

Chapter 1: Issues and Opportunities

Plan Purpose

The City of Wausau's Comprehensive Plan is a guide that helps elected officials, committees, and the public envision how the City will develop over time. It assists with City decision-making related to the physical development and redevelopment of the built environment. It also identifies how the City will prioritize maintaining and enhancing its services in a financially sustainable manner. Throughout the development of this plan, the City engaged the public through various activities to understand what its residents' needs are. The result is a plan that incorporates robust data, public input, and a clear vision of how the City will embrace opportunities that enhance its overall livability.

This Comprehensive Plan consists of eleven chapters that replace the previous 2017 Comprehensive Plan. Wisconsin Planning Law §66.1001 specifies that comprehensive plans must be updated every ten years and contain the following nine elements: Issues and Opportunities (Demographics), Natural, Agricultural and Cultural Resources, Housing, Utilities and Community Facilities, Transportation, Economic Development, Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation and Implementation. Each chapter addresses one of these elements, with the cultural resources element having its own chapter and downtown Wausau having another chapter due to the significance these resources have in the community.

There are many tangible projects that have resulted from the City's 2017, especially the redevelopment of the City's riverfront, remediation of contaminated sites, new development that meets strong housing demand, improvements to various transportation routes and facilities, strategic use of tax increment financing (TIF) to spur new development, and the construction of new public facilities, such as the new drinking water plant and new wastewater treatment plant. This updated comprehensive plan continues this legacy by identifying the community's current issues along with a series of goals, objectives, and policies that address them.

Planning Process

Public Participation

This Comprehensive Plan greatly exceeds the State of Wisconsin's minimum public participation requirements. Appendix A: Public Participation Plan (PPP) summarizes and describes these activities in detail. The PPP also includes a timeline that shows when each PPP activity took place.

TBD- additional results will be summarized here (including a word cloud) and full results attached to the end of the document when complete as Appendix 2.

Planning Context

Planning and zoning have been functions of local units of government for over 50 years in Wisconsin. Existing authority for planning is provided in state statutes, including §. 59, 60, 61 and 62. Over the years almost every city, village and county has developed various plans, from land use plans, from land use plans to master plans and even development plans. Comprehensive Planning Law (§.66.1001) required all jurisdictions within the state that exercise control over land use to prepare a comprehensive plan by 2010. State statute also requires a public participation plan to involve the public during the comprehensive plan update process, which is attached to the end of this document. Fourteen state planning goals are suggested. These goals, however, are not mandates for specific provisions that must be included in the comprehensive plan, but criteria on which the grant applications will be judged. The goals are:

1. Promotion of the redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and public services and the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial and industrial structures.
2. Encouragement of neighborhood designs that support a range of transportation choices.
3. Protection of natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces and groundwater resources.
4. Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
5. Encouragement of land uses, densities and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental and utility costs.
6. Preservation of cultural, historic and archaeological sites.
7. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government.
8. Building of community identity by revitalizing main streets and enforcing design standards.
9. Providing an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals of all income levels throughout each community.
10. Providing adequate infrastructure and public services and an adequate supply of developable land to meet existing and future market demand for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
11. Promoting the expansion or stabilization of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities at the state, regional and local levels.
12. Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.
13. Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities.
14. Providing an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens.



Previous Plans

The City of Wausau

This Comprehensive Plan replaces previous comprehensive plans from 2017, 2006, 1995, and 1983. A variety of plans have been developed for the City, listed below. Each Chapter in this Plan will provide more details on these plans as they relate to that topic:

- Tax Increment Financing and Districts (Ongoing)
- Wausau Older Adults Housing Study (2026)
- Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2023-2027)
- Wausau Safe Routes to School Plan (2024)
- Wausau Metropolitan Area Housing Assessment (2022)
- River Edge Master Plan (2020)
- Near West Side Master Plan, the Towers Plan (2020)
- Redevelopment Guides (2017 and 2020)
- Wausau Center Urban Design and Transportation Plan (2019)
- Wausau Sewer Service Area Plan (2018)
- Historical Survey (2017)
- East Riverfront Brownfield Plan (2015)

Marathon County

A variety of plans have been developed at the county level and those that relate will be discussed in later Chapters, such as the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Land and Water Conservation Plan, and the Disaster Mitigation Plan. Additionally, the Marathon County Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2026 to guide County decision makers on a wide array of issues over the next twenty years in creating a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business. This policy plan focuses on a county-level perspective and planning direction that complements and strengthens local planning efforts. The goal of the plan is to make Marathon County the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.



Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

This organization covers Wausau and several surrounding communities and coordinates transportation efforts that transcend municipal boundaries. Its plans and studies are discussed in detail in the Transportation chapter of this Plan.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan 2025

The City is included in the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) area. The NCWRPC is one of nine regional planning commissions in the State of Wisconsin. The North central region includes ten counties, loosely following the upper Wisconsin River Valley. The NCWRPC is a voluntary association of governments tasked with the mission of providing planning assistance to the communities throughout the Region.

The Regional Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2025, is an advisory document focusing on the nine comprehensive plan elements required by state statute, plus a new chapter on public health. Each chapter identifies issues, goals, objectives, and policies, which are discussed when relevant during the chapters of this Comprehensive Plan.

Data Sources

The U.S. Census Bureau has two data sources that are widely used in this plan, which are described below:

U.S. Census (2000, 2010, & 2020)	American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (2024)
• Counts population, households, etc. • Based on former Census “short form” • Mailed to every household in the U.S. • Mailed every decade (2010, 2020, etc.) • Self-reported data that is published • Typically more accurate than ACS • No data for non-Census years	• Counts U.S. Census info plus additional topics • Based on former Census “long form” • Mailed to a limited number of households • Mailed every year (2024, 2025, etc.) • Self-reported data used to produce estimates • Typically less accurate than Census • Provides data for non-Census years

The ACS evolved from the “long form” that some households used to receive with the Census. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau began releasing ACS data for all populations on a yearly basis. The availability of these surveys means that communities do not need to wait ten years for the census to assess current trends, but they are only estimates based on a limited sample size. Trends are generally analyzed for the fourteen-year time frame from 2010 to 2024 in this report since 2024 data was released in early 2026. 2010 also makes a good “baseline” year for data because of the impacts that the late 2000s recession had on demographics, especially influencing the number of children being born in the county, which peaked in 2007. Additionally, the decade leading up to 2010 was when the large Millennial generation was graduating high school and formed their own households by moving out of their parents’ homes, leading to a pronounced shift in the number of households and overall household size.

Despite the limitations listed above for each data source (self-reporting, etc.), there are few substitutes, if any, for most of the demographic data provided by these sources. In general, they are the most widely used and exhaustive data sets used in plans, grants, decision-making tools, and other programs. Other data sources are used for topics not covered by Census are cited accordingly, such as population projections and estimates from the Wisconsin Department of Administration’s (DOA).



Community Profile

The City of Wausau is located in the middle of Marathon County in Central Wisconsin. Wausau is the county seat and had a 2020 U.S. Census population of 39,994, which is about 29 percent of the total county population. Wausau is one of six cities and 16 villages in the county, see Map 1. The City is located at the crossroads of two major highways in Central Wisconsin, HWY 51 which runs north-south and HWY 29 which runs east-west. Wausau is the largest city in north-central Wisconsin and is the 18th largest city in the state by 2020 population. A detailed community history can be found in the Cultural Resources chapter. Overall, the Wausau area is known for its combination of urban amenities, outdoor recreation, moderate cost of living, community safety, and lack of traffic that make it a desirable place to live.



Natural Setting

The City of Wausau is located on the Wisconsin River, which runs into Lake Wausau to the south of the city. The Wisconsin River dominates the surface hydrology of the area with numerous streams flowing into it, along with the Big Rib and Eau Claire Rivers, which form the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway. Wetlands are scattered throughout the city mostly surrounding streams. The Wisconsin River divides the city into two distinct areas, the westside of the Wisconsin River and the eastside of the Wisconsin River. The City encompasses roughly 13,091 acres or 20.45 square miles.

Wausau's climate is classified as halfway between temperate and subarctic (boreal and hemi boreal). The area has four distinct seasons. Summers have warm but not excessively hot days and cool nights. Winters are long, cold, and snowy. The average annual precipitation is roughly 31.6 inches. Snow cover on the ground and ice cover on the lakes lasts from December to April. The growing season generally extends from late May to early September, for an average frost-free growing season of 135 days. Prevailing winds come out of the northwest from late fall through spring and from the south during the remainder of the year. Wind speed generally ranges from 4 to 15 miles per hour. Natural resources are described and mapped in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this plan.



Demographics

Reviewing the socioeconomic trends throughout the city is important to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future. The analysis of statistical data used in conjunction with public participation and input, can help communities identify the issues and opportunities they must address to improve their communities and reach their goals in the coming details. In 2010, Marathon County hired Next Generation Consulting to complete a footprint study titled “A Next Generation Talent Magnet.” In the footprint, La Crosse, WI and Eau Claire, WI were identified as comparative cities to Wausau, and their demographics are included in this chapter to provide a comparison between Wausau and its peers. Additionally, the percentage and net change between 2010 and 2024 is displayed due to the pronounced impact the 2008 recession had on demographics with a dramatic slowdown in nationwide population growth in the 2010s compared to the 1990s and 2000s.

Population

City of Wausau

The City of Wausau is the largest city and County Seat in Marathon County, and the County’s boundary serves as the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) boundary. Together with Portage and Wood Counties, Wausau is part of the Wausau-Stevens Point-Wisconsin Rapids Combined Statistical Area (CSA). The County (and also MSA) 2020 Census population was 138,013, and the CSA population was 282,597. Although these number rival more urbanized metropolitan and combined statistical area populations, the population is dispersed among midsize communities (e.g. Wausau, Marshfield, Stevens Point, Wisconsin Rapids) and many smaller communities rather than in one single dense, urban core.

Wausau had a 2020 Census population of 39,994, representing about 29 percent of the County population. The next biggest community in Marathon County, the Village of Weston, borders the City of Wausau directly to the Southeast and had a population of 15,723 people in 2020. When comparing growth rates between 2010 and 2024, the City of Wausau grew 2.3 percent, which is slightly slower than the County growth rate of 3.2 percent. See Table 1. The County’s higher growth rate is influenced by neighboring communities that grew faster than Wausau. For example, the Villages of Weston (5.9 percent), Rib Mountain (6.8 percent), and Kronenwetter (16.4 percent) all grew at much higher rates between 2010 and 2024.

Peer Communities

Table 1 displays the total population for the city of Wausau, the City of Eau Claire, the City of La Crosse, Marathon County, and the State. Eau Claire, with its easy access to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, grew at a considerable 6.7 percent, whereas La Crosse, which is landlocked, grew at just 0.1 percent during the same time. Both Wausau and Marathon County are growing slightly slower than the state and nation, which grew 4.0 percent and 8.5 percent during that time, respectively. The 2025 population estimate for the city from the Wisconsin Department of Administration is 40,571 persons, which is notably higher than Census estimates. This could indicate that more people are moving to the area in recent years due to its high quality of life and availability of jobs. The Land Use Chapter further examines population, including population projections.

Table 1: Demographic Change

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	38,426	39,106	39,994	39,996	890	2.3%
C. Eau Claire	61,704	65,883	69,421	70,322	4,439	6.7%
C. La Crosse	51,818	51,320	52,680	51,356	36	0.1%
Marathon Co.	125,834	134,063	138,013	138,403	4,340	3.2%
Wisconsin	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	5,914,872	227,886	4.0%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Age Distribution

Population distribution is important to the planning process, especially for two age groups are examined here. They are the 17 years of age and younger, and the 65 years of age and older population groups. These are often referred to as dependent populations as they are least likely to be in the workforce. In 2024, 41.3 percent of the population in the City of Wausau was dependent, compared to 39.3 percent in 2010. The population under 17 years of age is in school and requires education services, safe bicycle and pedestrian options, and other public services. The population over 65 years of age is typically entering retirement and requires services like accessibility to healthcare, senior facilities, universal housing, and a variety of transportation options to access services and programs. Both populations generally do not comprise a significant portion of the workforce.

17 Years and Under

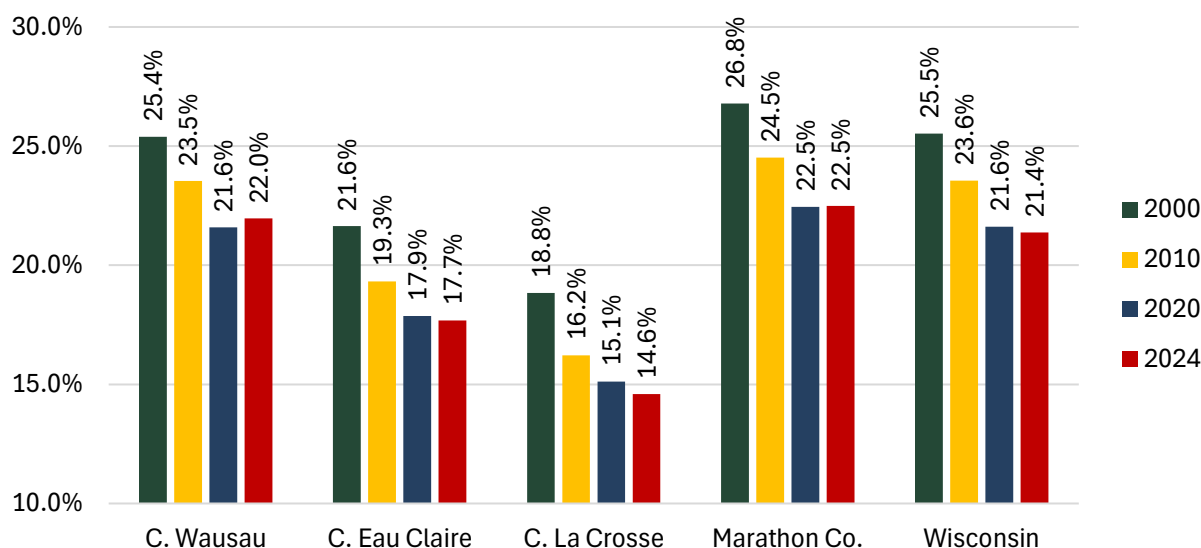
The City of Wausau's 17 and under population is in line with State and County trends, and this age group comprises a greater share of the population compared to peer communities; See Table 2 and Figure 1. Between 2010 and 2024, the total number of those aged 17 and younger in the City of Wausau decreased 4.5 percent for a decrease of 416 people. In 2024, 22 percent of the population in Wausau was under the age of 17, down from 23.5 percent in 2010. While Eau Claire has a smaller share of people 17 and under (17.7 percent), its overall decrease of 2.3 percent for that population is slower than Wausau's decrease. Meanwhile, La Crosse has a smaller share of people 17 and under (14.6 percent), and the total population 17 and under is decreasing much more rapidly with a decline of 10 percent during the same time. Marathon County and Wisconsin saw decreases in this age group that were only slightly more pronounced than Wausau's at 5.3 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively. The share of residents in this age group is also very similar to Wausau's 22 percent for the County (22.5 percent) and State (21.4 percent).

The decrease in population aged 17 and under can partially be explained by Millennials. Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) are the children of Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964). At that time, Baby Boomers were the largest generation, and Millennials were the second largest. These adults turned 18 years of age between 1999 and 2014, reducing the number of people aged 17 and under during that time period. The City, Region, County, and State all experienced a growth in this cohort between 1990 and 2000 before seeing a reduction in the number of people under 17 after 2000. By 2019, the Millennial Generation surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest generation, and as of 2026, Gen Z has surpassed Baby Boomers in size, ranking second behind Millennials. Often, student debt, inflation, high housing costs, and other factors during the 2010s and 2020s are cited as having contributed to a decrease in the number of children Millennials and Gen Z (1997-2012) are having as well as an increase in households with no children compared to previous generations.

Table 2: Persons 17 Years of Age and Younger

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	9,756	9,202	8,636	8,786	-416	-4.5%
C. Eau Claire	13,358	12,728	12,403	12,431	-297	-2.3%
C. La Crosse	9,762	8,325	7,960	7,493	-832	-10.0%
Marathon Co.	33,716	32,869	30,987	31,130	-1,739	-5.3%
Wisconsin	1,368,756	1,339,492	1,274,321	1,264,546	-74,946	-5.6%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 1: Percent of Population 17 Years of Age and Younger

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

65 Years and Older

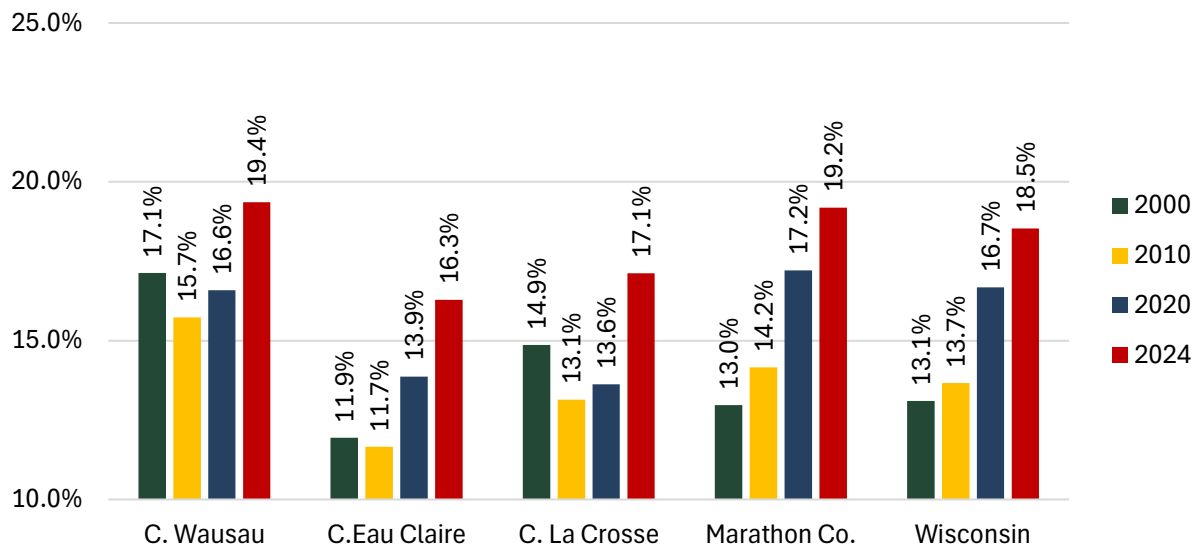
The City of Wausau, Marathon County, and Wisconsin all saw a dramatic increase in the share of the overall population that is aged 65 and over. This is a direct result of the large baby boomer cohort entering these age cohorts. In 2024, adults aged 65 and over made up 19.4 of the City's population, which is higher than in peer communities; Eau Claire's 65 and over population was 16.3 percent and La Crosse's was 17.1 percent in 2024. It was also similar to Marathon County (19.2 percent) and Wisconsin (18.5 percent) figures. However, the rate at which this age group increased in Wausau (25.9 percent) was much slower than in peer communities (49.1 percent in Eau Claire and 30.4 percent in La Crosse) as well as Marathon County (39.8 percent) and Wisconsin (41.0 percent) between 2010 and 2024 because this age group was largest for the City in 2010 (15.7 percent) compared to the others (13.9, 13.6, 17.2, and 16.7 percent, respectively). But overall, this age group is expected to grow. See Table 3 and Figure 2.

Table 3: Persons 65 Years of Age and Older

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	6,582	6,150	6,632	7,741	1,591	25.9%
C. Eau Claire	7,368	7,680	9,630	11,454	3,774	49.1%
C. La Crosse	7,701	6,744	7,178	8,794	2,050	30.4%
Marathon Co.	16,321	18,988	23,757	26,553	7,565	39.8%
Wisconsin	702,553	777,314	982,799	1,096,043	318,729	41.0%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 2: Percent of Population 65 Years of Age and Older



Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

An increase in older adults will impact the economy as retirements will need to be filled by skilled workers from younger generations. Additionally, as adults age, the ability to maintain a home and drive will impact housing and transportation demand in the coming years. These topics are covered in future chapters in this Plan.

Households

A household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. The City's trend of households reflects the national trend of fewer people living within the same household. This trend can drive housing demand even if the population is relatively flat, and changing average household size is discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Housign The City of Wausau, Cities of Eau Claire and La Crosse, Marathon County, and the State all gained population between 2010 and 2024, but the average household size for all five decreased over the past decade as the increase in total households outpaced the increase in population. The only exception was that the City of Eau Claire saw no change to its household size, which was already much lower than the others in 2010. Overall, there has been an increase in empty nester households as baby boomers age and live longer than previous generations, and there has been a decrease in the number of children younger generations are having.

The number of households within the city grew by 1,138 households between 2010 and 2024 as shown in Table 4. The growth rate during this time of 6.9 percent is slower than the County's 8.8 percent rate, which is the same as the Statewide rate. The City of Eau Claire's growth rate was double that of Wausau's with a 13.8 percent increase, and even the City of La Crosse, which hardly saw an increase in the overall population, had a slightly higher increase in the number of households than Wausau at 7.2 percent. The higher countywide increase in households means that more households are likely moving to neighboring communities outside of Wausau, but the difference between the two has narrowed considerably since the 2017 Comprehensive Plan was written. At that time, the County household growth rate was 7 percent higher than the City's between 2000 and 2010, compared to a 1.9 percent difference between 2010 and 2024. This could be a result of the City's ambitious housing redevelopment throughout the City. Additionally, household formation plays a role, where adults leave their parents' homes and live with roommates or a significant other, which creates new households out of the existing population.

Table 4: Total Households

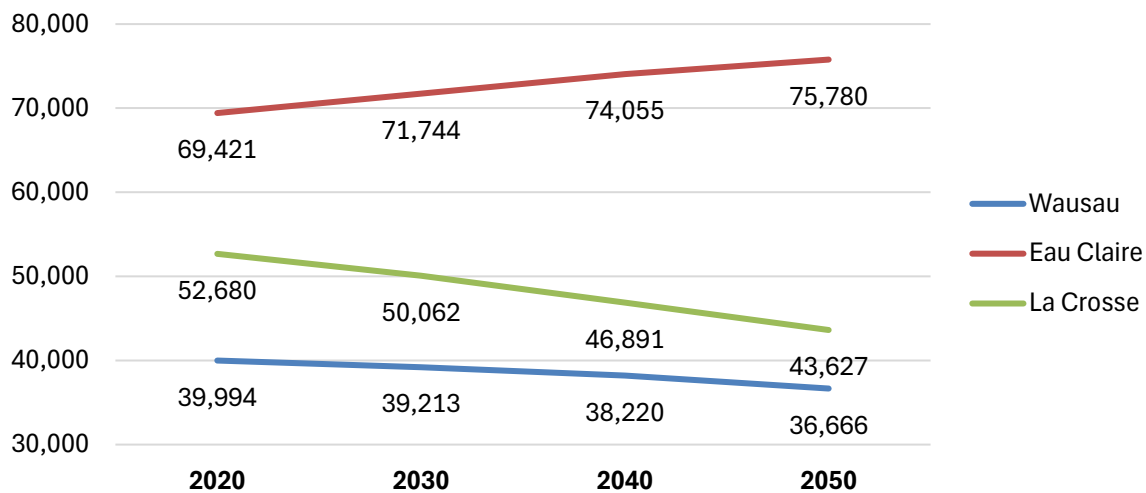
	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	15,678	16,487	17,420	17,625	1,138	6.9%
C. Eau Claire	24,016	26,803	28,864	30,492	3,689	13.8%
C. La Crosse	21,110	21,428	22,779	22,965	1,537	7.2%
Marathon Co.	47,402	53,176	56,517	57,866	4,690	8.8%
Wisconsin	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,428,361	2,479,480	199,712	8.8%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Population and Household Projections

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) creates the state's official population and household projections based on the most recent Census. In 2024, WDOA released population projections based on the 2020 Census, followed by household projections in 2026. Figure 3 and Table 5 list WDOA's projected population through 2050. According to WDOA, Wausau is expected to decrease in population by 8.3 percent, which is a more rapid decrease than the projections for Marathon County (-5.5 percent) and Wisconsin (-3.3 percent). The City of Eau Claire is expected to grow by 9.2 percent while the City of La Crosse is expected to decline by 17.2 percent, illustrating the variety of demographic trends present throughout the State.

DOA's methodology indicates that these population projections are based on existing fertility rates, death rates, and age cohorts of the existing population, and do not account for a large surge or decrease in population due to an unforeseen large-scale event, which is too hard to predict. For example, if natural disasters in other U.S. states lead to a large-scale inward migration to the Midwest, that hypothetical event would not be reflected in the projections.

Figure 3: Population Projections

Source: WDOA 2024

Table 5: Population Projections 2020-2050

	2020 Census	2030	2040	2050	Percent Change
Wausau	39,994	39,213	38,220	36,666	-8.3%
Eau Claire	69,421	71,744	74,055	75,780	9.2%
La Crosse	52,680	50,062	46,891	43,627	-17.2%
Marathon Co.	138,013	136,750	134,615	130,380	-5.5%
State	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: WDOA 2024

WDOA's household projections in Table 6 show a similar pattern as Figure 3 and Table 5 between 2020 and 2050. Wausau is projected to have a slight decline of 5.3 percent, while Eau Claire grows more rapidly with an increase of 11.5 percent, and La Crosse has a much more pronounced decline of 13.6 percent. Wausau's position, just like with population projections, results in a faster decline compared to Marathon County, which is projected to lose 1.7 percent of its households. And unlike its projected decrease in overall population, Wisconsin is projected to have a slight increase in households (1.7 percent). This is a result of the projected change in household size. WDOA predicts that Marathon County's household size will decrease from 2.41 in 2020 to 2.30 in 2050, while the state's household size will decrease from 2.37 to 2.24 during the same time.

Table 6: Household Projections 2020-2050

	2020	2030	2040	2050	Percent Change	Net Change
Wausau	17,420	17,491	17,225	16,498	-5.3%	-922
Eau Claire	28,864	30,243	31,380	32,171	11.5%	3,307
La Crosse	22,779	22,078	21,077	19,690	-13.6%	-3,089
Marathon Co.	56,517	57,492	57,364	55,574	-1.7%	-943
State	2,428,361	2,493,822	2,510,971	2,468,672	1.7%	40,311

Source: WDOA 2026

Overall, the State of Wisconsin is expected to lose nearly 200,000 residents in a 30-year timeframe. However, ACS estimates since the 2020 Census have reflected that many places in Wisconsin, including Central Wisconsin, are seeing population growth that is faster than during the 2010s. This can be observed in North Central Wisconsin, where many counties have seen inbound migration that has driven population growth. Marathon County's growth is currently being driven by both inbound migration (people moving to the County from somewhere else) as well as natural increase (more births than deaths) according to U.S. Census data (2025 County Population Totals and Components of Change).

According to the Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, many rural areas in the country that declined in population in the 2010s saw a population rebound since 2020. Additionally, the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) and Headwaters Economics identified a trend where counties with substantial recreation opportunities draw more residents than non-recreation counties, and they also attract those with higher incomes. Additionally, income growth has been stronger in recent years for outdoor recreation-oriented counties.

Though the Wausau Metropolitan area results in Marathon County being designated an urban county, and the United States Department of Agriculture does not consider Marathon County to have as much outdoor recreation as other Counties in the region (Adams, Juneau, Forest, Langlade, Oneida, and Vilas), Marathon's position as an affordable hub with a strong economy and high quality of life in close proximity to these counties, along with its own variety of local recreational offerings, positions Wausau to attract further growth that surpasses WDOA's

population projections in the coming years. Additionally, the rapidly aging population in Wisconsin's Northern Counties may increase demand for more housing near healthcare and services in Wausau due to its robust infrastructure and amenities. These topics are discussed in more detail later in this plan.

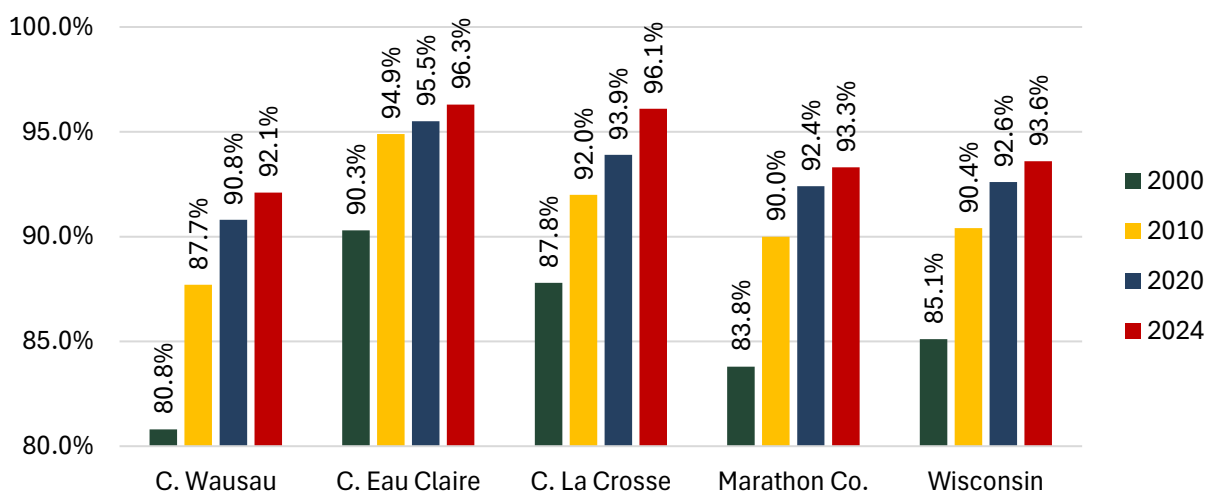
Education Levels

Educational attainment levels have increased in all areas in the City of Wausau since 2000 according to Tables 6 and 7. The percentage of population with at least a high school degree increased 4.4 percent between 2010 and 2024, which was the highest increase when compared to the Cities of Eau Claire (1.4 percent), La Crosse (4.1 percent), Marathon County (3.3 percent), and the State of Wisconsin (3.2 percent). However, the City of Wausau still has the lowest percentage of high school graduates (92.1 percent) compared to Eau Claire (96.3 percent), La Crosse (96.1 percent), Marathon County (93.3 percent), and Wisconsin (93.6 percent). See Figure 4.

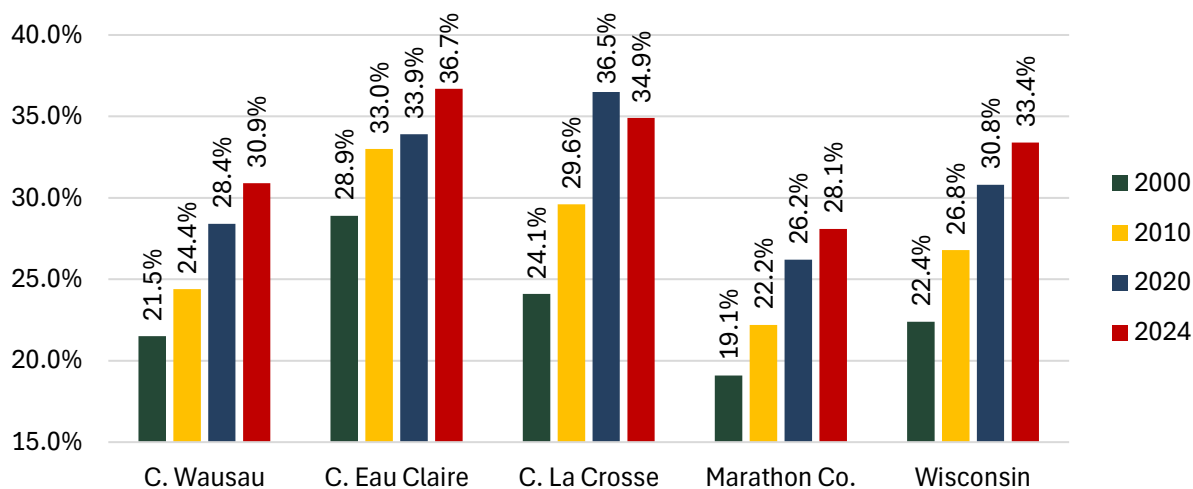
In 2024, an estimated 30.9 percent of City of Wausau residents had a bachelor's degree or higher, which was an increase of 6.5 percent compared to 2010. This was a faster increase than Eau Claire (3.7 percent) and La Crosse (5.3 percent), but those two communities have consistently had a higher share of college graduates at 36.7 percent and 34.9 percent, respectively. These higher rates are likely due to the influence of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and Viterbo University, whereas Wausau does not have a large 4-year college campus. An estimated 28.1 percent of Marathon County residents and 33.4 percent of Wisconsin residents were 4-year college graduates, increasing by 5.9 percent and 6.6 percent between 2010 and 2024, respectively. Overall the trend is increasing rates of both high school and college education over time throughout Wisconsin, though rising costs of education and decreasing college enrollment will impact higher education in the coming decades. See Figure 5.

In summary, education indicators show that Wausau has an improving education level but is still behind other comparable cities and the state in higher education. An increase in high school graduates ensures a base workforce able to support the kind of manufacturing industry which has been a cornerstone of the City's economy for many years. However, while a high school diploma used to be enough to work in the manufacturing production field, today, many manufacturing production jobs require at least a technical degree or certificate from a local technical college. As discussed later in the Utilities and Community Facilities chapter, both University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau and Northcentral Technical College provide educational opportunities in the community, recently partnering to share a campus on the City's northwest side.

Figure 4: People 25 and Over Who Have Completed Four or More Years of High School



Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Figure 5: People 25 and Over Who Have Completed Four or More Years of College

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Employment

In 2024, there were an estimated 19,920 Wausau residents aged 16 and over who were employed, regardless of whether their jobs was located in the City or not. The increase of 5.8 percent in employment between 2010 and 2024 was higher than the Countywide rate (4.2 percent) but lower than the Statewide rate (6.7 percent). It was also ahead of La Crosse (1.5 percent) but behind Eau Claire (9.3 percent). The Economic Development Chapter further examines employment in detail, including employment projections. With a rapidly retiring workforce, the ability to attract workers will continue to be important in the coming years. See Table 7.

Table 7: Total Employed People Age 16 and Older

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	18,489	18,821	19,242	19,920	1,099	5.8%
C. Eau Claire	33,423	36,579	39,037	39,973	3,394	9.3%
C. La Crosse	26,761	27,525	27,026	27,929	404	1.5%
Marathon Co.	66,550	69,232	71,187	72,144	2,912	4.2%
Wisconsin	2,734,925	2,839,636	2,983,277	3,031,042	191,406	6.7%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Income Levels

Median Household Income and Per Capita Income are the two major indicators of income. The City median household income rose roughly 54.9 percent between 2010 and 2024 from \$41,564 to \$64,389. This was faster than the median household income growth for the County (46.0 percent) and State (47.8 percent) as well as the City of La Crosse (38.1 percent). These figures are not adjusted for inflation, which, according to the U.S. Inflation Calculator, was 43.9 percent between 2010 and 2024. This means that the City's median household income of \$41,564 in 2010 had the same purchasing power as \$59,793 did in 2024. While this indicates that wages have grown slightly faster than overall inflation, the growth is far less pronounced, and certain commodities, such as housing, have exceeded the overall inflation rate. Housing values increased by 50.2 percent during the same time, and rent increased by 66.9 percent, according to the Housing chapter of this plan. Additionally, median household

income is considerably lower than County (\$77,884) and State (\$77,485) median household income, highlighting an opportunity for the City to support more jobs that pay a living wage. See Table 8.

Table 8: Median Household Income

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	\$36,831	\$41,564	\$47,438	\$64,389	\$22,825	54.9%
C. Eau Claire	\$36,399	\$43,090	\$59,705	\$67,395	\$24,305	56.4%
C. La Crosse	\$31,103	\$40,457	\$46,438	\$55,866	\$15,409	38.1%
Marathon Co.	\$45,165	\$53,363	\$63,029	\$77,884	\$24,521	46.0%
Wisconsin	\$43,791	\$52,413	\$63,293	\$77,485	\$25,072	47.8%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Per Capita Income has generally increased more rapidly between 2010 and 2024 than median household income, which can be partially explained by fewer people in each household relative to the household's overall income. Per capita income for the City increased by 53.4 percent between 2010 and 2024, rising from \$23,436 to \$35,957. This follows a similar pattern that median household income does: Wausau's per capita income is higher than La Crosse's (\$34,439), but less than that of Eau Claire (\$39,434), Marathon County (\$41,413), and Wisconsin (\$43,373). It also grew by just 53.4 percent between 2010 and 2024, which was below La Crosse (67.2 percent), Eau Claire (71.1 percent), Marathon County (59.9 percent), and Wisconsin (62.9 percent). See Table 9.

Table 9: Per Capita Income

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 Change	2010-2024 % Change
C. Wausau	\$20,227	\$23,436	\$29,131	\$35,957	\$12,521	53.4%
C. Eau Claire	\$18,230	\$23,041	\$31,510	\$39,434	\$16,393	71.1%
C. La Crosse	\$17,650	\$20,592	\$27,398	\$34,439	\$13,847	67.2%
Marathon Co.	\$20,703	\$25,893	\$33,608	\$41,413	\$15,520	59.9%
Wisconsin	\$21,271	\$26,624	\$34,450	\$43,373	\$16,749	62.9%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010, & 2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Demographics Summary

The City of Wausau's demographics are generally trending positively in a variety of ways, including job growth, income growth, population growth, and more. But many of the positive trends are not improving as rapidly as they are for countywide and statewide trends. The City can continue to capitalize on its high quality-of-life and moderate cost of living to continue attracting workers, residents, and economic development, which will be discussed throughout the plan.

Issues and Opportunities Summary

A variety of issues were identified throughout the planning process during planning meetings, interviews, focus groups, and a public survey, and others were taken from existing documents. The following chapters of this plan will list the issues that relate to each chapter's topic. Opportunities that the City has to address each issue are described in the Goals, Objectives, and Policies at the end of each chapter.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Each of the following Comprehensive Plan chapters' goals, objectives, and policies will be used to guide the future development of the City. For purposes of this planning process, goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

Goals

Broad statements that express general priorities about how the community should approach development issues during the next 20 years. These goals are based on key issues, opportunities and problems that affect the community.

Objectives

More specific than goals and are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. The accomplishment of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal.

Policies

Rules or courses of action that are used to ensure plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. Policies are intended to be used by decision-makers on a regular basis.

The City's 2017 Comprehensive Plan's goals, objectives, and policies were presented to Plan Commission, and they were reviewed and updated during the development of this updated Comprehensive Plan.