

Chapter Six

Economic Development

The condition of the local economy directly influences local growth and development and therefore must be considered when planning for a community's future. Employment patterns and economic trends generally occur on a regional scale. Oftentimes residents of one community work in another. Similarly, changes in a major industry can impact jobs and growth far beyond the community where the business is physically located.

It is therefore important to understand a local community's economy in light of its regional context. The following section provides a brief overview of the economy in Marathon County, in terms of the economic environment, key economic sectors and the regional labor force and employment projections. A more specific description of Marathon City includes employment trends, major local employers or industries, and where most residents of the Village of Marathon City work. Potential economic development opportunities and/or issues regarding the local economy are also identified.

Previous Plans and Studies

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), 2026

Marathon County is one of ten counties included in the North Central Wisconsin Economic Development District as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The NCWRPC is the agency responsible for maintaining that designation. As part of the designation, the NCWRPC annually prepares a CEDS. This report summarizes and assesses economic development activities over the past year and presents new and modified strategies to promote growth.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Recovery Plan, 2022

The purpose of this plan is to guide economic stabilization, recovery, and resiliency efforts within the North Central Wisconsin Region in the face of the current pandemic as well as future events that cause economic shocks. The goal of this plan is to develop a set of strategies that will help the Region's local economies recover from and become more resilient to economic shocks by identifying best practice strategies that help spur economic stabilization and recovery in the wake of economic shocks and that will help build local economic resilience. Helping local recovery and resiliency efforts will help the regional economy as a whole recover and grow back even stronger than before the disaster struck. A dashboard that monitors the status of economic metrics for broadband, childcare, housing, transportation, workforce and talent attraction, tourism, hospitality, economic indicators, and social indicators is found on NCWRPC's website.

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

ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Wisconsin, 2025

This report, developed by the United Way, described the 32 percent of households in Marathon County that are living in poverty or are experiencing financial hardship, making them "ALICE" households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). These households are largely employed but do not earn enough in wages to meet the "household survival budget," which does not allow for any savings. The report states that many ALICE households provide vital services, such as retail, health care, childcare, and security, but cannot make ends meet on the income provided from these jobs.

Marathon County Comprehensive Plan, 2026

The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan sets an economic development goal of having a diverse economy, and a place of opportunities where people and businesses can grow and be successful. Key economic development objectives include:

- Encourage development and redevelopment of key employment centers in areas that possess strong market potential, provide good transportation access for workers, and promote the efficient movement of goods.
- Contribute to a collaborative regional approach to economic development.
- Support an innovative atmosphere to foster an entrepreneurially supportive environment.
- Support the adoption and growth of technology-enabled businesses and workforce skills to strengthen Marathon County's economic competitiveness, productivity, and ability to attract and retain employers and talent.
- Maintain infrastructure to support economic growth
- Support the Central Wisconsin Airport.

Economic Environment

Economic Sectors

Table 18 details employment by sector for the Village of Marathon City and Marathon County. In 2024, there were a total of 745 Village residents employed, an 11 percent decrease from the Village's total employment in 2010. In 2024, the leading industry sectors for Village employed residents were the Manufacturing, and Education, Health & Social Services sectors.

Overall, there were 72,092 persons employed in the basic economic industry sectors in Marathon County in 2023. Employment within Marathon County has increased by three percent since 2010 when there were 69,980 persons employed. The leading industry sectors within Marathon County in 2023 were the Education, Health and Social Services; Manufacturing; and Retail Trade sectors.

Between 2000 and 2024, there were several dramatic shifts in employment throughout industries within the Village. Five sectors – the Construction, Transportation, Information, Arts, and Public Administration sectors – experienced significant increases in employment between 2010 and 2024. Each of the remaining nine sectors experienced a decrease in employment within the Village during this time.

Labor Force Analysis

Labor force is defined as the number of persons, sixteen and over, employed or looking to be employed. **Table 19** compares the labor force of the Village of Marathon City with that of Marathon County. Between 2010 and 2024, the Village of Marathon City experienced a 13.6 percent decrease in the labor force, as the Village's labor force decreased from 866 residents in 2010 to 748 residents in 2024. The Village experienced a faster decrease in labor force than Marathon County during the same time period. With a labor force consisting of 74,302 persons in 2024, Marathon County's labor force has decreased by 0.9 percent since 2010, when the County's labor force consisted of 74,962 persons.

Unemployment

Unemployment is defined as the difference between the total civilian labor force and total persons employed. Stay-at-home parents, retirees, or persons not searching for employment are not considered unemployed because they are not considered to be part of the labor force. In 2010, the Village had 2.0 percent unemployment, and by 2024 the Village's unemployment rate had dropped to 0.3 percent

Labor Force Participation

Workforce participation is a measure expressed in terms of a percentage of persons actively seeking employment divided by the total working age population. People not participating in the labor force may not seek employment due to a variety of reasons including retirement, disability, choice to be a homemaker, or simply are not looking for work. Since 2010, labor force participation rate has decreased within the Village down to 66.5 percent, similar to the County's participation rate of 66.9 percent.

Table 18: Employment by Industry Sector

Sector	Village of Marathon City			Marathon County		
	2010	2024	% Change	2010	2024	% Change
Ag., Forestry, Fishing, Hunting & Mining	25	16	-36.0%	2,231	1,978	-11.3%
Construction	35	57	62.9%	3,891	4,383	12.6%
Manufacturing	257	217	-15.6%	16,870	14,930	-11.5%
Wholesale Trade	38	23	-39.5%	2,369	2,240	-5.4%
Retail Trade	82	43	-47.6%	7,697	7,105	-7.7%
Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities	27	33	22.2%	3,116	3,331	6.9%
Information	3	24	700.0%	1,026	605	-41.0%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Leasing	59	49	-16.9%	5,471	5,721	4.6%
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative & Waste Mgmt Services	51	32	-37.3%	3,865	4,755	23.0%
Education, Health and Social Services	167	149	-10.8%	14,895	17,385	16.7%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services	51	56	9.8%	4,702	4,779	1.6%
Public Administration	10	26	160.0%	1,393	1,858	33.4%
Other Services	33	20	-39.4%	2,454	3,074	25.3%
Total	838	745	-11.1%	69,980	72,144	3.1%

Source: American Community Survey (2020-2024)

Table 19: Village of Marathon City Labor Force

	Village of Marathon City			Marathon County		
	2010	2024	Percent Change	2010	2024	Percent Change
Population 16 years and over	1,184	1,125	-5.0%	103,816	111,067	7.0%
Labor Force	866	748	-13.6%	74,962	74,302	-0.9%
Employed	842	745	-11.5%	69,980	72,173	3.1%
Unemployed	24	3	-87.5%	4,856	2,129	-56.2%
Unemployment Rate	2.0%	0.3%	-85.0%	4.7%	1.9%	-59.6%
Participation Rate	73.1%	66.5%	-9.0%	72.2%	66.9%	-7.3%

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

Major Employers

Major employers within the Village include Marathon Cheese, Menzner Lumber and Supply, County Materials, the Marathon City School District, and Maratech International.

Laborshed

A laborshed is an area or region from which an employment center draws its commuting workers. In 2023, there were 2,270 jobs located within the Village of Marathon City, significantly higher than the amount of Village residents employed (745). With more jobs located within the Village than workers, local employers have to draw from outside the Village borders to fill their jobs. According to Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data, 2,163 of the 2,270 jobs located within the Village are filled by workers who live outside of the Village, while 107 jobs within the Village are filled by Village residents.

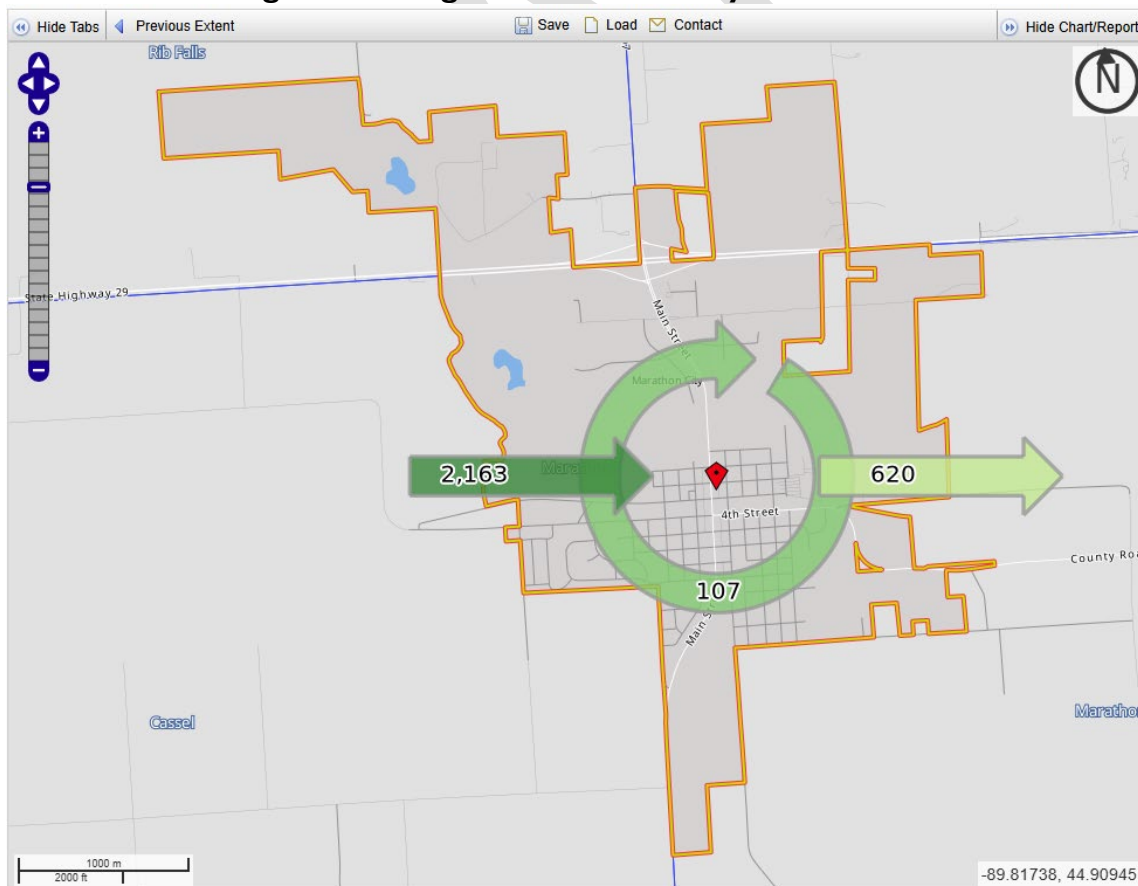
In-Migration

The majority of workers that commute into the Village for work live in close proximity to the Village, with many of these workers living within the Wausau metro area, the Village of Edgar, or the City of Merrill.

Out-Migration

The most substantial group of outbound commuters (those who live in the Village but work outside of the Village) travel to the City of Wausau for work. Other common work locations for Village residents include the City of Marshfield, Villages of Edgar and Stratford, and the Wausau metro area.

Figure 8: Village of Marathon City Laborshed



Source: U.S. Census On the Map

Occupations

As shown in **Table 20**, most residents in the Village of Marathon City were employed in Management, Professional & Related occupations. The second sector most represented was the Production, Transportation & Mineral Moving occupation group, followed by Sales & Office occupations. From 2010 to 2024, the most significant increase in employment was seen in Management, Professional & Related occupations.

Occupation	Village of Marathon City		Marathon County	
	2010	2024	2010	2024
Management, Professional & Related	217	268	21,212	27,203
Service	98	106	9,919	10,803
Sales & Office	218	132	17,063	14,118
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance	84	41	6,970	6,421
Production, Transportation & Mineral Moving	221	198	14,816	13,599
Total	838	745	69,980	72,144

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

Brownfield Sites

There are currently two sites listed as open (indicating they are in need of remediation) on the BRRTS database and 21 sites listed as closed (indicating they have been remediated to DNR standards) within the Village of Marathon City. An additional six contaminated sites within the Village required no action. The current open sites located within the Village are located at 409 Pine St and 800 4th St.

Two sites with significant redevelopment potential within the Village include the former **Weisenberger Tie & Lumber Company property** located in the northern portion of the Village and the Heartland Co-op mill property located between Walnut and Pine Street.

The Village has had discussions with developers interested in redevelopment of the properties into planned residential units. This redevelopment would be a combination of senior living units and multi-family units. To achieve this redevelopment the properties would need to undergo environmental cleanup. This would require demolition of the existing structures, excavation and disposal of contaminated materials, backfilling excavation area, utility buildout and construction of the new residential units. The redevelopment would be a public / private partnership to obtain grant funding for the clean-up and redevelopment. These properties are within the boundaries of TID #1 and may be folded into TID # 2 after TID #1 closes.

The clean-up and redevelopment of these properties is consistent with the future goals of the Village in protection water and land resources. Additionally, the potential redevelopment of these properties fits the commercial, residential and recreational goals of the Village of Marathon City.

Tax Increment District

Established tax increment districts (TID) use a tool called tax increment financing to subsidize redevelopment, infrastructure, and other community-improvement projects. Within a TID, future property tax revenue increases for an established period of time are used to finance the public or municipal improvements.

The Village of Marathon City currently has two Tax Incremental Districts – TID 1 and TID 2. They were created to promote industrial development and to eliminate blight. The Districts have since been amended to include additional territory to expand the Business Park and include more of the downtown area. The purpose of the districts is to promote additional development and downtown revitalization. Costs associated with these activities within the TID or within the one-half mile radius of the TID are considered to be eligible for Tax Increment Financing.

Economic Development Programs

There are a number of economic development programs available to businesses and local governments in Marathon County. A partial list of those programs is listed below:

Local:

Tax Increment Financing

In 2004, the WI State Legislature enacted changes to the state’s Tax Increment Financing statutes. One significant change involved allowing townships to establish tax increment districts for specified economic development projects. Tax Increment Financing has been employed by numerous communities throughout the state to promote redevelopment in blighted areas and finance new industrial development.

County:

MCDEVCO

MCDEVCO acts as an economic development coordinator for all of Marathon County. The purpose of the Corporation is to promote the social and economic welfare of the residents of Marathon County. The primary focus is to lessen the burdens of government by reducing the need for public assistance; and to alleviate unemployment, relieve poverty, and eliminate blighted areas that had surfaced within the County. The organization’s fundamental objectives are to bring about civic betterments and social improvements designed to promote the common good and general welfare of Marathon County.

MCDEVCO Revolving Loan Funds

MCDEVCO's Revolving Loan Funds provide gap financing that can be used to finance acquisition of existing businesses, land, building, and equipment; working capital; or construction/expansion projects. Gap financing builds strong communities for Marathon County. Economic development through gap financing attracts new businesses and allows small businesses to grow.

Regional:

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

The Village is a member of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, as are all local governments in Marathon County based on county membership. Membership brings with it a variety of planning benefits and service. Benefits include participation in the Economic Development District, including eligibility for a variety of grants administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration. In addition, resulting in membership with the NCWRPC, the County is a member of the Central Wisconsin Fund which manages a revolving loan fund designed to address a gap in private capital markets for long-term, fixed-rate, low down payment, low interest financing.

Central Wisconsin Development Fund

The Central Wisconsin Development Fund (CWED) manages a revolving loan fund designed to address a gap in private capital markets for long-term, fixed rate, low down payment, low-interest financing. It is targeted at the timber and wood products industry, tourism, and other manufacturing and service industries.

State:

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is the state's primary department for the delivery of integrated services to businesses. Their purpose is to 1) foster retention of and creation of new jobs and investment opportunities in Wisconsin; 2) foster and promote economic business, export, and community development; and 3) promote the public health, safety, and welfare through effective and efficient regulations, education, and enforcement. WEDC manages a variety of programs intended to assist businesses and communities. These include:

- Brownfield Program
- Capacity Building Grants (CB)
- Certified Sites
- Historic Preservation Tax Credit
- Business Opportunity Loan Fund
- Workforce Training Grants
- Idle Industrial Sites Redevelopment Program
- The Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) Program
- Community Development Investment (CDI) Grant Program
- Fast Forward Program

Rural Economic Development Program

This program administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) provides grants and low interest loans for small business (less than 25 employees) start-ups or expansions in rural areas. Funds may be used for "soft costs" only, such as planning, engineering, and marketing assistance.

Wisconsin Small Cities Program

The Wisconsin Department of Administration provides federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to eligible municipalities for approved housing and/or public facility improvements and for economic development projects. Economic Development grants provide loans to businesses for such things as: acquisition of real estate, buildings, or equipment; construction, expansion or remodeling; and working capital for inventory and direct labor.

University of Wisconsin Extension Office

The Center for Community Economic Development, University of Wisconsin Extension, creates, applies and transfers multidisciplinary knowledge to help people understand community change and identify opportunities.

The Wisconsin Innovation Service Center (WISC)

This non-profit organization is located at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater and specializes in new product and invention assessments and market expansion opportunities for innovative manufacturers, technology businesses, and independent inventors.

Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The UW SBDC is partially funded by the Small Business Administration and provides a variety of programs and training seminars to assist in the creation of small business in Wisconsin.

Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA)

This program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, provides immediate assistance and funding for the cost of transportation improvements necessary for major economic development projects.

Federal:

Economic Development Administration (EDA)

EDA offers a guaranteed loan program as well as a public works grant program. These are administered through local units of government for the benefit of the local economy and, indirectly, private enterprise.

US Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA – RD)

The USDA Rural Development program is committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life in all of rural America. Financial programs include support for such essential public facilities and services as water and sewer systems, housing, health clinics, emergency service facilities, and electric and telephone service. USDA-RD promotes economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks and community-managed lending pools. The program also offers technical assistance and information to help agricultural and other cooperatives get started and improve the effectiveness of their member services.

Small Business Administration (SBA)

SBA provides business and industrial loan programs that will make or guarantee up to 90% of the principal and interest on loans to companies, individuals, or government entities for financing in rural areas. Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation acts as an agent for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) programs that provide financing for fixed asset loans and for working capital.

Economic Development Issues

- **Diversification of Local Economy** – There is a need to diversify the local economy to help protect the Village from shifts in the regional / state / national economy. Development of technology firms and expanding the service industry should be just as important to attract to the area as manufacturing.
- **Industrial/Business Park Expansion** – In order to accommodate additional growth and future new development, adjacent lands will need to be acquired and prepared for expansion of the Industrial/Business Park.

Goals, Objectives & Policies

Economic Development Goal: The Village of Marathon City has a diverse economy that is a place of opportunity where people and businesses can grow and be successful.

1. Promote a diverse and health economy.
 - a. Increase development in the downtown.
 - b. Continue to leverage the TID to attract new businesses.
 - c. Establish a downtown overlay district that includes special regulations, beyond zoning, for the appearance of structures and facades.
 - d. Identify funding, such as a revolving loan fund, to assist businesses in making exterior renovations.
 - e. Work to attract a catalyst or magnet development that will draw other businesses to the Marathon City Center Project.
 - f. Pursue grant funding to clean-up and redevelop brownfield areas.
 - g. Support and grow the Business and Industrial Park.

2. Support local industry.
 - a. Encourage the expansion of local industries by making land available for increased development.
 - b. Work with regional and state entities to identify business support programming and services. [\[NCWRPC Entrepreneurship Portal\]](#)