

Chapter 1

Introduction & Demographics

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Lincoln is located in Vilas County, which is situated on the northern border of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Town encompasses the City of Eagle River, which serves as the county seat. Other surrounding communities include the Towns of Cloverland, Conover, Washington, Sugar Camp and Three Lakes.

Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law

A comprehensive plan is a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans are not meant to serve as land use regulations in themselves; instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year vision for future planning and community decisions. According to the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law, a comprehensive plan must include at least nine elements (incorporated as chapters in this plan). These are:

- Demographics
- Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Economic Development
- Land Use
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Implementation

State statutes prescribe a list of topics to address for each of the elements. This chapter reviews demographic data including the total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment, and income levels. Reviewing these trends is critical to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future.

State statutes also indicate that if a local government unit enacts or amends any of the following ordinances, the ordinance must be consistent with that local government unit's comprehensive plan:

- Official mapping established or amended under s. 62.23 (6)
- Local subdivision regulations under s. 236.45 or 236.46
- County zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.69
- City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (7)
- Town zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 60.61 or 60.62
- Shorelands or wetlands in shorelands zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.692, 61.351, 61.353, 62.231 or 62.233

How to Use this Plan

A comprehensive plan is a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive Plans are not meant to serve as land use regulations in themselves, and, instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year horizon for future planning and community decisions. The Town's Comprehensive Plan is a dynamic – living document that can be amended at any time. The Town's Comprehensive Plan should be used to:

- Guide local officials when making decisions that affect growth and development, especially decisions related to land use.
- Guide public and private investment in the Town and support grant funding requests.
- Examine statistical data and community opinions to provide context for policies in the plan and to form a benchmark for future reference and comparison.

Planning Process

In the spring of 2026, the Town initiated a process to update its plan. The state planning law – 66.1001 – requires that a comprehensive plan be updated every ten years. A variety of Planning Commission meetings were held over the course of 2026 to prepare the plan. A final Planning Commission meeting was held in the [season] of 202X to review the final draft and recommend adoption of the plan by the Town Board. The plan was adopted by the Town Board in the [season] of 202X.

Public Participation

An important part of any planning process is public involvement. Public involvement provides the citizens of the Town an opportunity to express their views, ideas, and opinions on issues that they would like addressed regarding the future development of the Town. Local officials use this input to guide policies and decisions with greater awareness of the public's desires and consensus. See the adopted Public Participation Plan in **Appendix A**. The Town of Lincoln posted all Planning Commission meetings to invite the public and held a Public Hearing to collect public input.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population and Households

Historical Trends

According to the latest data from the American Community Survey (ACS), the Town of Lincoln’s population was an estimated 2,738 people in 2024. As shown in **Table 1**, this represents about a six percent increase since 2000. In comparison, the populations of Vilas County and Wisconsin both had faster rates of increase during this time at about 12 and 10 percent respectively.

Table 1: Population					
	2000	2010	2020	2024	% Change 2000-2024
Lincoln	2,579	2,423	2,659	2,738	6.2%
Eagle River	1,443	1,398	1,628	1,528	5.9%
Cloverland	919	1,029	1,068	1,179	28.3%
Washington	1,577	1,451	1,587	1,610	2.1%
Conover	1,137	1,235	1,318	1,294	13.8%
Three Lakes	2,339	2,131	2,413	2,316	-1.0%
Sugar Camp	1,781	1,694	1,819	2,165	21.6%
Vilas County	21,033	21,430	23,047	23,647	12.4%
Wisconsin	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	5,914,872	10.3%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

There were 1,234 households in the Town of Lincoln in 2024, which represents an increase of about 11 percent from the number of households in 2000, as shown in **Table 2**. During the same period, the number of households in Vilas County and Wisconsin both experienced significantly faster household growth. Among surrounding communities, the Town of Cloverland experienced the fastest household growth during this time, increasing by over 40 percent. In 2024, the average household size in the Town of Lincoln was 2.22, down from 2.33 in 2000. In comparison, Vilas County’s average household size was 2.12 in 2024, down from 2.32 in 2000.

Table 2: Households					
	2000	2010	2020	2024	% Change 2000-2024
Lincoln	1,111	1,102	1,192	1,234	11.1%
Eagle River	626	684	777	732	16.9%
Cloverland	416	470	505	586	40.9%
Washington	683	679	749	823	20.5%
Conover	483	574	640	620	28.4%
Three Lakes	1,031	996	1,153	1,118	8.4%
Sugar Camp	708	729	816	910	28.5%
Vilas County	9,066	9,658	10,804	11,147	23.0%
Wisconsin	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,428,361	2,479,480	18.9%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Projections

Table 3 compares projected population in the Town of Lincoln and surrounding communities to Vilas County and Wisconsin, based off population projections conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). The DOA population projections are recognized as Wisconsin’s official population projections and are based on historical population and household growth in the community, with more recent years given a greater weight. According to the DOA projections, the Town of Lincoln is projected to significantly decrease in population by 2050.

Table 3: Population Projections					
	2020	2030	2040	2050	% Change 2020-2050
Lincoln	2,659	2,683	2,596	2,431	-8.6%
Eagle River	1,628	1,643	1,589	1,488	-8.6%
Cloverland	1,068	1,048	987	901	-15.6%
Washington	1,587	1,610	1,565	1,472	-7.2%
Conover	1,318	1,346	1,317	1,246	-5.5%
Three Lakes	2,413	2,488	2,470	2,397	-0.7%
Sugar Camp	1,819	1,822	1,760	1,665	-8.5%
Vilas County	23,047	23,185	22,365	20,885	-9.4%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: WI DOA Official Population Projections

Age Characteristics

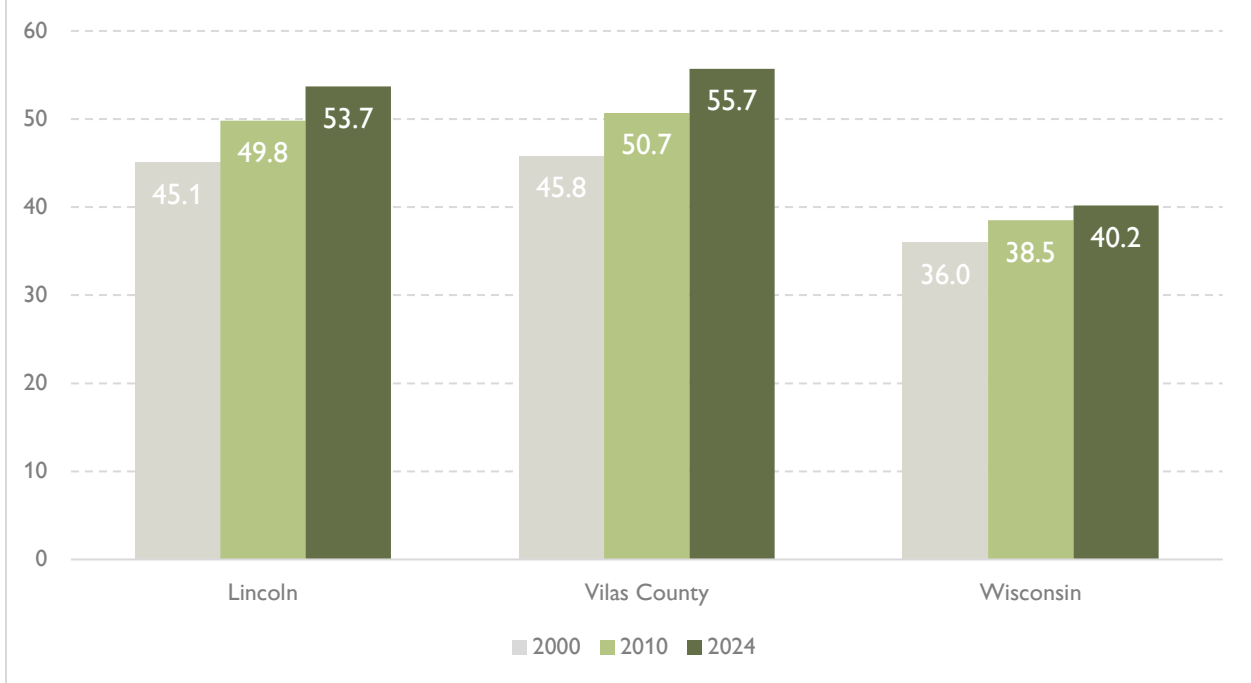
As shown in **Figure 1**, the median age in the Town of Lincoln was 53.7 in 2024, higher than it was in 2010 (49.8). The Town of Lincoln's median age of 53.7 was lower than the median age in Vilas County (55.7) and higher than Wisconsin (40.2) as a whole in 2024. When examining age characteristics, two age groups are particularly significant, those 65 and over and those under 18. The population under 18 is a dependent population that requires more services including quality childcare, schools, and specialized health care needs. Those 65 and over may require access to healthcare, transportation, and community services.

Between 2000 and 2024, the proportion of the population that was age 17 and younger within the Town of Lincoln decreased from about 20 percent in 2000 to about 16 percent in 2024, as shown in **Figure 2**. The percentage of the population below the age of 18 also decreased in Vilas County and Wisconsin as well during this time.

Figure 3 compares the proportion of the population ages 65 and older in the Town of Lincoln, Vilas County, and Wisconsin. Between 2000 and 2024, the percentage of the population age 65 and older within the Town of Lincoln increased from 21.3 percent in 2000 to 30.5 percent in 2024. Vilas County and Wisconsin experienced similar increases in the proportion of the population age 65 and older during this time.

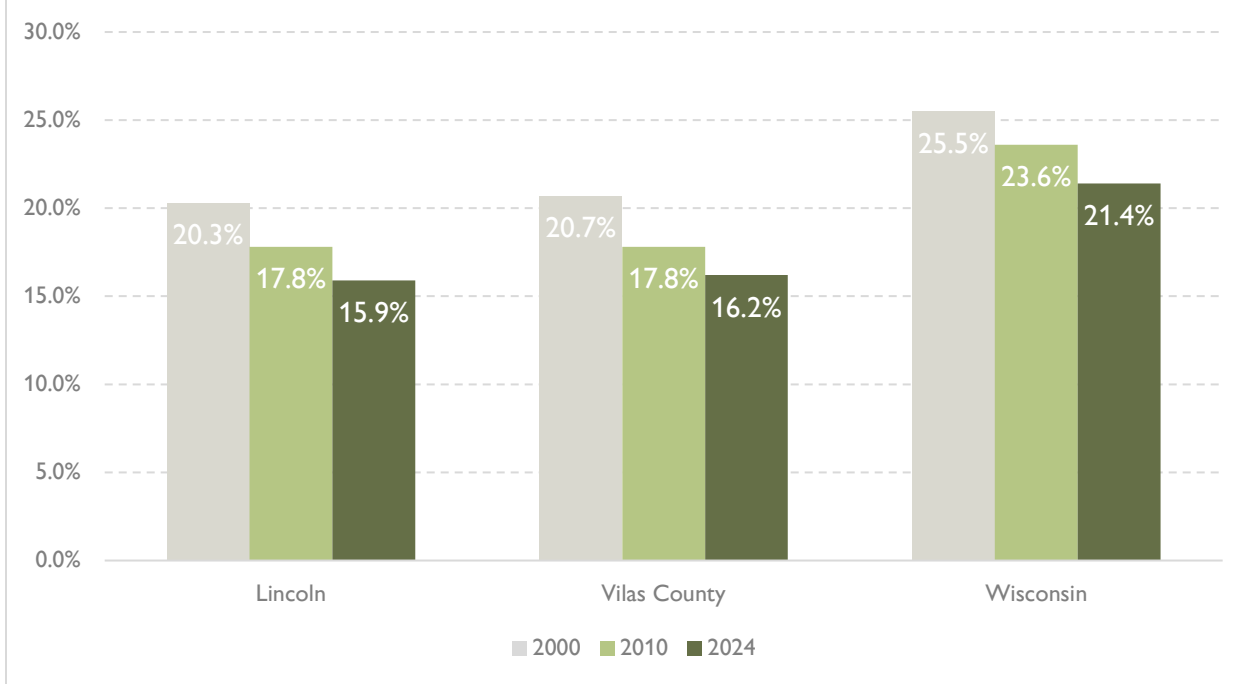
Due to longer life expectancy and the size of the Baby Boomer generation, the 65 and older age group is expected to continue to increase in size. The trend is occurring at the state and national levels and to an even greater degree within the rural Wisconsin counties, especially in the northern one-third of the state. This population trend whereby older age categories increase significantly while younger age categories decline may impact the future labor supply, school system, and health care industry at the national, state, and local levels.

Figure 1: Median Age

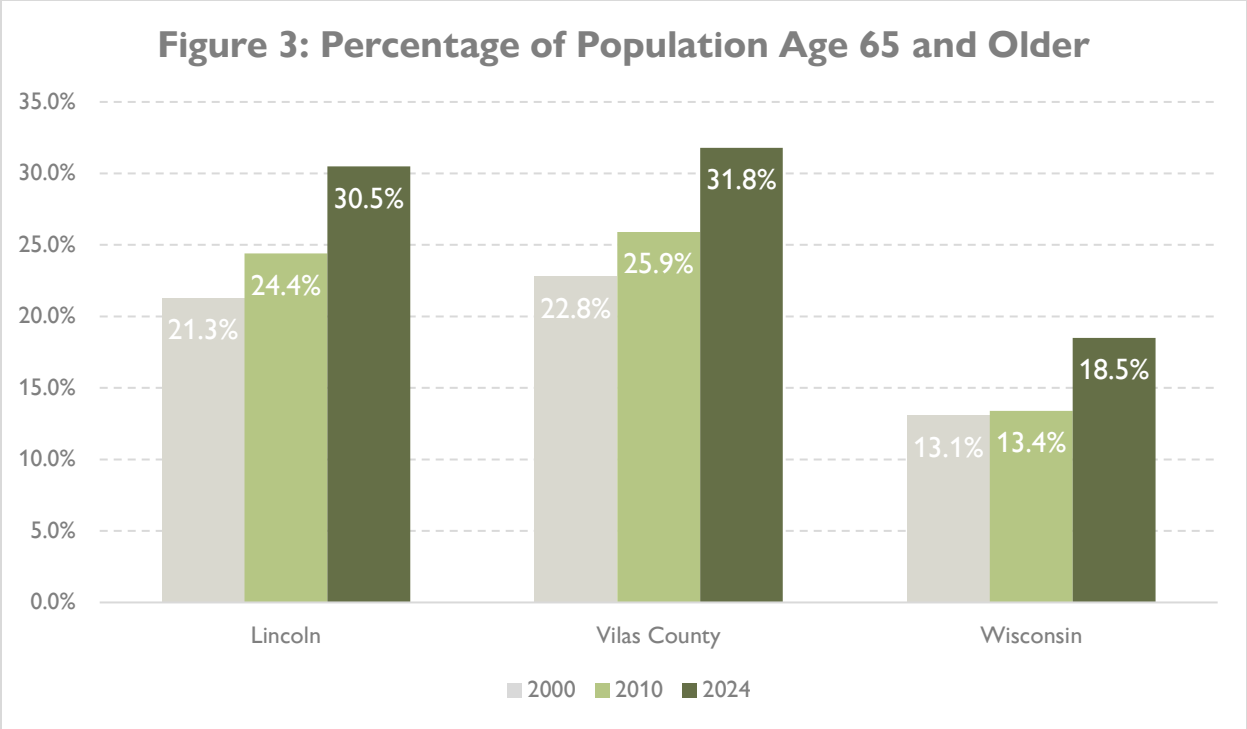


Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Figure 2: Percentage of Population Below the Age of 18



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Figures 4 and 5 compare the distribution of age groups for the Town of Lincoln and Vilas County. As shown below, both the Town and County have a large proportion of residents in the older age groups (ages 50-79), indicating that the Town and County both have a high concentration of adults either nearing retirement or that are already at retirement age, and both have low concentrations of young adults and children.

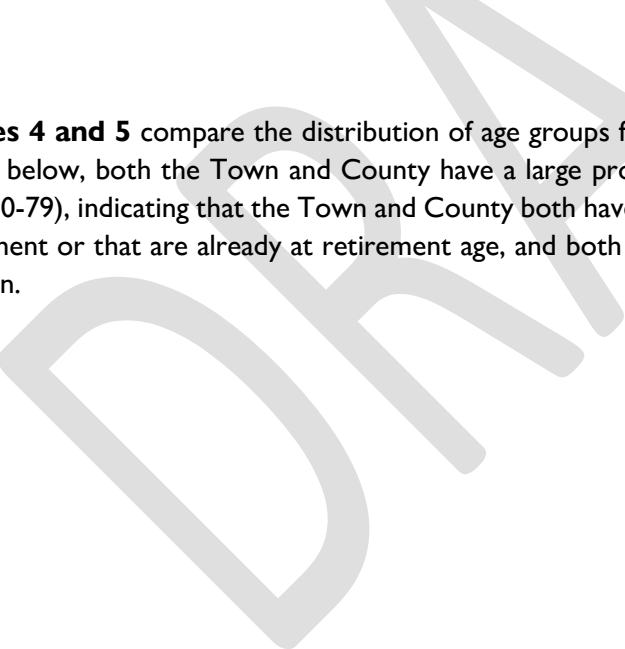
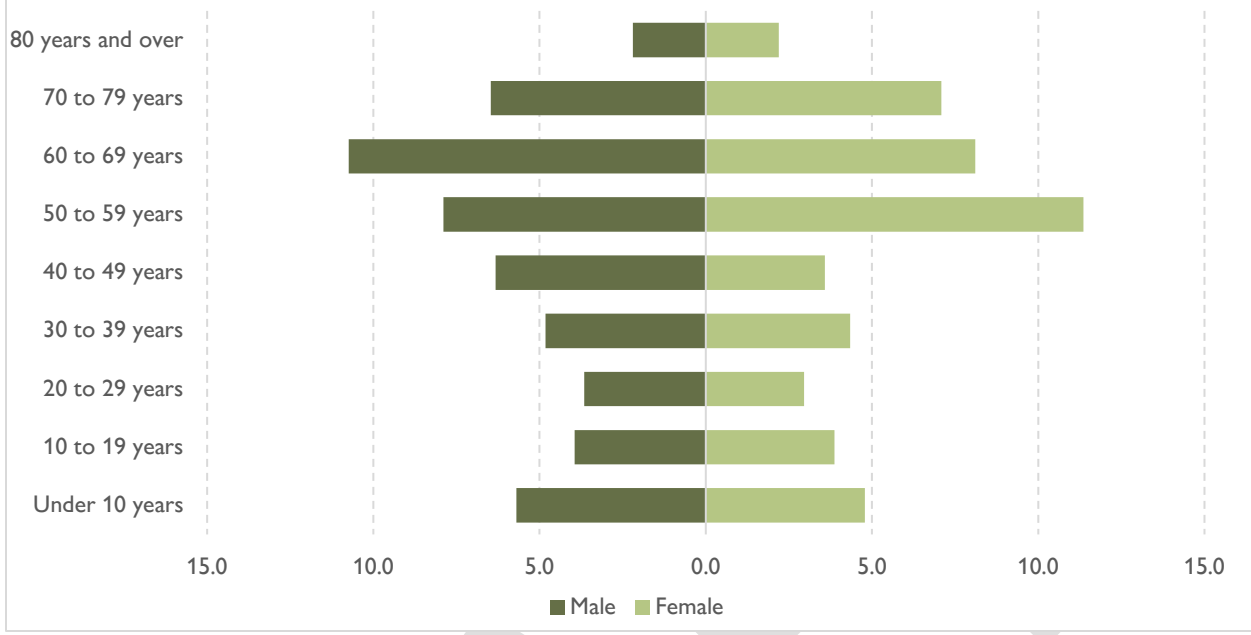
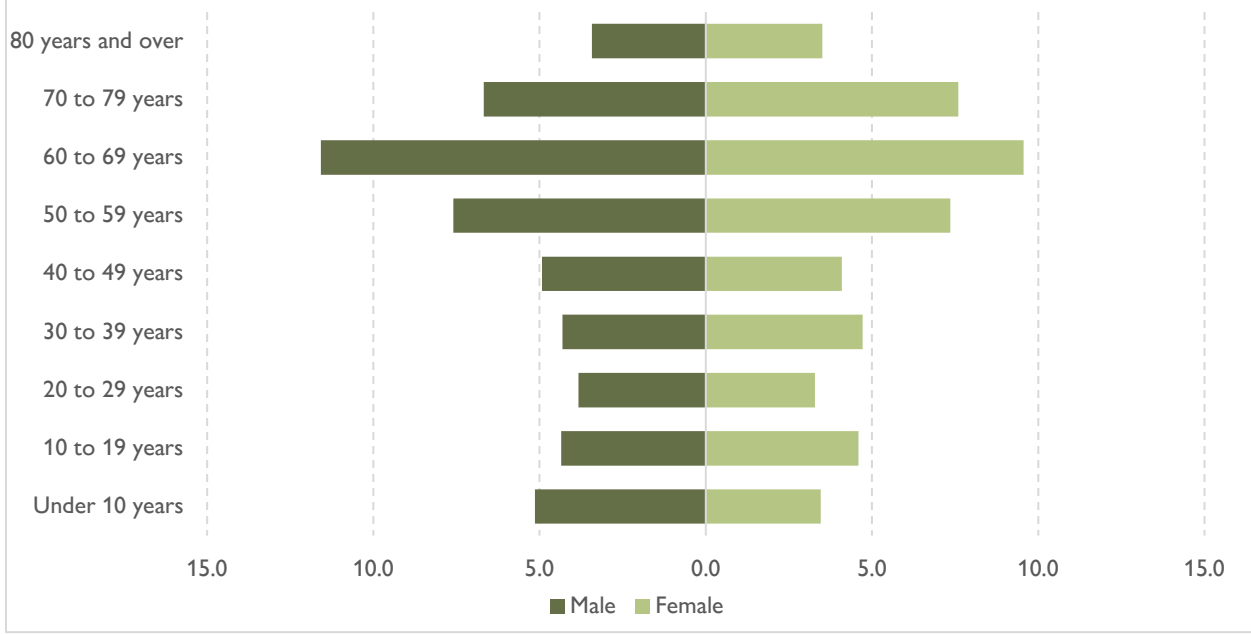


Figure 4: Town of Lincoln Population Pyramid



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Figure 5: Vilas County Population Pyramid

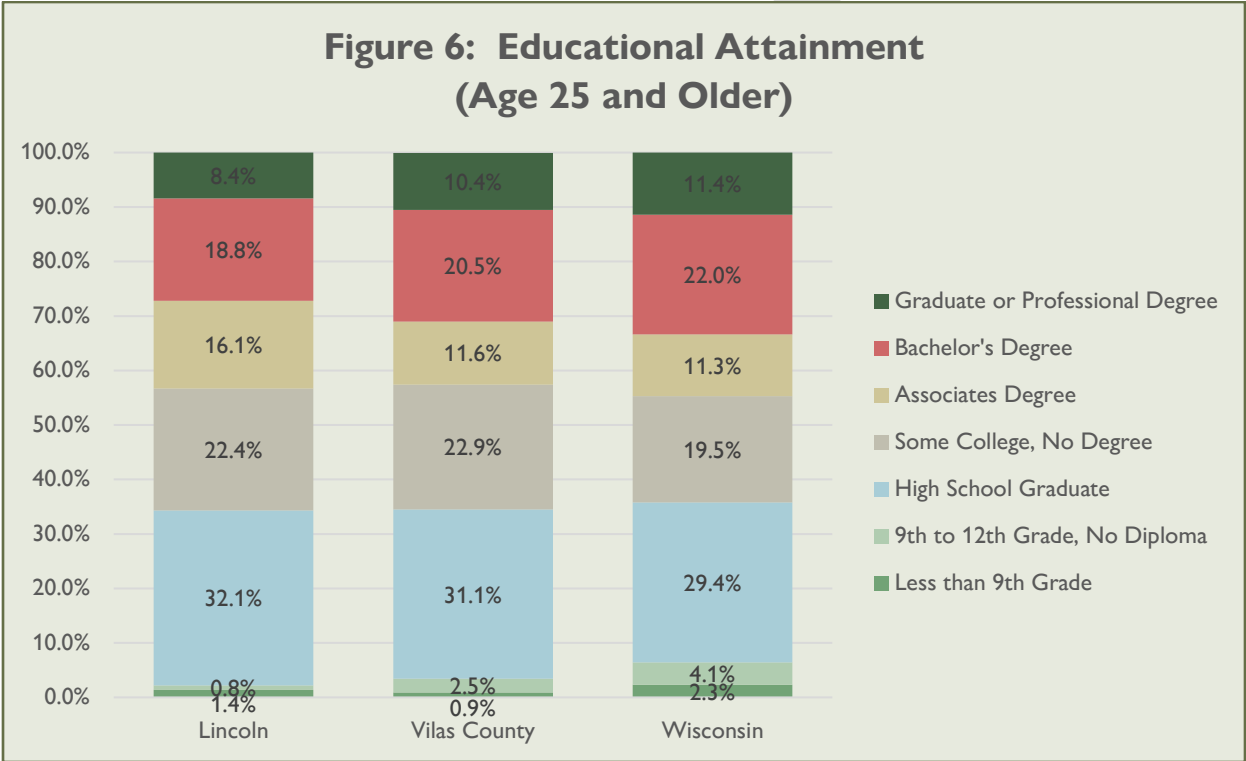


Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Education and Income Levels

Education

Figure 6 compares educational attainment of those in the Town of Lincoln to the County and the State by showing the highest level of education completed by residents ages 25 and older. In 2024, nearly 98 percent of Town residents ages 25 and older had a high school education or higher. This was higher than the County and the State. In the Town of Lincoln, over 27 percent of the population held bachelor’s or other advanced degrees compared to nearly 31 percent of County residents and over 33 percent of State residents.



Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Income

Median household income and per capita income are two commonly used measures of income. Median household income is the income for the middle point of households, meaning half of all households fall below that income, and half are above. Per capita income is the measure of average total income per person.

Median household income for Town of Lincoln residents was \$77,500 in 2024. **Table 4** shows that this was higher than Vilas County and similar to the State of Wisconsin. Median household income within the Town of Lincoln was higher than the County and lower than the State in 2010. When adjusted for inflation, median household income in the Town increased by over 18 percent between 2010 and 2024. During this time, median household income increased by 15.5 percent in Vilas County and by 5.5 percent in Wisconsin.

Table 5 illustrates that income per capita in the Town of Lincoln was higher than both the County and the State in 2024. The Town’s per capita income was also higher than both Vilas County’s and Wisconsin’s in 2010. When adjusted for inflation, per capita income in the Town of Lincoln increased by over six percent between 2010 and 2024. This was significantly slower than the increases experienced by the County and State during this time.

Table 5: Median Household Income					
Minor Civil Division	2000*	2010*	2024	2000-2024 % Change	2010-2024 % Change
Lincoln	\$71,616	\$65,551	\$77,500	8.2%	18.2%
Vilas County	\$61,682	\$59,255	\$68,431	10.9%	15.5%
Wisconsin	\$80,011	\$73,441	\$77,485	-3.2%	5.5%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)

*: Adjusted for inflation

Table 6: Per Capita Income					
Minor Civil Division	2000*	2010*	2024	2000-2024 % Change	2010-2024 % Change
Lincoln	\$33,946	\$43,235	\$45,981	35.5%	6.4%
Vilas County	\$33,548	\$38,612	\$43,101	28.5%	11.6%
Wisconsin	\$38,865	\$37,895	\$43,373	11.6%	14.5%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)

*: Adjusted for inflation

Employment Characteristics

Tables 6 and 7 illustrate the breakdown of the labor force and employed population living in the Town of Lincoln in 2010 and 2024. The “employed population” includes those that are 16 and older. Between 2010 and 2024, the Town’s labor force increased by about seven percent, a faster increase than both Vilas County and Wisconsin during this time.

Labor force participation indicates the percentage of those 16 years and over that are in the labor force. The Town’s increase in labor force is due to an increase in the number of residents age 16 and over and not due to an increase in participation rates. The Town’s labor force participation rate actually decreased by about 8 percentage points within the Town of Lincoln from 2010 to 2024, dropping to 56 percent in 2024.

Table 7: Labor Force Characteristics					
	Labor Force			Labor Participation Rate	
	2010	2024	2010-2024 % Change	2010	2024
Lincoln	1,216	1,302	7.1%	64.1%	56.0%
Vilas County	10,718	10,971	2.4%	58.1%	53.9%
Wisconsin	3,078,465	3,136,600	1.9%	69.0%	65.3%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)

In 2024, there were 1,278 employed residents in the Town of Lincoln. This represents a slight decrease in employment among City residents since 2010, as shown in **Table 7**. In contrast, employment increased in Vilas County during the same period, increasing by about 8 percent, while the State experienced a 5.6 percent increase in employment during this time. The U.S. Census classifies individuals as unemployed if they are not working, actively seeking work, and available to accept a job. The unemployment rate in the Town was 1.0 percent in 2024, lower than Vilas County’s rate of 2.1 percent and the State’s rate of 2.1 percent.

Table 8: Employment				
	2010	2024	2010-2024 % Change	Unemployment Rate
Lincoln	1,040	1,278	22.9%	1.0%
Vilas County	9,764	10,532	7.9%	2.1%
Wisconsin	2,869,310	3,031,042	5.6%	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)

Table 9: Occupation of Employed Workers				
Occupation	Lincoln		Vilas County	
	2010	2024	2010	2024
Management, Professional & Related	382	478	3,346	3,954
Service	167	244	2,085	2,058
Sales & Office	309	290	2,181	2,234
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance	104	101	1,298	1,226
Production, Transportation & Mineral Moving	78	165	854	1,060
Total	1,040	1,278	9,764	10,532

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)

As shown in **Table 8**, most residents in the Town of Lincoln were employed in Management, Professional & Related occupations. The second sector most represented was the Sales & Office occupation group, followed by Service occupations.

Demographic Snapshot

- The Town of Lincoln has experienced an increase in both population and the number of households since 2000. Household growth within the City has outpaced population growth during this time, leading to a decrease in household size.
- The Town of Lincoln is projected to experience a significant decrease in population by 2050.
- There is a considerable proportion of the population either entering the retirement phase or already retired. Over 30 percent of the Town's population in 2024 was age 65 or older.
- The Town's median age increased from 49.8 in 2010 to 53.7 in 2024.
- The Town of Lincoln has a higher proportion of residents with a high school diploma than the County and the State, and a lower proportion of residents with a bachelor's degree, or graduate/professional degree than the County and State.
- The Town of Lincoln's median household income of \$77,500 in 2024 was higher than the median household income of Vilas County and similar to Wisconsin's. Additionally, per capita income within the Town was higher than both the County and State in 2024.
- The Town's labor participation rate is higher than the County's participation rate and is significantly lower than the State's participation rate, and the Town's unemployment rate of 1.0 percent in 2024 is lower than the State and the County.
- Most people in the Town of Lincoln work in Management, Professional, and Related occupations.