations have contributed to or supported economic development projects in the Region.

### PRIMARY ECONOMIC HEALTH INDICATORS

Primary metrics established for the 2020 CEDS Update are shown in the graphic below, followed by any available updates where data is available. These primary metrics, along with input from partnering organizations helps establish a snapshot of the economic health of the Region and provide a benchmark for future comparison.

#### PRIMARY Economic Health Indicators



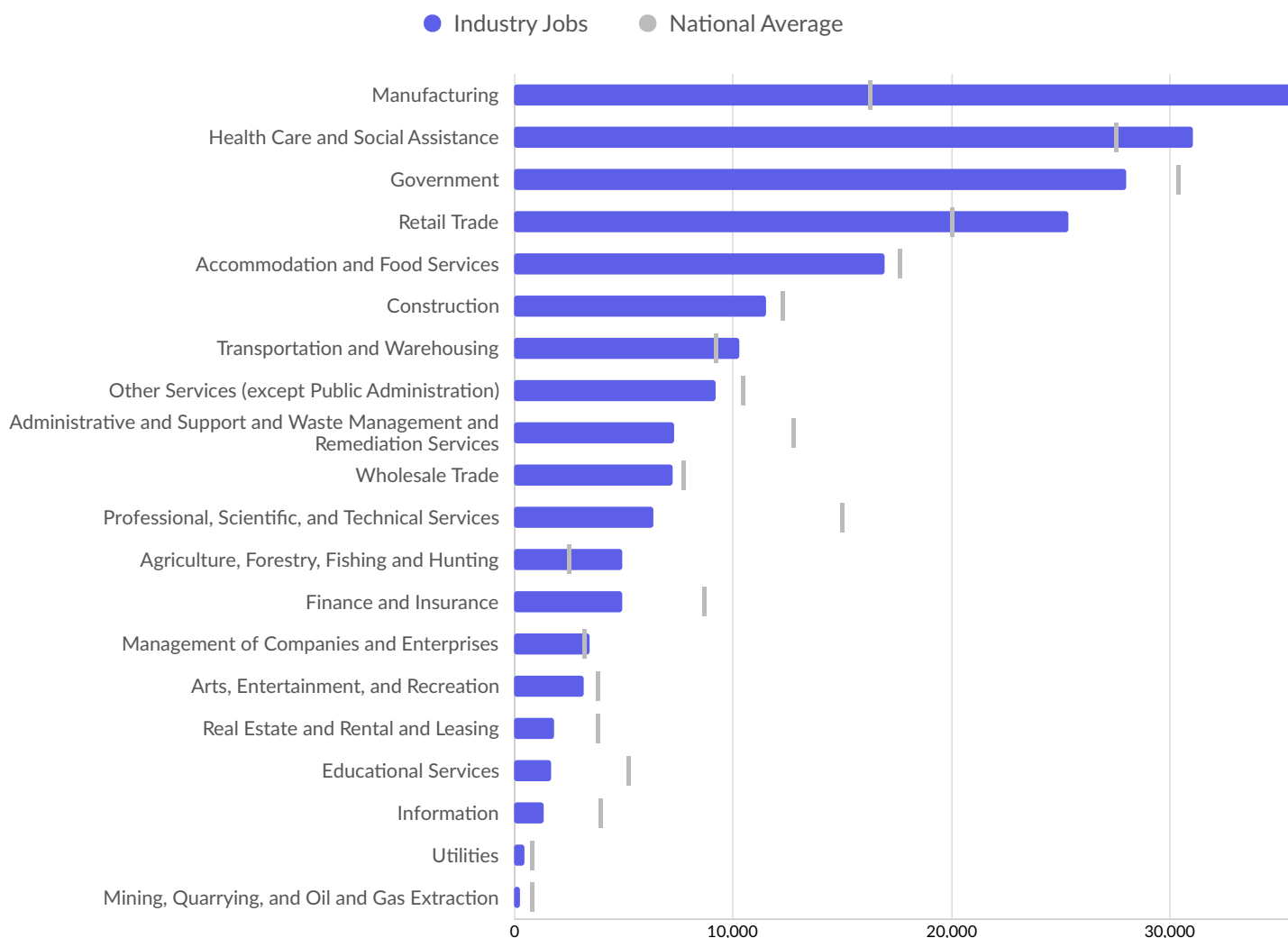


# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Jobs by Industry

**Manufacturing** remains the largest employment industry in the Region, followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, and Government.

### West Central Wisconsin Largest Industries (2018-2023)



Source: Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Employment by Industry & Change

Source: Lightcast

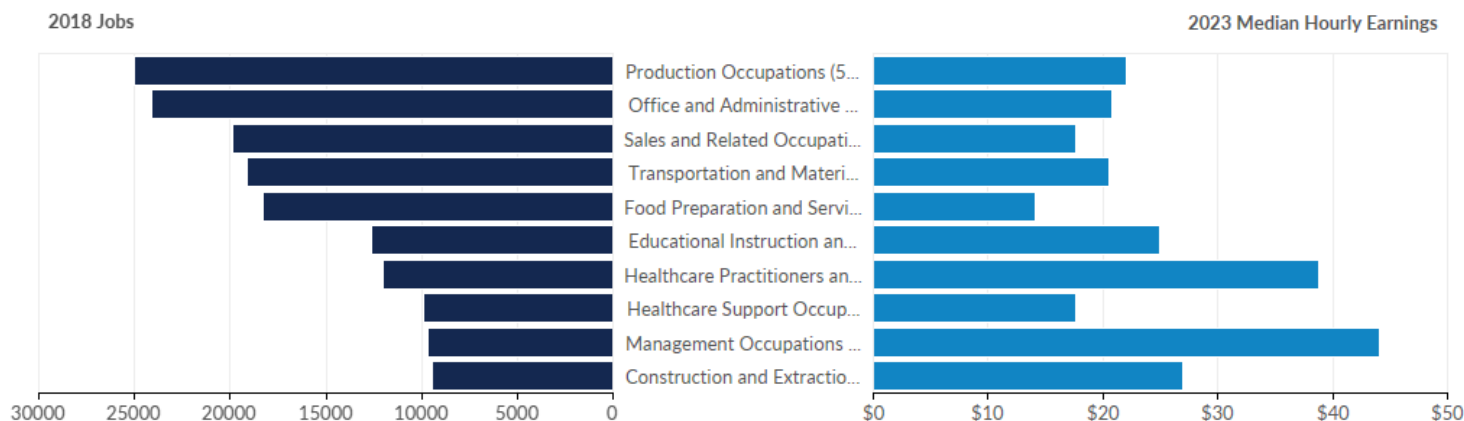
INDUSTRY	2018	2023	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Manufacturing	35,198	35,604	406	1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	30,307	31,069	762	3%
Government	28,923	27,983	- 941	(3%)
Retail Trade	23,596	25,335	1,739	7%
Accommodation and Food Services	16,887	16,958	72	0%
Construction	10,895	11,508	613	6%
Transportation and Warehousing	9,096	10,276	1,180	13%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	9,069	9,205	136	1%
Admin/Support/Waste and Remediation Services	7,986	7,309	- 677	(8%)
Wholesale Trade	6,472	7,260	788	12%
Finance and Insurance	5,990	4,920	- 1,070	(18%)
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5,880	6,357	477	8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	5,063	4,946	- 117	(2%)
Management of Companies and Enterprises	3,387	3,474	87	3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2,802	3,219	417	15%
Information	1,670	1,356	- 314	(19%)
Educational Services	1,652	1,713	61	4%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	1,436	1,799	363	25%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	660	251	- 409	(62%)
Utilities	400	472	72	18%

Manufacturing continues to employ the highest number of workers in West Central Wisconsin. **Real Estate, Rental and Leasing** experienced the highest employment growth in the Region from 2018 to 2023 (**25%**) followed by **Utilities (18%)**, **Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (15%)**, and **Transportation and Warehousing (13%)** during the same time period.

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Largest Occupations

Source: Lightcast

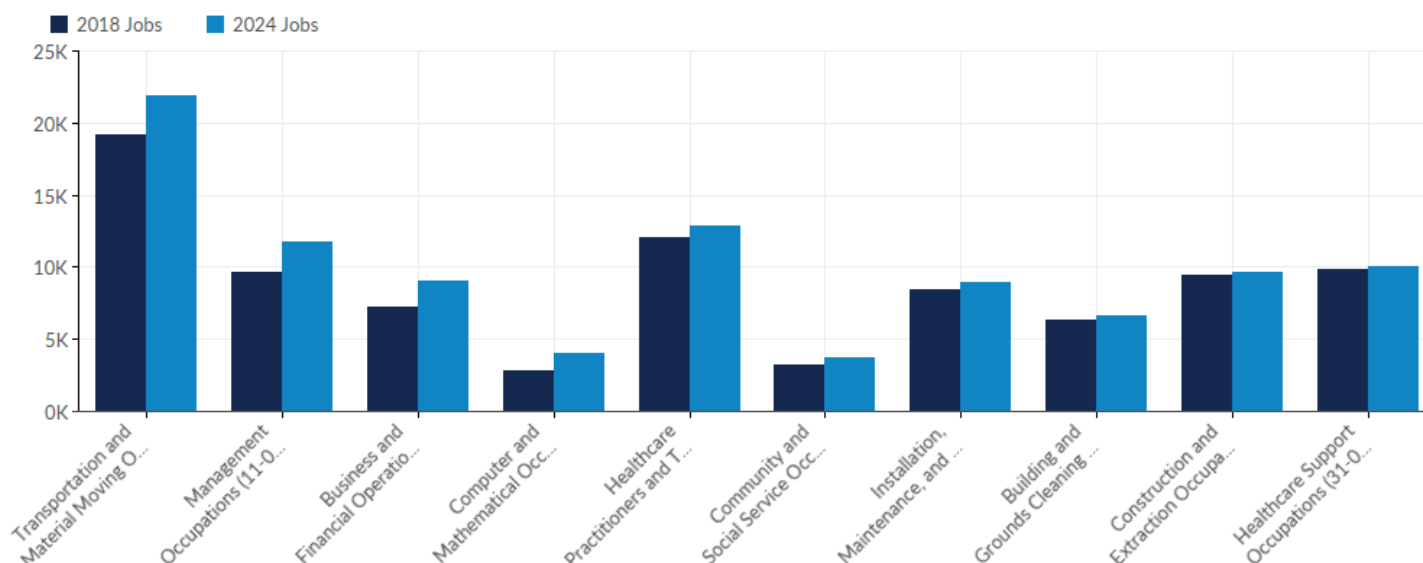


Occupation	2018 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2018-2024)	% Change	2023 Median Hourly Earnings
Production Occupations	25,034	24,485	-549	-2%	\$22.07
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	24,128	22,471	-1,657	-7%	\$20.83
Sales and Related Occupations	19,863	19,740	-123	-1%	\$17.67
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	19,137	21,842	2,705	14%	\$20.49
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	18,287	18,284	-3	0%	\$14.13
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	12,643	12,684	41	0%	\$24.97
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	12,014	12,834	820	7%	\$38.79
Healthcare Support Occupations	9,864	10,024	160	2%	\$17.63
Management Occupations	9,663	11,781	2,118	22%	\$44.05
Construction and Extraction Occupations	9,434	9,617	183	2%	\$26.95

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Fastest Growing Occupations

Source: Lightcast

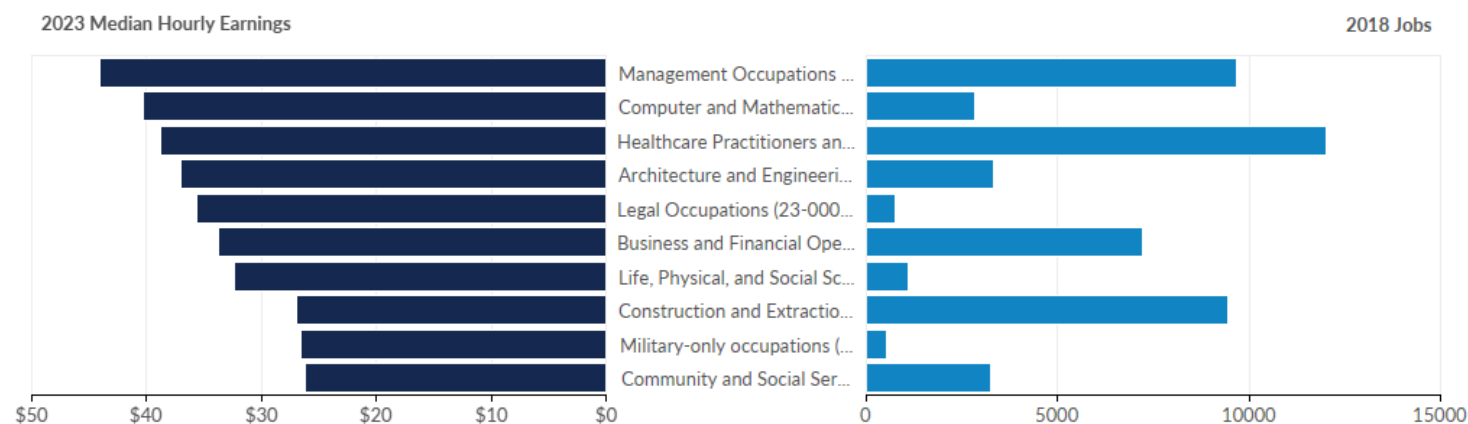


Occupation	2018 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2018-2024)	% Change	2023 Median Hourly Earnings
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	19,137	21,842	2,705	14%	\$20.49
Management Occupations	9,663	11,781	2,118	22%	\$44.05
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	7,232	9,077	1,845	26%	\$33.76
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	2,817	4,036	1,219	43%	\$40.28
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	12,014	12,834	820	7%	\$38.79
Community and Social Service Occupations	3,262	3,747	485	15%	\$26.24
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	8,457	8,930	473	6%	\$26.23
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	6,335	6,668	333	5%	\$16.50
Construction and Extraction Occupations	9,434	9,617	183	2%	\$26.95

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Highest Paying Occupations

Source: Lightcast



Occupation	2018 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2018-2024)	% Change	2023 Median Hourly Earnings
Management Occupations	9,663	11,781	2,118	22%	\$44.05
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	2,817	4,036	1,219	43%	\$40.28
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	12,014	12,834	820	7%	\$38.79
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	3,334	2,898	-436	-13%	\$37.04
Legal Occupations	764	692	-72	-9%	\$35.68
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	7,232	9,077	1,845	26%	\$33.76
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1,098	1,009	-89	-8%	\$32.35
Construction and Extraction Occupations	9,434	9,617	183	2%	\$26.95
Military-only occupations	529	525	-4	-1%	\$26.55
Community and Social Service Occupations	3,262	3,747	485	15%	\$26.24

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Cluster Identification

According to the Brookings Institution, an industry cluster is a group of firms, and related economic actors and institutions, that are located near one another and that draw productive advantage from their mutual proximity and concentrations. The most important findings for policy makers and practitioners related to cluster analysis finds that:

1. **Clusters are the key organizational unit for understanding and improving the performance of regional economies.**
2. **Cluster thinking matters because it orients economic development policy and practice toward groups of firms and away from individual firms.**
3. **Cluster thinking offers important lessons for economic development policy and practice.**

A report developed for the West Central Region found that the highest ranked cluster is currently **Local Education and Training**, with a score of 70 (out of 100) points. The Local Education and Training cluster is made up of 5 industries which includes the following:

Industries and Regional Jobs in the Local Education and Training Cluster	
Industry	Jobs
*Elementary and Secondary Schools (Local Government)	10,759
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	562
*Elementary and Secondary Schools	559
Automobile Driving Schools	50
Fine Arts Schools	161

Source: Lightcast

*\*Note: **Elementary and Secondary Schools** simply refers to the combined levels of education encompassing both elementary school (typically grades K-5) and secondary school (typically grades 6-12), while **Elementary and Secondary Schools (Local Government)** specifically indicates that this educational system is overseen and funded by a local government entity, like a school district, rather than a broader state or federal level.*

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## THE TOP 14 RANKED CLUSTERS IN THE WCWRPC REGION

Source: Lightcast

Average cluster scores out of 100. This is not a benchmark against other regions and instead compares relative performance to other clusters within the WCWRPC Region.

 Local Education and Training	70
 Plastics	65
 Local Health Services	64
 Food Processing and Manufacturing	60
 Upstream Chemical Products	59
 Business Services	59
 Medical Devices	58
 Financial Services	58
 Local Utilities	56
 State Government Services	56
 Local Motor Vehicle Products and Services	56
 Distribution and Electronic Commerce	54
 Oil and Gas Production and Transportation	54
 Agricultural Inputs and Services	53

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Detailed Performance Measures

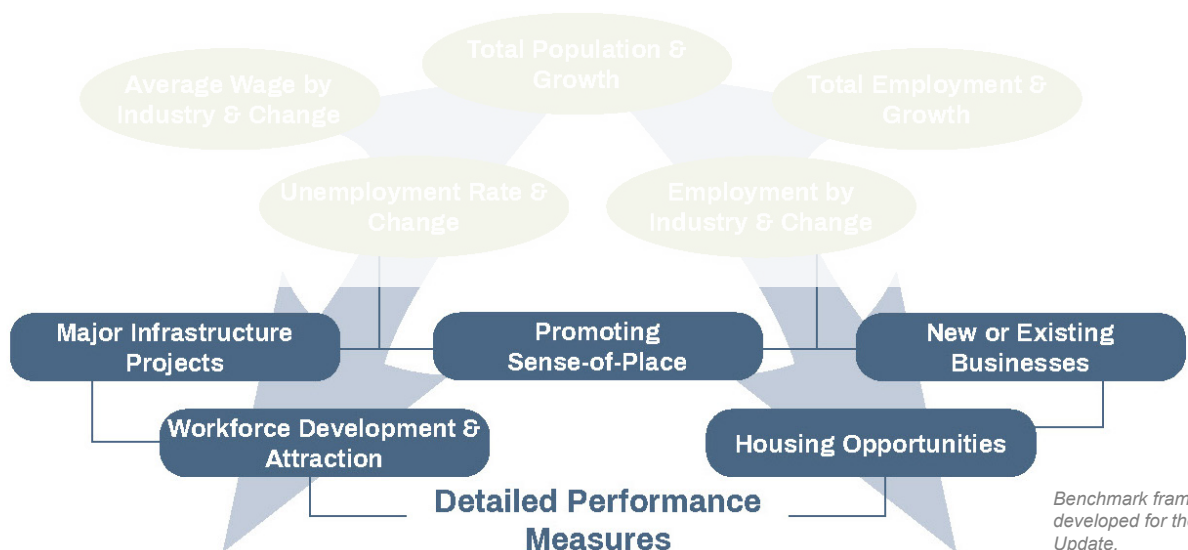
The list of performance measures included in this section help to identify a mix of regional actions and tasks to support the 2020 CEDS goals. Key metrics are identified for each of the five regional goals of the 2020 CEDS Update. While it is not always clear who is responsible for accomplishing specific 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.

### Performance Measure Categories

*(based on CEDS regional goals & strategies)*

- **Goal 1: Major Infrastructure Projects**
- **Goal 2: Promoting Sense-of-Place**
- **Goal 3: New or Existing Businesses**
- **Goal 4: Workforce Development & Attraction**
- **Goal 5: Housing Opportunities**

### PRIMARY Economic Health Indicators



*Benchmark framework  
developed for the 2020 CEDS  
Update.*



# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Update of Regional Goals & Performance Measures

### Regional Goal 1: Strengthen Community, County & Regional Infrastructure

**SWOT FINDING:** *Transportation facilities (roads, bridges, etc.), broadband services and water/wastewater utility infrastructure construction and repair is a major concern facing communities in the Region. As communities look to support economic development projects and steady population growth, national and state level programs or funding opportunities will be critical to maintaining a healthy, functioning infrastructure system.*

#### 1. Major Infrastructure Projects

- Increase number of infrastructure projects
- Increase broadband coverage through partnerships or grants
- Increase knowledge and support for passenger rail service to the Region
- Increase public transit availability/use
- Increase rural transportation connectivity through planning or construction
- Increase bike/pedestrian infrastructure
- Increase reuse of brownfields and under-utilized sites for development or redevelopment projects

**2024 UPDATE:** As the West Central Region moves beyond the impacts of the pandemic, it continues to face challenges that have a longer history. One of the most prominent is ensuring the region's infrastructure is up to date. According to a 2023 report from the Council on Foreign Relations, the state of infrastructure in the U.S. is significantly overstretched and puts it at a disadvantage compared to other countries. For its part West Central Wisconsin must continue to make investments in maintaining and developing infrastructure in order to remain competitive in a globalized economy. Over the past year, the District has continued to make progress in this effort through the following projects:

- *Sewer Service Area Reviews to promote efficient growth and to provide water quality management planning in proposed sanitary sewer extension projects. This work continues in the Chippewa-Eau Claire Urban Area and is commencing in the cities of Menomonie and Hudson through a grant from the Wisconsin DNR.*
- *Administration of Community Development Block Grants for the City of Augusta and Town of Fremont to support infrastructure and public services projects that promote vitality, stability and economic growth.*
- *Shared Ride Taxi Administration for the cities of Chippewa Falls and Hudson.*
- *Development of a Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan for Barron County.*
- *Partners to the Rail Coalition of Western Wisconsin & the Chippewa-St. Croix Rail Commission; and staffing to the Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) & Regional Rural Transportation Program.*
- *Administrative support to the Western Wisconsin Broadband Alliance. Recently, with the EDD's assistance, the Alliance has been involved in education work related to the federal government's Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment (BEAD)'s Internet for All initiative. This work is helping to tackle barriers to broadband access and adoption.*

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Regional Goal 2: Promote & Assist In Developing Sense-of-Place as an Economic Development Tool

**SWOT FINDING:** *There are many unique regional assets in the form of diverse natural and cultural resources that make the area an attractive place for new residents and businesses. There needs to be greater capitalization of these assets and a coordinated approach to market the many quality of life benefits of living in West Central Wisconsin.*

### 2. Promoting Sense-of-Place

- Increase number of placemaking exercises
- Increase marketing of regional assets
- Increase number of outdoor recreation planning efforts
- Increase outreach efforts, methods, and funding sources to enhance and promote quality of life

**2024 UPDATE:** In recent decades as traditional industries in the Midwest like agriculture and manufacturing have undergone change, many communities are boosting their economies by focusing on amenities that shape their identities and sense-of place. These could take the form of natural resources for outdoor recreation or assets developed by municipalities, such as parks or walking trails. As noted by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, “creating vibrant and engaging communities helps to recruit and retain residents, sustains a robust labor force and enhances quality of life.” Placemaking is a key component of developing vibrant places, and the Region has put a priority on promoting sense-of-place as an economic development strategy. Sample initiatives include:

- *Completion of an Outdoor Recreation Plan for Chippewa County, and the commencement of a new Outdoor Recreation Plan for the City of Cumberland. The Chippewa County plan includes detailed sub-plans for the Village of Lake Hallie and towns of Lake Holcombe, Anson, Wheaton, and Lafayette.*
- *Lake Altoona Visitor Economic Impact Study to measure the impact of visitors on the Eau Claire County economy, which will analyze survey results through an IMPLAN data analysis platform.*
- *Grant award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)’s Rural Business Development Grant program to complete an 8-county Regional Outdoor Recreation Plan, which includes the collaboration of two Economic Development Districts (WCWRPC & MRRPC) and the National Park Service. The Plan, which was put in motion by the USDA’s Rural Partners Network initiative, identifies outdoor recreation assets, facility needs and opportunities for related economic and business development.*
- *Participation with other local organizations that are part of the USDA Rural Partners Network in a multi-state collaboration spearheaded by Innovate Marquette, a large economic development organization based in Marquette, MI. This initiative will ultimately strive to develop a robust, integrated and nationally competitive outdoor recreation & innovation economy in the Upper Peninsula in Michigan and West Central Wisconsin.*

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Regional Goal 3: Encourage & Support New or Existing Businesses

**SWOT FINDING:** *Business growth in the Region can take on various forms. This may include the encouragement and support of new entrepreneurial ventures, the retention and expansion of existing businesses, or the attraction of new business developments. A variety of programs and resources are in place to facilitate these activities, while others could be added to further strengthen regional efforts to drive the economy forward. Emphasis should be placed on key cluster and driver industries that complement and strengthen the current mix of industries.*

### 3. New or Existing Businesses

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase number of jobs</li><li>• Increase number of establishments</li><li>• Increase business start-ups</li><li>• Decrease poverty rates</li><li>• Decrease unemployment rates</li><li>• Increase wages and earnings</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase number of applications to Regional Business Fund, Inc. or other similar agencies to support business retention or expansion</li><li>• Increase number of incubators, accelerator programs and/or centers for new or existing businesses</li><li>• Maintain up-to-date data for businesses interested in locating in the Region</li></ul> |
|--|---|

**2024 UPDATE:** One of the most important programs to which the EDD provides direct support is the Regional Business Fund (RBF). This revolving loan program has made the difference in helping hundreds of businesses in the Region get off the ground before, during and after the pandemic. As of 09/30/2024, WCWRPC staff have assisted the RBF in closing 50 business loans for 47 businesses at a total dollar amount of \$3,245,955 during the year. In addition, 310 jobs have been retained and/or are expected to be created and \$29,894,697 in private funds has been leveraged. An additional 7 loans have been committed and 12 applications are pending.

Along with this program, the District has been an integral part of other efforts to support business growth and development, such as:

- *Administration of an Eau Claire County ARPA-funded small business and non-profit grant program that has provided over 110 grants totaling more than \$2.25 million to support post-pandemic recovery and innovation.*
- *Regular advice and assistance to the EDA-funded St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center through service on its Management Committee. In 2024, the EDD has been involved with this business incubator's current effort to apply for new EDA funding to expand the facility by helping to determine that it qualified for funding and by assisting in technical reviews during the grant-writing process.*
- *Participation as a vendor at Wisconsin Farm Technology Days, an annual event showcasing the latest advancements in farming technology and practices. This year's event was held in Cadott and helped raise awareness of WCWRPC's services among agriculture industry organizations and businesses.*
- *Representation on the Manufacturing Alliance Planning Advisory Group to support efforts to grow manufacturing businesses throughout the 7-county region. This includes supporting the next generation of "Manufacturing Works" as the new "Manufacturers Alliance," which will provide manufacturing sector partners with information, resources, recruitment, communications, and access to education institutions and talent initiatives in the region.*

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Regional Goal 4: Address Regional Workforce Development & Attraction Issues

**SWOT FINDING:** *While the Region has many higher education opportunities, fewer employment options for these graduates contribute to a "brain drain" and loss of a skilled workforce. The out-migration of many younger people coupled with the aging population will likely result in insufficient workforce numbers in the Region in the near future.*

### 4. Workforce Development & Attraction

- Increase participation of regional partners with West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board
- Increase participation of regional partners with economic development efforts of Momentum West
- Increase/encourage participation in placemaking and sense-of-place marketing of the Region
- Increase number of workforce trainings/programs to train or recruit workers
- Increase support to educational institutions and their programming needs
- Increase efforts to retain young talent

**2024 UPDATE:** Throughout the U.S. workforce shortages continue to pose challenges to businesses, and the State of Wisconsin is no exception. According to a recent analysis by the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the state has been facing significant labor shortages since early 2017. Although the pandemic created a short-term spike in unemployment, the trends have returned to having more job openings compared to numbers of unemployed.

In response to this continuing pattern, economic development practitioners in the 7-county region must remain focused on carrying out initiatives to bolster the workforce. Importantly, this work includes projects that highlight the many quality-of-life benefits of living in the region to potential workers. The District has been central to these efforts through its work, some of which includes:

- *Consultation with the Chippewa Valley Health Cooperative in its effort to secure resources for the development of a nonprofit hospital in the region in the wake of the closure of two major hospitals and numerous health clinics. The EDD also served on a task force convened by local chambers of commerce to study the issue of the closures. These efforts are critical to supporting workers who lost their jobs and to ensure the region has the medical workforce it needs over the long-term.*
- *Installation of signs and development of a public web map for 20 regional bike trails in the Chippewa Valley that includes the routes, trailheads and the real-time location of users accessing the map via mobile devices. In addition, work is underway to update the Chippewa Valley Bike Map by early 2025. The provision of these resources puts an emphasis on the quality-of-life amenities the region has to offer to workers.*
- *Update to the Wisconsin DNR state trail map that travels through and outside the Metropolitan Planning Area.*
- *Representation on the boards of Momentum West and the West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, two organizations that have been heavily involved in workforce development efforts in the Region. This includes supporting the next generation of "Manufacturing Works" as the new "Manufacturers Alliance," which will provide manufacturing sector partners with information, resources, recruitment, communications, and access to education institutions and talent initiatives in the region.*

# SECTION III: ANNUAL EVALUATION

## Regional Goal 5: Improve Housing Opportunities for All

**SWOT FINDING:** *The current demand for affordable rental and owner-occupied housing options exceeds the supply throughout the Region, which has become a barrier for attracting needed workforce.*

### 5. Housing Opportunities

- Increase number of housing studies completed
- Establishment of partnership relationships to further housing development
- Increased regional utilization of available housing funding sources
- Increase number of housing projects carried out based on recommendations in housing studies
- Ensure housing projects that are carried out meet diverse needs in the Region's population

**2024 UPDATE:** Similar to other states, a shortage of housing has been cited as one of the biggest economic development challenges that communities in Wisconsin face. Particularly, communities will be stretched to make sure that a sufficient volume of housing is available for workers coming into the workforce. A 2023 study by Forward Analytics, the research arm of the Wisconsin Counties Association, estimates that 227,000 housing units must be built by 2030 in order to accommodate new workers and those who could be attracted to move to the state.

WCWRPC has played an important role in helping to understand housing issues in the West Central Region. In recent years, it has completed several countywide housing studies in Barron, Polk and Dunn counties. During the reporting period, it began a new housing needs assessment in St. Croix County, which will include "housing snapshots" for 21 communities in the county. Survey work is currently underway, and work will continue on the plan into 2025.

Another component of the workforce housing shortage is a lack of accommodation for the region's most vulnerable residents. Since 2022, the EDD has been administering a Neighborhood Investment Fund (NIF) grant, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, on behalf of the City of Menomonie and Stepping Stones of Dunn County, Inc., to construct a new facility for the homeless. The project will help ensure that no segment of the population is left behind as local workforce development strategies in the City move forward. The facility began operations in late 2023, and the City will be closing out the grant before the end of 2024.

As a component of its ongoing work, the EDD incorporates a housing element into the comprehensive plans it develops in partnership with communities. These plans provide the blueprint for how communities grow and change, an integral part of which is identifying local housing needs and solutions. Several comprehensive plans for municipalities and counties are currently in progress, as identified in other sections of this report.

# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## Work Plan Status & Updates

The following section presents the WCWRPC Work Plan from the 2020 CEDS with an update of completed and on-going activities and program support. While every effort is made to identify accomplishments for these activities, this in no way encompasses all the efforts and accomplishments of all the dedicated economic development professionals and stakeholders in the Region.

### WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Prepare and submit 2020 CEDS Annual Update to EDA	October 2024	Complete.
Provide technical and grant preparation assistance to member governments to accomplish identified projects	On-going	Provided assistance to units of government in all 7 counties as detailed in other sections of this report.
Provide assistance to businesses on financing, start-ups, expansions, and relocations	On-going	Over \$3.2 million in loans have been provided to 47 businesses through the first 3 quarters of 2024 via the activities of the Regional Business Fund.
Continue to provide county, community, and economic profiles	On-going	Updated annually and available on WCWRPC website.
Assist in strengthening and maintaining an active economic development network	On-going	Representation on Board of Directors of Momentum West, Workforce Development Board and UW-River Falls Chancellor's Advisory Council.
Provide guidance and resources in completing necessary regional studies and solutions	On-going	Ongoing work on Lake Altoona Visitor Economic Impact Study; Sewer Service Area Reviews for Chippewa/Eau Claire Urban Area and commencing in Menomonie and Hudson via Wisconsin DNR grant.
Assist communities and counties in developing economic development strategies	On-going	Funding award from USDA Rural Business Development Grant program to develop 8-county outdoor recreation plan that includes collaboration between two EDDs (WCWRPC & MRRPC).
Work with local governments on recreation trail development	On-going	Installation of signs and development of public webmap for 20 regional bike routes in the Chippewa Valley.



# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Assist local governments in applying for outdoor recreation aids	Yearly	Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funding secured for Roberts to expand its current sidewalk network and Stanley to construct a bicycle path throughout the city; development of outdoor recreation plans allows local communities to apply for project funding from the State of Wisconsin (Chippewa County plan completed, City of Cumberland plan commenced).
Provide technical assistance to local governments to manage rural growth through comprehensive planning	On-going	Comprehensive plan or plan updates completed for the Town of Lake Holcombe and City of Chippewa Falls; new planning projects to commence for Chippewa County and Dunn County in late 2024.
Provide data and other technical assistance services to local governments and other partners	On-going	Regular provision of socio-economic data as requested to county economic development corporations, utilities, educational institutions and others, such as a request in July 2024 for Barron County occupational and wage trends; worked with City of Neillsville on compiling traffic counts for emergency management and mitigation.
Provide CEDS annual reports which briefly analyze changes in economic conditions and project/program status	Annually	Complete Annual Performance Reports every October.
Prepare hazard mitigation plans for counties and promote community resiliency	On-going	Barron County & St. Croix County plans awaiting final approval; Polk County finalizing its plan; Eau Claire County plan anticipated to be substantially complete by the end of 2024; FEMA applications tentatively approved for plan updates in Chippewa, Clark and Dunn counties.
Continue to administer Regional Business Fund, Inc. and other local revolving loan funds	On-going	50 loans provided to businesses in the region broken out as follows: Barron County (12), Chippewa County (6), Clark County (2), Dunn County (3), Eau Claire County (13), Polk County (6), St. Croix County (8).

# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Assist on local transportation issues (rural transportation coordination, inter-city passenger rail, transit studies, local financing, etc.)	On-going	Administration of shared ride taxi services in Chippewa Falls and Hudson; helped to facilitate extension of Chippewa Falls shared ride taxi to Eau Claire transit system to provide access to medical services in the wake of the closure of major local hospitals.
Assist local governments on comprehensive planning	On-going	Comprehensive Plan projects underway for City of Colby, Village of Roberts/Town of Warren (joint plan), Village of Lake Hallie, City of Abbotsford, Town of Bridge Creek and Town of Anson.
Collaborate on regional economic development marketing efforts for West Central Wisconsin	On-going	On-going through coordination with Momentum West.
Provide coordinating support to regional broadband implementation efforts	On-going	Provide on-going staff support to West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance; recently, with WCWRPC's assistance, the Alliance has been involved in education work related to the federal government's Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment (BEAD)'s Internet for All initiative.
Conduct placemaking workshops to promote sense-of-place	On-going	Integrating placemaking concepts into comprehensive planning & outdoor recreation planning; provided support to a community placemaking charette in the Fairchild area; assisting the City of Abbotsford with pre-event planning for a charette focused on its downtown.
Provide grant administration services to communities receiving funding for infrastructure projects	On-going	Grant Administration services provided to Northern Wisconsin State Fair for FEMA grant; to City of Menomonie for EDA grant; to City of Augusta & Town of Fremont for CDBG grants.
Maintain board position on Momentum West	On-going	Continue to serve on Board.
Maintain board position on West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board	On-going	Continue to serve on Board.



# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Assist local governments in accessing the necessary tools and resources to preserve and maintain their downtowns, neighborhood commercial areas, historic properties/areas, culturally significant, and environmentally sensitive areas	On-going	On-going through development of comprehensive plans; also via Rain to Rivers trainings to help protect regional waters; Polk County Farmland Preservation Plan; incorporation of farmland preservation planning into comprehensive plan updates for Chippewa & Dunn counties; mapping & data collection to assess sediment infill and effectiveness of sand traps in Lake Eau Claire; grant application to update the Eau Claire River Watershed's EPA-approved 9-Key Element Plan.
Provide technical assistance to county economic development corporations	On-going	Regular consulting assistance and socio-economic data research upon request, for example in July 2024 provided Barron County with occupational and wage trends.
Maintain a prioritized list of infrastructure projects in need of funding	On-going	Projects updated on an ongoing basis.
Conduct Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning	On-going	Transportation Alternatives Funding (TAP) awarded for Safe Routes to School (SRTS) educational and outreach initiatives in WCWRPC's 7-county region; to fund SRTS implementation activities in Altoona, Chippewa Falls & Eau Claire under the Chippewa Valley SRTS Partnership; and for SRTS plan development for Colby, Neillsville, Glenwood City and Rice Lake; update to Village of Frederic SRTS plan ongoing.
Process applications for Momentum West's Gold Shovel program	On-going	Applications processed as received.
Monitor housing needs in the region and promote programs aimed at increasing housing opportunities for all	On-going	Administration of ARPA-funded Neighborhood Investment Fund grant for the City of Menomonie and Stepping Stones of Dunn County, Inc. related to construction of new facility for the homeless; project completed in Spring 2024.
Prepare housing needs assessments and strategies for units of governments	On-going	Commenced housing needs assessment in St. Croix County, which will include "housing snapshots" for 21 communities in the county.

# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Provide information and consultation on potential funding opportunities and their requirements	On-going	Continue to provide information on potential funding sources and their requirements to communities, including to fire departments in City of Amery and Village of Prairie Farm; to the Chippewa Valley Health Cooperative re. potential EDA funding for new nonprofit hospital; to the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center in River Falls on its prospective EDA application to expand the facility; to Northwood Technical College on potential EDA funding for workforce development facility for medical lab technicians.
Support partner efforts in recruiting and retaining workers and residents	On-going	Participation on boards of organizations that directly work on the issue including the Workforce Development Board and Momentum West – provide technical assistance as requested.
Provide general support for Disaster Ready Chippewa Valley (DRCV)	On-going	Continue to provide staffing support; in June 2024, DRCV hosted a preparedness open house event and Emergency Operations Center tour; an active shooter seminar with a “Stop the Bleed” class is planned for December 2024.
Monitor state and federal legislation regarding areas of concern such as comprehensive planning, community and rural development, transportation, solid waste, water quality, and education	On-going	Monitoring funding programs established by legislation, such as the Wisconsin Agricultural Road Improvement Program to support large producers, the Wisconsin Pre-Disaster Flood Resilience Grant Program, and the federal BEAD program and related Internet for All programming; participated in annual Chippewa Valley Rally Days at the State Capitol in Madison to advocate with other stakeholders for community and economic development issues important to the Region.
Act as a coordinating entity between local governments and state and federal agencies	On-going	Continue to provide support in the form of working with EDA staff to evaluate potential funding projects (New Richmond, Chippewa Valley Health Cooperative); providing assistance to prospective EDA applicants (City of River Falls); administering and closing out EDA grant for Stout Technology & Business Park expansion (City of Menomonie).

# SECTION IV: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

## WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Serve on educational institution committees and provide data and input as requested	On-going	Provide continuing assistance to UW- Eau Claire, UW-Stout, UW-River Falls and CVTC; serve on UW-River Falls Chancellor's Advisory Council.
Participate on regional advisory committees relating to special projects and efforts	On-going	Continue to provide support, including the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center Management Committee in River Falls.
Provide staffing for regional water quality planning efforts	On-going	Provide staff and administrative support to Rain to Rivers of Western Wisconsin in its work to protect regional waters; and collaborate with the Eau Claire River Watershed Coalition to support education and best practices to advance water quality and soil health.

# SECTION V: ADDITIONAL DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

## Economic Development Program Outreach & Project Development

WCWRPC reaches out to local governments to develop projects that will move the economic development priorities of the region forward, as those are articulated in the CEDS. These projects help to realize regional aspirations and goals including new job creation, business development, investment in infrastructure, comprehensive planning for communities, environmental preservation, and support of housing and workforce development efforts, among many others. Some recent or ongoing examples of successful work in this regard include the following:

- » Grant administration services for the **City of Menomonie's EDA project** related to the expansion of the Stout Technology & Business Park onto an additional 72 acres of land. The project provided sewer, water and street infrastructure that will provide space for new and expanding businesses to create new jobs, and in so doing, shore up the local workforce. The project was closed out in Spring 2024
- » Several **comprehensive planning projects** are either recently completed or currently underway. These plans include an economic development component, which is among the nine state-required elements of comprehensive plans. As such, these plans help communities to manage growth and change locally over a 20-year timeframe. Plans that were finished over the past year include for the Town of Lake Holcombe (its first comprehensive plan) and the City of Chippewa Falls. At the present time, plans or plan updates are being developed in partnership with the following communities with the target dates for completion noted: City of Colby (late 2024), Village of Lake Hallie (late 2024), Town of Bridge Creek (late 2024), Village of Roberts/Town of Warren (joint plan – early 2025), Town of Anson (Spring of 2025), and City of Abbotsford (end of 2025). New plans will commence for Chippewa County and Dunn County in late 2024.
- » The **Polk County Farmland Preservation Plan** identifies areas in the county where farmland should be preserved. This Plan will help the County to manage development within its boundaries so that acreage needed to support the local agricultural economy will remain. A draft of the Plan has been completed and submitted to the County for review, with final approval anticipated by the end of 2024.
- » WCWRPC conducted an **Environmental Review for the Altoona Public Housing Authority** during Summer 2024. This review is required as part of the Housing Authority's 5-Year Plan, which it must submit to the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development in order to receive funding from the agency. The public housing program that is operated by the Authority is critical to Altoona's workforce development efforts by providing housing stability for low-income workers in the community.

# SECTION V: ADDITIONAL DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

- » During Summer 2024, WCWRPC provided consultation, and completed a grant application, for the Village of Colfax and City of Altoona, respectively, related to a one-time funding program established by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. The new program, called the **Flexible Facilities Program**, is funded through the American Rescue Plan Act and helps to improve community infrastructure by funding rehabilitation activities for community centers and libraries, coupled with substantial upgrades to broadband and other digital technology.

## Technical Assistance to Local Governments & Other Stakeholders

The Economic Development District engages in a wide variety of initiatives to provide technical assistance to local governments and other regional stakeholders including grant writing, planning assistance, and other related activities in order to affect the Commission's strategic direction and to implement the CEDS. Examples of recent projects include:

- » Staff continue to work with the Village and School District of Frederic to update its **Safe Routes to School (SRTS)** plan. In addition, WCWRPC secured funding from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for the 2024-2028 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding cycle to extend the current SRTS program another two years. This funding will support educational and outreach initiatives in WCWRPC's 7-county region; fund implementation activities in Altoona, Chippewa Falls, and Eau Claire under the Chippewa Valley SRTS Partnership; and also cover SRTS plan development for Colby, Neillsville, Glenwood City, and Rice Lake.
- » WCWRPC assisted the Village of Roberts and the City of Stanley in submitting a **2024-2028 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) application** to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT). The DOT awarded funds for these projects. With the funds, the Village of Roberts will expand its current sidewalk network, while the City of Stanley will construct a bicycle path throughout the city.
- » The Commission is providing **interactive mapping of Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs)**, which shows communities' proposed municipal infrastructure projects and helps to communicate integrated data to elected officials, staff and the public. WCWRPC has so far provided these services to Eau Claire County, Chippewa County, the City of Chippewa Falls and the Village of Lake Hallie. It recently updated the CIP maps in these locations.
- » WCWRPC's continued partnership with the Rail Coalition of Western Wisconsin & the Chippewa-St. Croix Rail Commission has been vital to moving regional passenger rail efforts forward. Working with WCWRPC, these groups were **recently awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)** for a rail corridor study from Eau Claire to the Twin Cities. A consultant has been hired to carry out the study with an estimated completion of Phase I by mid-2025.

# SECTION V: ADDITIONAL DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

- » WCWRPC is involved in developing **Crash Reports** in order to provide data on crash incidents for counties and communities in the 7-county region. This information is a critical indicator of the level of safety in the Region, which has impacts on several CEDS goals including Strengthening Community, County & Regional Infrastructure; Developing Sense of Place as an Economic Development Tool; and Address Regional Workforce Development & Attraction Issues. Over the last year, the Barron County Crash Report was completed, and currently, the Clark County Crash Report is underway.
- » The Commission is assisting the City of Chippewa Falls with a city-wide **Wayfinding Guide**. Previous work included mapping and photos of all signage throughout the City. Current progress throughout the reporting period includes development of a planning document identifying current issues, opportunities, and signage design and placement recommendations. The plan is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.
- » Staff collected and mapped demographic and economic data to identify funding opportunities with the Economic Development Administration for the **Regional Business Fund, the regional revolving loan fund**, to support business development and expansion in West Central Wisconsin.
- » WCWRPC has assisted the Osseo Area Dusty Riders to develop an **ATV trail guide update** that identifies ATV and UTV routes in West Central Wisconsin. The guide was completed in May of 2024.
- » WCWRPC is working on a **traffic project with the City of Eau Claire**, and specifically, it has purchased a camera to analyze traffic trends on roads in Eau Claire. With the City providing guidance on locations from which to capture images, data is being gathered and analyzed including the number of cars on the roads, speeds and turning movements.
- » Rain to Rivers Partnership - The Commission continues to assist **Rain to Rivers of Western Wisconsin** through contracted services for education and outreach efforts related to stormwater runoff. Members of this partnership include Chippewa & Eau Claire Counties; Cities of Altoona, Chippewa Falls, Eau Claire, Hudson, Menomonie, Rice Lake and River Falls; Town of Washington; and the University of Wisconsin-Stout and University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Recent accomplishments of Rain to Rivers included a **partnership with the North American Stormwater and Erosion Control Association of Wisconsin (NASECA-WI) to conduct an Erosion Control Compliance training** in western Wisconsin. This training provided Wisconsin-based rules and regulations education for Engineers, Site Managers, Site Superintendents, Contractor Superintendents and Foremen, BMP Installers and Inspectors. The training took place in the City of Eau Claire with funding support from a grant received by the Xcel Energy – Natural Resource Fund. A total of 47 individuals attended.

# SECTION V: ADDITIONAL DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

## Economic Resilience & Recovery Update

WCWRPC has continued to carry out hazard mitigation, business continuity support, and disaster resiliency planning programs throughout its seven-county region as part of its emergency response/resiliency strategy in its CEDS. After having completed many Hazard Mitigation Plans over the years, staff are currently working on updates to such plans for several counties in the region. Barron County and St. Croix County plans are awaiting final FEMA approval, and Polk County is finalizing a draft of its plan. Eau Claire County's mitigation plan update is anticipated to be substantially complete by the end of 2024. These plans are funded by FEMA, and new FEMA grant applications have been tentatively approved for plan updates for Chippewa, Clark and Dunn counties. Additionally, the Commission continues to provide administrative and programming support to Disaster Ready Chippewa Valley (DRCV), which promotes cooperation between the private and public sectors in preparing for and mitigating the effects of disasters, while also helping businesses and organizations with preparedness and continuity planning. In June 2024, DRCV hosted a preparedness open house event and Emergency Operations Center tour, and an active shooter seminar with a "Stop the Bleed" class is being planned for December 2024.

WCWRPC has also assisted communities in the region to apply for, secure and administer FEMA mitigation grant funding for the construction of Community Safe Rooms. Currently, the Commission is providing grant administration services for just such a project at the Northern Wisconsin State Fairgrounds in Chippewa Falls. This project will be closing out by the end of 2024. It has also collaborated with the City of Altoona and Hillcrest Estates to secure FEMA grant funding for the largest mobile home park in Wisconsin and a nearby childcare center. Additionally, mitigation grant funding has been tentatively approved for the Village of Almena for the construction of a Community Safe Room. During the past quarter, WCWRPC has collaborated with an electric cooperative to explore mitigation grant funding to bury power lines in an area prone to outages and is actively working with a growth area in St. Croix County to consider grant options for hydrologic analysis to address repetitive flooding issues.



# SECTION VI: CEDS 2025 PLAN UPDATE

## Updating the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a place-based, regionally driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning – as implemented through the CEDS – is not only a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) programs, but successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. The CEDS provides the capacity-building foundation by which the public sector, working in conjunction with other economic actors (individuals, firms, industries), creates the environment for regional economic prosperity.

For the West Central Wisconsin - Economic Development District to remain in good standing with EDA, the District CEDS must be updated every five years. The last plan update took place in 2020, requiring the plan update process to occur again in 2025. In anticipation of this update, we will soon be organizing the Strategy Committee and identifying key partners needed to develop the plan and meet the federal regulations governing the CEDS (see 13 C.F.R. § 303.7) of which the following elements are to be included:

- » Summary Background: A summary background of the economic conditions of the region;
- » SWOT Analysis: An in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (commonly known as a "SWOT" analysis);
- » Strategic Direction/Action Plan: The strategic direction and action plan should build on findings from the SWOT analysis and incorporate/integrate elements from other regional plans (e.g., land use and transportation, workforce development, etc.) where appropriate as determined by the EDD or community/region engaged in development of the CEDS. The action plan should also identify the stakeholder(s) responsible for implementation, timetables, and opportunities for the integrated use of other local, state, and federal funds;
- » Evaluation Framework: Performance measures used to evaluate the organization's implementation of the CEDS and impact on the regional economy.

In addition to the sections noted above, the CEDS must incorporate the concept of economic resilience. Economic resilience can be defined as "the ability of regions to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stress that it may experience." The EDD or community responsible for the CEDS can address resilience as a separate section, distinct goal or priority action item, and/or as an area of investigation in the SWOT analysis. It may be most effective, however, to infuse the concept of resilience throughout the CEDS document. As a baseline, EDA



# SECTION VI: CEDS 2025 PLAN UPDATE

suggests regions undertake a two-pronged approach to help identify and counter the vulnerabilities that each region may face (see section on Economic Resilience for more information).

## Plan Update Timeline & Process

For the plan update process, the District proposes the following timeline for completion of the CEDS:

January 2025	Establish Strategy Committee/Key Partners, draft stakeholder and public input surveys.
January-March 2025	Socio-demographic data collection and analysis. Collect and summarize surveys. Develop plan template and begin drafting document.
April 2025	Strategy Committee meeting and partner discussions/interviews to develop plan goals, strategies, and conduct Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise.
June 2025	Draft of CEDS document completed and distributed for comments/input. Publication of notices regarding opportunity for public comment on draft CEDS (one newspaper per county). 30-day public comment period.
July-August 2025	Final revisions to CEDS completed based on strategy committee, stakeholders, and public input received. Finalize CEDS document.
September 2025	Approval of CEDS document at WCWRPC meeting.
October 2025	Final CEDS document delivered to EDA.

