

# Adams County Economic Development Strategy 2026



A D A M S   C O U N T Y  
E c o n o m i c   D e v e l o p m e n t

Prepared with the assistance of the:  
North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

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# Chapter 1: Background

County leaders are aware of the need for a county-wide economic development strategy. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the economic context by presenting an economic history of Adams County and an overview of previous planning processes on the local, regional, and state levels.

## Economic History Overview, Mid 1800s-Present

The first economic endeavors in Adams County were driven by the logging industry, as was common for many Wisconsin counties before the transition to agriculture. Jared Walsworth set up the first known commercial venture in 1838 near Big Spring in New Haven. His trading post and lodging house mainly served loggers clearing forest tracts. He later built a tavern. George Stowell, an employee of Walsworth, started the first farm in the County near New Haven. By the 1860s, the population had reached 6,000 with an economy that was driven by farming and a plethora of flourmill and sawmills, powered by County streams and rivers.

The population stalled in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of sandy soils, numerous wetlands, and the lack of railroad service in the county which impeded agriculture. Unlike the northern counties whose economies transitioned directly from logging to dairies, farmers in the central and southern counties engaged in wheat production. The weather and soils proved unsuitable for this activity and many farms failed as a result. Agricultural pursuits shifted to dairies as well as vegetable production in the late nineteenth century. Today, agriculture is still prominent and remains one of the strongest drivers of the economy.

In 1910, the Chicago-North Western Railroad built a service line for Adams County. However, the railway skirted two miles south of the Village of Friendship, the only incorporated community in the county. Land prices in the area had been high due to speculation. The community of Adams was established to accommodate the railroad workers, depots, and yards. The community of Adams incorporated in 1912.

The recreation and tourism boom started in the 1920s in the communities of Dellwood and Quincy, along the Wisconsin River. Visitors came to see the spectacular scenery of the Dells and a number of recreation cabins were built for accommodation. In the 1940s, dams were constructed on the river, creating the Castle Rock and Petenwell Lakes. The flowages stimulated the growth of more vacation homes and cemented Adams County's prominence as a retirement destination. Recreation and tourism continue to be major parts of the economy.

## Previous Planning Processes

### Adams County Economic Development Strategy, 2016

Adams County Economic Development (ACED) developed a 2016 Economic Development Strategy with assistance from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) and the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). The Strategy identifies salient demographic, housing, labor force and transportation trends throughout Adams County that pertain to economic health throughout the County. The Economic Strategy also includes a comprehensive economic assessment of key indicators of economic health in Adams County including such measures as Industry Earnings, Employment Projections, Location Quotient Analyses and Cluster Analyses. The document concludes with a comprehensive strategy consisting of a set of eight goals and objectives.

### North Central Wisconsin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), 2026-3030

The NCWRPC is designated as an Economic Development District by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration which provides funding for the purpose of developing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the Region's economic roadmap, which includes Adams and nine other counties. The CEDS provides a detailed assessment of economic development conditions in the Region, contains a SWOT Analysis, and identifies a Regional Economic Development Strategy, which includes goals and objectives. This then provides the foundation for the NCWRPC economic development work plan. Along with maintaining the NCWRPC's designation as an EDD, updating the CEDS provides access to grant funds from EDA for the Region.

### Adams County Housing Study, 2025

In 2024, Adams County Economic Development (ACED), in partnership with the Adams County Housing Committee and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Partners Network (RPN) worked with the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) to produce this study in response to growing concerns over housing affordability. The Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) soon partnered with ACED and Adams County to further enhance this project.

This project consisted of robust data collection, public surveys, public open houses, and stakeholder interviews to understand which housing types are highest in demand, and what barriers prevent an adequate supply of desired housing. This study recommends a variety of strategies and programs that each individual community may explore depending on their own needs to encourage the construction and rehabilitation of needed housing.

### Adams County Comprehensive Plan, 2018

The Adams County Comprehensive Plan analyzes labor patterns, the economic base, employment projections, and existing facilities. The plan outlines the following goals:

- Maintain, diversify, and expand the economy in the County, while maintaining the rural character of the County.
- Preserve and enhance the quality of life by promoting compatibility with economic development.
- Encourage the coordination of economic development, including tourism efforts, throughout the County and the region.

### North Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), 2025

The RCP's economic development chapter examines the Region's economy and compares it to statewide and national trends, followed by a series of economic development recommendations and local, Regional, State, and federal programs. The following issues facing economic development within the Region were identified:

- An aging workforce, retirements, and the need for a skilled and flexible workforce
- Unpredictable weather impact on agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism, and financial resiliency
- The need for broadband expansion
- Childcare availability and affordability
- Unknown future of the forest products industry
- Limited access to active rail lines
- Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and their unknown future impact on the economy
- The increase in flexible, hybrid, and remote work and its impact on commercial real estate, local businesses, community facilities, and job recruitment strategies
- Inflation's impact on businesses, County and municipal budgets, household finances, and growing wealth gaps between households of different income levels

## Chapter 2: Demographics and Workforce

This chapter is a review of the socio-economic trends throughout Adams County that are important to understanding the strengths, weaknesses, issues, and opportunities at play in the County. This chapter examines population, net migration, housing, household composition, income, educational attainment, labor force, and worker commute patterns.

### Demographics

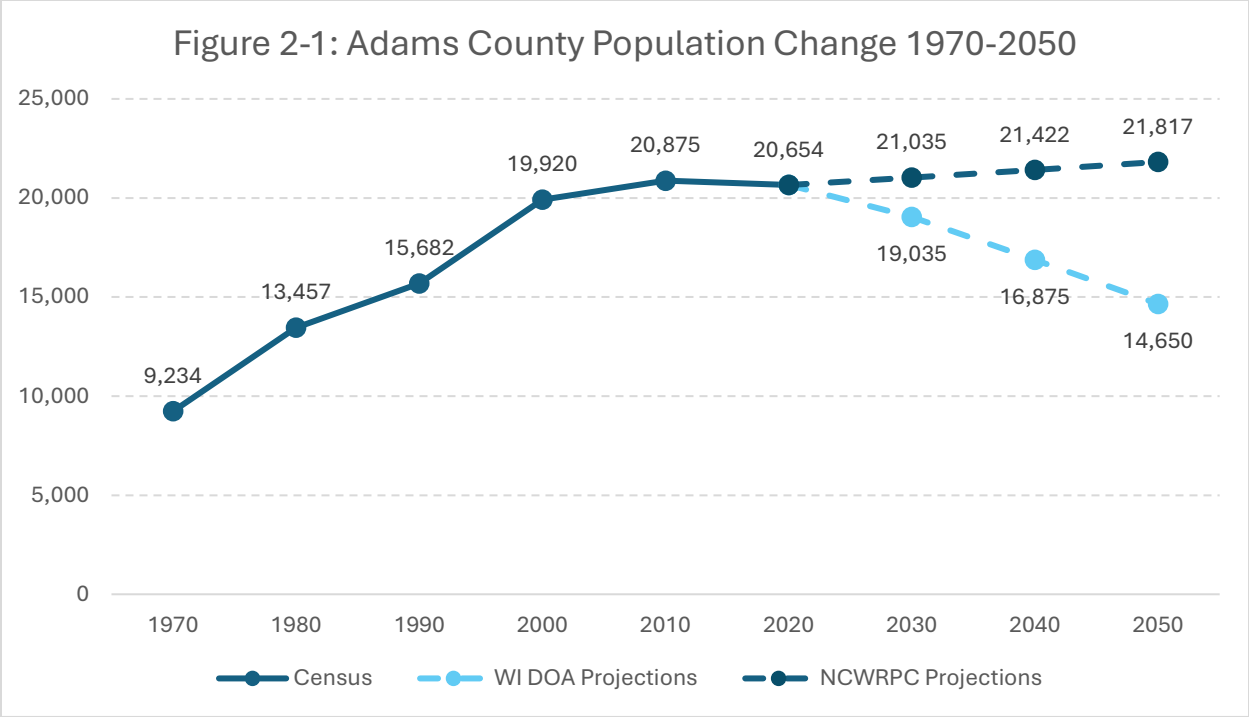
#### Population Profile

In 2023, the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) estimated the population of Adams County to be 20,899. The County's population has held steady since both the 2010 Census and the 2020 Census, as the County's population has increased by less than one percent since 2010 (compared to a 4.6 percent increase in population throughout Wisconsin during this time. Previously, the County had experienced a growth in population exceeding 33 percent between 1990 and 2010, compared to a 16 percent increase for the State during this time. These trends indicate that population growth has significantly slowed for Adams County over the past two decades and is no longer outpacing or even keeping pace with the State's rate of population growth.

The DOA creates population projections for the entire State after every decennial Census, and these are considered as the State's official projections. In 2025, the DOA released updated population projections based off the 2020 Census out to 2050, projecting a significant decrease in population for Adams County in each decade. Overall, the DOA projections project a 29 percent decrease in population in Adams County by 2050.

However, Adams County has actually experienced a slight increase in population between 2020 and 2024, which is in contrast with the projected significant decrease in population from the DOA projections. Therefore, the NCWRPC used the rate of population growth between 2000 and 2020 to forecast population projections through 2050. These NCWRPC projections project a 5.6 percent increase in population by 2050 for Adams County.

**Figure 2-1** shows the County's change in population through 2020 in Adams County, as well as future population projections from both the DOA and NCWRPC.



Source: U.S. Census, WI DOA, NCWRPC

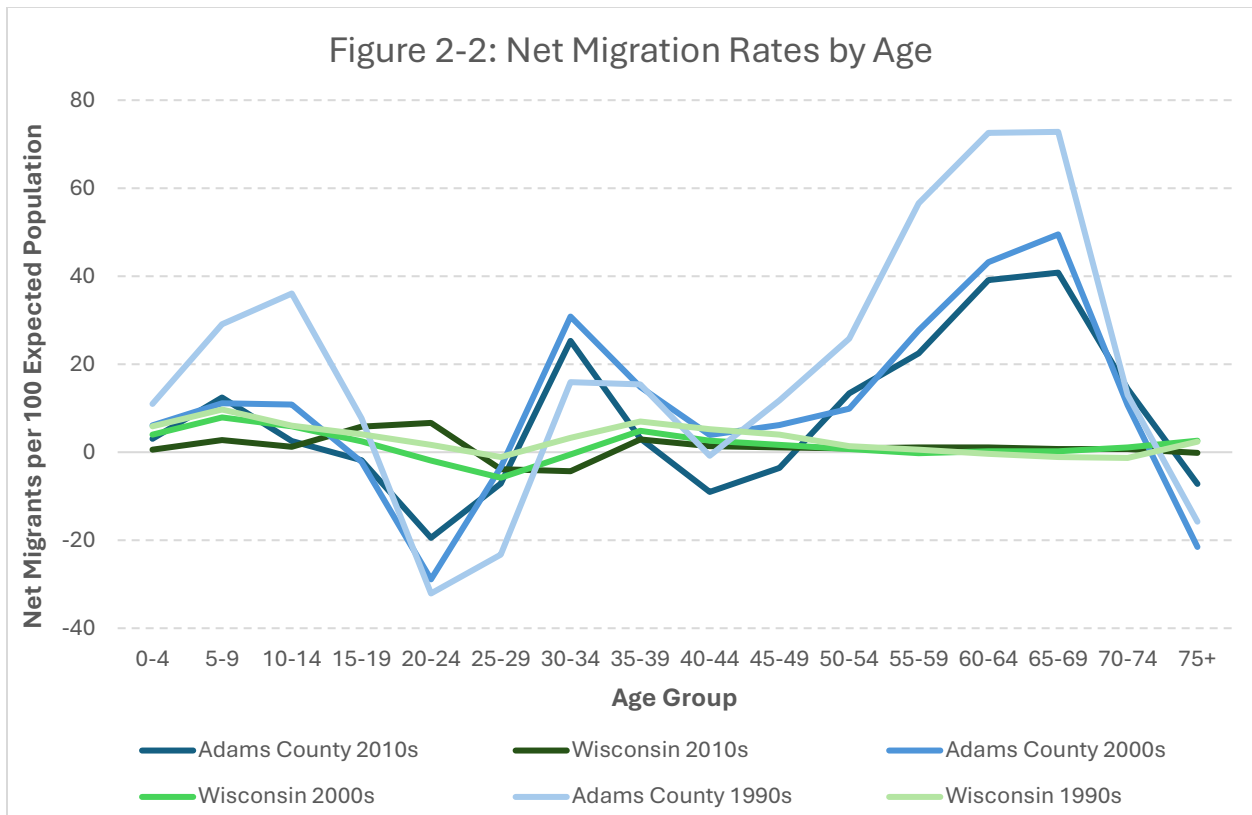
**Population Net Migration**

From 2020 to 2024, Adams County experienced a decrease in natural population change, meaning that there were more deaths than births within the County. During this time, there were 835 more deaths within Adams County than there were births. This natural decrease in Adams County is an indicator of an older population. This is evidenced in the County’s median age of 55.5 years, compared to the Wisconsin median age of 40.1 years.

Over this same time period, Adams County experienced an increase in net migration, which is the difference between those residents moving into the area and residents moving out of the area. During this time, there were 1,496 more residents that moved into Adams County than residents who moved out of Adams County. Census information reveals that most of the residents moving out of Adams County were between the ages of 20 and 29 years, while the majority of residents moving into Adams County were individuals between the ages of 50 and 74.

According to a report from the Rural Population Research Network, young professionals (typically those ages 20-29) are moving out of rural locations and into more urban areas that offer a mix of entertainment, food, outdoor recreational, and job opportunities. Meanwhile, mid-career adults (typically those ages 30-54) are moving into suburban areas and growing rural economies that can provide good schooling and affordable housing options. The report also finds that retirement age adults (typically individuals ages 55 and older) are moving into areas with lake access and other outdoor recreational opportunities.

The trends identified in the Rural Population Research Network report are also true for Adams County. As shown in **Figure 2-2**, Adams County has a negative net migration rate for young adults, but generally has positive net migration rates as residents transition through life stages and start young families. With the County’s strong tourism industry as well as plentiful lake access and outdoor recreation opportunities, Adams County is a highly appealing destination for retirement age adults, as evidenced by the County’s strong positive net migration rates for adults ages 55 and older.



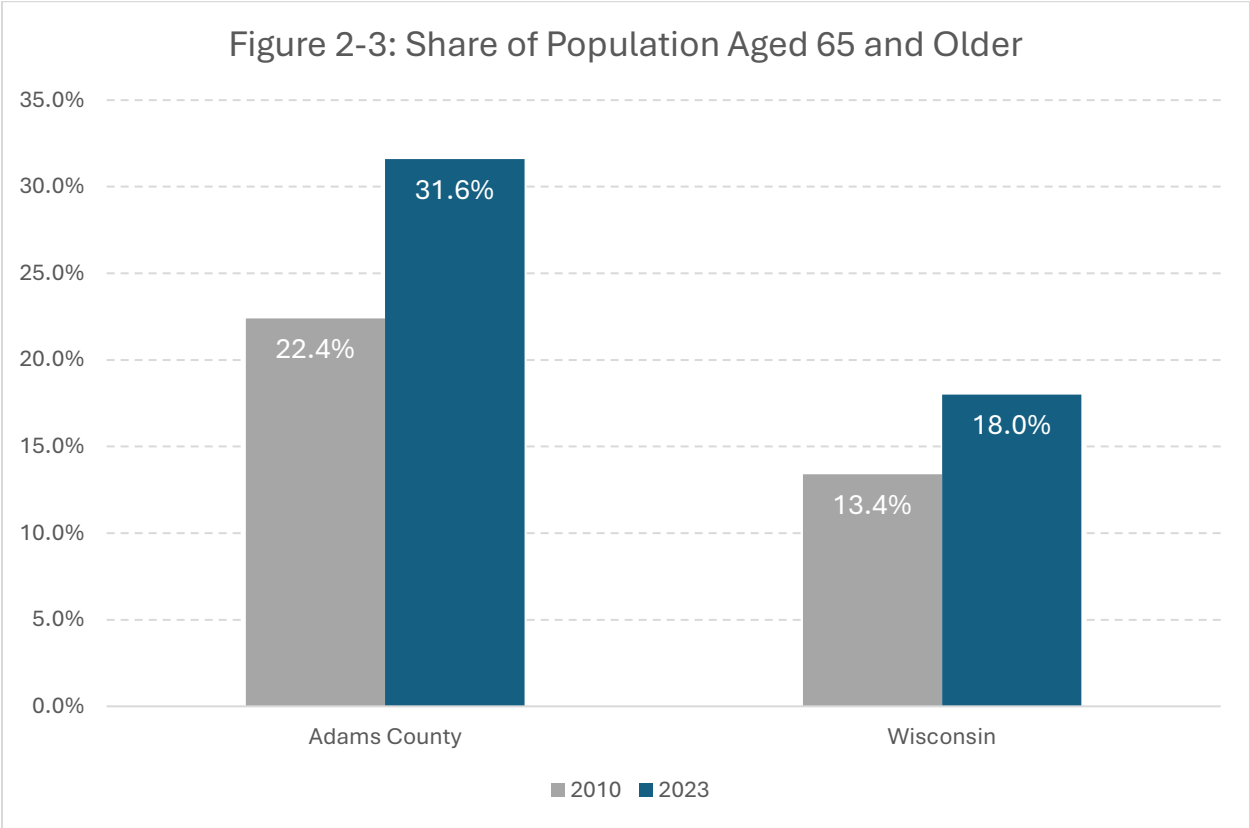
Source: Egan-Robertson, David, Katherine J. Curtis, Richelle L. Winkler, Kenneth M. Johnson, and Caitlin Bourbeau, *Age-Specific Net Migration Estimates for US Counties, 1950-2020*. Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2024. Web. [11/12/2025.] <https://netmigration.wisc.edu/>.

### Age Dynamics

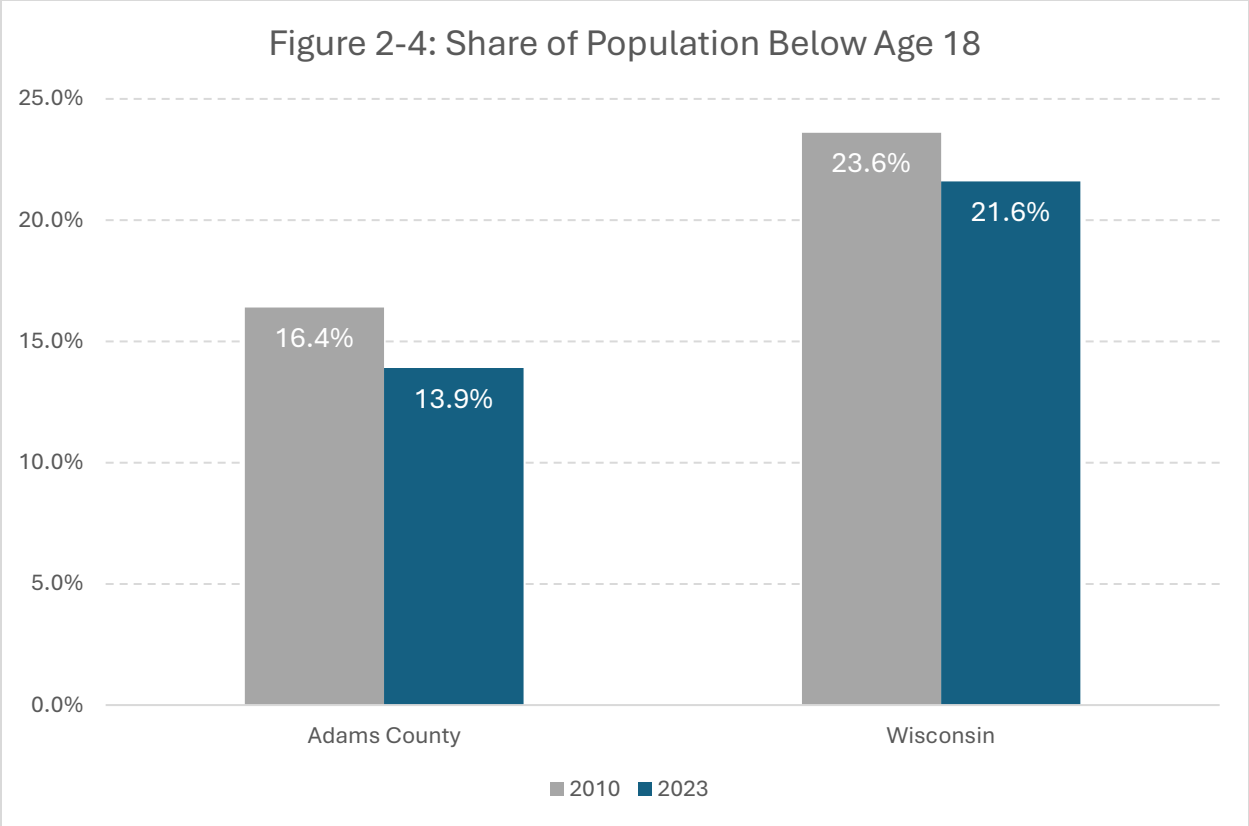
Examining the age distribution of the population can help determine and prepare for the needs of the community. The population below the age of 18 and the population age 65 and older are two age groups that are particularly important to consider when determining the needs of the population. These two age groups are often referred to as dependent populations and have different needs. The population below age 18 requires services such as quality childcare, schools, and specialized health care needs. Those 65 and over may require access to healthcare, transportation, and community services.

Adams County has historically been considered a retirement community, as some communities within the County actively work to attract retirees. This is reflected in the median age (55.5) of the County being significantly higher than the State median age of 40.1. Like statewide and national trends, Adams County’s share of individuals aged 65 and older is increasing, while the share of those under 18 is decreasing.

In 2023, about 31.6 percent of the Adams County population was aged 65 and older, compared to about 22.4 percent in 2010. As the trend towards an older population continues, senior-oriented services will be in higher demand, while the County’s employers will need to replace workers entering retirement. **Figure 2-3** displays the share of population aged 65 and older in Adams County and Wisconsin.



In 2023, about 13.9 percent of the Adams County population was below the age of 18, lower than in 2010 when 16.4 percent of the County’s population was below the age of 18. While the share of the population below the age of 18 is decreasing, providing access to healthcare, quality schools, and childcare will still be important for Adams County moving forward, as these services and amenities increase the attractiveness of the County to prospective residents and workers. **Figure 2-4** displays the share of population below the age of 18 in Adams County and Wisconsin.



**Households and the Number of People per Household**

The rate of growth for households in Adams County was faster than the population growth rate from 2000 to 2020. While the population increased by 3.7 percent between 2000 and 2020 in Adams County, the number of households grew 14.5 percent during this time. This is due to the decreasing size of households, a phenomenon observed for several decades across the country. In 2000, the average household size was 2.32 persons. In 2020, the average size was 2.15, compared to 2.36 for the State.

**Housing**

Decreasing household sizes will affect the number of housing units needed in Adams County, as well as the types of housing demanded. In 2023, there were 16,873 housing units in Adams County. The number of housing units within Adams County has increased over 19.5 percent since 2000. However, most of this growth occurred between 2000 and 2010, as housing construction significantly slowed down after the 2008 recession. Over 86.4 percent of households were owner occupied, while the remaining 13.6 percent of households were renter occupied. Adams County has a high vacancy rate, as over 44 percent of housing units within the County were considered vacant. The majority of these vacancies are seasonal housing units. Overall, about 38.4 percent of all housing units within Adams

County are considered to be seasonal housing units, significantly higher than the State percentage of about seven percent.

The median value of a house in Adams County was \$184,500 in 2023, which was significantly lower than the State’s median value of a house (\$247,400). When adjusting for inflation, the median value of housing in Adams County has increased since 2010, when the median adjusted median adjusted value was \$180,452. Approximately 52 percent of all owner-occupied households within Adams County had a mortgage in 2023.

Housing affordability is an important issue to address for the local economy. There is a general consensus that a household should not have to spend more than 30 percent of its income on housing – this is the accepted definition of housing affordability by HUD. Households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing are considered cost-burdened. Overall, over 26.6 percent of all households within Adams County were considered to be cost-burdened in 2023, similar to the State percentage of 26.0 percent. Renters are generally more likely to be cost-burdened than homeowners, as about 37.5 percent of renter households within Adams County were cost-burdened, compared to about 25 percent of homeowners in Adams County.

As shown in **Table 2-1**, the probability of spending more than 30 percent of income on housing increases the lower a household’s income is. Over 77 percent of households in Adams County earning less than \$20,000 are considered to be cost-burdened by housing costs. In Adams County, most income brackets have a lower cost-burden rate than the statewide average, except for households earning less than \$10,000 and those earning between \$75,000-\$99,999.

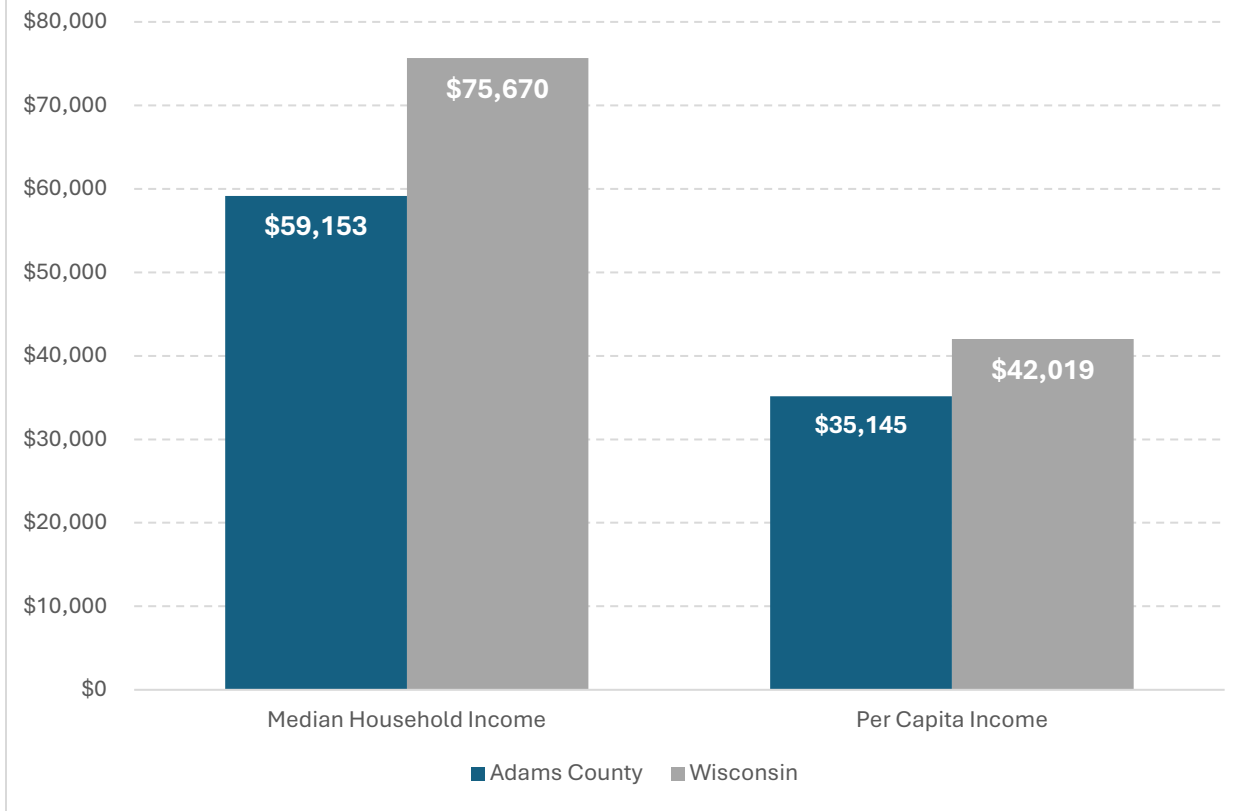
Table 2-1: Monthly Housing Costs Exceeding 30 Percent of Income							
	Less than \$10,000	\$10,000 - \$19,999	\$20,000 - \$34,999	\$35,000 - \$49,999	\$50,000 - \$74,999	\$75,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 or More
Adams County	81.2%	77.3%	43.5%	26.8%	17.9%	9.0%	2.4%
Wisconsin	69.4%	83.8%	67.3%	42.0%	20.5%	8.4%	2.5%

*Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023*

## Income Metrics

There are two measures of income: median household income and per capita income. Median household income provides an indication of the economic ability of the typical family or household unit while per capita income provides a measure of relative earning power on a per person level. Income levels are lower in Adams County than they are in Wisconsin and the nation. In 2023, the median household income in Adams County was \$59,153, which was only 78 percent of the statewide median household income. Similarly, Adams County’s per capita income of \$35,145 was only 84 percent of the statewide per capita income. **Figure 2-5** compares income levels in Adams County and Wisconsin.

**Figure 2-5: Income Metrics, 2023**



Typical expenses a household needs to consider often include food, childcare, medical, housing, transportation, internet & mobile, taxes, and civic expenses. The MIT Living Wage Calculator suggests that a single adult in Adams County needs an hourly wage of \$19.39 to cover the typical expenses (about \$40,326 annually), while a single adult with one child needs an hourly wage of \$33.41 (about \$69,486 annually), and two adults (both working) with two children would each need to earn \$23.72 per hour (about \$98,685 annually). Considering that the median household income in Adams County is \$59,153, over half of all households within the County earn a wage that is higher than what is considered a living wage for a single adult. However, over half of all households within the County earn less than what is considered to be a living wage for households with children.

## Education

The educational attainment level of people within a community is often an indicator of the overall income, job availability and well-being of a community. With more jobs requiring a degree of some level, a high school education is no longer sufficient to obtain a living wage in many cases. Additionally, higher levels of education are often linked to higher paying jobs, leading to increased

wages and improved life outcomes. These factors help highlight the important role education can play in improving quality of life.

Educational attainment among Adams County residents currently lags behind the State. Adams County has a lower percentage of residents who have obtained a high school degree or higher than Wisconsin, and also has a significantly lower percentage of residents who have obtained an Associate’s degree or higher and who have obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher. **Table 2-2** compares educational attainment between Adams County and Wisconsin.

<b>Table 2-2: Highest Level of Educational Attainment, 2023</b>		
	<b>Adams</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>
Less than 9th Grade	2.7%	2.4%
9th to 12th Grade, no diploma	8.3%	4.3%
High School Graduate	39.8%	29.7%
Some College, no degree	22.7%	19.8%
Associate's Degree	9.2%	11.2%
Bachelor's Degree	12.5%	21.6%
Master's Degree	3.7%	8.1%
Doctorate Degree	1.0%	3.1%
<hr/>		
High School Graduate or Higher	89.0%	93.4%
Associate's Degree or Higher	26.5%	44.0%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	17.3%	32.8%

*Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023*

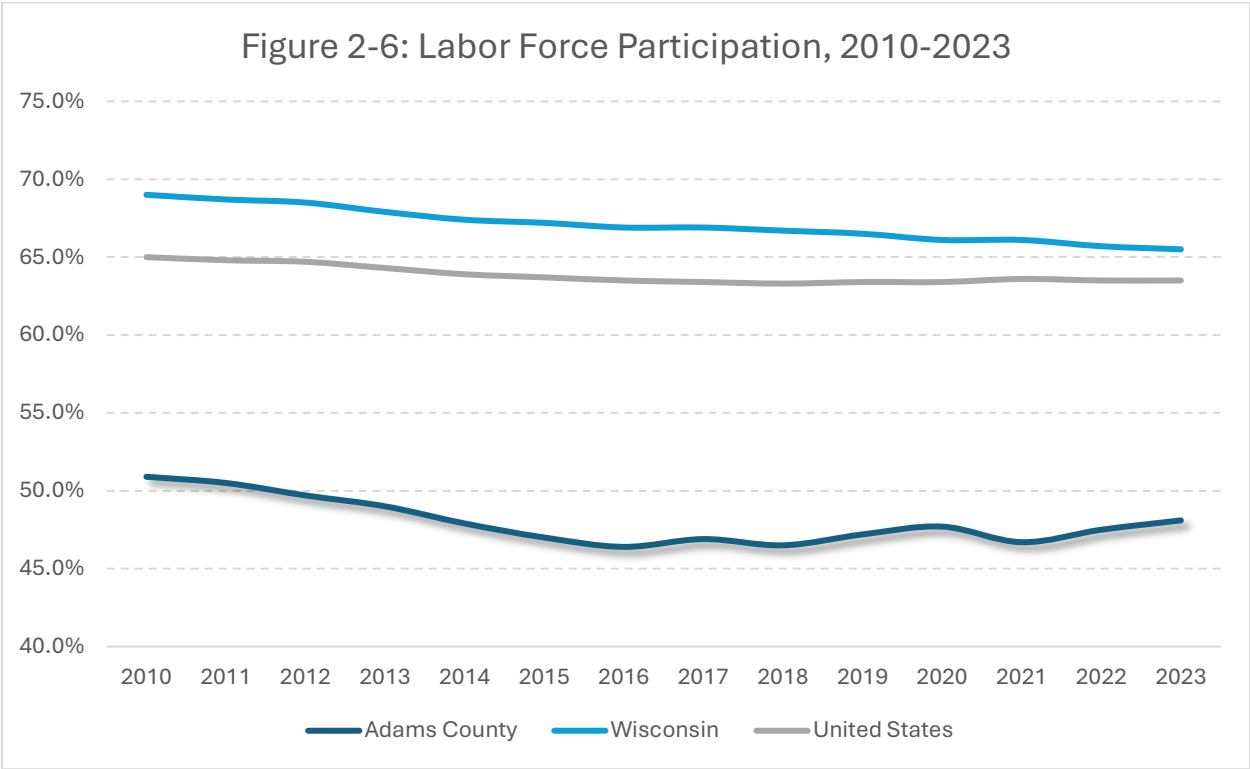
However, while the County does have lower rates of educational attainment than the State, educational attainment within Adams County continues to improve. In 2023, 89 percent of Adams County residents, aged 25 and older, had completed high school, compared to 84 percent in 2010. At the same time, 26.5 percent had attained an Associate’s degree or higher in 2023, compared to 18.4 percent in 2010. Additionally, 17.3 percent of Adams County residents had attained a Bachelor’s degree or higher in 2023, compared to 10.8 percent in 2010.

## **Labor Force and Unemployment**

### **Labor Force**

Labor force is the number of individuals who are aged sixteen and over that are employed or looking to be employed. Individuals over sixteen who are students, stay-at-home parents, retired, institutionalized, or unable or unwilling to seek employment are not considered to be part of the labor force.

Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is an important metric of economic strength. Adams County has consistently had a lower LFPR than Wisconsin and the Nation, even if the figure is just measured for those between the ages of 20 to 64. This is concerning because it means that there is relatively less disposable income to spend in the local economy because fewer adults are working. In 2023, Adams County had 18,420 residents aged 16 and older, and 8,853 of these residents participated in the labor force. With 8,853 residents participating in the labor force, Adams County had a labor force participation rate of 48.1 percent, significantly lower than the State’s labor force participation rate of 65.5 percent. **Figure 2-6** displays annual labor force participation rates for Adams County, Wisconsin, and the United States over time.

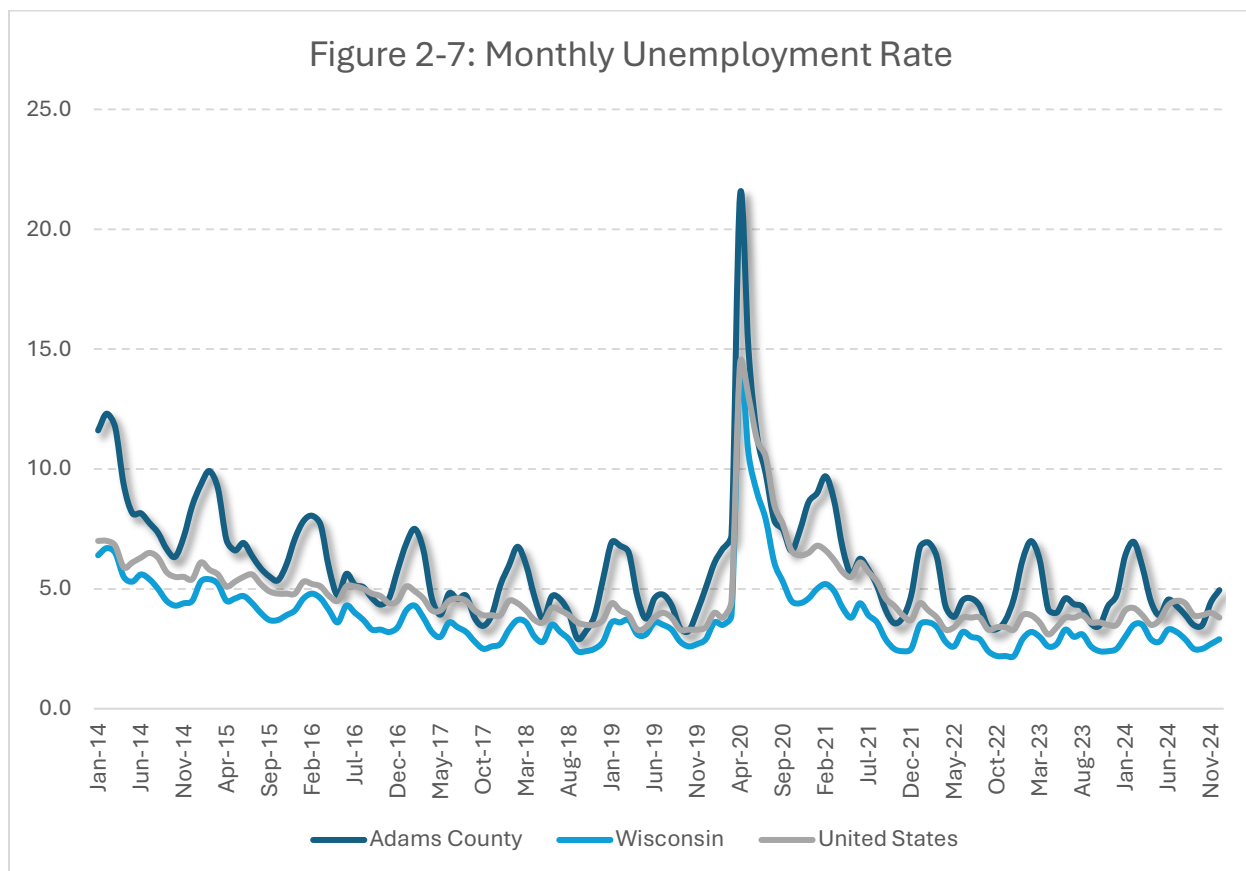


**Unemployment**

Adams County has traditionally had a higher unemployment rate than both the national and state unemployment rates. With an unemployment rate of 5.1 percent in 2023, Adams County’s unemployment rate has significantly decreased since 2010, when the unemployment rate was 12.2 percent. **Table 2-3** compares annual unemployment rates in 2000, 2010, 2020, and 2023 for Adams County and Wisconsin. **Figure 2-7** compares monthly unemployment rates from 2014-2024 for Adams County, Wisconsin, and the United States. Adams County’s higher unemployment rates are largely driven by seasonal tourism, and unemployment rates are generally more volatile than the state and national rates.

Table 2-3: Annual Unemployment Rates					
	2000	2010	2020	2023	Change
Adams County	4.4	12.2	9.8	5.1	15.9%
Wisconsin	3.4	8.4	6.4	2.8	-17.6%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



### Labor Force Commuting Patterns

According to U.S. Census on the Map, 2,472 workers commuted into Adams County and 5,924 workers commuted out of Adams County for work, while 2,003 residents lived and worked within Adams County. This indicates that there are fewer jobs located within Adams County than there are residents who live in Adams County.

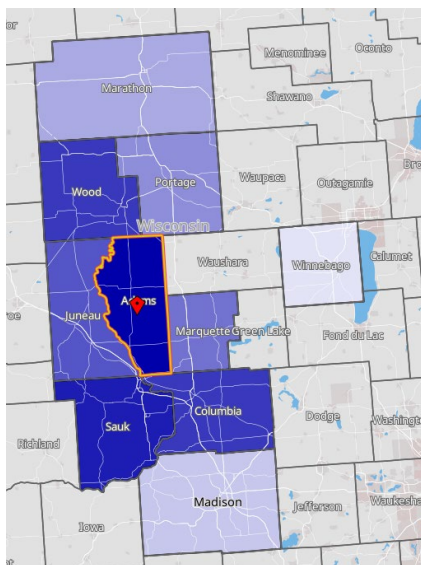
Sauk County received the most Adams County resident workers (914), followed by Columbia and Wood Counties who both received 531 Adams County resident workers. Other common employment destinations for Adams County resident workers include Juneau, Marquette, Portage, Marathon, Dane, and Winnebago Counties. This is reflected in the average commuting times for Adams County workers, 29.1 minutes compared to the Wisconsin average of 22.2 minutes.

Wood County (423) was responsible for most of the in-bound commuters who work in Adams County, followed by Sauk (312) and Juneau (275) Counties. Other counties with high numbers of workers traveling into Adams County for work include Columbia, Marquette, Waushara, Portage, Dane, and Monroe Counties.

These commuting patterns indicate that there is interdependency between Adams County and many of the surrounding counties and highlight the mobility of the labor force in the area. **Figure 2-8** and **Figure 2-9** show work destinations for Adams County residents and home destinations for Adams County employees, respectively.

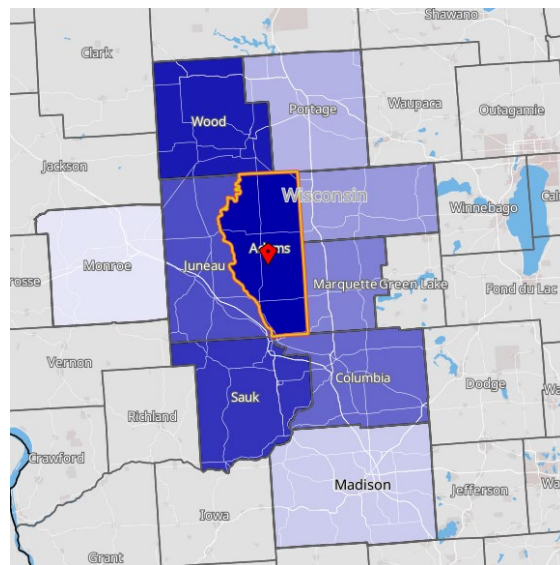
About 26 percent of the jobs outside of the County that are held by Adams County residents are in “goods producing” industries, 20.5 percent are in “trade, transportation and utilities” industries, and 53.5 percent are in “all other services” industries. In contrast, 65.5 percent of the jobs in Adams County held by workers who live outside of the County are “all other services” industries. This may indicate that Adams County residents currently have the capacity to support manufacturing jobs, wholesale and retail trade, transportation and utilities jobs, but those positions are not available in the volume needed for those workers. Additionally, many people have to commute from outside to fill service related jobs in Adams County, indicating a potential mismatch between opportunities to live in Adams County for the workers filling those jobs. This mismatch could be due to factors such as housing availability & affordability and community amenities.

**Figure 2-8: Where Adams County Residents Work**



Source: U.S. Census on the Map, LEHD 2022

**Figure 2-9: Where Adams County Employees Live**



Source: U.S. Census on the Map, LEHD 2022

## Key Demographic Issues and Trends

- Aging Population
- Low Labor Force Participation Rates
- Stagnant Incomes
- Employment and Labor Mismatch
- Housing

## Chapter 3: Economic Assessment

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze past and current data as well as projections for the County to identify its economic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. This chapter seeks to identify struggling industries to promote job retention as well as to pinpoint emerging and driver industries to attract and grow in the County. This is done by examining the jobs existing in the County and by identifying how concentrated industries are within Adams County.

Business ownership and entrepreneurship are also important factors of the economy to analyze. New business startup activity, business growth, and business retention are all signs of a local economy that is strong enough to support business. Tracking the number of total businesses and business startups over time can also help to predict and explain job trends, as new, small businesses are currently the number one driver of job growth nationwide.

With the significant impact that the Tourism industry has on the Adams County economy, it is also important to examine Tourism trends within the County. Tracking trends such as visitor spending, jobs supported by tourism, and the overall economic impact of tourism over time help to identify the impact that Tourism has on the Adams County economy.

### Employment Trends

#### Total Employment

Adams County had 5,626 jobs within its boundaries in 2023, according to the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). Adams County's employment total of 5,626 in 2023 represents a 6.9 percent decrease from the employment total of 6,044 in 2013. The decrease in employment since 2013 experienced in Adams County is in contrast to the State trend, as the State experienced a 6.8 percent increase in employment during this time, as shown in **Table 3-1**. It is also important to consider the impact that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has had on employment. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a drastic decrease in employment, with employment in Adams County slowly starting to increase in the wake of the pandemic. Adams County's economy is more reliant on jobs in industries that are more likely to be impacted by disruptions such as the pandemic, which could help explain the drastic differences in employment trends between the County and State.

Table 3-1: Total Employment			
	2013	2023	Percent Change 2013-2023
Adams County	6,044	5,626	-6.9%
Wisconsin	3,032,411	3,239,881	6.8%

Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW

### Employment by Sector

In 2023, the three largest employment sectors in Adams County were Natural Resources & Mining, Government, and Leisure & Hospitality. The Natural Resources & Mining industry accounted for over 21 percent of all jobs, and this sector experienced a 9.8 percent decrease in employment since 2013. The Government sector accounted for about 18 percent of all jobs in the County, and this sector experienced a 19.8 percent decrease in employment between 2013 and 2023. The Leisure & Hospitality industry accounted for about 17 percent of all jobs and experienced a 9.4 percent decrease in employment between 2013 and 2023.

Between 2013 and 2023, only five sectors experienced an increase in employment within Adams County. These sectors were the Information; Financial Activities; Trade, Transportation, and Utilities; Construction; and Professional and Business Services sectors. All other sectors within Adams County experienced a decrease in employment of at least nine percent during this time.

The three sectors that experienced the fastest declines in employment between 2013 and 2023 were the Other Services, Government, and Manufacturing sectors, each experiencing a decrease of over 13 percent during this time. **Table 3-2** shows the change in employment by supersector between 2013 and 2023 in Adams County.

Table 3-2: Employment by Supersector, Adams County 2013-2023			
Supersector	2013	2023	Percent Change 2013-2023
Natural Resources and Mining	1,358	1,227	-9.6%
Construction	250	270	8.0%
Manufacturing	327	284	-13.1%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	745	861	15.6%
Information	11	25	127.3%
Financial Activities	110	145	31.8%
Professional and Business Services	215	232	7.9%
Educational and Health Services	471	424	-10.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	1,035	938	-9.4%
Other Services	262	210	-19.8%
Government	1,260	1,010	-19.8%
Total	6,044	5,626	-6.9%

Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW

**Employment Projections by Sector**

By 2033, Adams County is expected to add 735 jobs, an increase of about 13 percent. The Natural Resources and Mining sector is projected to add the most jobs (182) during this time, while the Information sector is projected to experience the fastest growth during this time. The Government sector is the only sector in Adams County expected to experience a decrease in employment by 2033. **Table 3-3** shows employment projections by supersector for Adams County.

<b>Table 3-3: Adams County Employment by Supersector Projections</b>			
<b>Supersector</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2033</b>	<b>Percent Change 2023-2033</b>
Natural Resources and Mining	1,227	1,409	14.8%
Construction	270	323	19.6%
Manufacturing	284	327	15.1%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	861	973	13.0%
Information	25	45	80.0%
Financial Activities	145	188	29.7%
Professional and Business Services	232	268	15.5%
Educational and Health Services	424	509	20.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	938	1,085	15.7%
Other Services	210	232	10.5%
Government	1,010	1,002	-0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,626</b>	<b>6,361</b>	<b>13.1%</b>

*Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW*

**Unemployment Trends**

As discussed previously in Chapter Two, unemployment rates in Adams County have historically been higher than the state and national averages. With an unemployment rate of 5.1 percent in 2023, Adams County’s unemployment rate has significantly decreased since 2010, when the unemployment rate was 12.2 percent. In part, the high unemployment rates, as well as the low labor force participation rate among working age adults, could reflect the lack of job opportunities in the County, as Adams county has far fewer jobs than workers.

**Average Annual Wage by Industry Sector**

Overall, the average annual wage in Adams County was \$56,795 in 2023. The County’s average annual wage was lower than the State’s average wage of \$75,404. Among industry sectors, the Utilities industry had the highest average annual wage in Adams County at \$146,750, followed by the Management of Companies and Enterprises industry at \$87,931. Several industries that have a high

concentration in Adams County have a higher average annual wage in the County than the statewide average. These include the Agriculture, Accommodation and Food Services, and Government industries. **Table 3-4** breaks down average annual wages by industry in 2023.

Table 3-4: Average Annual Earnings by Industry, 2023				
Industry (2-Digit NAICS)	Adams County	Cost of Living Adjusted Earnings	Wisconsin	County Wage as a Percentage of State Wage
Agriculture	\$56,563	\$58,554	\$50,267	112.5%
Mining	N/A	N/A	\$104,863	N/A
Utilities	\$146,750	\$151,915	\$173,315	84.7%
Construction	\$56,098	\$58,072	\$88,381	63.5%
Manufacturing	\$70,090	\$72,557	\$89,431	78.4%
Wholesale Trade	\$77,602	\$80,334	\$104,027	74.6%
Retail Trade	\$35,864	\$37,126	\$42,781	83.8%
Transportation and Warehousing	\$69,246	\$71,683	\$69,602	99.5%
Information	\$45,288	\$46,882	\$130,640	34.7%
Finance and Insurance	\$69,428	\$71,872	\$121,806	57.0%
Real Estate	\$54,997	\$56,933	\$74,402	73.9%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$67,093	\$69,454	\$109,428	61.3%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$87,931	\$91,026	\$146,878	59.9%
Administrative and Support Services	\$34,699	\$35,920	\$52,003	66.7%
Educational Services	\$52,041	\$53,873	\$56,443	92.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$57,104	\$59,114	\$75,654	75.5%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$29,342	\$30,375	\$44,348	66.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	\$28,477	\$29,480	\$26,163	108.8%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$33,282	\$34,453	\$41,458	80.3%
Government	\$87,056	\$90,120	\$84,061	103.6%
Total	\$56,795	\$58,794	\$75,404	75.3%

Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW

**Industries with a High Percentage of Workers Nearing Retirement Age**

In 2023, about 36 percent of the County’s labor force, more than one in three workers, was over the age of 55 years old, and thus nearing retirement age. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force participation rate drops swiftly after workers reach this age. **Table 3-5** shows industries that have a high proportion of workers nearing retirement age. These industries are more likely to face a shortage of qualified workers as these older workers retire. Businesses have started to make investments in technology to partially alleviate the quantity problem. But more sophisticated technology requires more sophisticated workers.

<b>NAICS</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Percent of Workers 55+</b>
48	Transportation and Warehousing	53%
53	Real Estate	48%
11	Agriculture	47%
52	Finance and Insurance	38%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	38%
56	Administrative and Support Services	38%
44	Retail Trade	35%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	34%

*Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW*

## Local Economy

### Gross Regional Product

Gross Regional Product (GRP) measures the total value of goods services produced in regional economies. When measured over time, GRP can help identify whether regional economies are growing or shrinking. Between 2014 and 2024, Adams County experienced a 36.6 percent increase in GRP, increasing to over \$627 million in 2024. Adams County’s GRP growth during this time was slower than the State’s growth, as the State experienced a 51.5 percent increase in GRP between 2014 and 2024.

The top GRP producing industries within Adams County in 2024 were the Agriculture and Natural Resources, Government, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and the Manufacturing industries. The Agriculture and Natural Resources industry produced over \$140 million in GRP and accounted for over 22 percent of the County’s GRP production in 2024. The Government industry produced over \$115 million in GRP, accounting for over 18 percent of the County’s GRP. The Retail Trade industry accounted for about 7.5 percent of the County’s GRP, producing over \$47 million. The Accommodation and Food Services industry accounted for about 7.5 percent of the County’s GRP, producing over \$47 million in GRP. The Manufacturing industry accounted for about 6.3 percent of the County’s GRP, producing over \$39 million.

### Location Quotient

A location quotient is a way of quantifying how concentrated an industry is in a region compared to the nation. It can reveal what makes a particular region unique as well as its economic strengths and weaknesses. The location quotient model uses employment information for both a particular region and the nation and compares their ratios of industrial employment to total employment. Based on this information, each industry sector is assigned a numeric value called a location quotient which in turn is used identify exporter industries. Export industries are the drivers of the local economy. Any

industry with a location quotient value greater than one is considered to be an exporter and the higher the location quotient, the greater the concentration of jobs. Non-exporter industries have location quotients lower than one. While non-exporter industries are less concentrated and are not major drivers of the local economy, they are important for economic diversity and possibly have the potential to grow.

There were five industries within Adams County that were considered as exporter industries in 2024. These industries were the Agriculture and Natural Resources; Utilities; Accommodation and Food Services; Arts, Entertainment, and Food Services; and Government industries. Among the County’s exporter industries, only the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation industry experienced an increase in employment between 2014 and 2024. **Table 3-6** shows the location quotient of each industry in Adams County in 2024.

Table 3-6: Adams County Location Quotient 2024	
NAICS 2-Digit Industry	Location Quotient
Agriculture	18.64
Mining	0.00
Utilities	2.43
Construction	0.85
Manufacturing	0.76
Wholesale Trade	0.50
Retail Trade	0.95
Transportation and Warehousing	0.72
Information	0.26
Finance and Insurance	0.34
Real Estate	0.76
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.22
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.15
Administrative and Support Services	0.39
Educational Services	0.21
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.56
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1.48
Accommodation and Food Services	1.66
Other Services (except Public Administration)	0.74
Government	1.22

Source: Lightcast 2025.4; QCEW

The relative strength of a regional industry can be determined using a quadrant analysis. By examining the size and change over time of a location quotient value, mature, driver, troubled, and emerging industries can be identified by their quadrant position. **Figure 3-1** below displays a quadrant analysis using industry employment concentration on the vertical axis and the percentage

change in employment from 2014 to 2024 on the horizontal axis. The size of each bubble in the figure represents the total number of workers in each respective industry.

Industries in the upper right quadrant of **Figure 3-1** are considered driver industries, industries in the bottom right quadrant are considered emerging industries, industries in the lower left quadrant are considered troubled industries, and industries in the upper left quadrant are considered mature industries.

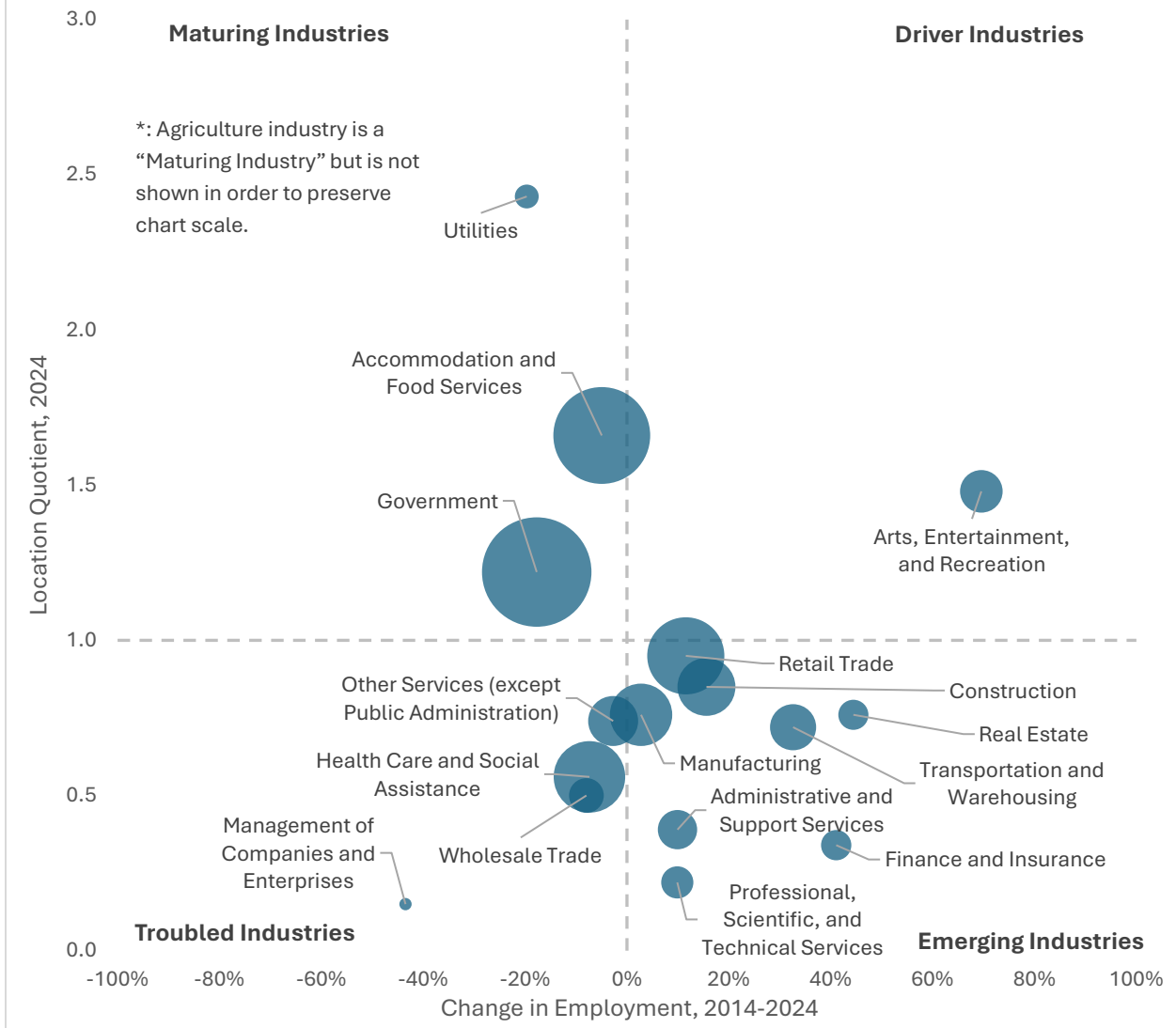
The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation industry is the County's only driver industry according to the location quotient analysis. The strength of this industry within Adams County speaks to the important role that Tourism has on the County's economy.

Four industries within Adams County are considered to be maturing industries; the Agriculture, Accommodation and Food Services, Government, and Utilities industries. The Agriculture, Accommodation and Food services, and Government industries are the top employment industries within Adams County, and are projected to remain so even with the declines in employment within these industries experienced over the past decade. These four industries are also major sources of GRP production within the County, combining to account for over 53 percent of the County's total GRP production.

There are eight emerging industries within Adams County. Several of these industries such as the Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Construction industries are also major sources of employment and GRP production in Adams County.

The remaining four industries (Other Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, Management of Companies and Enterprises, and Wholesale Trade) are considered to be troubled economies. These industries are not concentrated within the Region and have experienced a decline in employment over the past decade.

**Figure 3-1: Adams County Location Quotient Analysis**



### Gap Analysis

A needs-based economic development strategy, or a “gap” analysis, identifies demands and deficiencies in the local economy and attracts new investment or industries to fill those gaps. By looking at the amount spent by industries on components its supply chain met outside of Adams County, potential opportunities for growth can be identified. In 2024, there was over 750 million dollars in demand by industries in Adams County. Only about 22 percent of the total demand was met by the region.

**Table 3-7** displays the industries with the highest demand met by imports. Meeting the supply chain components of the County’s existing industries keeps more revenue in the County and lowers the

cost of transportation for the same industries. Many supply gaps exist in industries that are complimentary to the County’s workforce, resources, and existing businesses. For example, several industry sectors, particularly manufacturing and agriculture related sectors, have all or most of their industry demand met by imports. Filling these gaps could strengthen the strategic advantage of Paper Product Manufacturing and agriculture in the County as clustering industries can reduce costs, foster innovation, and lead to the development of supporting associations and institutions.

Table 3-7: 2024 Industries with Highest Amount of Demand Met by Imports - 4-Digit						
NAICS Code	Demand For	Demand met In-Region	Percent of Demand met In-Region	Demand met by Imports	Percent of Demand met by Imports	Total Demand
9029	State Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	\$1,426,006	1.4%	\$98,656,259	98.6%	\$100,082,265
9012	Federal Government, Military	\$0	0.0%	\$97,547,195	100.0%	\$97,547,195
3221	Pulp, Paper, and Paperboard Mills	\$0	0.0%	\$32,303,702	100.0%	\$32,303,702
9036	Education and Hospitals	\$22,246,401	51.2%	\$21,210,907	48.8%	\$43,457,308
3253	Pesticide, Fertilizer, and Other Agricultural Chemical Manufacturing	\$0	0.0%	\$11,447,891	100.0%	\$11,447,891
1120	Animal Production	\$1,543,632	12.3%	\$10,974,189	87.7%	\$12,517,821
3241	Petroleum and Coal Products Manufacturing	\$0	0.0%	\$10,484,412	100.0%	\$10,484,412
1151	Support Activities for Crop Production	\$1,851,299	16.3%	\$9,507,599	83.7%	\$11,358,898
5221	Depository Credit Intermediation	\$2,434,214	23.1%	\$8,110,192	76.9%	\$10,544,407
5417	Scientific Research and Development Services	\$0	0.0%	\$7,569,916	100.0%	\$7,569,916

Source: Lightcast 2025.4

## Industry Cluster Analysis and Cluster Key Strengths

An economic cluster analysis groups related industries together and compares these “clusters” to others in a given region. The resulting cluster ranking compares the County’s industries to each other, based on five factors: earnings, growth, regional competitiveness, regional specialization, and GRP. The clusters, made up of related industries, are given a score based on each of these factors and each factor was weighted equally. The development and growth of cluster industries can be advantageous, leading to the availability of a knowledgeable workforce and specialized infrastructure.

Among the 24 industry clusters measured for Adams County, the average cluster score was 40 out of 100. Industry clusters with a score of at least 57 were considered to be Top clusters, Average clusters had a score between 23 and 56, while Bottom clusters had a score of 22 or less. In 2024, Adams County had five Top clusters, 15 Average clusters, and 4 Bottom clusters.

### Top Clusters

The highest rated cluster within Adams County was the Paper and Packaging cluster with a score of 100. It was followed by Agricultural Inputs and Services (score: 80), Federal Government Services (score: 78), Local Utilities (score: 60), and Local Education and Training (score: 58).

Within the Paper and Packaging cluster there was one industry: Corrugated and Solid Fiber Box Manufacturing. This industry had 262 jobs, with average annual earnings of \$74,329, had high growth and regional specialization scores, and produced \$31,634,420 million in GRP.

The Agricultural Inputs and Services cluster had three industries: Crop Production, Animal Production, and Farm Labor Contractors and Crew Leaders. The Crop Production industry had 1,031 jobs and average earnings of \$57,641 and produced \$108,622,744 in GRP. The Animal Production industry had 170 jobs and average earnings of \$52,575 and produced \$17,455,507 in GRP. The Farm Labor Contractors and Crew Leaders industry had 39 jobs, average earnings of \$47,815 and generated \$2,122,479 in GRP.

There were two industries in the Local Utilities Cluster: Fuel Dealers and Electric Power Distribution. The Fuel Dealers industry had 36 jobs, with average earnings of \$63,726 and produced \$7,839,275 in GRP. The Electric Power Distribution industry had 49 jobs, with average earnings of \$146,750 and produced \$31,593,642 in GRP.

There was one industry in the Local Education and Training cluster: Elementary and Secondary Schools. This industry had 271 jobs, average earnings of \$67,752, and produced \$18,406,701 in GRP.

## **Average Clusters**

There were 15 clusters within Adams County that scored as Average clusters. The top three scoring clusters among this group were the Local Hospitality Establishments (score: 51), Local Retailing of Clothing and General Merchandise (score: 49), and Local Logistical Services (score: 48) clusters. Below is a listing of each cluster that qualified as an Average cluster:

- Local Hospitality Establishments
- Local Retailing of Clothing and General Merchandise
- Local Logistical Services
- Distribution and Electronic Commerce
- State Government Services
- Business Services
- Local Health Services
- Local Personal Services (Non-Medical)
- Local Financial Services
- Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
- Local Commercial Services
- Local Household Goods and Services
- Local Food and Beverage Processing and Distribution
- Local Community and Civic Organizations
- Local Government Services

## **Bottom Clusters**

The lowest rated clusters in Adams County were the Transportation and Logistics, Local Motor Vehicle Products and Services, Food Processing and Manufacturing, and the Hospitality and Tourism clusters.

The Hospitality and Tourism cluster (made up of hotels, RV parks, and campgrounds) had the lowest score (7 out of 100) among clusters within Adams County. This low score is due to the low wages, lack of growth, low regional competitiveness, and with the exception of the hotels industry, low GRP produced. Despite being identified as a bottom cluster within Adams County, the tourism industry is still a major component of the local economy, as it brings in a significant amount of money from outside of the County and supports a significant proportion of jobs within the County as well. A more detailed analysis of the Tourism industry is included later in the chapter.

## Economic Opportunities Based on Industry & Cluster Assessment

- **Crop Production and Animal and Aquaculture Production**

The Crop Production and Animal and Aquaculture Production sectors will continue to be a driving force in the Adams County economy. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Adams County has over 114,792 acres of land currently being utilized as farmlands. Among Wisconsin Counties, Adams County ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in total crop production in terms of sales, mostly due to high rankings in vegetable (ranked #2 in the State) and fruit production (ranked #5 in the State). The top crops by acreage within the County are corn (for grain purposes), potatoes, soybeans (for beans), and snap beans.

It is important to note that the agriculture industry as a whole will face issues such as aging farmers, potential conversion of productive farmland into developed areas, and attracting workers. However, there is potential to capture more dollars by focusing on cluster development or related industries such as food processing, farm implements, etc.

- **Corrugated and Solid Fiber Box Manufacturing**

As a whole, the Manufacturing industry is considered to be an emerging industry, with employment numbers projected to increase by over 15 percent by 2033. The Paper and Packaging cluster was identified as the top industry cluster within the County. Corrugated and Solid Fiber Box Manufacturing is the only industry within the Paper and Packaging cluster and contains 262 jobs and produced over \$31 million in GRP in 2024. The average wage in this industry is \$74,329, well above the County average wage. Further development of this industry could have a positive impact on the County.

- **Food Processing and Manufacturing**

With Adams County being a major producer of vegetable crops and fruits, there is significant potential to grow the fruit and vegetable canning industry (an industry within the Food Processing and Manufacturing cluster) in Adams County. As mentioned earlier, Adams County ranks second in the State in terms of vegetable production and ranks fifth in the State in terms of fruit production. The leading crops in the County in terms of acreage are corn (for grain purposes), potatoes, soybeans (for beans), and snap beans. Adams County is also a major producer of cranberries, ranking fifth in the State in terms of acreage devoted to cranberry production with 1,121 acres utilized for cranberry production. With the Food Processing and Manufacturing industry cluster being identified as a Bottom cluster in Adams County, expanding the fruit and vegetable canning industry within the County represents a major growth opportunity for Adams County.

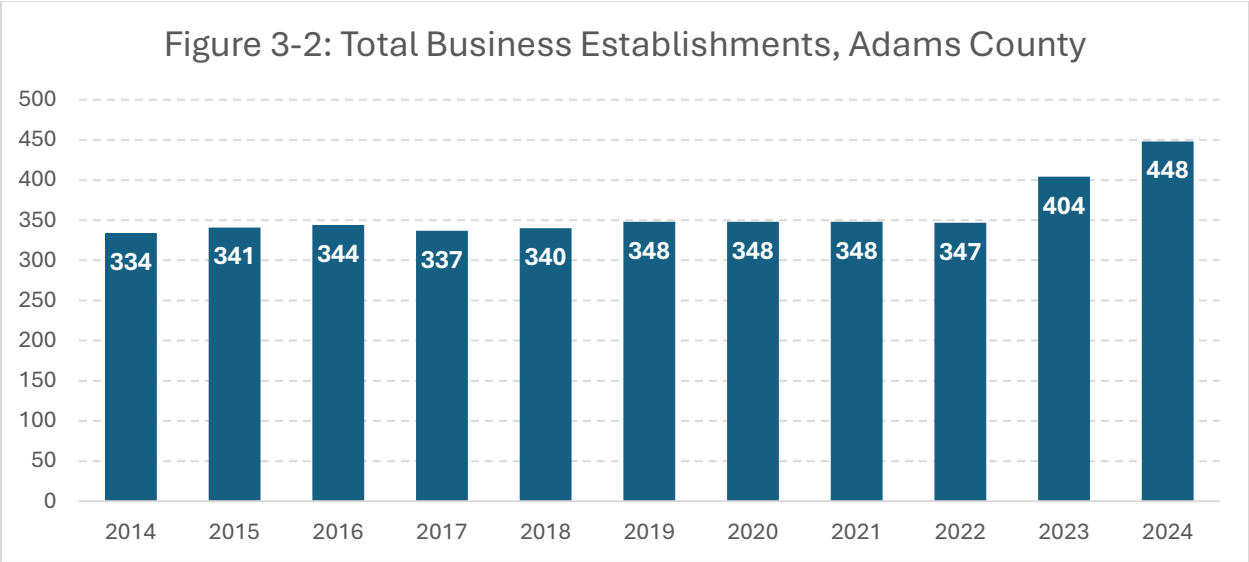
## Business Environment

Examining the business environment within the County can help determine the County’s economic well-being and overall competitiveness. A strong business environment is an indicator of a healthy and competitive economic environment. Tracking entrepreneurial and business startup activity can help determine how successful the County is at attracting businesses, while tracking the number of business births and exits can help show the County’s ability to support businesses and overall economic dynamism (business churn).

It is important to note that the data tracking business startups and business births and exits come from different data sources. Data tracking business startups comes from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Business Formation Statistics and tracks the number of Employer Identification Number (EIN) applications. Data tracking business births and exits comes from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Business Dynamics Statistics and track the business openings and closures over time. The most current data for business startups is in 2024, while the most current data for business births and exits is in 2023, hence the difference in timelines below.

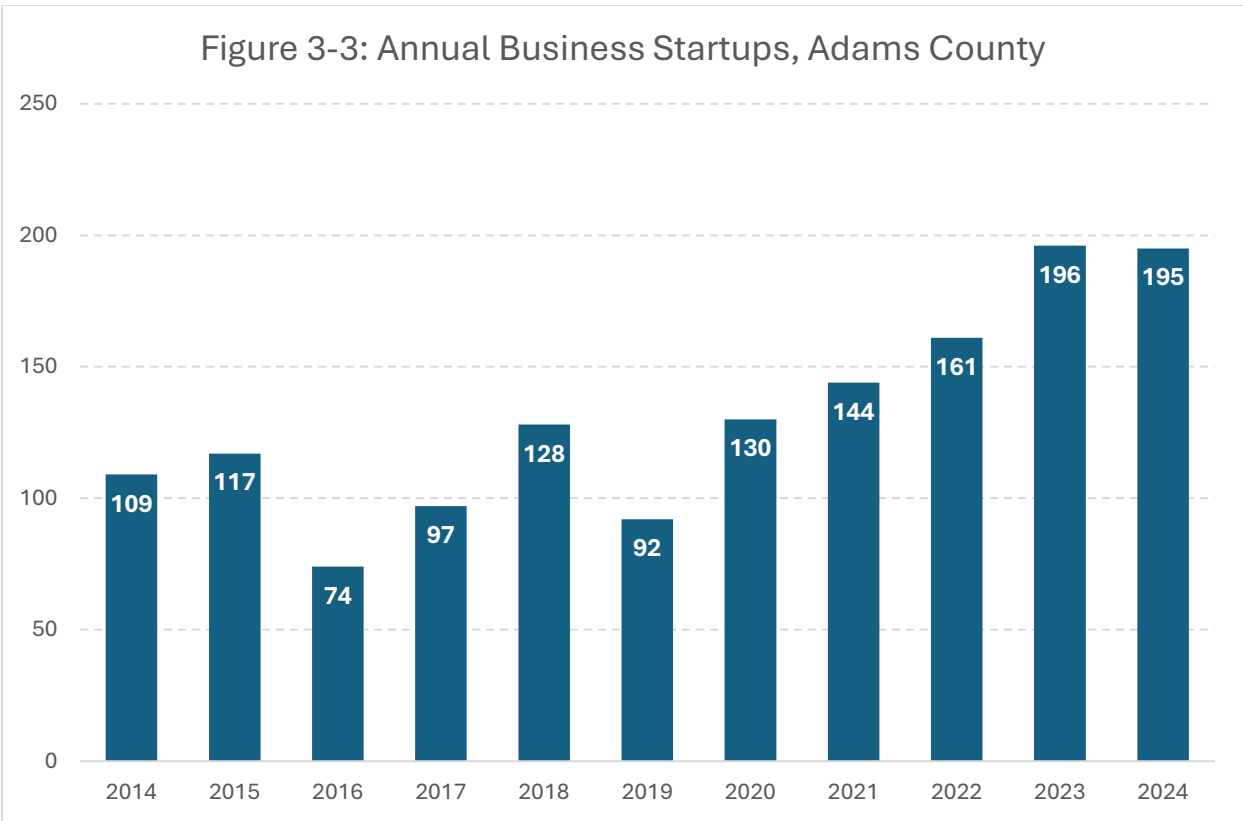
### Total Business Establishments

Overall, Adams County has experienced a net increase of 114 business establishments since 2014, as the total number of business establishments located within the County increased to 448 in 2024. This represents an increase of over 34 percent since 2014. This is a positive sign for Adams County, as the increase in total business establishments has led to an increase in the number of jobs and revenues generated within the County. Having more businesses located within the County also brings more stability to the jobs and revenues that are located within the County. **Figure 3-2** shows trends in business establishments in Adams County over the past decade.



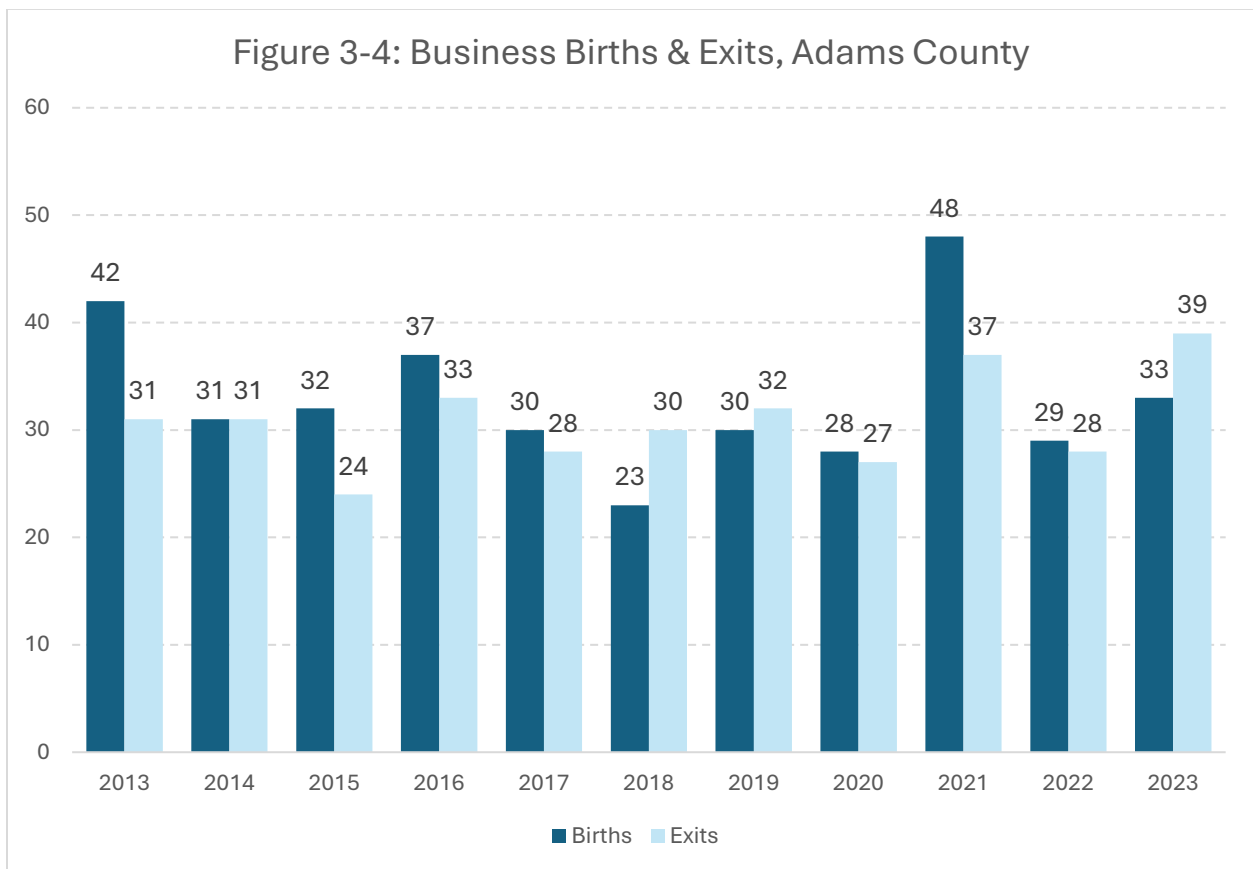
### Business Startups and Entrepreneurship

In 2024, there were 195 business startups within Adams County, significantly higher than the 109 business startups within the County in 2014. Over the past decade, there have been an average of 131 business startups in Adams County per year. **Figure 3-3** shows business startup trends in Adams County over the past decade. Supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem is important for economic development efforts, because new businesses are currently the number one driver of job growth nationwide. The increase in entrepreneurial activity in Adams County is a positive sign for the County’s economy.



## Business Starts and Exits

Generally, the overall number of business births and exits in a given year within Adams County falls between the 20 to 40 range. **Figure 3-4** compares the number of business births and exits over the past decade in Adams County. Over the past decade, the County has averaged 33 business births per year compared to 31 business exits per year. Increases in business openings and closures can be an indicator of increased economic dynamism, as more business churn can lead to increases in competition and risk-taking, leading to advances in innovation and technology. These advances often lead to wage growth and increased living standards.



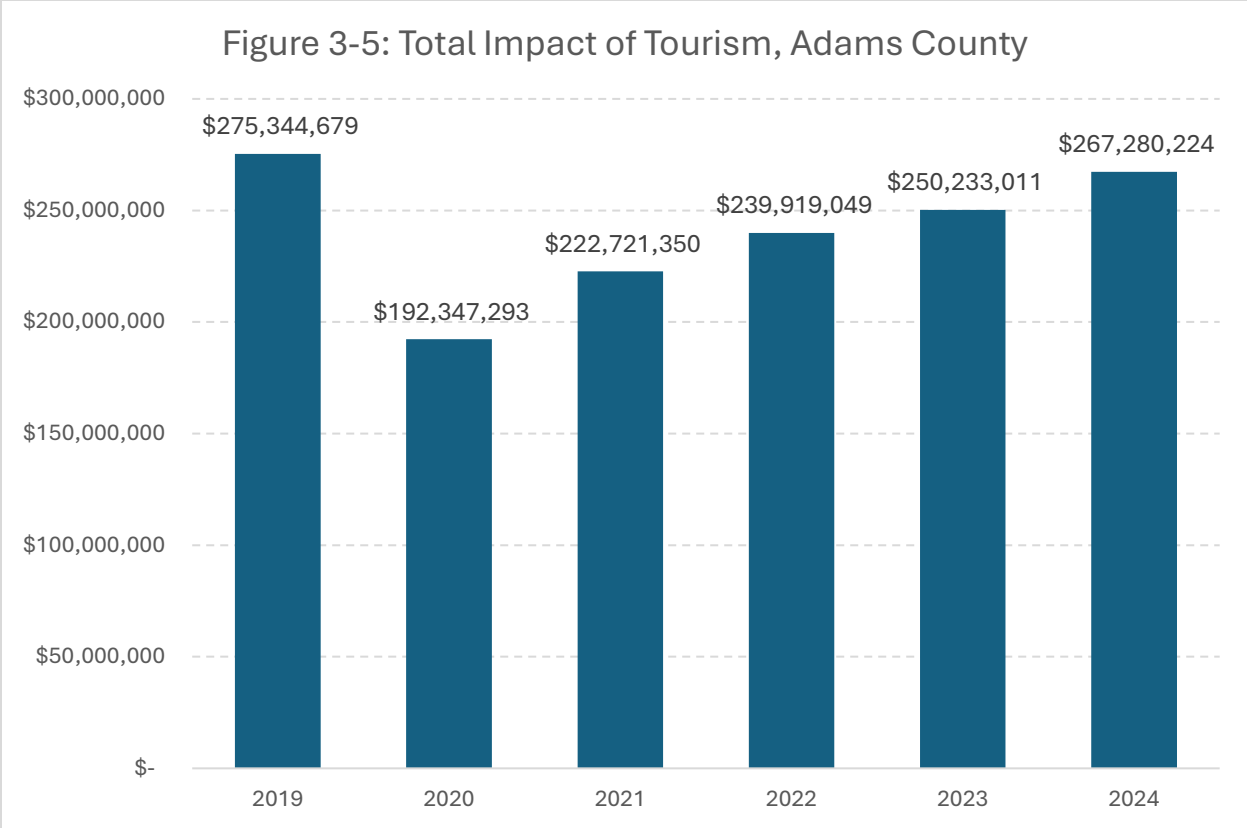
## Tourism

The County's recreation and tourism boom started in the 1920's when visitors came to see the spectacular scenery of the Wisconsin Dells and a number of recreation cabins were built for accommodation. In the 1940's, dams were constructed on the Wisconsin River, creating the Castle Rock and Petenwell Lakes. The flowages stimulated the growth of more vacation homes and cemented Adams County's prominence as a retirement destination. Recreation and tourism continue to be major parts of the Adams County economy.

Visitors and seasonal residents help stimulate the local economy by supporting local businesses, particularly those in the hospitality industry such as hotels, restaurants, and bars. This support of local businesses helps support local jobs as well, making the Tourism industry an important factor in employment within Adams County. The Tourism industry also impacts the local housing stock, as over 38 percent of the County's housing stock is comprised of seasonal housing.

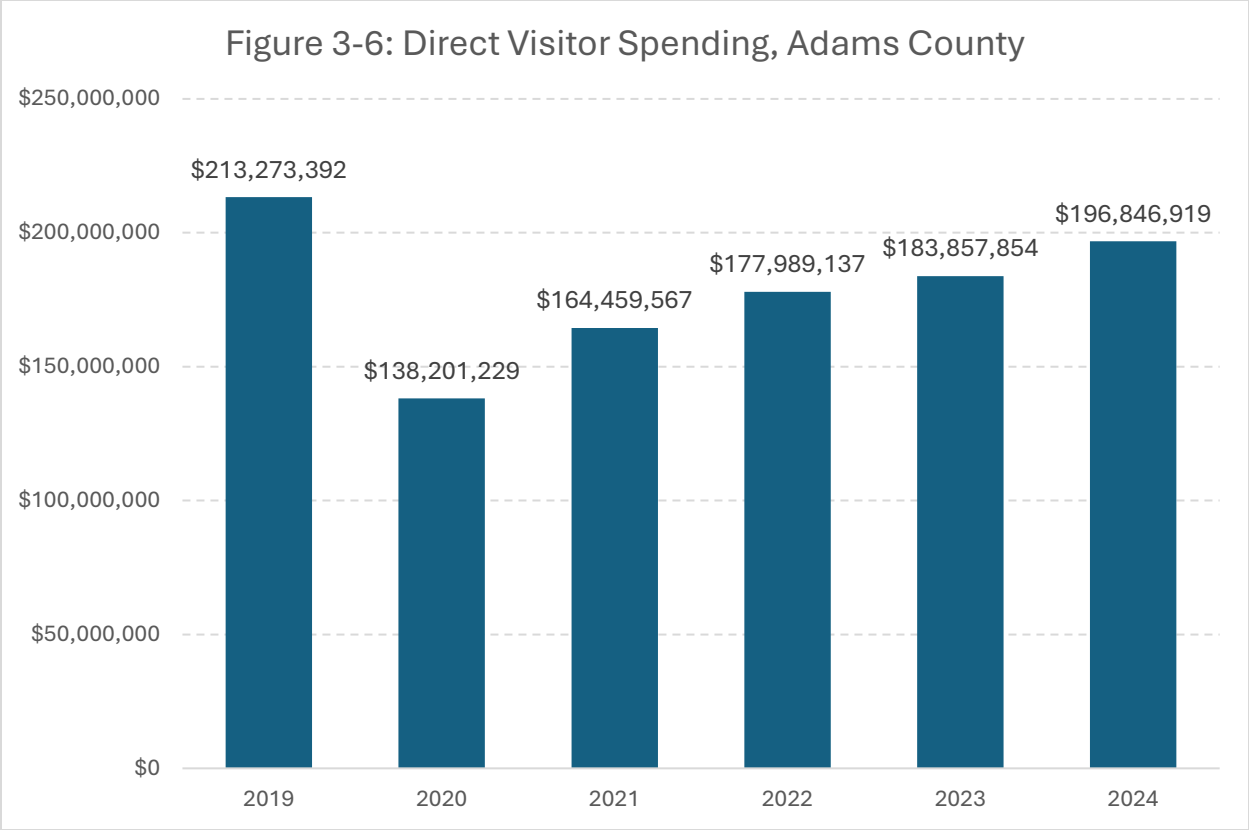
According to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, the Tourism industry had a total economic impact of over \$267 million in Adams County in 2024. The total impact of tourism is equal to over 42.6 percent of the Adams County GRP, indicating that the Tourism industry has a significant impact on the local economy. Adams County experienced the largest percent increase in total economic impact from tourism in Wisconsin between 2023 and 2024, increasing by 6.8 percent. **Figure 3-5** shows trends of the total economic impact of tourism in Adams County. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic decrease in the total impact of tourism in 2020 but has experienced strong growth in tourism activity in the years following.

The economic impact of tourism can be further broken down into several areas. Direct visitor spending measures the amount of money visitors spend while visiting, thus providing a direct measure of the impact on local businesses and the overall local economy. Tourism also has a significant impact on employment throughout Adams County, supporting over a fifth of jobs in Adams County.



**Direct Visitor Spending**

Direct Visitor Spending is the amount of money that visitors spend while visiting or passing through their destination. Direct Visitor Spending is spread across five sectors: Lodging, Food & Beverage, Retail, Transport, and Recreation. According to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, direct visitor spending within Adams County totaled over \$196 million in 2024. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Adams County has experienced consistent growth in direct visitor spending but has still yet to reach the pre-pandemic visitor spending total of over \$213 million in 2019. **Figure 3-6** shows direct visitor spending in Adams County from 2019-2024.



**Jobs Supported by Tourism**

Tourism has a significant impact on employment within Adams County. According to data from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, tourism supported 1,661 jobs in Adams County in 2024. Data from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) indicates that there were 5,831 jobs within Adams County in 2024. **This means that over 28.5 percent of jobs within Adams County were supported by tourism.**

In 2024, the Tourism industry generated over \$61 million in labor income within Adams County, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all income earned within the County. This is a significantly higher proportion than the State of Wisconsin as a whole, where tourism employment accounted for only about four percent of earnings statewide.

**Broadband**

Improving access to broadband has become a critical economic development initiative, especially in rural areas. Access to the internet is especially important in rural areas because it connects residents, workers, and businesses with the amenities and opportunities that are typically only found in more urban areas. This makes the provision of adequate internet access critical for attracting and

retaining residents, workers, and businesses alike. Access to high-quality internet also improves health outcomes in rural areas, by providing an alternative, and often more convenient, method for obtaining health care. With the high-quality recreational opportunities and high proportion of seasonal housing in Adams County, being able to provide high-quality internet throughout the County represents a significant opportunity to stimulate the Adams County economy by making it more desirable for these visitors and seasonal residents to visit and stay longer, or even move into the County full-time.

When measuring broadband, there are two factors to consider: availability of broadband and broadband adoption rates. Broadband adoption rates are measured through the percentage of households with an internet subscription. To measure the availability of broadband, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) maps address-level broadband coverage data for homes and businesses throughout the country via its **National Broadband Map**. This allows the FCC to record the number of serviceable locations that have access to broadband. Serviceable locations are broken down into three categories, those that are served, underserved, or unserved by broadband. The FCC's definitions for these categories are provided below.

#### **FCC Definitions for Broadband Accessibility:**

- **Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL):** A specific residential or business structure where fixed broadband internet service is, or can be, installed.
- **Served Location:** A BSL with access to reliable broadband (download/upload speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps).
- **Underserved Location:** A BSL with access to broadband with speeds higher than 25/3 Mbps but lower than 100/20 Mbps.
- **Unserved Location:** A BSL with either no access to broadband or access to broadband that is below the FCC's current benchmark of 25/3 Mbps.

#### **Broadband Accessibility**

In 2024, there were 17,875 broadband serviceable locations in Adams County. According to the latest data from the FCC, about 75 percent of these locations are considered to be served, about 10 percent are considered to be underserved, and the remaining 15 percent are considered to be unserved. Compared to the State, access to high-quality broadband is less common in Adams County, as about 88 percent of broadband serviceable locations statewide have access to high-quality broadband (served), while only about 5 percent of locations statewide are considered unserved.

## **Broadband Adoption**

Broadband adoption rates are based on self-reported data collected by the American Community Survey and are measured as the percentage of households with a broadband subscription of any type (which includes cellular data and satellite internet service in addition to broadband infrastructure). Overall, about 83 percent of households throughout Adams County had a subscription to broadband at their home in 2023. Broadband adoption rates are lower in Adams County than they are statewide, as about 89 percent of households statewide had a broadband subscription in 2023. This disparity in broadband adoption rates is partly due to differences in the availability of broadband in these areas, as broadband availability is much higher in more densely populated areas than in areas with low density population. Other factors such as educational attainment, income, age, and disability status also impact broadband adoption rates.

While Adams County has lower broadband adoption rates than the State as a whole, The County's broadband adoption rate has increase substantially in the past several years. In 2019, only 54.4 percent of households in Adams County had a broadband subscription, compared to 2023 when 82.8 percent of households in the County had a broadband subscription. This represents a 52 percent increase in the County's broadband subscription rate, significantly faster than the 32 percent increase experienced by the State as a whole, indicating that Adams County is closing the broadband gap between itself and the State.

### **FCC Broadband Standards**

Current FCC standards indicate that broadband speeds should be at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Generally, these speeds are the minimum speeds where video streaming and a few in-home devices can work simultaneously. However, higher internet speeds are becoming increasingly important over time.

# Childcare

The availability of childcare is increasingly becoming a critical economic development initiative. Adams County, like many communities in Wisconsin, currently has a shortage of childcare, issues with the affordability of childcare, which help to exacerbate workforce shortages. Childcare shortages significantly impact families, employers, and thus, the economy. The total economic impact of parents leaving the labor force is significant, as over one billion dollars are lost statewide in productivity, earnings, and tax revenues due to the childcare shortage, making addressing the issue of childcare critical.

When examining the status of childcare within Adams County, it is important to consider the number of children who are likely to need childcare and compare it to the number of childcare slots available within the County. Children below the age of 6 are the likeliest group to require childcare. Therefore, the number of children within Adams County below the age of 6 is used as a comparison to the number of licensed childcare slots available within the County.

While the availability of childcare poses one potential issue, the affordability of childcare also presents an issue. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the average cost of childcare for one child is about \$13,000 per year.

## Availability of Childcare

According to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, there are currently four licensed childcare providers within Adams County. The four licensed childcare providers in Adams County combined have the capacity to provide a maximum of 81 childcare slots.

According to estimates from the American Community Survey, there are 742 children in Adams County that are below the age of 6 and are likely to need some form of childcare. With only 81 licensed childcare slots available within Adams County, this equates to over 9 children per licensed childcare slot, indicating that Adams County has a severe childcare shortage. This severe gap poses challenges for families currently residing or working in Adams County and also serves as a potential barrier for attracting young families to move into the County. Young families currently in the County may be forced to look into other means to provide care for their children, such as having a parent leave the workforce in order to provide care, have a family member provide care, or find unlicensed care.

Table 3-8: Childcare Availability Analysis, Adams County		
Children Below Age 6	Licensed Childcare Slots	Children per Childcare Slot
742	81	9.16

Source: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, American Community Survey

## Key Trends Based on Economic Assessment

### Tourism Industry

Adams County has a significant Tourism industry, which positions the County well for attracting and retaining residents in the future according to recent migration trends. While jobs within the Hospitality and Recreation industry sectors (which are a large component of the Tourism industry) offer low wages and thus might lead to challenges in expanding these industries, the Tourism industry is still an important component of the County's economy. This is especially true when factoring in the proportion of jobs and earnings the industry supports, the proportion of GRP the industry generates within the County, and the positive impact that a robust recreation system can have on population.

### Low Wages

While it is possible to identify driver and emerging economies, it is important to give consideration to the incomes within these industries. Adams County has lower average wages in most industries than the State. This is an opportunity for Adams County to attract industries looking for lower labor costs. To improve wages in the area, the County could focus on attracting industries that have lower averages than the Nation and the State but higher than the current Adams County total earnings average of \$56,795.

### Labor Force Attraction and Retention

Local governments can play a major role in economic development and labor force attraction when they focus on developing local amenities. Amenities ranging from shopping centers and redevelopment of downtowns, to entertainment, to park and recreation development such as trails, and diverse transportation options draw people to an area and are an asset to employers searching for talent. The provision of both childcare and broadband will also positively impact the ability of the County to attract and retain residents and allow more residents to participate in the labor force. Even the monitoring of affordable and diversity of housing options can play a role in retaining and attracting a workforce.

### Strong Business Environment

Trends in the total number of business establishments and in the number of business startups indicate that Adams County has a strong business environment that is capable of supporting and attracting businesses. New, small businesses are currently the main driver of job growth nationwide, making maintain the County's strong business environment a priority.

## **Potential Impacts of Strong Agriculture Industry**

Adams County has a strong Agriculture industry, as evidenced by the Agriculture industry accounting for over 22 percent of the County's GRP, and the industry's high Location Quotient (18.64). Adams County is also one of Wisconsin's leading counties in terms of crop production, ranking second in vegetable production and fifth in fruit production. The Agriculture Industry has the potential to spur growth in other industries, particularly the Food Processing and Manufacturing sector, based off the County's high levels of crop production. There is significant potential for expanding the Food Processing and Manufacturing sector, particularly when paired with the County's leading crops such as corn (for grain purposes), potatoes, soybeans (for beans), snap beans, and cranberries.

## **Aligning Technology, Higher Education, and Work**

As the LFPR shrinks and the looming "silver tsunami" arrives, businesses will have a more difficult time finding the quantity and the quality of talent that they need. Adams County has experienced a large increase in the proportion of its population either nearing retirement age, or that has already reached retirement age. As a result, a high number of replacements are expected during the same period of time. Businesses have already started investing in labor saving technologies to mitigate this problem. As these technologies are implemented, businesses will need a more educated workforce but will also need fewer workers. In terms of higher education, the County is behind the State averages.

Jobs in the manufacturing, transportation, warehousing, and finance and insurance industries are requiring more than a high school education. As a result, there is a need to increase the number of technical and associate degrees in the workforce. Efforts to work with secondary and technical schools in the County and Region to tailor technology classes to the needs of County industries needs could be advantageous. Also, while many schools have moved the focus of education to the sciences and technology, a push to incorporate "soft skills" could also be beneficial, as employers are citing this issue as a problem.

Adams County imports over 55 percent of the workers that work within the County's borders, while it exports about 75 percent of its resident workers to other counties. Businesses and workers are not bound to the County's borders. As a result, it would be advantageous to the County to work with the surrounding regions for workforce development. Exploring the workforce needs of surrounding industries and job centers is essential to Adams County residents who chose to live in the County for its natural features, low cost of living or other reasons, but commute outside.

## **Impact of Childcare Shortage**

Adams County currently has a severe childcare shortage, as there are over nine children below the age of six for every licensed childcare slot within the County. This weakens the County's ability to attract young families to the County, while making it difficult for young families to remain in the County as well. The childcare shortage also negatively impacts employers, as a lack of childcare leads to reduced labor force participation rates, and a lower overall population base to draw workers from, further exacerbating workforce shortage issues.

## Chapter 4: Infrastructure

Infrastructure is an important component of economic development, and its development is one of the primary functions of government. Providing adequate access to both public and private infrastructure and transportation systems is essential for supporting business growth. Businesses count on utilities such as water, sewer, and power, while access to telecommunication networks (broadband) is becoming increasingly important. The transportation network of roads, rail, air transport, and other means of moving people and goods are also essential for business. Business and industrial parks offer sites with access to many of these utilities and networks making the sites located within these parks considered to be “ready to build”.

### Community Infrastructure

#### Road Network

The County’s transportation network is comprised of state, county, and local roadways. There are over 1,451 miles of road within Adams County, including 93 miles of state highways, 226 miles of county highways, and over 1,131 miles of local streets and roads. State highways that run through Adams County include State Highways 13, 21, 23, 73, and 82. There are no Interstate or U.S. highways in the County, however, Interstate 90/94 connecting Chicago and Milwaukee to La Crosse and Minneapolis is located near the southwest corner of the County.

Adams County has several designated truck routes, including State Highways 13, 21, 73, and 82. Significant freight moves along these routes, which have easy linkage with Interstates 39 and 90/94. These routes provide Adams County with access to the rest of the state and the nation. Local truck routes often branch out from these major corridors to link local industry with the main truck routes as well as for the distribution of commodities within the local area.

#### Rail

The Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) crosses Adams County with a connection to the Canadian National (formerly Wisconsin Central) at Necedah. Union Pacific has about 29 miles of line in Adams County. One of the largest railroads in North America, Union Pacific runs across the State and connects to Minneapolis and Chicago. There is a Union Pacific terminal located within the City of Adams, as well as discussions underway regarding a proposed rail bridge within the County.

Additionally, Amtrak provides the County with access to passenger rail via stations in Wisconsin Dells or Tomah. Amtrak’s Empire Builder route has two trains per day between Chicago and Seattle (including stops in Milwaukee and Minneapolis). Approximately 20,000 passengers utilize the depot in Wisconsin Dells each year.

## **Municipal Water Systems**

There are several municipal water facilities located within Adams County, including municipal facilities in the City of Adams and Village of Friendship, as well as a private facility in the Town of Easton. The original Adams Wastewater Treatment Plant was originally built in 1972 with a design capacity of 300,000 gallons per day. The construction of the plant was also accompanied by a considerable number of new sewer lines to serve the Adams-Friendship area. The plant currently has a capacity of about 436,000 gallons per day. The City of Adams is currently considering an expansion project for the Adams Wastewater Treatment Plant.

There is also a municipal water treatment facility serving the Adams-Friendship area that is located along the Little Roche a Cri Creek on the west side of Friendship near the Adams County Fairground.

A private wastewater treatment facility serving the Easton Lake District is located in the Town of Easton along Campbell Creek. Sand Valley – located within the Town of Rome - also has a private wastewater treatment facility that serves their resort and five golf courses. The rest of the County relies on private on-site septic systems for their wastewater needs.

The City of Adams and the Village of Friendship provide municipal water supplies for domestic and commercial use. The City of Adams serves about 700 customers and the Village of Friendship serves about 350 customers. A new water treatment facility in the City of Adams was recently constructed in 2025 to address PFAS contamination. The City of Adams maintains four high-capacity wells and two large water towers that combined turn-over roughly 400,000 gallons per day. The Village buys water from the City at wholesale rates and receives it through three connections between the two separate municipally owned water distribution systems. The Town of Rome Water Utility also provides a private water supply system to 1,100 customers around Lake Camelot. The Oxford Federal Correctional Institution also supplies water but only for its facility.

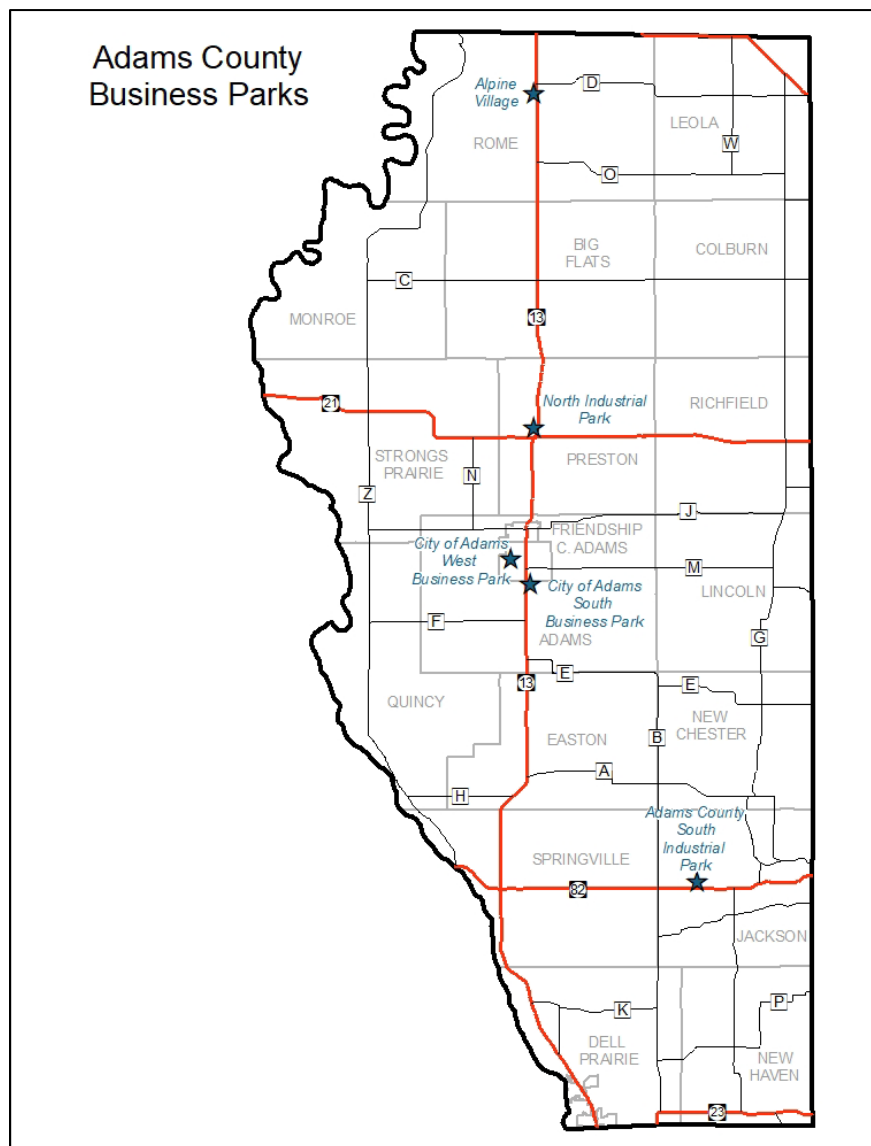
## **Electric & Natural Gas**

The Adams-Columbia Electric Cooperative serves the largest part of the County. The Waushara Electric Cooperative serves part of the northeast quarter of the County while Alliant Energy serves the Adams-Friendship area and parts of the Towns of Dell Prairie and Leola. Pioneer Power and Light (located in Westfield) serves most of New Chester and Grand Marsh. There are several high-voltage transmission lines traversing the County.

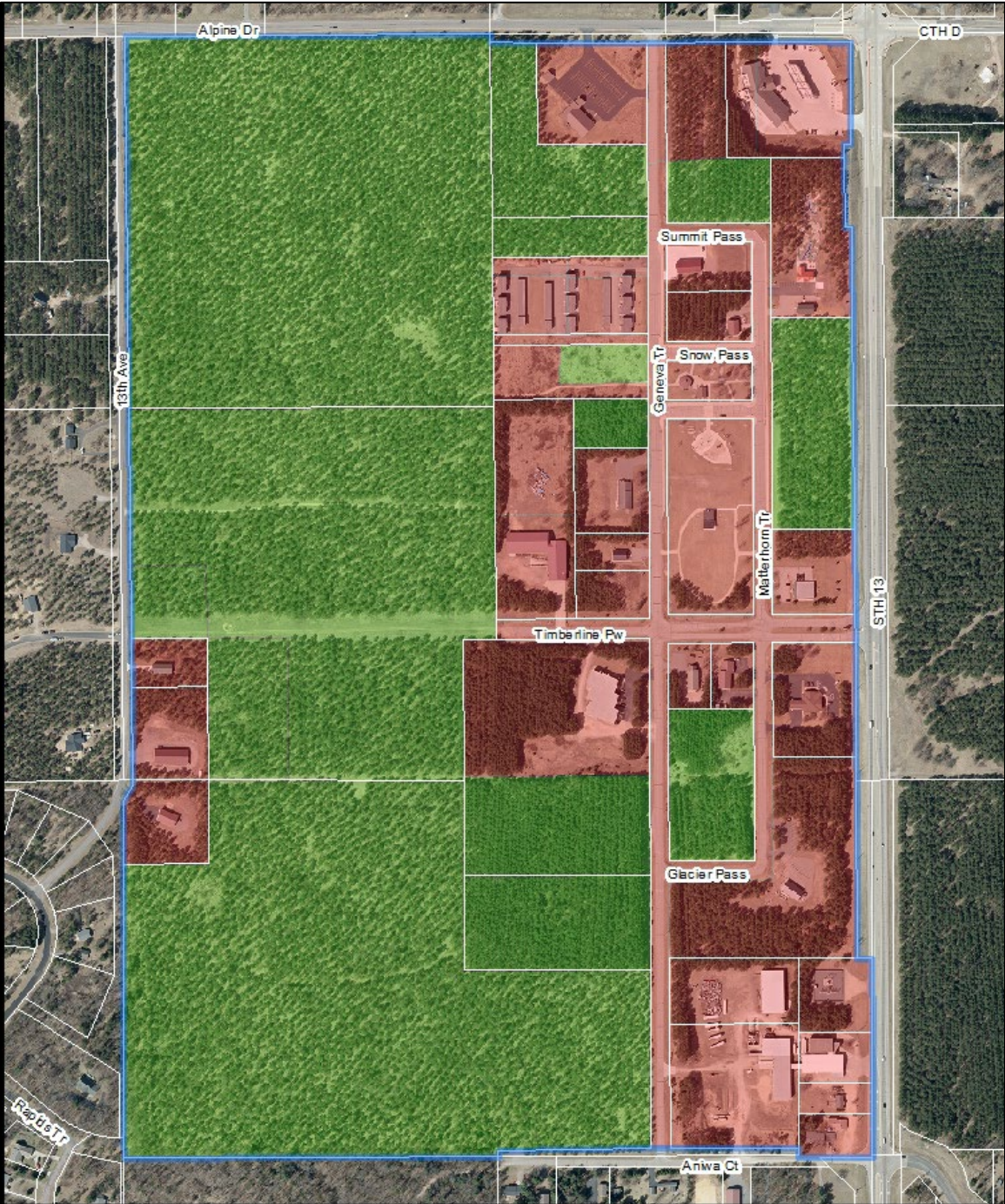
The Wisconsin Gas Company distributes natural gas in the Adams-Friendship area and at the Federal Correctional Institution at Brooks. The remainder of the community depends upon bottled gas from local supplies. An oil pipeline crosses the county diagonally from the Town of Rome to the Town of New Chester. There are also several solar energy facilities located throughout the County, including the Akron Solar energy complex in the Town of Rome and the Enbridge Solar energy complex (20-acres) located off the intersection of County Highway M and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Town of Lincoln.

## Business & Industrial Parks

There are five business parks located in Adams County – Alpine Village Business Park, City of Adams South Business Park, City of Adams West Business Park, North Industrial Park (Town of Preston), and the Adams County South Industrial Park. Of the County’s business parks, only the City of Adams West Business Park is currently considered to be full. A description of each business park is provided below, including the amount of acres available for development, and known characteristics such as access to municipal water, sewer, gas, electricity, and rail, whether the park is in a Tax Incremental Financing District (TID) or not, known internet download and upload speeds, and which highways access the park.



### Alpine Village Business Park



Total Acres: 231 | Available Acres: 146

Water	Sewer	Gas	Electric	Rail	TID	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Highway Access
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	1,000	1,000	STH 13

### City of Adams South Business Park



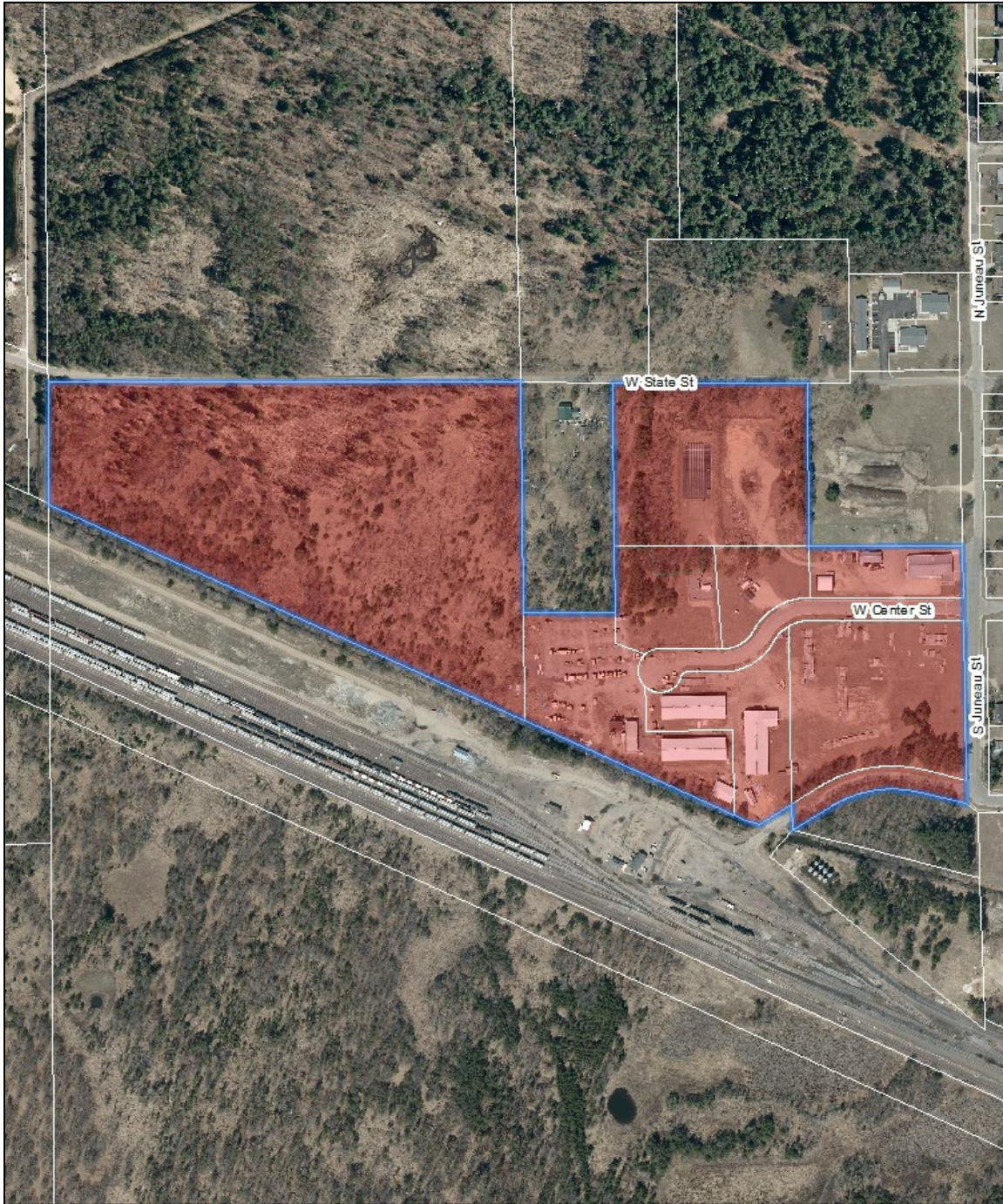
Total Acres: 28



Available Acres: 26

Water	Sewer	Gas	Electric	Rail	TID	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Highway Access
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	1,000	1,000	STH 13

### City of Adams West Business Park



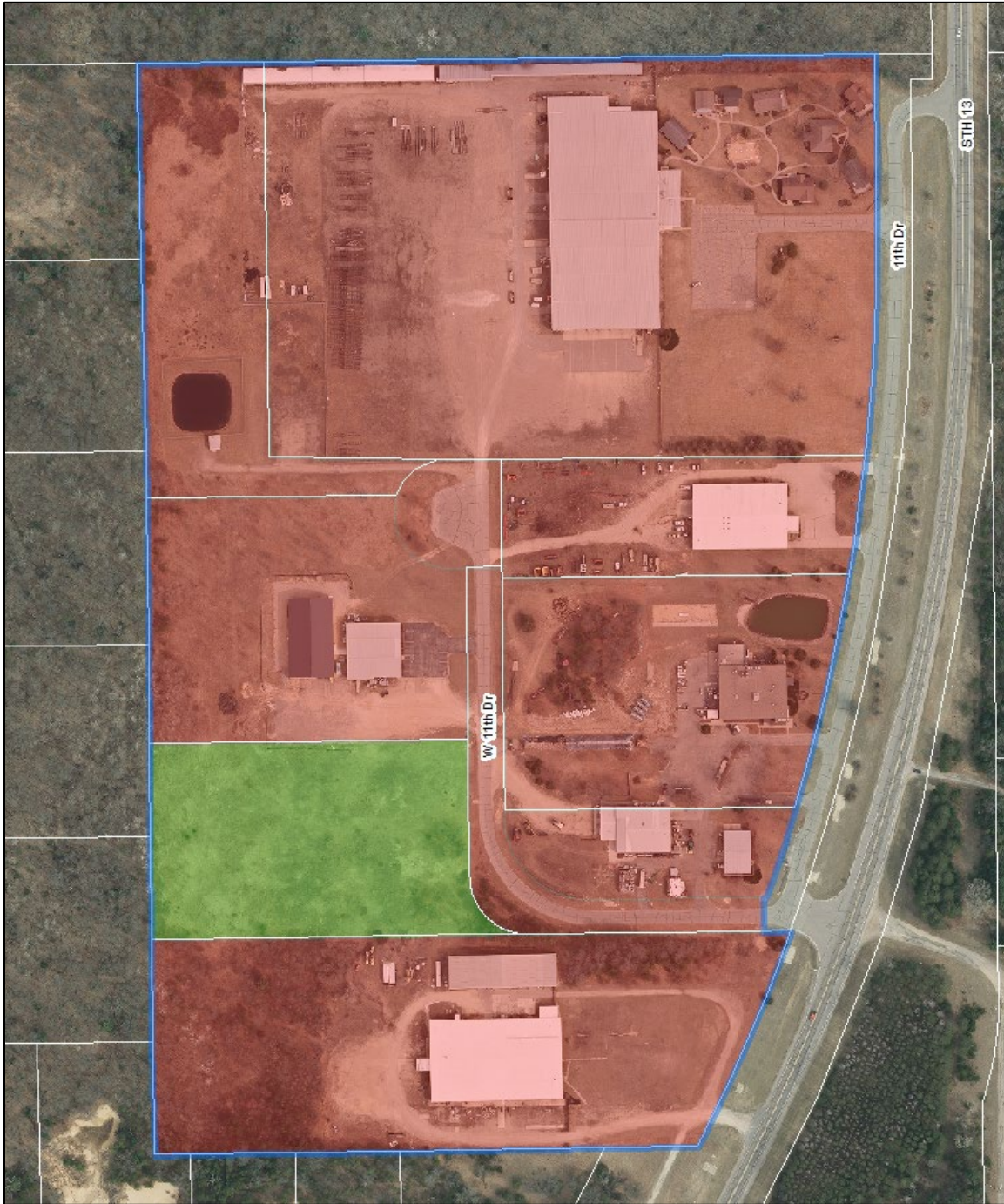
Total Acres: 46



Available Acres: 0

Water	Sewer	Gas	Electric	Rail	TID	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Highway Access
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1,000	1,000	STH 13

### North Industrial Park – Town of Preston



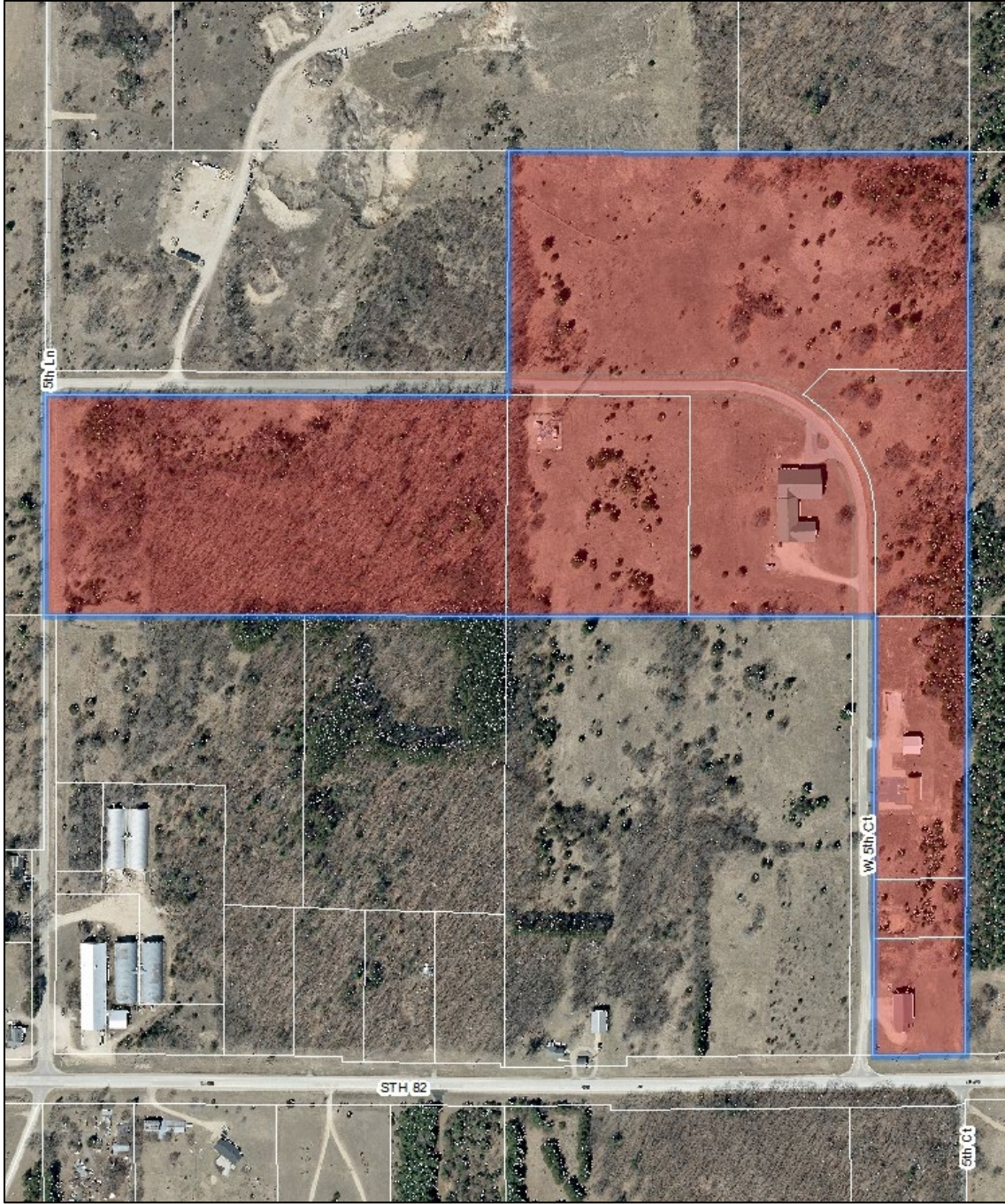
Total Acres: 58



Available Acres: 5

Water	Sewer	Gas	Electric	Rail	TID	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Highway Access
No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	1,000	35	STH 13 & 21

## Adams County South Industrial Park



Total Acres: 66 | Available Acres: 0

Water	Sewer	Gas	Electric	Rail	TID	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Highway Access
No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	1,000	1,000	STH 82

## Chapter 5: Strategy

The economic development strategy for Adams County will require a multipoint approach to maintain and expand a diversified economy that minimizes fluctuations in any one industry or occupation sector.

### Goal 1: Strengthen Relationships with Local Governments.

Strengthening relationships with local governments throughout the County has multiple benefits for economic development throughout the County. Strengthening these relationships can provide a better opportunity for municipalities to communicate their priorities, initiatives, issues they are facing, and their needs to ACED. This in turn, improves ACED's ability to provide local-focused support and assistance, ensuring that economic development efforts align with local priorities.

**Objective 1.1:** Strengthen ACED's relationship with municipalities throughout Adams County.

**Action 1.1.1:** Engage with each municipality within the County on an annual basis to allow municipalities to communicate their priorities, initiatives, issues they are facing, and their needs to ACED.

**Action 1.1.2:** Provide local-focused support and assistance to municipalities based on their communicated needs. This could entail providing staff assistance, providing relevant data, helping to identify potential projects, and making connections between local government and regional, state, and federal agencies as needed for local initiatives.

**Action 1.1.3:** Support local infrastructure projects. Examples of support that ACED could provide include writing letters of support for projects seeking grant funding, advocating for local projects, and connecting communities to the appropriate organizations/agencies for their project needs.

### Goal 2: Foster and Grow Entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship plays an important part in the economy. Supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem is a vital economic development strategy because young, small-growth firms are currently responsible for the majority of net new jobs nationwide.

Due to the location, labor force, difficulty attracting large employers and current industry mix of Adams County a focus on entrepreneurship through the idea known as "economic gardening" will be an important strategy to grow the wealth of the community. According to the Kauffman Foundation,

economic gardening is based on the idea that entrepreneurs drive economies, based on research showing that most new jobs in any local economy were produced by the community's small, local businesses.

Economic gardening connects entrepreneurs to resources to provide them with the infrastructure and information needed to start and grow businesses, including market information that is often only available to large firms. This approach has been successful in creating jobs in communities that were in the midst of a recession, in some cases with no need for other economic incentives.

**Objective 2.1:** Build the capacity of local entrepreneurs to compete by developing an economic gardening program for Adams County.

**Action 2.1.1:** Continue providing programs similar to the Adams County Economic Development Business Plan Grant and continue providing services such as hosting informational materials for business owners on the Adams County Economic Development website.

**Action 2.1.2:** Assist investors and entrepreneurs with business plans and locating financing/investment networks.

**Action 2.1.3:** Encourage the creation of a local entrepreneur's club that consists of investors and entrepreneurs, businesses, and banks. Examples include the Juneau County Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club (I&E).

**Action 2.1.4:** Develop a method of communicating pertinent information with entrepreneurs and new startups in Adams County.

**Action 2.1.5:** Explore economic gardening initiatives from other communities in the United States. Examples include Littleton and Steamboat Springs, CO; Lake Elsinore, San Bernadino, Chico, San Luis Obispo, CA; Santa Fe, NM; Lancaster County, PA; and the State of Wyoming.

**Action 2.1.6:** Identify existing local businesses that would be willing to meet with potential new businesses or relocating businesses.

**Action 2.1.7:** Identify small businesses in high growth industries or with high growth potential in Adams County.

**Action 2.1.8:** Establish a suite of service providers to provide assistance to targeted firms.

**Action 2.1.9:** Identify and make consistent contact with local entrepreneurs (e.g. monthly email list).

Having locations that facilitate innovation and creation improves the support system for local entrepreneurs and reduces the financial barriers to business startups. Makerspaces provide a space where people can gather to create, invent, and learn. Libraries sometimes serve as maker spaces if they have equipment such as 3D printers, hardware supplies, and tools, and software and electronics.

Business incubators help new and startup companies to develop their skills, research, or products by providing services, such as management training and office space. Incubators reduce the barriers to starting a company and they can help in developing and promoting a culture of entrepreneurship and assist in business creation and retention.

“Fab labs” are small scale workshops that provide fabrication technology such as rapid prototypers, CNC machines, printed circuit boards, and sheet material cutters. These can be integrated with school programs such as a high school tech ed class. Funding is available from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to outfit public schools with fab labs and the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) for fab lab and incubator projects. Nearby school districts with Fab Labs include the School District of Nekoosa, School District of Mauston, School District of New Lisbon, School District of Wisconsin Rapids, Tri County School District, Necedah Area School District, and the Wonewoc-Union Center School District.

**Objective 2.2:** Develop or promote locations for entrepreneurs to test out ideas and innovate, such as a “makerspace” or a business incubator.

**Action 2.2.1:** Explore working with the City of Adams, Village of Friendship, and other organizations such as the library and technical college to develop a makerspace where entrepreneurs can use or borrow specialized equipment.

**Action 2.2.2:** Assist with the development of a space where entrepreneurs can rent small spaces to test out ideas or projects as businesses.

**Action 2.2.3:** Identify financing and funding sources. To help with these efforts, the County should utilize the North Central Wisconsin Entrepreneurship Portal as a resource to help identify funding opportunities and other resources available to entrepreneurs.

**Action 2.2.4:** Establish an administrative back-end function for local non-profits and small businesses, enabling them to share administrative support, bookkeeper, copier, website support, etc.

Many entrepreneurs can start out as home-based businesses to test their ideas without needing the same level of capital investment and overhead expenses as a dedicated business. “No impact” occupations are suitable for a home office due to the limited amount of traffic and lack of on-site sales. Allowing appropriate home occupations is important to provide opportunities to entrepreneurs while still preventing businesses that could be a nuisance to adjacent residential properties.

**Objective 2.3:** Allow certain home occupations and home-based businesses.

**Action 2.3.1:** Promote the review of applicable zoning ordinance (County, Town, Village, and City) to determine the type of home occupations allowed and the locations they are allowed and make recommendations based on the types of home occupations that are appropriate for the community.

Outside investors can be important or essential to a business at multiple points in a business’s life. Initial investors can be needed to make large capital investments up front. Angel investors can be necessary for the type of expansion that a successful business needs to keep growing. These networks are important to identify, expand and connect with potential clients.

**Objective 2.4:** Identify and expand angel and capital investor networks and connect them with businesses to improve new business and expansion prospects.

**Action 2.4.1:** Communicate with groups such as the Wisconsin River Business Angels (located in Plover) and WEDC to explore potential partnerships with investors and exchange information.

### **Goal 3: Support the Adams County Chamber of Commerce.**

Tourism and the related industries, such as hospitality, lodging, restaurants, and recreation are important components of the Adams County economy. Tourism infuses money from outside of Adams County into the Adams County economy, provides property income and boosts tax revenue. According to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, the Tourism industry had a total economic impact of over \$267 million in Adams County in 2024 and generated over \$196 in direct visitor spending. The total impact of tourism is equal to over 42.6 percent of the Adams County GRP, indicating that the Tourism industry has a significant impact on the local economy.

Although much of the employment in the tourism industry are low wage and low skill jobs, they provide the necessary entry level experience for workers to begin a career, and develop soft skills that many employers believe are lacking in the current workforce. Tourism also brings some management, supervising, accounting, maintenance and repair, and other business supporting occupations that provide relatively higher wages.

Adams County has a very high proportion of seasonal residents. In 2023, Adams County had 6,473 housing units that were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, compared to 9,351 units of year-round occupied housing. Seasonal housing accounts for over 38 percent of the County's housing stock. There are opportunities to attract these seasonal residents to live in the county full time, especially those that are looking to retire. These opportunities will grow as the large Baby Boomer generation continues to retire. There are also opportunities to attract additional seasonal residents and the associated seasonal housing development.

Economic development efforts should be coordinated with tourism. Workforce training, such as soft skills development, may boost the tourism industry while providing workers with the skills needed to compete in higher wage jobs in the future.

**Objective 3.1:** Assist with workforce development for tourism industries.

**Action 3.1.1:** Coordinate with workforce development and tourism related businesses to hold soft skill workshops and training to improve employee skills for entry level positions.

**Objective 3.2:** Ensure all major websites and campaigns have some cross-referencing to each other and reflect the “brand” theme consistently throughout all sectors.

**Action 3.2.1:** Support the Adams County Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations to increase the number of visitors.

## Goal 4: Educate and Train the Workforce.

Unfortunately, workforce development is often disconnected from economic development. However, it is a vital component of economic development as industries need labor to produce their goods and services. Labor availability is one component in firm location, so having the labor force to attract industry is an essential component of economic development. Focusing resources on workers rather than incentives for business also improves the skills and quality of life of the workers in Adams County.

Adams County is served by Mid-State Technical College, which serves an important role in workforce training for available jobs. Adams County is also within Advance Wisconsin Employment's (AEW) region, an organization which focuses on workforce development. The AEW creates a Workforce Development Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Adams County and the Adams County Rural and Industrial Development Commission should coordinate with the AEW and Mid-State Technical College on economic development activities.

The lower rates of educational attainment in Adams County require a focus on improving education and training, especially as higher wage manufacturing and agricultural jobs increasingly require associates degrees or technical training.

**Objective 4.1:** Expand cooperative efforts between Mid-State Technical College and local high schools to provide education and direction regarding post HS educational and employment prospects to high school students.

**Action 4.1.1:** Promote and support workforce training programs provided by Mid-State Technical College. Specifically, Mid-State recently constructed a workforce development center to provide training in the healthcare, welding and construction sectors, as well as a new Fire District Training Center at their Adams Campus.

**Action 4.1.2:** Expand cooperative efforts between Mid-State Technical College and local employers to tailor technical training towards workforce needs.

**Action 4.1.3:** Work with local officials to include local businesses in the school to work program to ensure it is as successful as possible.

**Action 4.1.4:** Develop school visits (student and teachers) to local businesses so students better understand local career opportunities and are introduced to the idea of opening their own business. Encourage teacher visits to local businesses to help teachers better understand existing employment opportunities.

**Action 4.1.5:** Support and coordinate with the Heavy Metal Tour that is coordinated by the Central Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance, Mid-State Technical College, and Northcentral Technical College.

**Objective 4.2:** Prepare the workforce of affected industry for transition due to high proportion of retirements.

**Action 4.2.1:** Work with schools (high school and technical college) to educate future workers to fill positions that will be available due to retiring workers.

**Action 4.2.2:** Promote and support apprenticeship and job shadowing programs for younger workers to work with experienced employees.

**Objective 4.3:** Build capacity in general job skills and business skills.

**Action 4.3.1:** Hold soft skills workshops to help prepare potential employees.

**Action 4.3.2:** Develop training programs or workshops to help retiring workers interested in developing a “second career”.

**Action 4.3.3:** Promote the Adams County Economic Development Business Plan Grant which offers funding and business plan templates to support new and emerging businesses.

**Action 4.3.4:** Hold workshops to train essential entrepreneurial and business management skills, such as creating a business plan.

**Action 4.3.5:** Promote the Small Business Development Center at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

## **Goal 5: Retain, Expand, and Attract Businesses to Adams County.**

Business retention and expansion is especially important to economic development. Research shows that up to 86 percent of new jobs created are by existing businesses in the community, rather than attracting new companies. It is also usually easier to retain and expand existing businesses than attracting new firms. Business retention and expansion programs can be one of the most important ways of gathering information about how to improve Adams County to facilitate growing and expanding businesses and ensuring an adequate workforce exists.

However, it is still important for Adams County to take steps towards business attraction, including marketing the County and providing easily accessible information to potential businesses. It is important for Adams County to have accurate information about the infrastructure readily available.

**Objective 5.1:** Develop procedures for business retention and expansion.

**Action 5.1.1:** Develop a business retention and expansion team, task force, or committee to address business needs.

**Action 5.1.2:** Conduct periodic surveys or interviews of local businesses to learn challenges and needs.

**Action 5.1.3:** Develop procedures for business retention and expansion (e.g. business visits, contact intervals, surveys, etc.).

**Action 5.1.4:** Use data available from the Department of Workforce Development, WEDC, and the NCWRPC.

**Action 5.1.5:** Create an awards program or other recognition for businesses in Adams County. An example of an awards program that the County could consider is the Vilas County EDC's Business of the Month program which shines a spotlight on businesses to highlight achievements and share stories of success.

**Action 5.1.6:** Work with local banks to ensure that they are aware of the local programs and resources available for businesses. Survey results from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Entrepreneurship Assessment indicate that banks are the most widely relied upon resource for local businesses throughout North Central Wisconsin. Making banks aware of local programs and resources ensures that they can pass along the information to their clients.

**Action 5.1.7:** Consider partnering with other communities and/or organizations for the formation of an entrepreneurial support program. Funding opportunities such as WEDC's Entrepreneurship Partner Grant, USDA's Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program, USDA's Rural Business Development Grant, and EDA's Build to Scale Program all offer funding assistance for the formation of such a program.

**Objective 5.2:** Develop procedures for business attraction.

**Action 5.2.1:** Utilize Centergy's Available Sites platform to showcase available commercial, retail, and industrial properties throughout Adams County. The platform provides a listing of available sites as well as relevant workforce data. [Note: This action replaces the previous plan's 4.2.2]

**Action 5.2.2:** Develop a method to respond to business relocation inquiries and informational requests in a prompt manner.

**Action 5.2.3:** Use data available from the Department of Workforce Development, WEDC, and NCWRPC.

**Objective 5.3:** Ensure any projects that receive incentives are enhancing the public benefit of the project, such as elevated design, quality employment opportunities, wages, etc..

**Action 5.3.1:** Concentrate limited incentives on businesses with the highest potential for growth and long-term stability.

**Action 5.3.2:** Develop performance criteria for businesses that receive incentives with potential payback provisions if criteria are not met.

**Action 5.3.3:** Use incentives for projects that would otherwise not be feasible, but for the incentives.

## **Goal 6: Improve Adams County Infrastructure.**

Infrastructure development, including water, sewer, broadband, and transportation, is one of the essential roles of government. Land is critical for both existing business and new businesses looking to relocation. Having readily available land with the necessary modern services is part of a strong economic development program. As key as infrastructure is to development, the availability of accurate information about the infrastructure is just as important as the infrastructure itself.

**Objective 6.1:** Strive to provide sewer and water infrastructure around the County's lakes to accommodate future development.

**Action 6.1.1:** Conduct feasibility studies as needed to determine the feasibility of providing infrastructure around the County's lakes.

**Objective 6.2:** Inventory and Market Available Sites.

**Action 6.1.1:** Maintain an inventory of all existing and potential sites in the County.

**Action 6.1.2:** Work with communities to improve all sites with needed infrastructure. This could include helping communities to identify potential projects that could be eligible for funding from sources such as EDA's Public Works program and the USDA's Community Facilities Grant and Loan program.

**Action 6.1.3:** Market sites with real estate agents, developers, site selectors and Centergy's Available Sites platform (which is part of WEDC's Locate in Wisconsin Tool).

**Action 6.1.4:** Consider participating in the Certified Sites program sponsored by WEDC.

Transportation is extremely important to economic development because businesses must be able to transport their products to their market. Highway and Rail access is an important piece of infrastructure to promote industrial development in Adams County. The lack of close interstate access hinders the transfer of goods by truck. Utilities and infrastructure are one of the important functions of government.

**Objective 6.2:** Improve freight transportation infrastructure.

**Action 6.2.1:** Survey businesses on freight needs and whether the interstate connecting routes and rail system is meeting their needs.

**Action 6.2.2:** Encourage rail system maintenance and expansion.

Broadband access is an important component of both livability and entrepreneurialism. Some new businesses will start using the internet to sell products and a reliable and fast connection is essential to facilitating this type of startup. It may also be an important component for many potential residents that would consider moving to Adams County.

**Objective 6.3:** Improve broadband access through both wireless and fiber optic networks.

**Action 6.3.1:** Work with communities and internet service providers to implement BEAD Funding priorities in suitable locations where broadband expansion would be best utilized.

**Action 6.3.2:** Obtain rural broadband expansion grants.

**Objective 6.4:** Improve cellular access throughout the County.

**Action 6.4.1:** Work with cellular service providers and report “dead zones” to cellular service providers serving the County as needed.

Redevelopment and infill development is an important component to an economic development strategy. Reducing blighted and contaminated properties raises surrounding property values and attracts a higher level of investment in the area. This also can bring new jobs into the area without needing additional infrastructure such as new roads. Finally, cleaning up contaminated sites reduces the potential for groundwater or surface water contamination, or other environmental or public health problems.

Developers are often not willing to assume the risks of a contaminated or blighted property due to the amount of uncertainty that exists regarding potential contamination. Performing site assessments to determine the potential issues reduces the uncertainty. This can initiate the redevelopment process of an underutilized plot of land that otherwise would sit vacant and be an economic and environmental liability.

**Objective 6.5:** Utilize land in an economically efficient and environmentally sustainable manner.

**Action 6.5.1:** Develop an inventory of sites in Adams County that have potential for redevelopment, including site readiness, potential contamination, and potential infrastructure needs.

**Action 6.5.2:** Incentivize the use and reuse of existing infrastructure.

**Action 6.5.3:** Pursue Brownfields and other related funding from the WI DNR and other entities (WEDC, US EPA, WisDOT, EDA, USDA, and HUD) to remediate contaminated sites with redevelopment potential.

## Goal 7: Support Niche Industries in Adams County.

Supporting industries within Adams County that have the largest potential for growth will help to focus economic development efforts in areas that are more likely to provide local returns. Additionally, targeting industries that are related to industries already concentrated in the County will help close supply chain leakages and to keep money in the local economy.

Some of the niche industries identified below may consist of only one or two companies in Adams County, so it is important to consider this when making decisions. The small number of companies can mean relatively small changes within a single company can create large impacts to the industry data. This can also result in inaccuracies when data includes estimates.

### Objective 7.1: Support the following niche industries in Adams County

- Food Processing and Manufacturing
- Paper Manufacturing
  - Corrugated and Solid Fiber Box Manufacturing
- Crop and Animal Production
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Construction
- Plastics Product Manufacturing
- Retail Trade

**Action 7.1.1:** Pursue firms within these industries to expand and locate in Adams County.

**Action 7.1.2:** Consistently communicate with firms in this industry to identify and address opportunities and challenges.

## Goal 8: Improve Livability and Quality of Life in Adams County.

Community development is an important component of economic development. Community development can improve workforce attraction efforts. Workforce attraction strategies largely revolve around livability and quality of life improvements to the community. Livability and quality of life are increasingly recognized as essential elements of a community when an employer is making location decisions. More livable communities are able to more easily attract and retain skilled or educated workforce to suit the needs of an employer.

Adams County loses a lot of people in the 20-29 age cohorts due to out-migration, which is most likely occurring for educational or employment reasons. Creating a more desirable place to live can increase the likelihood that these residents will return to Adams County after gaining the education

and skills they need to compete in the labor force. These returning workers may be the next entrepreneurs that start a business in Adams County. The location and recreational amenities of Adams County also have the potential to attract new residents that have the ability to work from home or do not need to be in a metropolitan area to work. Enhancing these amenities would complement and enhance the entrepreneurial potential of Adams County.

Workforce attraction also requires the appropriate housing for both current residents and in-migrants to live. Adequate housing is essential to support the labor force in the County. Many rural communities have trouble attracting skilled labor because potential workers have difficulty finding suitable housing, so they pass on jobs they could otherwise fill. Without adequate housing, businesses can face trouble recruiting workers, and workers can be forced to live elsewhere and commute longer distances to work, which reduces the amount of money available to spend on other local goods and services.

**Objective 8.1:** Develop the housing needed to make Adams County more competitive in attracting the labor force needed for local businesses.

**Action 8.1.1:** Work with communities, developers, and stakeholders to implement the housing strategies and recommendations identified in the 2025 Adams County Housing Study.

**Action 8.1.2:** Consider the results of the public survey conducted as part of the 2025 Adams County Housing Study. Survey results indicate that there are significant concerns about housing in Adams County. Many residents face a long wait for affordable rentals, with reports of numerous vacant properties that aren't being utilized. There's a strong desire for better housing options for middle-class families, as current offerings are primarily geared toward low-income individuals or seniors. Many feel that high rental prices do not reflect the quality of available housing, which often requires repairs and upkeep. There is also a sentiment that suggests that a lack of jobs that match housing costs is making it difficult for families to find suitable and affordable living conditions in Adams County.

**Action 8.1.3:** Support investment in revitalizing the existing housing stock in Adams County.

**Action 8.1.4:** Consider assisting housing developers build a variety of mixed-use housing options for working individuals and families, especially in close proximity to Adams County employment centers, such as Adams-Friendship.

Transportation is essential both for businesses and workers. Workers must be able to get to work. The rural nature of Adams County results in some issues related to transportation that are not easily solved. For example, low density land uses make public transit and active transportation inefficient and costly, but still necessary for a small portion of Adams County households that have limited access to a vehicle.

**Objective 8.2:** Improve alternative transportation options in Adams County.

**Action 8.2.1:** Actively implement the adopted Adams County bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and the Adams-Friendship Safe Routes to School Plan.

**Action 8.2.2:** Explore opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with area transit providers, or businesses, including shared ride taxis or business specific shuttle services.

**Action 8.2.3:** Promote the Wisconsin RIDESHARE as a resource for commuters to find rideshare options such as carpooling.

**Action 8.2.4:** Work with stakeholders in the area, such as businesses, local governments, and residents to explore the feasibility of a regional transit service (e.g. the Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit).

**Action 8.2.5:** Reduce barriers to employment by providing emergency transportation (or public transport) to work and childcare.

**Action 8.2.6:** Support the efforts of the Adams County Visionary Community Network to bring transit services to Adams County.

A place that is attractive to visitors also has the potential to be attractive to residents. Coordinating with the chamber of commerce, tourism, and visitor and convention bureau entities in the area can help in attracting new residents to be a part of the Adams County workforce.

**Objective 8.3:** Coordinate with County/Communities/Chamber of Commerce to promote quality of life, engage youth, and to attract workforce in Adams County.

**Action 8.3.1:** Support efforts to improve the quality of life throughout the County.

**Action 8.3.2:** Involve and appoint young adults to various public boards and/or commissions to create opportunities for the development of the “next generation” of community leaders.

**Action 8.3.3:** Market Adams County as an attractive place to live and work.

**Action 8.3.4:** Assemble welcome packages that businesses can provide to potential new hires that assist in finding housing, recreation, activities, and programs in the Adams County area. Envision Greater Fond du Lac’s Summer Series for Interns & Co-ops is an example of such a program that Adams County could consider.

**Action 8.3.5:** Support efforts to provide amenities that improve the County’s quality of life in an effort to attract and retain young families.

**Objective 8.4:** Address childcare availability and capacity challenges in Adams County.

**Action 8.4.1:** Adams County was recently awarded a Thrive Rural Wisconsin Grant in an effort to improve childcare throughout the County. As part of this effort, Adams County is working on a childcare initiative to help address capacity challenges and support the local workforce. The local leadership team will work to streamline community needs, assess resources, and develop a process with key stakeholders that can lead to the development of a childcare facility.

**Action 8.4.2:** Develop an inventory of the known childcare providers – both licensed and unlicensed - located throughout the County.

**Action 8.4.3:** Develop a list of steps needed to become a licensed childcare facility and work with community partners and providers to ensure that this information reaches prospective childcare providers.

## **Goal 9: Increase visibility of Adams County Economic Development (ACED).**

ACED is the lead County agency related to economic development. As a small organization with limited resources is important to continue to work with other agencies and organizations and expand those partnerships. As the single point of contact it is critical that ACED has visibility, especially online. Economic development should be considered a long-term pursuit that is evaluated periodically.

**Objective 9.1:** Coordinate with County/Communities/Chamber of Commerce/others to spur development in Adams County.

**Action 9.1.1:** Maintain and expand partnerships related to economic development.

**Action 9.1.2:** Continue to maintain and upgrade the organization's website for more visibility and provide data that business prospects seek.

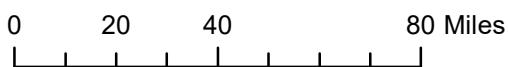
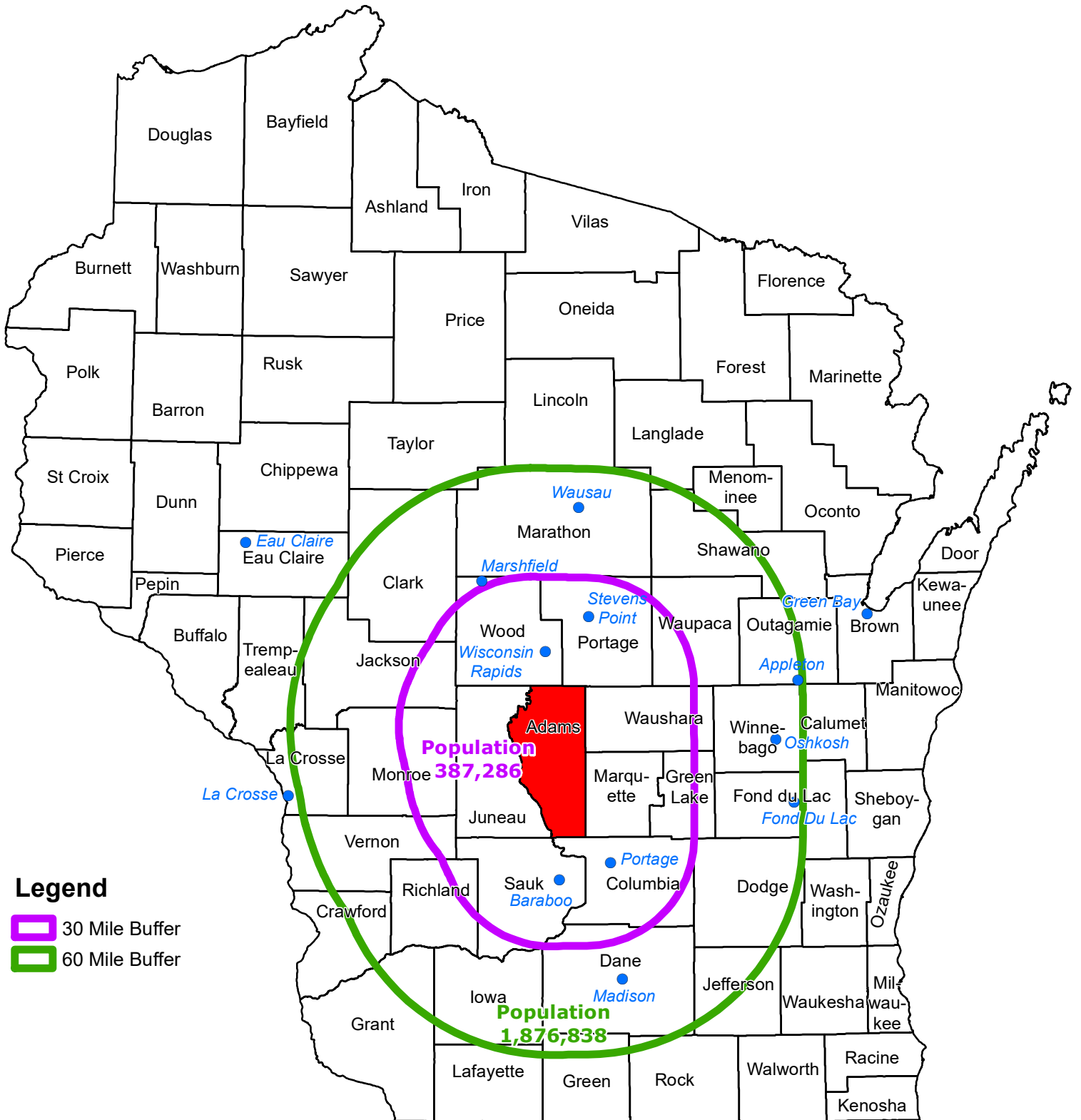
**Action 9.1.3:** Market ACED to expand our reach to stakeholder, including businesses, communities, developers, organizations, and residents.

**Action 9.1.4:** Identify various metrics for monitoring to determine success of efforts over time, such as business contacts and formations, tax base increase, etc.

## Appendix A – Adams County and Surrounding Counties

# Adams County and Surrounding Counties

2025 Population Estimates



**Appendix B – Adams County Consumer Expenditure Report**

## 2025 Employed Population 16+ by Industry

Adams County,...

Total	8,495
Agriculture/Mining	3.6%
Construction	7.5%
Manufacturing	15.8%
Wholesale Trade	1.7%
Retail Trade	11.9%
Transportation/Utilities	6.3%
Information	1%
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	4.6%
Services	40.9%
Public Administration	7.0%

## 2025 Consumer Spending

Apparel & Services: Total \$	\$13,799,444
Average Spent	\$1,455.94
Spending Potential Index	59
Education: Total \$	\$8,085,549
Average Spent	\$853.09
Spending Potential Index	48
Entertainment/Recreation: Total \$	\$27,366,285
Average Spent	\$2,887.35
Spending Potential Index	70
Food at Home: Total \$	\$49,164,799
Average Spent	\$5,187.25
Spending Potential Index	70
Food Away from Home: Total \$	\$23,396,908
Average Spent	\$2,468.55
Spending Potential Index	60
Health Care: Total \$	\$58,590,593
Average Spent	\$6,181.75
Spending Potential Index	80
HH Furnishings & Equipment: Total \$	\$18,829,868
Average Spent	\$1,986.69
Spending Potential Index	68
Personal Care Products & Services: Total \$	\$6,031,967
Average Spent	\$636.42
Spending Potential Index	61



**Source:** Esri forecasts for 2025 and 2030. U.S. Census 2010 and 2020 Census data converted by Esri into 2020 geography. Consumer Spending data are derived from the 2022 and 2023 Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## 2025 Consumer Spending

Adams County,...

Shelter: Total \$	\$156,918,997
Average Spent	\$16,556.13
Spending Potential Index	62
Support Payments/Gifts in Kind: Total \$	\$24,441,412
Average Spent	\$2,578.75
Spending Potential Index	78
Travel: Total \$	\$21,855,308
Average Spent	\$2,305.90
Spending Potential Index	64
Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs: Total \$	\$9,517,098
Average Spent	\$1,004.13
Spending Potential Index	74

## Top Tapestry Segment

Adams County,...

## Rural Resort Dwellers (15):

This segment is characterized by rural areas with seasonal homes and seniors with skilled jobs.


[Learn more about this segment...](#)

**Data Note:** Household population includes persons not residing in group quarters. Average Household Size is the household population divided by total households. Persons in families include the householder and persons related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. Per Capita Income represents the income received by all persons aged 15 years and over divided by the total population.

Income represents the preceding year, expressed in current dollars. Household income includes wage and salary earnings, interest dividends, net rents, pensions, SSI and welfare payments, child support, and alimony.

Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race. The Diversity Index measures the probability that two people from the same area will be from different race/ethnic groups.

Consumer spending shows the amount spent on a variety of goods and services by households that reside in the area. Expenditures are shown by broad budget categories that are not mutually exclusive. Consumer spending does not equal business revenue. Total and Average Amount Spent Per Household represent annual figures. The Spending Potential Index represents the amount spent in the area relative to a national average of 100.

 **Source:** Esri forecasts for 2025 and 2030. U.S. Census 2010 and 2020 Census data converted by Esri into 2020 geography. Consumer Spending data are derived from the 2022 and 2023 Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Adams County**  
**Economic Development Strategy**  
**2026**