



# Portage County, Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan 2024-2044



**Portage County, Wisconsin – Recommended 3/26/2024**

**Planning and Zoning Staff**

Timothy Reed, Director  
Kristen Johnson, Planner

Amy Heins, Administrative Associate

**County Board**

Vincent Miresse  
Chris Doubek  
Lionel Weaver  
David Medin  
Julie Morrow  
Shaun V. Przybylski  
David Ladick  
Joan M. Honl  
Andrew Rockman  
Bob Gifford  
Stan Potocki  
Mike Splinter  
Donald Jankowski

Pat Keller  
Al Haga, Jr.  
Mike A. Olson  
Suzanne Oehlke  
Larry Raikowski  
Scott Soik  
Greg Hakala  
Jeanne Dodge  
Matthew J. Jacowski  
Barry Jacowski  
Steve Cieslewicz  
David L. Peterson

**Comprehensive Plan Committee**

Ray Oksuita  
Michael Copas  
Brenna Olson  
Gary Rzentkowski  
Paul Cieslewicz  
John Jazdzewski  
Rhonda Hollfelder  
Kathy Girolamo  
Roger Skrzeczkoski, Sr.  
Andrew Stashek  
Kathleen Lee  
Dave Wilz  
Bill McKee  
Jason Gliczynski  
Ray Reser

Jeanette Wilson  
Jim Garbe  
Bill Gibbs  
Mike Bronk  
Brian Roehrborn  
Dave Crubaugh  
Karen Shulfer  
Alex Peden  
Walter Leppen  
Dominique Swangstu  
Adam DeKleyn  
Bob Kurszewski  
Dean Curtis  
Mike Wiza  
Ryan Kernosky

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This plan was developed by the Portage County Planning and Zoning Committee with assistance from North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC). Photo credits: Tracy Arnold, Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, and CrowdRiff Media Hub.

For more information contact:



North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission  
210 McClellan St. Suite 210  
Wausau, WI 54403  
715-849-5510  
[www.ncwrpc.org](http://www.ncwrpc.org)

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## Chapter I: Issues and Opportunities

### Background

Portage County is located in Central Wisconsin along the Wisconsin River. The County borders Wood County to the west, Marathon County to the north, Waupaca County to the east, and Waushara and Adams Counties to the south. There are seventeen towns, one city, and ten villages in the County (one of these is a one-acre portion of the Village of Milladore which is mostly located in Wood County). See Map 1.1: Planning Context. A summary of Portage County's history can be found in the county's 2006 Comprehensive 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; 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:

1. Demographics (Issues and Opportunities)
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Utilities and Community Facilities
5. Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources
6. Economic Development
7. Intergovernmental Cooperation
8. Land Use
9. Implementation

This plan is an update of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan adopted by the county. Much of that plan is brought forward with updated data. This chapter is the first of nine chapters of the Portage County Comprehensive Plan, and it involves examining the County's demographics. Reviewing socio-economic trends throughout the county is critical to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future. This chapter reviews total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment, and income levels in detail.

### Planning Process

The process to develop the 2006 Portage County Comprehensive Plan was a very extensive effort. It involved grouping the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting into an "urban area" and grouping the remaining Towns and Villages into one "rural area" so different planning principals and vision statements could be applied for the two areas' unique needs. The planning process began in 2001 and was led by the Portage County Comprehensive Planning Joint Steering Committee. Surveys, workshops, visioning sessions, and drafts were conducted for public input throughout the process.

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan involved assembling a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee with members from each community in the County. Six meetings were held throughout 2023 to review and

edit the Plan's chapters, and an online public survey was distributed, returning 680 total responses. Detailed survey results are displayed in Attachment E.

In late 2023, the Steering Committee recommended the draft Plan to the County Planning and Zoning Committee, which adopted a resolution recommending the Plan to the County Board. The Portage County Board adopted the plan in March 2024.

## Data Sources

Data from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) is used throughout this Plan in addition to other sources such as the Wisconsin Department of Administration's (DOA) population projections and the Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator.

The U.S. Census and the ACS are both produced by the U.S. Census Bureau; however, the Census is a count of the American population and housing units conducted every ten years while the American Community Survey is an estimate of the population and housing released on a yearly basis. Data is included from 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2021, and trends are generally analyzed for the eleven-year time frame from 2010 to 2021 in this report. Note that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the portion of the Village of Milladore in Portage County has no people living in it. There is currently a small population of group quarters there, but the number of them is unknown. Therefore, the Village of Milladore is excluded from demographic tables and figures in this Plan but is included in land use calculations conducted later in this plan. Additionally, the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Plover, Park Ridge, and Whiting are sometimes calculated together to show the "urban area" population, and all other villages and towns are calculated together as the "rural area" population.

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. However, small populations, such as many of the communities in Portage County are often difficult to survey while the Census count of the population is never completely correct. This can produce data that is not always completely accurate or consistent. Furthermore, Census and ACS data is self-reported which can produce its own accuracy issues. However, 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.

It is important to note that many individual municipalities in Portage County have recently completed their own comprehensive plans. Due to the wide variety of Census and ACS products and years available, data in this Plan's tables may differ from what has been adopted in individual municipal plans. For example, the 2021 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates' population for the Town of Dewey is 1,172, which is considerably more than the 985 estimated by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. Additionally, the ACS data shows 488 households for the Town of Dewey, but Town staff estimates 430 based on recycling and garbage contracts. When reading this plan, it is important to consider the variety of data sources and resulting figures they produce.

Rather than piecing together data from multiple sources and municipalities, this Plan utilizes the approach of using the same data source across all municipalities so countywide totals add up consistently. Data

sources in the plan are based on what is the most widely used and recognized in the State of Wisconsin when completing comprehensive plans. Individual municipal comprehensive plans and their associated data sources can be viewed on Portage County's website or at the County's Planning and Zoning Office.

## Demographics

### Population

In 2021, Portage County's population was estimated to be 70,378, with a gain of 941 residents since 2010 for a total of 8,032 more residents compared to 1990. Over half of the County's population gain since 1990 occurred between 1990 and 2000. Though the statewide population grew at a slightly faster rate between 1990 and 2021, different factors such as death rates, birth rates, and migration often differ between statewide and local trends.

Population growth has slowed at both the state and the county levels since 2000. From 1990 to 2010, the county grew 13.1 percent while the state grew 15.3 percent. Since 2010, the county grew 1.4 percent while the state grew 4.6 percent.

Table 1 displays total population for each local unit (minor civil division) in the county, the countywide total, and the state. Though the county grew as a whole, the City of Stevens Point, Villages of Amherst, Amherst Junction, Junction City, Nelsonville, Park Ridge, and Whiting, and Towns of Almond, Belmont, Buena Vista, Hull, Linwood, New Hope, Plover, and Sharon all lost population between 2010 and 2021. Since 2010, the fastest growing communities were the Village of Plover (13.6 percent), Town of Lanark (16.0 percent), and Town of Grant (15.0 percent). These communities also added the most total residents, with an increase of 1,605 in the Village of Plover, 246 in the Town of Lanark, and 256 in the Town of Grant.

Communities that lost population at the fastest rate include the Town of Almond (-28.5 percent), Town of Linwood (-16.2 percent), and Town of Nelsonville (-16.1 percent). Communities that lost the most residents include the City of Stevens Point (-730), Town of Linwood (-225), and Town of Plover (-220). Household size is discussed later in this chapter, and housing is discussed in Chapter 2. It is important to note here that communities with declining populations can still need new housing units because household size is declining across the county.

### Population Projections

The Wisconsin Department of Administration calculates population projections for the county and each local government unit. The latest population projections were published in 2013 and project population sizes from 2020 to 2040. The WDOA estimated that the county will continue to grow through 2040, with a projected population of 76,750 by then. Note that the projected population for the county for the year 2020 was originally 73,680, compared to an estimated ACS population of 70,378 in 2021. This shows that the county did not grow as quickly as projected, so future population growth may also be short of what is projected. See Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table I: Total Population

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2021	1990-2010 % Change	1990-2010 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	23,006	24,492	26,482	25,752	15.1%	3,476	-2.8%	-730
V. Plover	8,176	10,520	11,830	13,435	44.7%	3,654	13.6%	1,605
V. Whiting	1,838	1,760	1,598	1,535	-13.1%	-240	-3.9%	-63
V. Park Ridge	546	488	473	461	-13.4%	-73	-2.5%	-12
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>33,566</b>	<b>37,260</b>	<b>40,383</b>	<b>41,183</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>6,817</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>800</b>
V. Almond	455	459	441	441	-3.1%	-14	0.0%	0
V. Amherst	792	964	1,031	1,015	30.2%	239	-1.6%	-16
V. Amherst Jct.	269	305	297	291	10.4%	28	-2.0%	-6
V. Junction City	502	440	418	382	-16.7%	-84	-8.6%	-36
V. Nelsonville	171	191	230	193	34.5%	59	-16.1%	-37
V. Rosholt	512	518	436	463	-14.8%	-76	6.2%	27
T. Alban	860	897	758	820	-11.9%	-102	8.2%	62
T. Almond	590	679	727	520	23.2%	137	-28.5%	-207
T. Amherst	1,335	1,435	1,361	1,450	1.9%	26	6.5%	89
T. Belmont	540	623	604	602	11.9%	64	-0.3%	-2
T. Buena Vista	1,170	1,187	1,196	1,161	2.2%	26	-2.9%	-35
T. Carson	1,327	1,299	1,153	1,293	-13.1%	-174	12.1%	140
T. Dewey	849	975	1,060	1,172	24.9%	211	10.6%	112
T. Eau Pleine	944	931	890	938	-5.7%	-54	5.4%	48
T. Grant	1,673	2,020	1,712	1,968	2.3%	39	15.0%	256
T. Hull	5,559	5,493	5,323	5,294	-4.2%	-236	-0.5%	-29
T. Lanark	1,154	1,449	1,539	1,785	33.4%	385	16.0%	246
T. Linwood	1,035	1,111	1,387	1,162	34.0%	352	-16.2%	-225
T. New Hope	694	736	709	656	2.2%	15	-7.5%	-53
T. Pine Grove	949	904	1,045	1,037	10.1%	96	-0.8%	-8
T. Plover	2,223	2,415	1,778	1,558	-20.0%	-445	-12.4%	-220
T. Sharon	1,742	1,936	2,045	1,986	17.4%	303	-2.9%	-59
T. Stockton	2,494	2,896	2,914	3,008	16.8%	420	3.2%	94
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>27,839</b>	<b>29,863</b>	<b>29,054</b>	<b>29,195</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>1,215</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>61,405</b>	<b>67,123</b>	<b>69,437</b>	<b>70,378</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>8,032</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>941</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>4,891,769</b>	<b>5,363,675</b>	<b>5,637,947</b>	<b>5,895,908</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>746,178</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>257,961</b>

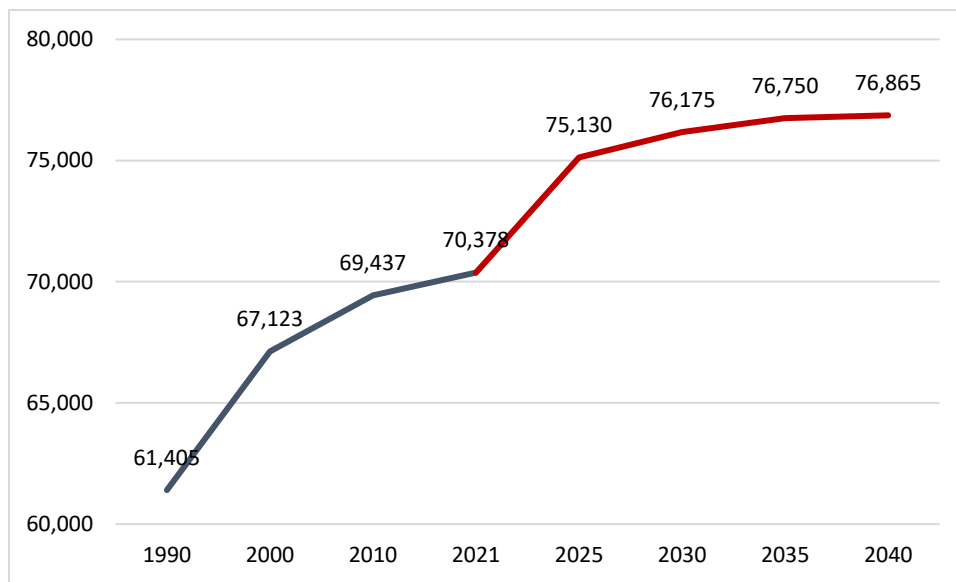
Source: U.S. Census 1990 &amp; 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 2: Population Projections 2025-2040**

Minor Civil Division	2021 Population	2025	2030	2035	2040
C. Stevens Point	25,752	29,110	29,640	29,980	30,150
V. Plover	13,435	13,770	14,200	14,530	14,770
V. Whiting	1,535	1,620	1,575	1,520	1,460
V. Park Ridge	461	505	505	500	495
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>41,183</b>	<b>45,005</b>	<b>45,920</b>	<b>46,530</b>	<b>46,875</b>
V. Almond	441	450	450	445	435
V. Amherst	1,015	1,130	1,155	1,175	1,185
V. Amherst Jct.	291	415	430	440	445
V. Junction City	382	425	415	405	390
V. Nelsonville	193	140	135	130	125
V. Rosholt	463	495	490	480	465
T. Alban	820	875	865	855	835
T. Almond	520	685	685	680	670
T. Amherst	1,450	1,320	1,305	1,280	1,250
T. Belmont	602	635	635	635	630
T. Buena Vista	1,161	1,220	1,220	1,210	1,195
T. Carson	1,293	1,340	1,335	1,330	1,310
T. Dewey	1,172	950	950	940	930
T. Eau Pleine	938	975	985	990	985
T. Grant	1,968	1,970	1,970	1,960	1,935
T. Hull	5,294	5,465	5,450	5,405	5,325
T. Lanark	1,785	1,675	1,715	1,745	1,760
T. Linwood	1,162	1,150	1,150	1,145	1,135
T. New Hope	656	710	705	695	680
T. Pine Grove	1,037	950	945	935	925
T. Plover	1,558	1,880	1,920	1,955	1,980
T. Sharon	1,986	2,135	2,165	2,180	2,190
T. Stockton	3,008	3,135	3,180	3,205	3,210
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>29,195</b>	<b>30,125</b>	<b>30,255</b>	<b>30,220</b>	<b>29,990</b>
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>70,378</b>	<b>75,130</b>	<b>76,175</b>	<b>76,750</b>	<b>76,865</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021; WDOA 2025-2040

**Figure 1: Portage County Historic and Projected Population**



Source: U.S. Census 1990 & 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

**Age Distribution**

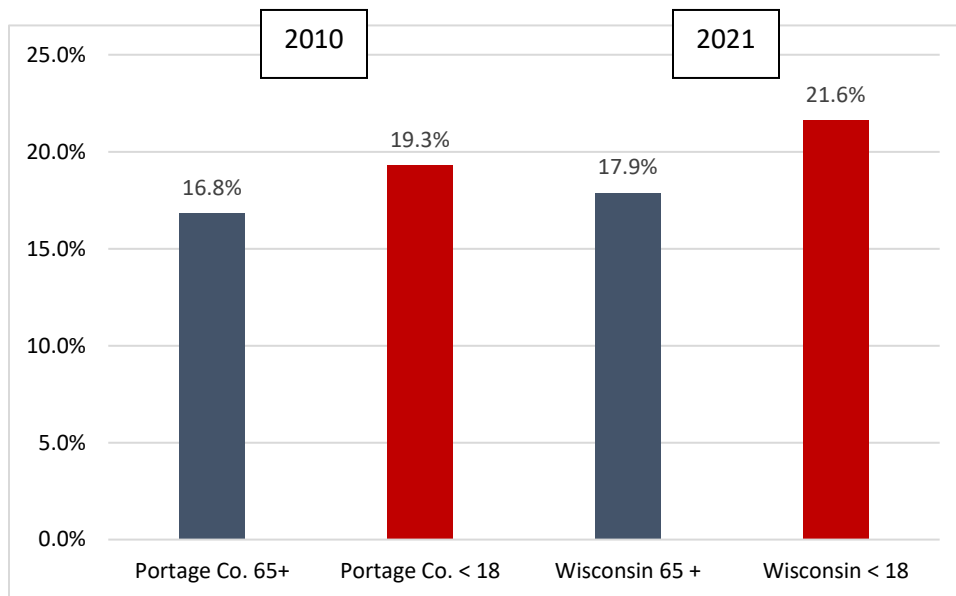
Population distribution is important to the planning process, with two groups examined in detail here. They are the populations of those 17 and younger and those 65 and older. These are often referred to as dependent populations and have different needs. The younger group requires schools, and the older group is retiring. Comparing these groups over time and to the state, demographic changes in the county are identified. See Figure 2 and Table 3.

From 2010 to 2021, there has been a countywide decrease of 8.1 percent in the number of people age 17 and younger, and the rate of decrease is generally more pronounced in rural parts of the county. During the same time, there was an increase of 38.5 percent in the number of residents age 65 and older, with a higher rate of increase in rural parts of the county. Overall, the County is losing the younger population group at a faster rate (-8.1 percent) than the statewide rate (-5.1 percent) and is gaining members in the older population group at a slightly slower rate than the statewide rate (39.7 percent). Communities with the fastest growing 17-and-under population include the Towns of Pine Grove (39.2 percent) and Eau Pleine (33.8 percent), and the Village of Whiting (13.3 percent). Communities with the fastest growing population age 65 and over include the Village of Nelsonville (220.0 percent) and Towns of Buena Vista (204.8 percent) and Lanark (141.1 percent).

This is mainly due to the aging of the Baby Boomers, the largest generation in American history, who are retiring. The oldest Baby Boomer will be 77 in 2023 while the youngest Baby Boomer will be 59 years old. Based on increases in life expectancy and advances in medicine, the 65 and older group can expect to grow in absolute numbers and as a percentage of total population. However, the increase is also due to a lower fertility rate that is shifting the age profile. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 1957, the fertility rate was 3.7 births per woman in the United States. In 2014, the average was 1.93 which is lower than the 2.1 replacement rate needed to keep a population steady.

Portage County’s median age is 35.6 years old, which is slightly lower than the state median of 38.1. This is partially skewed by the low median age of the City of Stevens Point (27.5), which is typical in college towns. This is followed by the Village of Nelsonville (33.3) and the Town of Pine Grove (34.9). However, median ages of many rural communities in Portage County are higher, with the highest being the Towns of Almond (55.8), Buena Vista (52.5), and Carson (51.2). Overall, there is a slightly smaller percentage of Portage County residents are age 65 and older (16.8 percent) compared to the State of Wisconsin (17.9 percent), and the county’s share of those 17 and under (19.3 percent) was also slightly lower than statewide (21.6 percent). Shifting demographics in these age groups should be monitored as it will impact the needs for facilities for school districts, hospitals, senior housing, and family-oriented housing, and it will affect the labor market as more retire and fewer children enter the workforce.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Population over Age 64 and 17 and Under**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 and 2021



Table 3: Age Characteristics

Minor Civil Division	Population Under Age 18, 2010	Population Under Age 18, 2021	% Change 2010-2021	Population Age 65 and Over, 2010	Population Age 65 and Older, 2021	% Change 2010-2021	Median Age 2010	Median Age 2021
C. Stevens Point	4,493	4,057	-9.7%	2,818	3,278	16.3%	25.9	27.5
V. Plover	2,857	3,071	7.5%	1,322	2,097	58.6%	36.0	36.3
V. Whiting	263	298	13.3%	513	471	-8.2%	52.2	46.6
V. Park Ridge	118	114	-3.4%	127	126	-0.8%	44.4	41.9
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>7,731</b>	<b>7,540</b>	<b>-2.5%</b>	<b>4,780</b>	<b>5,972</b>	<b>24.9%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
V. Almond	130	122	-6.2%	62	59	-4.8%	36.9	35.7
V. Amherst	309	239	-22.7%	126	176	39.7%	35.0	40.3
V. Amherst Jct.	85	79	-7.1%	26	31	19.2%	36.7	35.5
V. Junction City	120	108	-10.0%	42	53	26.2%	28.5	36.5
V. Nelsonville	93	63	-32.3%	10	32	220.0%	31.4	33.3
V. Rosholt	93	99	6.5%	84	85	1.2%	44.0	43.9
T. Alban	150	179	19.3%	142	172	21.1%	47.8	49.4
T. Almond	225	60	-73.3%	84	141	67.9%	38.1	55.8
T. Amherst	291	318	9.3%	231	370	60.2%	43.9	46.4
T. Belmont	91	102	12.1%	123	127	3.3%	49.7	49.3
T. Buena Vista	314	190	-39.5%	104	317	204.8%	38.1	52.5
T. Carson	211	259	22.7%	187	270	44.4%	47.9	51.2
T. Dewey	312	235	-24.7%	114	252	121.1%	38.8	46.6
T. Eau Pleine	160	214	33.8%	130	189	45.4%	48.5	48.5
T. Grant	370	431	16.5%	240	311	29.6%	43.2	44.6
T. Hull	1,331	887	-33.4%	840	1,013	20.6%	44.4	48.9
T. Lanark	430	365	-15.1%	180	434	141.1%	39.3	45.5
T. Linwood	339	189	-44.2%	182	325	78.6%	41.1	52.3
T. New Hope	165	148	-10.3%	110	176	60.0%	46.5	49.8
T. Pine Grove	222	309	39.2%	101	169	67.3%	37.1	34.9
T. Plover	423	444	5.0%	148	284	91.9%	41.3	40.6
T. Sharon	434	349	-19.6%	245	475	93.9%	43.1	50.2
T. Stockton	767	663	-13.6%	255	401	57.3%	42.1	43.8
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>7,065</b>	<b>6,052</b>	<b>-14.3%</b>	<b>3,766</b>	<b>5,862</b>	<b>55.7%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>14,796</b>	<b>13,592</b>	<b>-8.1%</b>	<b>8,546</b>	<b>11,834</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>37.6</b>
Wisconsin	1,343,593	1,274,605	-5.1%	754,868	1,054,247	39.7%	38.1	39.6

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

Figures 3 and 4 show the population pyramid for Portage County in 2021 and for the projections for 2040. However, the term “pyramid” has already become misnomer in Portage County’s case. Until recently, most communities’ population “bases” were larger than the tops. Today in the North Central Wisconsin region, many communities’ population age-sex distributions resemble columns rather than pyramids, as is the case in Portage County. In 2010, 12.1 percent of the population was 65 years and older and had jumped to 16.8 percent by 2021.

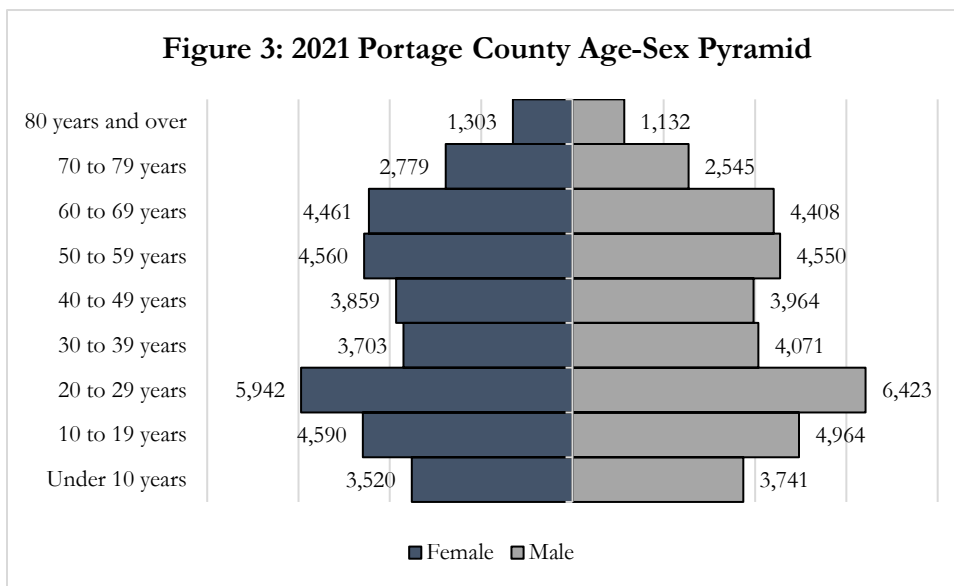
By 2040, 23.5 percent of the population is expected to be 65 years or older, a net increase of 6,231 senior citizens. To put that in perspective, the country of Japan became the world’s first “hyper-aged” society in 2007 when more than 21 percent of its society was estimated to be aged 65 or older.

According to the latest projections out of Japan, the percentage of Japan’s population that is 65 and older is expected to reach 40 percent around 2060. The decrease in the percentage of 17 and younger persons and the increase in the 65 and older persons will have an impact on the labor force, school system and health care industry in the county. As the growth in population slows, so will the workforce and ultimately job growth. It will also be difficult to fund public services if employment and tax revenues are not growing, as there is a lower percentage of the population working from which to collect state income taxes and more income coming from Social Security. At the same time, the economy is expected to shift as older adults drive the economy. Healthcare is expected to continue to grow as well as other service providers.

There are a number of actions a community can take to not only address these challenges but to capitalize on the benefits of this age group. Not only do older adults have years of valuable experiences and wisdom, many entrepreneurs, and therefore job creators, are at or near retirement age. As Portage County imports older adults looking to retire in the area, this demographic brings a great amount of spending power to the local economy.

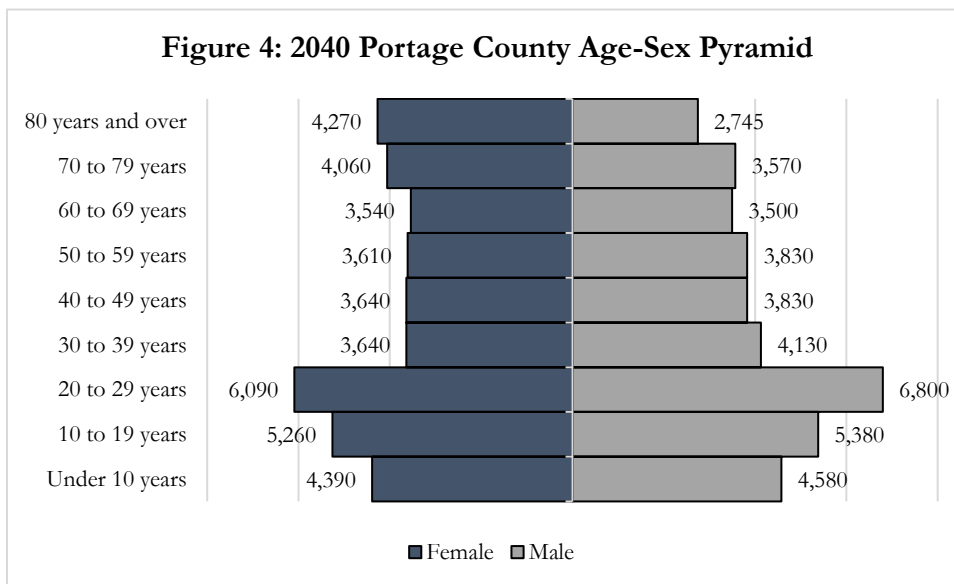


**Figure 3: Portage County Age-Sex Pyramid 2021**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021

**Figure 4: Portage County Projected Age-Sex Pyramid 2040**



Source: WDOA 2013

## Households

In 2021, there were 29,041 households in Portage County following at least three decades in household growth as displayed in Table 4. Household growth between 1990 and 2010 (29.4 percent over 20 years) was considerably higher than the rate of growth between 2010 and 2021 (5.3 percent over 11 years). Generally, the number of households across the country has been increasing relative to the rate of population growth as more people decide to live alone and more couples having fewer children or no children at all. The number of households has increased faster than the population as a whole. This is reflected by the 5.3 percent increase in households compared to 1.4 percent increase in population between 2010 and 2021. This results in an increase of 1,468 households compared to the increase of 941 people between 2010 and 2021. As a result, the number of people per household is down slightly from 2.39 in 2010 to 2.32 in 2021. In 1990 the average number of people per household was 2.71, and this decrease in household size is expected to continue.

Municipalities that have seen the number of households increase between 2010 and 2021 are the Town of Grant (26.4 percent), Town of Dewey (24.5 percent), and Town of Buena Vista (22.7 percent). Municipalities that gained the most total households are the Village of Plover (960), Town of Grant (176), and Town of Hull (153). Municipalities with the largest rate of decrease in number of households during the same time were the Village of Whiting (-12.3 percent), Town of Pine Grove (-9.4 percent), and Town of Plover (-9.4 percent). Municipalities that lost the most households were the Village of Whiting (-86), City of Stevens Point (-85), and Town of Plover (-59). See Figure 5 and Table 4.

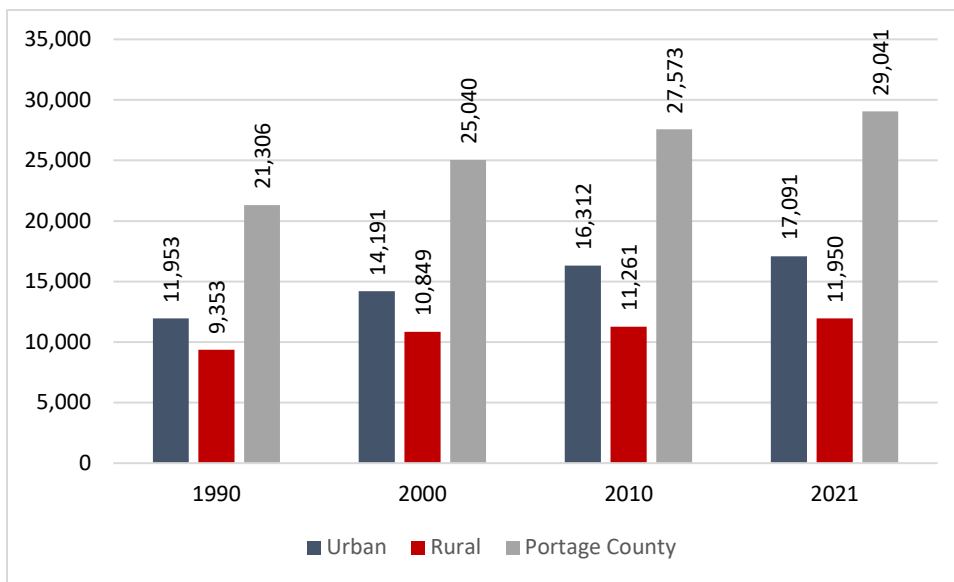
## Education

Educational attainment improved over the past 21 years. Over the period, the number of persons who graduated from high school as a percentage of those over 25, increased from 86.5 percent in 2000 to 94.8 percent in 2021. The county increase was reflected in almost every local unit between 2000 and 2021. Portage County has consistently had a slightly higher share of high school graduates compared to the State of Wisconsin.

The rate of persons 25 and older with four or more years of college is also increasing within the county and has also been slightly higher than the statewide share of college graduates. In 2021, 33.4 percent of the county, aged 25 years and older, had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. This was a 10.0 percent increase over 2000, similar to the statewide rate of 10.1 percent.

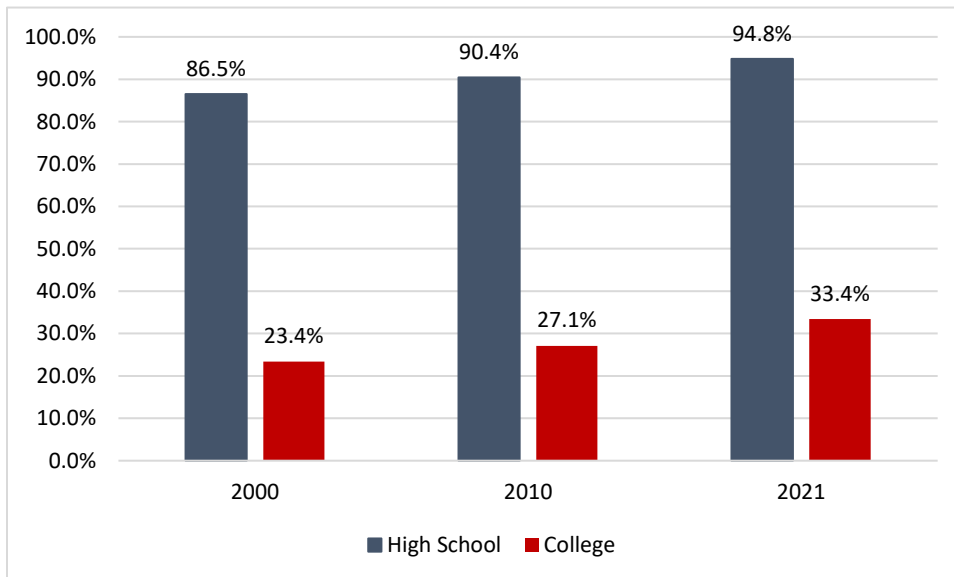
According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 27 percent of jobs in the United States require a college education. However, other experts believe the percentage to be much higher. Nationally, 37.8 percent of the workforce has an associate degree or higher, which is slightly higher than in Portage County and the State of Wisconsin. Maintaining an educated workforce ensures that local employers can fill jobs that require special skill sets. See Figure 6 and Table 5.

**Figure 5: Portage County Total Households**



Source: U.S. Census 1990 & 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

**Figure 6: Portage County Educational Attainment**



Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

Table 4: Households

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2021	1990-2010 % Change	1990-2010 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	8,245	9,305	10,758	10,673	30.5%	2,513	-0.8%	-85
V. Plover	2,857	3,985	4,644	5,604	62.5%	1,787	20.7%	960
V. Whiting	637	690	697	611	9.4%	60	-12.3%	-86
V. Park Ridge	214	211	213	203	-0.5%	-1	-4.7%	-10
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>11,953</b>	<b>14,191</b>	<b>16,312</b>	<b>17,091</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>4,359</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>779</b>
V. Almond	174	189	174	171	0.0%	0	-1.7%	-3
V. Amherst	316	395	408	475	29.1%	92	16.4%	67
V. Amherst Jct.	101	109	112	111	10.9%	11	-0.9%	-1
V. Junction City	180	169	158	158	-12.2%	-22	0.0%	0
V. Nelsonville	63	72	72	75	14.3%	9	4.2%	3
V. Rosholt	203	198	185	180	-8.9%	-18	-2.7%	-5
T. Alban	289	325	311	322	7.6%	22	3.5%	11
T. Almond	211	256	266	265	26.1%	55	-0.4%	-1
T. Amherst	429	494	541	565	26.1%	112	4.4%	24
T. Belmont	193	240	285	265	47.7%	92	-7.0%	-20
T. Buena Vista	361	418	406	498	12.5%	45	22.7%	92
T. Carson	441	475	503	524	14.1%	62	4.2%	21
T. Dewey	278	356	392	488	41.0%	114	24.5%	96
T. Eau Pleine	312	344	354	370	13.5%	42	4.5%	16
T. Grant	555	726	667	843	20.2%	112	26.4%	176
T. Hull	1,851	1,988	2,118	2,271	14.4%	267	7.2%	153
T. Lanark	369	546	612	719	65.9%	243	17.5%	107
T. Linwood	342	388	478	489	39.8%	136	2.3%	11
T. New Hope	246	278	283	280	15.0%	37	-1.1%	-3
T. Pine Grove	316	333	406	368	28.5%	90	-9.4%	-38
T. Plover	738	861	630	571	-14.6%	-108	-9.4%	-59
T. Sharon	578	705	813	764	40.7%	235	-6.0%	-49
T. Stockton	807	984	1,087	1,178	34.7%	280	8.4%	91
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>9,353</b>	<b>10,849</b>	<b>11,261</b>	<b>11,950</b>	<b>20.4%</b>	<b>1,908</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>689</b>
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>21,306</b>	<b>25,040</b>	<b>27,573</b>	<b>29,041</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>6,267</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>1,468</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>1,822,118</b>	<b>2,279,768</b>	<b>2,274,611</b>	<b>2,401,818</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>452,493</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>127,207</b>

Source: U.S. Census 1990 &amp; 2000, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 5: Educational Attainment**

Minor Civil Division	% Completed High School			% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher			% Change (High School)	% Change (Bachelor's)
	2000	2010	2021	2000	2010	2021		
C. Stevens Point	85.1%	92.6%	94.6%	26.1%	33.2%	38.3%	9.5%	12.2%
V. Plover	91.5%	91.5%	95.8%	30.6%	31.6%	40.1%	4.3%	9.5%
V. Whiting	84.0%	85.7%	93.1%	22.8%	20.9%	28.6%	9.1%	5.8%
V. Park Ridge	93.6%	96.5%	99.1%	52.9%	46.8%	60.3%	5.5%	7.4%
V. Almond	90.0%	83.6%	86.8%	25.1%	17.5%	18.5%	-3.2%	-6.6%
V. Amherst	88.2%	90.8%	91.9%	20.0%	20.1%	27.0%	3.7%	7.0%
V. Amherst Jct.	94.6%	98.5%	96.5%	14.9%	27.1%	25.1%	1.9%	10.2%
V. Junction City	77.9%	83.5%	87.2%	8.4%	8.6%	16.0%	9.3%	7.6%
V. Nelsonville	85.2%	96.3%	94.4%	21.9%	30.4%	36.4%	9.2%	14.5%
V. Rosholt	80.5%	81.3%	89.0%	8.3%	9.3%	14.5%	8.5%	6.2%
T. Alban	77.7%	85.7%	90.7%	8.2%	10.9%	15.6%	13.0%	7.4%
T. Almond	84.4%	92.7%	94.3%	13.2%	17.3%	24.3%	9.9%	11.1%
T. Amherst	86.0%	88.6%	96.1%	16.3%	22.6%	28.4%	10.1%	12.1%
T. Belmont	84.4%	87.1%	89.2%	11.0%	19.5%	16.0%	4.8%	5.0%
T. Buena Vista	84.2%	88.8%	95.4%	13.4%	23.5%	23.4%	11.2%	10.0%
T. Carson	80.9%	84.0%	96.0%	13.8%	21.0%	23.0%	15.1%	9.2%
T. Dewey	86.1%	93.1%	94.9%	19.8%	18.8%	25.7%	8.8%	5.9%
T. Eau Pleine	82.5%	88.6%	95.7%	17.1%	22.4%	25.9%	13.2%	8.8%
T. Grant	87.9%	91.3%	95.3%	11.6%	11.2%	20.3%	7.4%	8.7%
T. Hull	90.4%	91.6%	97.0%	31.1%	34.3%	37.4%	6.6%	6.3%
T. Lanark	86.8%	86.6%	95.8%	14.6%	18.9%	32.9%	9.0%	18.3%
T. Linwood	88.5%	90.7%	94.7%	19.6%	16.0%	24.7%	6.2%	5.1%
T. New Hope	79.4%	93.7%	95.4%	34.0%	40.7%	38.8%	16.0%	4.8%
T. Pine Grove	69.9%	72.1%	82.9%	6.0%	7.8%	13.6%	13.0%	7.6%
T. Plover	85.5%	88.1%	94.8%	22.4%	17.1%	29.5%	9.3%	7.1%
T. Sharon	81.6%	87.7%	96.4%	13.3%	16.5%	27.5%	14.8%	14.2%
T. Stockton	88.3%	89.4%	93.2%	16.0%	18.6%	25.4%	4.9%	9.4%
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>86.5%</b>	<b>90.4%</b>	<b>94.8%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>85.1%</b>	<b>89.4%</b>	<b>93.3%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>32.5%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021



## Employment

In 2021, there were 37,801 residents employed. (Note that these are all County residents that are employed and many of them work outside the county.) This is a 3.9 percent increase in the county's employment since 2010, compared to 5.1 percent growth for the state. About half of the communities in the county saw a decrease in the number of residents with jobs, and the overall increase in employed residents was higher in more urban communities (City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting) than it was in more rural areas. See Figure 7 and Table 6.

Areas where there is a decrease in the number of workers in Portage County are likely tied to the aging population. The median age is lowest in the City of Stevens Point, but it is much higher in many of the rural townships. There are likely more retired individuals in rural Portage County, even though the countywide median age is slightly lower than the state's. When an individual reaches the age of 55 and older, their probability of participating in the labor force drops significantly.

## Income

Median income and per capita income are displayed in Figure 8 and Tables 7 and 8. The county median household income rose about 27 percent over the 21-year period, compared to a state increase of 30 percent. Meanwhile, the county per capita income also increased by over 40 percent, compared to the state increase of 38.0 percent. Note that these changes have not been adjusted for inflation.

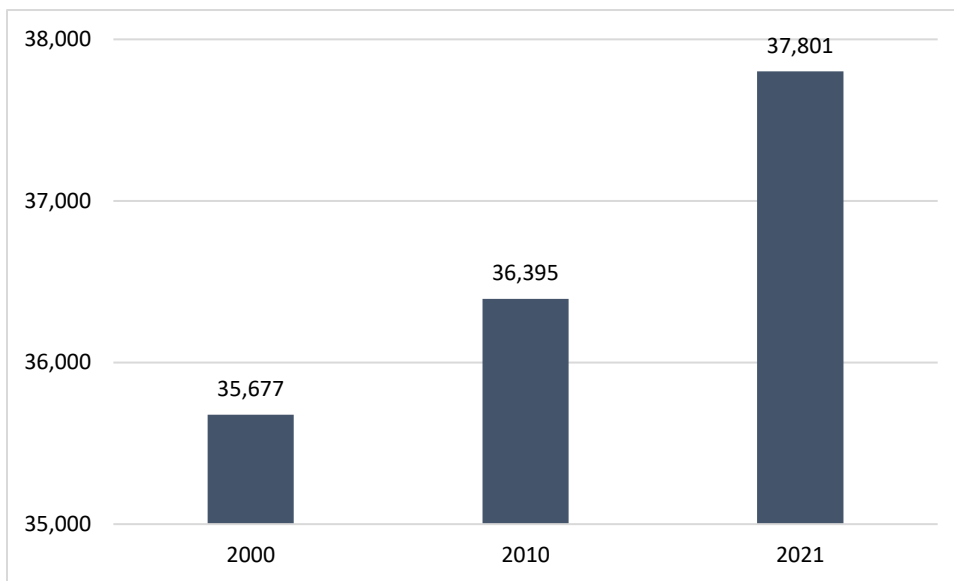
During the past 21 years, the county's median household income grew slightly more slowly than the state rate while the per capita income grew faster than the state. Overall, the county median income and per capita income are less than the state levels, but Central Wisconsin's cost of living is typically lower than areas around Madison, Milwaukee, and the Fox Cities, where most of the state's population lives.

When incomes are adjusted for inflation, it is apparent that incomes have stagnated. For reference, a median household income of \$43,487 and a per capita income of \$19,854 in January 2000 would be the equivalent of \$77,504 and \$35,384 in February 2023, respectively, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator. This results in a decrease of around \$7,000 for households incomes, but the decrease is only around \$500 for per capita income. These calculations also reflect the reduction in average household size as there is less income for households than in the past, but about the same per person.

## Summary

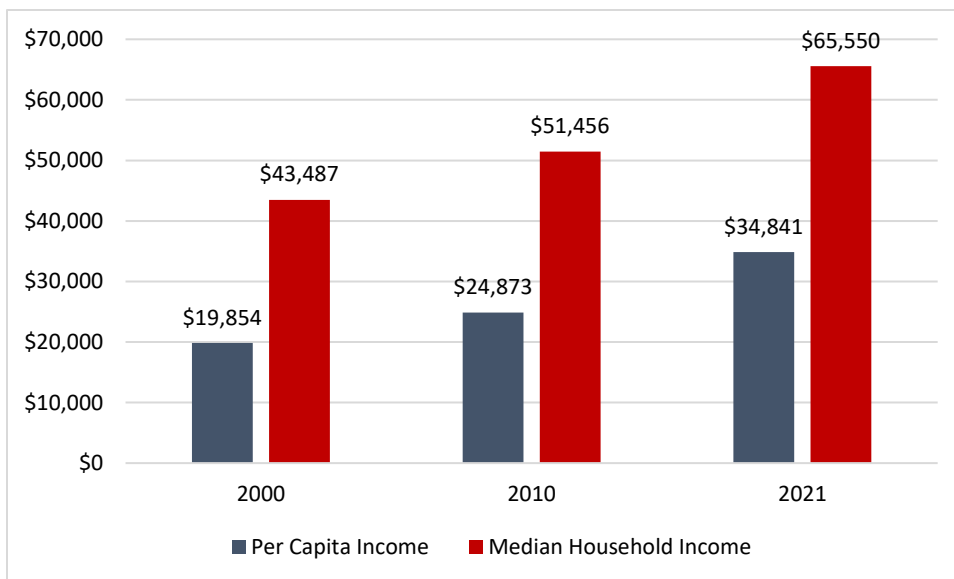
Portage County has grown since 1990, but at a slower rate than the State of Wisconsin. An aging population and smaller household sizes will affect the local economy and services, but an affordable cost of living, variety of urban and rural landscapes, and educational and career opportunities may attract those looking to relocate from higher cost areas. Evaluating this data in the chapter ensures that the planning process will accommodate changing demand for housing, schools, healthcare, and other aspects that contribute to the county's quality of life.

**Figure 7: Portage County Total Residents Employed**



Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

**Figure 8: Portage County Income**



Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

**Table 6: Total Employed (Age 16 and Over)**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	2000-2021 % Change	2000-2021 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	12,547	13,795	14,676	17.0%	2,129	6.4%	881
V. Plover	6,094	6,447	6,951	14.1%	857	7.8%	504
V. Whiting	864	696	656	-24.1%	-208	-5.7%	-40
V. Park Ridge	260	207	204	-21.5%	-56	-1.4%	-3
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>19,765</b>	<b>21,145</b>	<b>22,487</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>2,722</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>1,342</b>
V. Almond	203	177	234	15.3%	31	32.2%	57
V. Amherst	528	478	511	-3.2%	-17	6.9%	33
V. Amherst Jct.	141	168	152	7.8%	11	-9.5%	-16
V. Junction City	189	215	189	0.0%	0	-12.1%	-26
V. Nelsonville	101	107	105	4.0%	4	-1.9%	-2
V. Rosholt	284	189	206	-27.5%	-78	9.0%	17
T. Alban	412	362	433	5.1%	21	19.6%	71
T. Almond	384	383	319	-16.9%	-65	-16.7%	-64
T. Amherst	752	727	656	-12.8%	-96	-9.8%	-71
T. Belmont	308	283	321	4.2%	13	13.4%	38
T. Buena Vista	670	692	633	-5.5%	-37	-8.5%	-59
T. Carson	752	600	752	0.0%	0	25.3%	152
T. Dewey	568	549	569	0.2%	1	3.6%	20
T. Eau Pleine	465	504	439	-5.6%	-26	-12.9%	-65
T. Grant	1,052	973	1,107	5.2%	55	13.8%	134
T. Hull	2,977	2,534	2,914	-2.1%	-63	15.0%	380
T. Lanark	728	754	931	27.9%	203	23.5%	177
T. Linwood	649	748	565	-12.9%	-84	-24.5%	-183
T. New Hope	385	378	306	-20.5%	-79	-19.0%	-72
T. Pine Grove	373	557	513	37.5%	140	-7.9%	-44
T. Plover	1,182	1,020	714	-39.6%	-468	-30.0%	-306
T. Sharon	1,140	1,178	1,086	-4.7%	-54	-7.8%	-92
T. Stockton	1,669	1,674	1,659	-0.6%	-10	-0.9%	-15
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>15,912</b>	<b>15,250</b>	<b>15,314</b>	<b>-3.8%</b>	<b>-598</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>35,677</b>	<b>36,395</b>	<b>37,801</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>2,124</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>1,406</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>2,734,925</b>	<b>2,869,310</b>	<b>3,014,612</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>279,687</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>145,302</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 7: Median Household Income**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	2000-2021 % Change	2000-2021 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	\$33,178	\$40,115	\$49,712	49.8%	\$16,534	23.9%	\$9,597
V. Plover	\$51,238	\$59,714	\$70,664	37.9%	\$19,426	18.3%	\$10,950
V. Whiting	\$42,381	\$43,239	\$65,208	53.9%	\$22,827	50.8%	\$21,969
V. Park Ridge	\$57,031	\$62,708	\$81,161	42.3%	\$24,130	29.4%	\$18,453
V. Almond	\$37,857	\$43,750	\$62,039	63.9%	\$24,182	41.8%	\$18,289
V. Amherst	\$40,125	\$53,375	\$51,902	29.4%	\$11,777	-2.8%	-\$1,473
V. Amherst Jct.	\$44,500	\$67,500	\$81,875	84.0%	\$37,375	21.3%	\$14,375
V. Junction City	\$33,750	\$40,500	\$53,438	58.3%	\$19,688	31.9%	\$12,938
V. Nelsonville	\$41,875	\$56,667	\$56,875	35.8%	\$15,000	0.4%	\$208
V. Rosholt	\$42,750	\$37,875	\$53,125	24.3%	\$10,375	40.3%	\$15,250
T. Alban	\$36,250	\$53,229	\$69,167	90.8%	\$32,917	29.9%	\$15,938
T. Almond	\$45,156	\$58,846	\$71,971	59.4%	\$26,815	22.3%	\$13,125
T. Amherst	\$50,435	\$63,313	\$85,375	69.3%	\$34,940	34.8%	\$22,062
T. Belmont	\$46,591	\$49,464	\$54,583	17.2%	\$7,992	10.3%	\$5,119
T. Buena Vista	\$46,920	\$70,000	\$64,211	36.9%	\$17,291	-8.3%	-\$5,789
T. Carson	\$51,583	\$60,260	\$100,278	94.4%	\$48,695	66.4%	\$40,018
T. Dewey	\$50,391	\$59,815	\$88,871	76.4%	\$38,480	48.6%	\$29,056
T. Eau Pleine	\$49,167	\$62,969	\$75,000	52.5%	\$25,833	19.1%	\$12,031
T. Grant	\$52,459	\$60,037	\$82,426	57.1%	\$29,967	37.3%	\$22,389
T. Hull	\$53,915	\$64,621	\$91,641	70.0%	\$37,726	41.8%	\$27,020
T. Lanark	\$41,932	\$51,000	\$88,687	111.5%	\$46,755	73.9%	\$37,687
T. Linwood	\$55,972	\$65,333	\$76,932	37.4%	\$20,960	17.8%	\$11,599
T. New Hope	\$46,538	\$66,319	\$68,438	47.1%	\$21,900	3.2%	\$2,119
T. Pine Grove	\$35,294	\$45,000	\$63,750	80.6%	\$28,456	41.7%	\$18,750
T. Plover	\$49,313	\$75,000	\$77,313	56.8%	\$28,000	3.1%	\$2,313
T. Sharon	\$53,750	\$64,628	\$87,969	63.7%	\$34,219	36.1%	\$23,341
T. Stockton	\$50,957	\$63,646	\$76,939	51.0%	\$25,982	20.9%	\$13,293
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>\$43,487</b>	<b>\$51,456</b>	<b>\$65,550</b>	<b>50.7%</b>	<b>\$22,063</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>\$14,094</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>\$43,791</b>	<b>\$51,598</b>	<b>\$67,080</b>	<b>53.2%</b>	<b>\$23,289</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>\$15,482</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 8: Per Capita Income**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	2000-2021 % Change	2000-2021 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	\$17,510	\$21,653	\$28,362	62.0%	\$10,852	31.0%	\$6,709
V. Plover	\$23,085	\$27,672	\$37,002	60.3%	\$13,917	33.7%	\$9,330
V. Whiting	\$19,492	\$24,681	\$37,856	94.2%	\$18,364	53.4%	\$13,175
V. Park Ridge	\$28,074	\$30,807	\$37,863	34.9%	\$9,789	22.9%	\$7,056
V. Almond	\$18,104	\$20,007	\$24,978	38.0%	\$6,874	24.8%	\$4,971
V. Amherst	\$18,514	\$22,734	\$30,529	64.9%	\$12,015	34.3%	\$7,795
V. Amherst Jct.	\$19,261	\$27,551	\$39,361	104.4%	\$20,100	42.9%	\$11,810
V. Junction City	\$17,648	\$18,284	\$26,354	49.3%	\$8,706	44.1%	\$8,070
V. Nelsonville	\$19,708	\$21,966	\$29,679	50.6%	\$9,971	35.1%	\$7,713
V. Rosholt	\$16,002	\$18,336	\$29,553	84.7%	\$13,551	61.2%	\$11,217
T. Alban	\$15,664	\$24,169	\$33,284	112.5%	\$17,620	37.7%	\$9,115
T. Almond	\$17,962	\$24,146	\$46,399	158.3%	\$28,437	92.2%	\$22,253
T. Amherst	\$19,751	\$28,278	\$37,608	90.4%	\$17,857	33.0%	\$9,330
T. Belmont	\$20,427	\$23,965	\$30,045	47.1%	\$9,618	25.4%	\$6,080
T. Buena Vista	\$18,775	\$25,446	\$35,213	87.6%	\$16,438	38.4%	\$9,767
T. Carson	\$21,576	\$33,500	\$44,457	106.0%	\$22,881	32.7%	\$10,957
T. Dewey	\$24,623	\$26,925	\$49,312	100.3%	\$24,689	83.1%	\$22,387
T. Eau Pleine	\$20,301	\$27,882	\$38,916	91.7%	\$18,615	39.6%	\$11,034
T. Grant	\$21,793	\$24,945	\$37,674	72.9%	\$15,881	51.0%	\$12,729
T. Hull	\$22,433	\$30,718	\$50,523	125.2%	\$28,090	64.5%	\$19,805
T. Lanark	\$19,246	\$22,181	\$39,712	106.3%	\$20,466	79.0%	\$17,531
T. Linwood	\$21,073	\$24,482	\$41,065	94.9%	\$19,992	67.7%	\$16,583
T. New Hope	\$21,334	\$32,115	\$39,046	83.0%	\$17,712	21.6%	\$6,931
T. Pine Grove	\$18,257	\$20,055	\$27,216	49.1%	\$8,959	35.7%	\$7,161
T. Plover	\$21,186	\$26,977	\$35,486	67.5%	\$14,300	31.5%	\$8,509
T. Sharon	\$20,760	\$27,735	\$40,246	93.9%	\$19,486	45.1%	\$12,511
T. Stockton	\$19,886	\$26,497	\$33,276	67.3%	\$13,390	25.6%	\$6,779
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>\$19,854</b>	<b>\$24,873</b>	<b>\$34,841</b>	<b>75.5%</b>	<b>\$14,987</b>	<b>40.1%</b>	<b>\$9,968</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>\$21,271</b>	<b>\$26,624</b>	<b>\$36,754</b>	<b>72.8%</b>	<b>\$15,483</b>	<b>38.0%</b>	<b>\$10,130</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

## **Issues**

A variety of issues were identified throughout the planning process. Many of these were brought up during the series of planning meetings, others were taken from existing documents, and some were taken from other public meetings. The next seven chapters of this plan will list the issues that relate to those chapters. Responses from the public survey were also used to confirm existing knowledge about concerns regarding land use, environmental protection, quality of life, and other issues that are discussed throughout this Plan. Detailed survey results are displayed in Attachment E.

## **Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

Each of the following comprehensive plan chapters will conclude with a set of goals, objectives, and policies, which will be used to guide the future development of the county. For purposes of this planning process, goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

### **Goals**

Broad statements that express general public 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 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.

## Chapter 2: Housing

### Background

Portage County faces several housing concerns such as lack of inventory and availability. This chapter assesses the age, structural value, and occupancy characteristics of each municipality's housing stock. Additionally, it identifies specific policies and programs that promote the development of housing for residents of the local governmental unit and provides a range of housing choices that meet the needs of persons of all income levels, all age groups, persons with special needs, policies and programs that promote the availability of land for the development or redevelopment of low-income and moderate-income housing. Also included are policies and programs to maintain or rehabilitate the local governmental unit's existing housing stock.

### Previous Planning Efforts

#### ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Wisconsin, 2023

This report, developed by the United Way, described households in Portage County that are above the federal poverty level, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities, or "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.

The ALICE report shows that 20 percent of the County's households are considered ALICE households and 11 percent are considered under the poverty level, indicating that the average household in Portage County is slightly more financially prosperous than the average State of Wisconsin household (23 percent ALICE, 11 percent in poverty). This is based on 2021 data, so affordability could be a larger challenge as housing prices and inflation have increased since then.

#### City of Stevens Point Housing Study (2017)

The City of Stevens Point conducted a housing study in 2017. Although the study only involved one municipality, the City's housing market is also influenced by countywide trends. Recommendations included adding housing units to main street corridors and supporting programs to revitalize existing housing. Additionally, the study supports a shift to neighborhood-level planning throughout the City.

#### 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.



The strategies developed in this plan will place particular emphasis on addressing the opportunities and challenges in five foundational pillars that are expected to have a major impact on the future prosperity of North Central Wisconsin. These foundational pillars include Broadband, Childcare, Housing & Transportation, Workforce & Talent Attraction, and Tourism & Hospitality; each of which are vital components of strong and resilient communities in both the current and future economic landscapes. Developing a set of best-practice strategies to guide local communities in addressing the challenges facing these five foundational pillars within their community will help spur economic recovery and help build economic resilience and sustainability within local communities throughout the Region.

#### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The 2006 Portage County Comprehensive Plan found that housing was affordable for many people at the time, and although single family homes were most common, multifamily housing was increasing in supply. Urbanized areas were growing more quickly than rural areas, and housing in unincorporated areas had higher values for new housing construction. This plan listed the following goals for housing:

- Meet the housing needs of our senior citizens and those with special needs.
- Allow for adequate, affordable housing in every community.
- Housing development takes into consideration the protection of natural resources and open spaces.
- Maintain or improve the quality and integrity of existing housing and neighborhoods.
- Local units of government work together to develop creative ways to plan for and share the benefits of growth across municipal boundaries.
- Develop an ongoing educational program for municipal boards and the public related to housing issues.
- Neighborhood design enhances community character.

#### Portage County LIFE Report, 2023

The Portage County LIFE Report identifies several areas for improvement regarding several topics, especially the following areas:

- Behavioral health: Address alcohol and drug use, improve youth mental health, and increase accessibility and affordability of services
- Early Childhood Care & Education: Increase high-quality childcare, ensure a skilled childcare workforce, and increase accessibility and affordability.
- Housing & Shelter: Ensure high-quality housing, increase temporary and transitional housing, and increase the affordability, availability, and accessibility of housing.

Other topics this report addresses include community safety, hunger, K-12 education, health, wellness, employment, income, land, water, air, and transportation. The report was led by a committee of over 70 members along with local health systems and nonprofit organizations.

#### Regional Livability Plan, 2015

The Regional Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2015. It is an update of a plan adopted by NCWRPC in 1981. The RPC looks at housing in all

ten counties that make up the North Central Region, including Portage County. It looks at general trends within the Region and recommends how county and local government can address their housing issues.

Housing is a crucial component of livability. The complex dynamics of the housing market impact future housing development. Understanding this relationship provides a basis for the formulation of policy to coordinate transportation facilities with a sustainable pattern of residential development. The connection between home and work is a fundamental function of any transportation system. Home-work connections should be efficient, reinforce and strengthen community ties, and foster economic development and environmental sustainability. Understanding the factors affecting people's decisions on meeting their housing needs provides a basis for establishing solid home-work connections in the region.

The policies that affect the availability and affordability of housing, such as minimum lot sizes, can influence traffic levels, land use patterns and infrastructure costs, by determining the density of development. A range of factors must be considered to ensure access to a safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for all needs and income levels. Policies that regulate the location and standards for housing can also have a profound effect on the quality of life and the character of our communities throughout the Region.

Balancing the needs of diverse communities with different housing issues requires that each situation be considered individually, but that a uniform standard of quality and affordability be applied, and that each community seeks the solution which fits the unique challenges that it faces. This planning process will identify goals, objectives, and performance measures to advance the Region's housing efforts.

#### Welcoming Wisconsin Home: A Statewide Action Plan for Homelessness 2021-2023

The Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness launched this report to outline an ambitious series of programs and strategies to reduce homelessness in Wisconsin, most of which were not included in the 2021-2023 state budget. Despite a reduction in homelessness among veterans in the 2010s, homelessness overall has grown, especially in the last few years. The report recommends addressing racial wealth gaps that were a result of lending practices and restrictive covenants in the 20th century, investing in affordable housing, programs, and services, improving housing access through counseling, repair assistance, and other strategies, stabilizing existing housing by growing jobs and other opportunities, using data to make decisions, using resources such as housing vouchers, and expanding partnerships between government programs and nonprofit agencies and working with surrounding states. These strategies are needed to address the severe statewide shortage of very low-income housing units in urban, suburban, and rural communities alike.

#### Wisconsin Realtors Association's (WRA) Workforce Housing Report: Falling Behind, 2019

The association released a study in 2019 finding a lack of workforce housing throughout the State of Wisconsin. The claim is backed by the falling number of building permits being issued for new home construction, the rising cost of new home construction, a decline in home ownership and a continued decline in overall affordability. The report can be found on the WRA's website.

### Wisconsin State Consolidated Housing Plan, 2020-2024

The Consolidated Housing Plan is required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the application process required of the State in accessing formula program fund of Small Cities Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships, Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG), Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), and Housing Trust Fund (HTF). The Consolidated Plan provides the framework for a planning process used by States and localities to identify housing, homeless, community, and economic development needs and resources, and to tailor a strategic plan for meeting those needs. This is how the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) describes the Consolidated Plan, which consists of a 5-year strategic plan, annual action plans, and annual performance reports.

The Consolidated Plan has five parts: (1) an overview of the process; (2) a description of public participation; (3) a housing, homeless, community and economic development needs assessment; (4) long-term strategies to meet priority needs; and (5) an action plan. The Division of Housing and Intergovernmental Relations (DHIR) prepares the Consolidated Housing Plan and is focused on low income and special needs populations.

The plan looks at several different factors that are significant components of the housing picture. Housing affordability is a primary consideration. According to federal guidelines a family should not have to spend more than thirty percent of its income on housing. Using this standard "...households in the low-income range have great difficulty finding adequate housing within their means and that accommodates their needs.

The gap between wages and housing costs is only made worse by the shortage of affordable housing units. "Despite overall economic prosperity state and nationwide, community and housing resources are becoming scarcer. If the dwindling resources are not because of appropriation cuts, it is then because of significantly increasing needs." Recent economic conditions have been unlikely to reduce the need for affordable housing, and the supply has not kept pace.

Other factors than the construction of new housing units affect the quality and availability of housing as well. Just as the difficulty of providing affordable housing to low-income families can be stated in terms of an hourly wage, there is more involved in a well-housed community than the number of housing units.

The State Consolidated Housing Plan (CHP) is primarily focused on how government action can address special needs, not on the workings of the private housing market. The focus of activities and strategies described in the Plan primarily address meeting the evolving needs of low- and moderate-income persons, including persons of special needs requiring targeted assistance. Overall, the plan's objectives include providing decent, affordable housing, creating suitable living environments, creating economic opportunities, making public facilities, services, infrastructure, and housing available and accessible, and making housing more sustainable.

## Issues

### Affordability

Generally, a lack of housing inventory has resulted in an increase in housing prices relative to incomes and a decrease in available housing stock. The 2023 Comprehensive Plan Survey indicated that only 12 percent of respondents were satisfied with housing affordability in the County, which was the second lowest category after childcare (7 percent; see Attachment E). This is true for both urban and rural areas in the United States, as the number of builders and total new construction decreased considerably after the 2008 global financial crisis. Inflation has also increased the cost of new construction, both for structures and the infrastructure serving them. To help address this, several programs are available to local governments that offer funding to provide affordable housing units are listed at the end of this chapter.

In addition to government programs and funding sources, there are also solutions to enable the creation of market-rate (unsubsidized) housing units. Modifications to a municipal or county zoning code can allow for reduced lot size, floor area (square footage), and required parking space minimums, making it more feasible to build housing at lower prices. Additionally, enabling accessory dwelling units (also known as in-law suites), townhomes, condominiums, and multifamily structures with only a few units per building helps fill in the “missing middle” of the housing market. These are owner-occupied products where owners have a chance to build equity through homeownership while not having to pay the higher prices that single family homes often have. Not only does this create a stepping stone between renters and single-family homeowners, but it also provides more options for seniors or those with disabilities to have a smaller, lower-maintenance home. In general, affordable senior housing is particularly difficult to find, and wait lists are common.

It is generally preferred to locate higher density housing clustered near existing development, rather than in rural areas, so seniors and other renters are closer to services and infrastructure. Well and septic costs limit residential development to low densities, and these systems can cost over \$35,000 per housing unit. Drinking water in some communities is also a concern with well and septic systems. Additionally, residents of smaller communities in Portage County often commute for work, and there is a desire to have more jobs and residences located near each other to revitalize these communities.

Finally, existing housing, which is more affordable than new construction, is often in need of costly repairs. Programs to assist homeowners with a downpayment or with large repairs can also improve affordability while keeping older structures in good repair, benefiting a community’s image and property values.

### Manufactured and Modular Housing

Manufactured housing is a widespread form of affordable housing, and it has a presence in Portage County. Over 6 percent of the County’s housing stock is mobile homes, which have improved considerably in quality in recent decades. Although there are concerns that mobile homes depreciate over time, they are often the most affordable for-purchase housing option.

Additionally, various builders construct homes built to stick-built construction standards in a factory, and ship components of the building to a site to be assembled on a foundation. Many of these homes are indistinguishable from on-site, stick-built homes, but sometimes cost only 75 percent of what it costs to

build a stick-built home. These are known as modular homes, which do not fall into the same category as manufactured (mobile) homes.

For mobile (manufactured) homes, housing units may be arranged in “parks” where an owner of the structure itself leases the land the structure occupies, further reducing costs compared to homes built on for-purchase lots. Therefore, mobile and manufactured homes may be an owner-occupied housing option available to low- and moderate-income households who can’t afford a traditional, stick-built home.

### Senior Housing

Though Portage County has a slightly younger median age when compared to the entire State of Wisconsin, the presence of two college campuses skews this median. Outside of the City of Stevens Point, most of the County’s municipalities have a median age that is considerably higher than the statewide median of 39.6 years old. The Country’s population continues to age as younger generations have fewer children and household sizes decrease. This issue could be further exacerbated in Portage County where a reasonable cost of living, access to outdoor recreation, and proximity to quality healthcare and services may make it an attractive location for retirees.

Older generations living in Portage County will influence the type of housing needed in the coming years. Older residents who are less mobile may need housing units without stairs, or a housing unit with services like lawncare and snow removal included. Those who are no longer confident driving may choose to live closer to stores, churches, and clinics which are more commonly located in urban areas. Seniors living on fixed income may also have fewer choices in terms of what kind of housing they can afford. Seniors who prefer to stay in their existing homes may benefit from aging-in-place programs that help pay for ADA-accessible ramps or showers, for example, and others may benefit from various levels of in-home care or public transportation.

### Student Housing

University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point and Mid-State Technical College students are typically younger, have lower incomes, are less likely to own a car, and have a shorter credit history than the average Portage County resident. Therefore, housing choices for this demographic are limited, and off-campus housing stock that is affordable may be in poor condition. The 2017 City of Stevens Point Housing Study found that over half of students who responded to a survey indicated that their housing was in fair or poor condition. This study recommends various strategies to ensure that student housing continues to meet the student population’s needs.

### Subsidized and Special Needs Housing

Disabled and low-income residents may require special housing accommodations in Portage County. Several programs, such as Section 8 housing vouchers or the Section 515 (USDA-RD) program subsidize housing construction or monthly rent for these residents depending on the program. Additional privately-owned housing may also meet the needs of these residents, but this data is difficult to track since rents often change every year. CAP Services, based in Stevens Point, also provides housing assistance as well as programs that help low-income homeowners improve the energy efficiency of their homes. A complete list of programs for subsidized and special needs housing is listed at the end of this chapter.

## Seasonal Housing

Wisconsin has one of the highest concentrations of seasonal housing units for recreational or occasional use. While Portage County has a much lower rate of seasonal homes than surrounding counties with more lake frontage, there has been a nationwide increase in the popularity of vacation rentals. These are known as Tourist Rooming Houses (TRHs) in Wisconsin, which are often advertised through companies like Airbnb and VRBO. Although they have a presence in some portions of Portage County, there are no known planning issues regarding them at this time.

## **Inventory and Trends**

Portage County has a high level of owner occupancy, which is several percentage points higher than the state. Homeownership levels are lowest in the City of Stevens Point and Village of Plover, which may be influenced by a considerable student population. Over 90 percent of housing units are owned occupied in many of the County's townships. Only around 6 percent of housing units are vacant, and one-third of these vacant units are seasonal or recreational homes. Housing is less expensive than the statewide average but increasing in value at a faster rate. Like much of Wisconsin, a small share of housing units has been built since 2010, reducing availability and affordability, and raising concerns about preserving the quality of older housing units. Finally, single-family homes comprise over 68 percent of the County's housing stock, affecting what housing choices are available for households with a variety of incomes and abilities.

## **Existing Housing Stock**

### Total Housing Units

Portage County had an estimated total of 31,072 housing units in 2021, resulting in an increase of 29.2 percent between 1990 and 2010 and an increase of 5 percent between 2010 and 2021. Housing units grew at a faster rate in Portage County than statewide between 1990 and 2021. However, only 1,471 units were added between 2010 and 2021 compared to 6,691 units between 1990 and 2010. Communities with the most newly constructed housing units between 1990 and 2021 were the City of Stevens Point (2,710 units) and Village of Plover (2,705 units), with all other municipalities adding fewer than 500 units each during this time. These two communities also had the highest housing unit growth rate between 1990 and 2021 at 31.4 percent and 90.1 percent, respectively, followed closely by the Village of Amherst, which saw an increase of 55 percent. Since 2010, almost two-thirds of the County's housing units added were in the Village of Plover, with relatively few units added to the remaining communities.

In many instances, the U.S. Census depicts a decrease in housing units. Sometimes this occurs when housing units age and are demolished or annexed to another municipality. But since many of the U.S. Census' estimates regarding housing are based on mathematical equations and estimates, they can also be inaccurate. For example, the City of Stevens Point is estimated to have 208 fewer units in 2021 compared to 2010, when several large multifamily units have been approved since 2021. In this case, it is more likely that the City of Stevens Point has more units in 2023 than in 2010, despite what appears to be a downward trend when viewing Census data. See Table 11.

**Table 9: Total Housing Units**

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2021	1990-2010 % Change	1990-2010 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	8,626	9,749	11,544	11,336	33.8%	2,918	-1.8%	-208
V. Plover	2,978	4,133	4,774	5,683	60.3%	1,796	19.0%	909
V. Whiting	653	702	707	679	8.3%	54	-4.0%	-28
V. Park Ridge	222	216	244	216	9.9%	22	-11.5%	-28
V. Almond	201	199	187	193	-7.0%	-14	3.2%	6
V. Amherst	340	419	448	527	31.8%	108	17.6%	79
V. Amherst Jct.	108	111	119	114	10.2%	11	-4.2%	-5
V. Junction City	197	193	212	194	7.6%	15	-8.5%	-18
V. Nelsonville	70	74	79	79	12.9%	9	0.0%	0
V. Rosholt	213	212	214	220	0.5%	1	2.8%	6
T. Alban	466	394	405	461	-13.1%	-61	13.8%	56
T. Almond	240	282	308	308	28.3%	68	0.0%	0
T. Amherst	493	556	601	628	21.9%	108	4.5%	27
T. Belmont	298	307	351	345	17.8%	53	-1.7%	-6
T. Buena Vista	378	446	440	553	16.4%	62	25.7%	113
T. Carson	458	499	562	556	22.7%	104	-1.1%	-6
T. Dewey	293	378	417	507	42.3%	124	21.6%	90
T. Eau Pleine	376	402	429	492	14.1%	53	14.7%	63
T. Grant	583	748	708	900	21.4%	125	27.1%	192
T. Hull	1,918	2,067	2,118	2,320	10.4%	200	9.5%	202
T. Lanark	471	659	717	792	52.2%	246	10.5%	75
T. Linwood	363	411	510	526	40.5%	147	3.1%	16
T. New Hope	326	365	406	329	24.5%	80	-19.0%	-77
T. Pine Grove	350	371	434	419	24.0%	84	-3.5%	-15
T. Plover	784	916	678	638	-13.5%	-106	-5.9%	-40
T. Sharon	666	754	867	850	30.2%	201	-2.0%	-17
T. Stockton	839	1,025	1,122	1,207	33.7%	283	7.6%	85
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>22,910</b>	<b>26,588</b>	<b>29,601</b>	<b>31,072</b>	<b>29.2%</b>	<b>6,691</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>1,471</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>2,055,774</b>	<b>2,321,144</b>	<b>2,625,477</b>	<b>2,718,369</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>569,703</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>92,892</b>

Source: U.S. Census 1990 &amp; 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021



### Building Age

A housing unit's age provides insight to what condition housing is in and how well it meets the needs of County residents. Overall, the distribution of the County's housing stock into different age categories has similar proportions to statewide figures. Most housing built in recent decades is in the City of Stevens Point and Village of Plover, but only about 6 percent of the County's housing stock has been built since 2010. Not only has the slowdown in new construction reduced housing availability and affordability, but it also limits choices for those who require or prefer a low-maintenance product, since newer units are more likely to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. This is especially important for seniors and those with limited mobility. Newer homes and apartments also tend to be larger and more expensive than existing structures, and as a result, enabling new construction for existing County residents frees up existing housing that is more affordable for low- and moderate-income households. Because of high construction costs, a list of programs at the end of this chapter are typically needed to construct new housing for lower and middle incomes under current economic conditions.

Regarding the condition of housing in the County, nearly half of all housing units have been built since 1980, and these homes are more likely to meet modern building codes and standards. But housing approaching 10 to 15 years of age or more may already need costly repairs like roofing, windows, and HVAC systems, impacting affordability. With over half of the County's housing stock being built prior to 1980, there could be a considerable number of properties with even more extensive remodeling needs, such as failing electrical, failing plumbing, or major foundation issues. Overall, the age of housing units can provide an estimate of how many units fall into different degrees of condition, but in general, the initial quality of the home's construction and the degree to which it is maintained result in homes in good and bad condition regardless of the when they were built. See Table 12.

### Housing Type

The type of housing units available can indicate how many housing choices are available for people of various incomes and abilities. Portage County has a similar mix of housing types as the State of Wisconsin as a whole, with almost 70 percent of housing units being single-family in both instances. Portage County has a lower share of multifamily structures with over 20 units (2.8 percent) compared to statewide (7.7 percent). But since 2021, several large multifamily complexes have been approved in the City of Stevens Point, especially near the UWSP Campus.

Multifamily units can be used to provide housing that is affordable to low- and middle-income households who are not ready to purchase a single-family home. They can be located near services like jobs, schools, hospitals, and stores to reduce expenses related to operating a vehicle. Most multifamily structures are in the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Amherst and Plover, which places them close to these services. Outside of the County's City and Villages, multifamily is much less common in Towns. But mobile homes, another housing type that is affordable to more households than single-family homes, can be found in both incorporated and unincorporated communities alike. See Table 13.

**Table 10: Total Housing Units: Year Built**

Minor Civil Division	Before 1940	1940-1959	1960-1979	1980-1999	2000-2009	2010-Present
C. Stevens Point	2,753	1,574	2,561	2,757	1,333	358
V. Plover	173	88	1,430	2,323	790	879
V. Whiting	53	142	271	114	53	46
V. Park Ridge	24	85	74	9	17	7
V. Almond	113	14	46	18	2	0
V. Amherst	108	93	80	149	75	22
V. Amherst Jct.	31	3	15	32	26	7
V. Junction City	45	49	66	28	6	0
V. Nelsonville	44	12	3	16	1	3
V. Rosholt	101	67	41	9	2	0
T. Alban	96	69	122	125	29	20
T. Almond	63	9	78	99	48	11
T. Amherst	180	8	216	122	72	30
T. Belmont	98	16	48	75	90	18
T. Buena Vista	87	8	196	166	70	26
T. Carson	75	47	127	204	60	43
T. Dewey	80	18	108	179	84	38
T. Eau Pleine	99	30	103	150	84	26
T. Grant	87	45	289	283	141	55
T. Hull	173	125	942	876	126	78
T. Lanark	240	39	131	248	115	19
T. Linwood	85	25	213	140	57	6
T. New Hope	97	15	58	75	81	3
T. Pine Grove	78	45	161	102	29	4
T. Plover	59	28	173	258	78	42
T. Sharon	88	82	188	319	133	40
T. Stockton	159	16	374	366	227	65
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>5,289</b>	<b>2,752</b>	<b>8,114</b>	<b>9,242</b>	<b>3,829</b>	<b>1,846</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>508,867</b>	<b>437,565</b>	<b>657,809</b>	<b>634,589</b>	<b>331,651</b>	<b>147,888</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021

**Table 11: Housing Units: Structure Type**

Minor Civil Division	Single Family	2-Unit	3 to 19 units	Over 20 units	Mobile Homes	Other
C. Stevens Point	5,335	1,156	1,923	636	237	8
V. Plover	3,461	206	1,698	140	178	0
V. Whiting	525	7	47	98	2	0
V. Park Ridge	210	6	0	0	0	0
V. Almond	150	22	14	1	6	0
V. Amherst	374	19	134	0	0	0
V. Amherst Jct.	101	7	5	0	1	0
V. Junction City	145	9	12	0	28	0
V. Nelsonville	70	0	3	0	6	0
V. Rosholt	180	1	39	0	0	0
T. Alban	426	4	0	0	31	0
T. Almond	278	0	0	0	30	0
T. Amherst	619	0	0	0	9	0
T. Belmont	298	0	0	5	42	0
T. Buena Vista	504	0	0	0	49	0
T. Carson	535	1	7	0	13	0
T. Dewey	455	0	2	0	50	0
T. Eau Pleine	444	2	14	0	32	0
T. Grant	847	21	0	0	32	0
T. Hull	2,011	90	0	0	219	0
T. Lanark	750	0	0	0	42	0
T. Linwood	516	0	2	0	8	0
T. New Hope	325	0	0	0	4	0
T. Pine Grove	309	0	0	0	108	2
T. Plover	559	0	0	0	79	0
T. Sharon	793	33	0	0	24	0
T. Stockton	1,075	5	0	0	127	0
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>21,295</b>	<b>1,589</b>	<b>3,900</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>1,357</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>1,924,685</b>	<b>170,039</b>	<b>326,001</b>	<b>210,212</b>	<b>86,592</b>	<b>840</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021

## Value Characteristics

### Median Home Value

Median Home Value is a way to measure one aspect of the County's cost of living relative to the state, and how the cost of living varies between communities within the County. Median home value ranged from \$99,400 in the Village of Almond to \$261,000 in the Town of Carson. The Countywide Median was \$184,900 in 2021, which was lower than the statewide median of \$200,400. Between 1990 and 2021, the countywide median home value increased 214.5 percent, which is slightly lower than 220.6 percent statewide. Many of the County's Towns saw the biggest increase in value, with the Town of New Hope's median home value increasing by 319.6 percent during this time. According to the U.S. Inflation Calculator, the rate of inflation between 1990 and 2023 was 132.1 percent. While interest rate, credit score, down payment, insurance and maintenance costs, and property taxes all impact the affordability of housing, most communities in the County saw home values appreciate at a rate higher than the rate of inflation. This results in a countywide increase in median home value of \$126,100, which is slightly lower than the statewide increase of \$137,900. See Table 14.

While Census data is useful for evaluating long-term trends, data is self-reported, and housing has increased in value since the most recent available data from 2021. According to the Wisconsin Realtors Association (WRA), the median sales price of a home in Portage County reached \$242,000 in 2022, and the estimated median of \$219,500 in 2021 is considerably higher than the U.S. Census estimates. By comparison, the median sales prices for a home in Wisconsin was \$240,000 in 2021, which increased to \$264,875 in 2022. Therefore, it is likely that housing is less affordable than the U.S. Census estimates in Table 14.

### Monthly Housing Costs

Nationwide, households are considered cost-burdened if they spend over 30 percent of their income on housing. Although median home value helps measure the affordability of housing in Portage County, it only includes owner-occupied units. Measuring the number of cost-burdened households over time includes all renters and owners, and it indicates if the county is getting more or less affordable over time. Generally, renter households tend to be more likely to be cost burdened since they often have lower incomes and can't predict how much rent will increase year-to-year. Additionally, seniors living on fixed income may find their homes to be less affordable as maintenance costs add up.

Table 15 displays the percentage of owner- and renter-occupied households that are cost burdened for 2010 and 2021. There appears to be no pattern between the share of households that are cost burdened and whether the community is urban or rural. There are fewer cost burdened owners and renters in 2021 compared to 2010, and there are about 5 percent fewer households in Portage County than in statewide estimates who are cost burdened. The County had a similar share of households in 2021 who were cost burdened compared to statewide totals. Overall, Portage County has a similar or slightly lower rate of cost burdened households when compared to statewide figures, but with inflation and an increase of housing prices since 2021, these figures have likely risen as of 2023.

**Table 12: Median Home Value**

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2021	1990-2010 % Change	1990-2010 Net Change	2010-2021 % Change	2010-2021 Net Change
C. Stevens Point	\$58,700	\$80,800	\$115,900	\$155,600	97.4%	\$57,200	34.3%	\$39,700
V. Plover	\$71,400	\$118,200	\$155,100	\$192,200	117.2%	\$83,700	23.9%	\$37,100
V. Whiting	\$61,100	\$97,000	\$136,700	\$172,700	123.7%	\$75,600	26.3%	\$36,000
V. Park Ridge	\$78,700	\$126,000	\$146,900	\$225,700	86.7%	\$68,200	53.6%	\$78,800
V. Almond	\$34,000	\$65,200	\$84,400	\$99,400	148.2%	\$50,400	17.8%	\$15,000
V. Amherst	\$45,300	\$91,900	\$123,600	\$169,900	172.8%	\$78,300	37.5%	\$46,300
V. Amherst Jct.	\$52,700	\$98,800	\$124,200	\$232,100	135.7%	\$71,500	86.9%	\$107,900
V. Junction City	\$38,700	\$69,000	\$83,400	\$105,600	115.5%	\$44,700	26.6%	\$22,200
V. Nelsonville	\$40,000	\$82,500	\$134,600	\$106,300	236.5%	\$94,600	-21.0%	-\$28,300
V. Rosholt	\$39,300	\$64,300	\$93,100	\$120,200	136.9%	\$53,800	29.1%	\$27,100
T. Alban	\$47,300	\$87,900	\$138,400	\$178,800	192.6%	\$91,100	29.2%	\$40,400
T. Almond	\$44,600	\$100,600	\$152,100	\$194,400	241.0%	\$107,500	27.8%	\$42,300
T. Amherst	\$63,400	\$106,000	\$184,500	\$244,000	191.0%	\$121,100	32.2%	\$59,500
T. Belmont	\$41,400	\$93,500	\$153,100	\$188,300	269.8%	\$111,700	23.0%	\$35,200
T. Buena Vista	\$52,400	\$94,100	\$153,300	\$222,600	192.6%	\$100,900	45.2%	\$69,300
T. Carson	\$59,100	\$96,600	\$153,700	\$261,000	160.1%	\$94,600	69.8%	\$107,300
T. Dewey	\$59,100	\$121,400	\$175,600	\$246,000	197.1%	\$116,500	40.1%	\$70,400
T. Eau Pleine	\$50,600	\$129,700	\$181,500	\$253,100	258.7%	\$130,900	39.4%	\$71,600
T. Grant	\$56,200	\$96,500	\$143,900	\$173,700	156.0%	\$87,700	20.7%	\$29,800
T. Hull	\$70,500	\$117,300	\$156,600	\$188,500	122.1%	\$86,100	20.4%	\$31,900
T. Lanark	\$48,000	\$93,100	\$149,400	\$206,500	211.3%	\$101,400	38.2%	\$57,100
T. Linwood	\$63,400	\$112,900	\$161,500	\$215,900	154.7%	\$98,100	33.7%	\$54,400
T. New Hope	\$47,500	\$109,400	\$199,300	\$247,400	319.6%	\$151,800	24.1%	\$48,100
T. Pine Grove	\$38,800	\$67,300	\$86,500	\$118,800	122.9%	\$47,700	37.3%	\$32,300
T. Plover	\$40,400	\$116,600	\$165,400	\$240,400	309.4%	\$125,000	45.3%	\$75,000
T. Sharon	\$58,700	\$109,900	\$174,900	\$231,900	198.0%	\$116,200	32.6%	\$57,000
T. Stockton	\$61,300	\$108,900	\$168,500	\$235,000	174.9%	\$107,200	39.5%	\$66,500
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>\$58,800</b>	<b>\$98,300</b>	<b>\$143,100</b>	<b>\$184,900</b>	<b>143.4%</b>	<b>\$84,300</b>	<b>29.2%</b>	<b>\$41,800</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>\$62,500</b>	<b>\$112,200</b>	<b>\$169,400</b>	<b>\$200,400</b>	<b>171.0%</b>	<b>\$106,900</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>\$31,000</b>

Source: U.S. Census 1990 &amp; 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 13: Percent of Households who are Cost Burdened**

Minor Civil Division	2010		2021	
	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter
C. Stevens Point	18.5%	54.0%	16.6%	51.2%
V. Plover	14.4%	31.5%	9.2%	32.0%
V. Whiting	19.3%	44.9%	16.6%	42.0%
V. Park Ridge	32.0%	60.0%	8.2%	25.0%
V. Almond	20.2%	22.2%	8.2%	18.8%
V. Amherst	27.0%	26.1%	7.6%	35.9%
V. Amherst Jct.	21.8%	0.0%	10.5%	0.0%
V. Junction City	9.5%	31.4%	19.6%	51.0%
V. Nelsonville	21.5%	71.4%	10.2%	0.0%
V. Rosholt	26.2%	24.2%	11.2%	19.3%
T. Alban	18.9%	50.0%	18.2%	46.2%
T. Almond	22.4%	15.0%	19.5%	13.9%
T. Amherst	25.4%	17.9%	20.9%	26.3%
T. Belmont	26.4%	80.0%	20.7%	29.4%
T. Buena Vista	17.6%	9.1%	15.3%	0.0%
T. Carson	28.2%	62.5%	11.8%	85.7%
T. Dewey	29.0%	0.0%	11.7%	27.3%
T. Eau Pleine	21.8%	15.0%	13.4%	13.9%
T. Grant	20.5%	12.2%	14.5%	51.1%
T. Hull	23.0%	33.6%	10.6%	26.9%
T. Lanark	30.0%	48.3%	10.0%	43.8%
T. Linwood	22.2%	100.0%	12.4%	20.0%
T. New Hope	24.7%	0.0%	18.3%	16.7%
T. Pine Grove	26.1%	21.1%	16.6%	19.4%
T. Plover	17.3%	22.0%	15.6%	25.4%
T. Sharon	23.6%	29.3%	18.9%	38.1%
T. Stockton	23.2%	0.0%	14.8%	24.2%
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>45.8%</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>49.4%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>43.3%</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

## Occupancy Characteristics

### Owner Occupied Housing Units

Owner-occupied housing units typically allow households to build long-term wealth while enjoying more living space. Owner occupancy is slightly higher in Portage County compared to statewide, with 70 percent of households being owner-occupied. This rate has remained relatively stable over time, and it is typical for there to be higher rates of owner occupancy in rural areas where there are fewer rentals, and lower rates in urban areas where there are more rental units, especially when a college campus is present. Portage County reflected this pattern, with owner occupancy rates ranging from 52.9 percent in the City of Stevens Point to 96.6 percent in the Town of Hull. See Table 16.

### Vacancy Status and Seasonal Units

Vacancy rates impact the availability of housing for renters and owners alike. In 2021, the vacancy rate in Portage County was 6.5 percent, which was considerably lower than the statewide rate of 10.9 percent. However, the state's high percentage of vacant housing units is due to its high concentration of seasonal housing units, especially on lakefront properties in the northern half of the state. This is less common in Portage County, but still encountered in communities like the Towns of Alban, Belmont, and Eau Pleine. Other reasons for housing units being vacant include the unit being vacant between one renter or owner moving out and another moving in or being rented but not actively occupied. Monitoring the County's vacancy rate over time ensures that there are enough housing units for those within the County looking to move, or for newcomers moving to the County. It also impacts local companies looking to recruit workers relocating from other regions. See Table 17.

**Table 14: Percent of Housing Units that are Owner-Occupied**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2000-2021
C. Stevens Point	52.3%	52.0%	52.5%	0.2%
V. Plover	67.2%	64.8%	59.3%	-7.9%
V. Whiting	74.5%	68.4%	75.5%	1.0%
V. Park Ridge	93.4%	95.3%	84.2%	-9.2%
V. Almond	69.8%	65.5%	78.4%	8.6%
V. Amherst	63.3%	70.3%	66.7%	3.4%
V. Amherst Jct.	80.7%	92.0%	77.5%	-3.2%
V. Junction City	67.5%	66.5%	64.6%	-2.9%
V. Nelsonville	77.8%	90.3%	78.7%	0.9%
V. Rosholt	71.2%	80.5%	64.4%	-6.8%
T. Alban	90.5%	97.1%	91.0%	0.5%
T. Almond	86.3%	87.2%	85.3%	-1.0%
T. Amherst	90.5%	90.2%	94.9%	4.4%
T. Belmont	89.2%	88.8%	86.8%	-2.4%
T. Buena Vista	90.9%	90.9%	93.6%	2.7%
T. Carson	91.4%	95.6%	95.2%	3.8%
T. Dewey	91.0%	91.6%	89.1%	-1.9%
T. Eau Pleine	86.6%	90.4%	85.9%	-0.7%
T. Grant	91.3%	90.9%	93.1%	1.8%
T. Hull	89.1%	91.5%	96.6%	7.5%
T. Lanark	87.9%	86.6%	91.5%	3.6%
T. Linwood	94.6%	95.0%	95.5%	0.9%
T. New Hope	88.1%	88.7%	94.3%	6.2%
T. Pine Grove	86.8%	71.4%	85.6%	-1.2%
T. Plover	89.4%	87.0%	87.4%	-2.0%
T. Sharon	88.9%	91.6%	91.2%	2.3%
T. Stockton	90.3%	96.4%	92.5%	2.2%
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>70.9%</b>	<b>70.1%</b>	<b>70.0%</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>68.4%</b>	<b>68.7%</b>	<b>67.4%</b>	<b>-1.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021



**Table 15: Vacant and Seasonal Housing Units**

Minor Civil Division	Percent of Total Housing Units that are Vacant			Percent of Vacant Housing Units that are Seasonal		
	2010	2021	% Change 2010-2021	2010	2021	% Change 2010-2021
C. Stevens Point	6.8%	5.8%	-1.0%	2.8%	6.3%	3.5%
V. Plover	2.7%	1.4%	-1.3%	0.0%	45.6%	45.6%
V. Whiting	1.4%	10.0%	8.6%	30.0%	0.0%	-30.0%
V. Park Ridge	12.7%	6.0%	-6.7%	90.3%	0.0%	-90.3%
V. Almond	7.0%	11.4%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
V. Amherst	8.9%	9.9%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
V. Amherst Jct.	5.9%	2.6%	-3.3%	100.0%	0.0%	-100.0%
V. Junction City	25.5%	18.6%	-6.9%	27.8%	0.0%	-27.8%
V. Nelsonville	8.9%	5.1%	-3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
V. Rosholt	13.6%	18.2%	4.6%	0.0%	17.5%	17.5%
T. Alban	23.2%	30.2%	7.0%	85.1%	95.7%	10.6%
T. Almond	13.6%	14.0%	0.4%	64.3%	60.5%	-3.8%
T. Amherst	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%	61.7%	52.4%	-9.3%
T. Belmont	18.8%	23.2%	4.4%	72.7%	71.3%	-1.5%
T. Buena Vista	7.7%	9.9%	2.2%	23.5%	67.3%	43.7%
T. Carson	10.5%	5.8%	-4.7%	33.9%	46.9%	13.0%
T. Dewey	6.0%	3.7%	-2.3%	20.0%	68.4%	48.4%
T. Eau Pleine	17.5%	24.8%	7.3%	48.0%	59.8%	11.8%
T. Grant	5.8%	6.3%	0.5%	80.5%	0.0%	-80.5%
T. Hull	0.0%	2.1%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
T. Lanark	14.6%	9.2%	-5.4%	61.0%	61.6%	0.7%
T. Linwood	6.3%	7.0%	0.7%	50.0%	51.4%	1.4%
T. New Hope	30.3%	14.9%	-15.4%	97.6%	49.0%	-48.6%
T. Pine Grove	6.5%	12.2%	5.7%	60.7%	19.6%	-41.1%
T. Plover	7.1%	10.5%	3.4%	58.3%	43.3%	-15.0%
T. Sharon	6.2%	10.1%	3.9%	50.0%	64.0%	14.0%
T. Stockton	3.1%	2.4%	-0.7%	42.9%	0.0%	-42.9%
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>-0.4%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>-0.1%</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>-1.4%</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>57.9%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

## **Demand Characteristics**

### Median Age of Population

Globally, an aging population in developed countries continues to impact the labor force and quality and availability of services. The median age of Portage County's residents is 37.6, which is lower than the statewide median of 39.6. This is, however, impacted by the presence of college students, many of whom are not year-round residents or long-term residents. As a result, the City of Stevens Point's median age is 27.5 years old, and the Village of Plover's median age is 36.3 years old. Most other communities in the county have median ages in the 40s and 50s, indicating high rates of "empty nest" and retired households, which are expected to continue increasing. Nearly all communities in the County saw an increase in median age between 2000 and 2021, and this trend can be exacerbated by young adults leaving the county to attend school or start a career and/or family elsewhere. See Table 18.

As households age, housing needs may shift, requiring more senior-oriented housing located near clinics, churches, and other services associated with urban areas, or new transportation needs for rural and urban areas as older residents become less inclined to drive. Barrier-free and low maintenance housing units, along with various degrees of assistance, are typical features of senior housing units, which are expected to increase in demand in the coming years.

### Persons per Household

Across the nation, the average household size is decreasing. This impacts housing demand as housing demand can still increase in a community even if the overall population does not grow. Overall, Portage County's average household size decreased by 8.3 percent from 2.53 persons per household in 2000 to 2.32 in 2021, while the average Wisconsin household size decreased more slowly at a rate of 4.4 percent from 2.50 persons per household in 2000 to 2.39 in 2021. The Town of Buena Vista saw the biggest decrease in household size during this time (-15.6 percent) while the Village of Almond saw the biggest increase (11.2 percent). Although this trend is expected to continue, the County's good schools and reasonable cost of living may eventually attract younger adults who grew up in the County looking for an ideal place to raise children. See Table 19.

Table 16: Median Age

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2000-2021	Net Change 2000-2021
C. Stevens Point	25.7	25.9	27.5	7.0%	1.8
V. Plover	32.1	36.0	36.3	13.1%	4.2
V. Whiting	43.9	52.2	46.6	6.2%	2.7
V. Park Ridge	46.9	44.4	41.9	-10.7%	-5.0
V. Almond	35.9	36.8	35.7	-0.6%	-0.2
V. Amherst	34.2	35.0	40.3	17.8%	6.1
V. Amherst Jct.	31.1	36.7	35.5	14.1%	4.4
V. Junction City	34.2	28.5	36.5	6.7%	2.3
V. Nelsonville	32.8	31.4	33.3	1.5%	0.5
V. Rosholt	30.9	44.0	43.9	42.1%	13.0
T. Alban	38.1	47.8	49.4	29.7%	11.3
T. Almond	37.9	38.1	55.8	47.2%	17.9
T. Amherst	41.0	43.9	46.4	13.2%	5.4
T. Belmont	39.3	49.7	49.3	25.4%	10.0
T. Buena Vista	37.0	38.1	52.5	41.9%	15.5
T. Carson	38.1	47.9	51.2	34.4%	13.1
T. Dewey	38.5	38.8	46.6	21.0%	8.1
T. Eau Pleine	39.4	48.5	48.5	23.1%	9.1
T. Grant	38.1	43.2	44.6	17.1%	6.5
T. Hull	37.1	44.4	48.9	31.8%	11.8
T. Lanark	36.8	39.3	45.5	23.6%	8.7
T. Linwood	38.3	41.1	52.3	36.6%	14.0
T. New Hope	40.5	46.5	49.8	23.0%	9.3
T. Pine Grove	37.3	37.1	34.9	-6.4%	-2.4
T. Plover	37.3	41.3	40.6	8.8%	3.3
T. Sharon	37.2	43.1	50.2	34.9%	13.0
T. Stockton	36.6	42.1	43.8	19.7%	7.2
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>3.5</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

**Table 17: Average Household Size**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2000-2021	Net Change 2000-2021
C. Stevens Point	2.29	2.39	2.27	-0.9%	-0.02
V. Plover	2.65	2.54	2.39	-9.8%	-0.26
V. Whiting	2.39	2.10	2.40	0.4%	0.01
V. Park Ridge	2.30	2.22	2.27	-1.3%	-0.03
V. Almond	2.32	2.53	2.58	11.2%	0.26
V. Amherst	2.46	2.53	2.14	-13.0%	-0.32
V. Amherst Jct.	2.83	2.65	2.62	-7.4%	-0.21
V. Junction City	2.35	2.65	2.42	3.0%	0.07
V. Nelsonville	2.80	3.19	2.57	-8.2%	-0.23
V. Rosholt	2.75	2.36	2.57	-6.5%	-0.18
T. Alban	2.63	2.44	2.55	-3.0%	-0.08
T. Almond	2.73	2.73	1.96	-28.2%	-0.77
T. Amherst	2.68	2.52	2.57	-4.1%	-0.11
T. Belmont	2.52	2.12	2.27	-9.9%	-0.25
T. Buena Vista	2.76	2.95	2.33	-15.6%	-0.43
T. Carson	2.71	2.29	2.46	-9.2%	-0.25
T. Dewey	2.61	2.70	2.40	-8.0%	-0.21
T. Eau Pleine	2.80	2.51	2.54	-9.3%	-0.26
T. Grant	2.69	2.57	2.33	-13.4%	-0.36
T. Hull	2.78	2.51	2.33	-16.2%	-0.45
T. Lanark	2.63	2.51	2.48	-5.7%	-0.15
T. Linwood	2.78	2.90	2.38	-14.4%	-0.40
T. New Hope	2.60	2.51	2.34	-10.0%	-0.26
T. Pine Grove	2.63	2.57	2.82	7.2%	0.19
T. Plover	2.64	2.82	2.73	3.4%	0.09
T. Sharon	2.81	2.52	2.60	-7.5%	-0.21
T. Stockton	2.94	2.68	2.55	-13.3%	-0.39
<b>Portage Co.</b>	<b>2.53</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>2.32</b>	<b>-8.3%</b>	<b>-0.21</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.41</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>-4.4%</b>	<b>-0.11</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 &amp; 2021

## Housing Programs

The following is a compilation of state and federal funding opportunities that may be relevant to housing projects within the area. This is not an exhaustive list of the grants and loans available, and some private funding options may exist.

### Wisconsin Department of Administration

#### **Community Development Block Grant-Housing Revolving Loan Fund Program**

Since 1982, over 270 communities in the State of Wisconsin have received Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for housing rehabilitation and homebuyer assistance through the State CDBG Small Cities Housing Program. CDBG housing funds are loaned to low and moderate-income (LMI) households, and to local landlords in exchange for an agreement to rent to LMI tenants at an affordable rate. Once CDBG housing loans are repaid to the community, they are identified as CDBG Housing Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs).

Under the CDBG housing RLF, homeowners in owner-occupied dwellings and homebuyers receive 0 percent interest loans that are either deferred or low monthly payments. Rental rehabilitation loans are 0 to 3 percent monthly installment loans. Loans are due in full when the title changes or when the home ceases to be the homeowner's primary residence or when the property is sold. CDBG housing funds can only be used for CDBG eligible activities.

#### **Community Development Block Grant-Small Cities Housing Program**

The Wisconsin Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Division of Housing (DOH), provides grants to general purpose units of local government for housing programs which principally benefit low and moderate income (LMI) households. These funds are primarily used for rehabilitation of housing units, homebuyer assistance, and small neighborhood public facility projects. CDBG dollars are flexible and responsive to local needs.

In addition to addressing LMI housing needs, CDBG can be used to leverage other programs or serve as a local match. The grant also can be used as an incentive to involve the private sector in local community development efforts or to respond to area needs. The CDBG program often serves as a catalyst for other community development projects.

## Homeless Programs

The Wisconsin Department of Administration administers the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), Housing Assistance Program (HAP), and Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). Collectively, these three programs are referred to the EHH Program. The programs assist with costs associated with finding housing for the homeless. Additional funding sources can be found in local nonprofits and churches.

### **HOME Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program**

The Division of Housing (DOH) has identified homeownership and the conservation of quality owner-occupied and rental housing as top priorities for allocating federal and state housing resources. A program was established to provide essential home purchase assistance and necessary home rehabilitation, and other vital improvements for dwelling units occupied by low- and moderate-income households. The source of funds is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). The Wisconsin Department of Administration, DOH awards these funds to local units of government and local housing organizations through a biennial funding cycle.

### **Housing-Related Consumer Protection Services**

The Bureau of Consumer Protection is responsible for the investigation of unfair and deceptive business practices and handles individual consumer complaints involving landlord/tenant complaints, and home improvement transactions. The Bureau is housed in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

### **Neighborhood Stabilization Program**

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program provides assistance to acquire and redevelop foreclosed properties that might otherwise become sources of abandonment and blight within their communities. HUD is requiring that these funds be targeted to communities with the most severe neighborhood problems associated with the foreclosure crisis.

### Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

#### **Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)**

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), like HOME, aims to encourage the production and rehabilitation of affordable housing. It provides an incentive for private entities to develop affordable housing. The credit reduces the federal taxes owed by an individual or corporation for an investment made in low-income rental housing. The amount of the tax deduction is tied to the proportion of low-income residents in the housing produced. The credit is paid out over 15 years to investors in the housing project. LIHTC provides funding for the construction of new buildings or the rehabilitation or conversion of existing structures. To qualify, a property must set aside a certain share of its units for low-income households.

#### **Home Improvement Advantage Loan**

With this loan, a homeowner can borrow up to \$15,000 to improve the quality and value of their home. The borrower must have no late mortgage payments in the past six months, a credit score of 620 or better, total mortgage debt cannot exceed 110 percent of value, and household must meet WHEDA Home Improvement Advantage income limits.

## **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**

Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers are administered by several housing authorities within Portage County. Eligible families are issued vouchers that they can use to secure housing in the private market. Having found a suitable housing unit which meets minimum health and safety standards, where the owner has agreed to rent under the program, the eligible family uses its voucher to cover the part of the rent beyond the portion it pays, usually 30 percent of its income. The landlord receives a subsidy directly for the portion of the Fair Market Rent not paid by the tenant. The voucher-holder signs a lease for a term of, at least, one year and the landlord signs a contract with their local housing authority, running concurrently with the lease. Eligibility for the program is generally limited to families with incomes below 50 percent of the median for the county in which they reside. The program is open to any housing unit where the owner agrees to participate and where the unit satisfies the standards. Congress is considering replacing the current voucher program with a block grant to states. If enacted, eligibility criteria for the program may change.

## **U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD)**

**Section 502 Homeownership Direct Loan** program of the Rural Health Service (RHS) provides loans to help low-income households purchase and prepare sites or purchase, build, repair, renovate, or relocate homes.

**Section 502 Mutual Self-Help Housing Loans** are designed to help very low-income households construct their own homes. Targeted families include those who cannot buy affordable housing through conventional means. Participating families perform approximately 65 percent of the construction under qualified supervision.

**Section 504 Very-Low-Income Housing Repair Program** provides loans and grants to low-income homeowners to repair, improve, or modernize their homes. Improvements must make the homes safer and more sanitary or remove health or safety hazards.

**Section 515 Multi-Family Housing Loan Program** supports the construction of multi-family housing for low-income residents. Under the program, has been in operation in Wisconsin since 1969, USDA underwrites fifty-year mortgages at a one percent interest rate in exchange for an agreement to provide housing for low and very low-income residents.

**Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance** program provides an additional subsidy for households with incomes too low to pay RHS-subsidized rents.

**Section 523 Rural Housing Site Loans** are designed to aid public non-profit and private organizations to acquire sites for affordable housing.

**Section 533 Rural Housing Preservation Grants** are designed to assist sponsoring organizations in the repair or rehabilitation of low-income or very low-income housing. Assistance is available for landlords or members of a cooperative.

**Single Family Home Loan Guarantees** are designed to assist and encourage lenders to extend 100 percent loans to moderate- and low-income rural homebuyers by providing a 90 percent loan note guarantee to lenders to reduce the potential risk of extending full loans to these potential homebuyers.

### Other Programs

In addition to administering some state and federal programs, the North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP) assists with housing through programs like the Emergency Housing Assistance Fund, which has the goal of preventing homelessness if someone has a documented crisis and can't afford rent. Other homelessness programs exist in the County through various agencies and non-profits. Weatherization programs also help pay for energy efficient upgrades to older housing stock, helping existing homeowners keep housing costs in check as energy prices rise.

### Emerging Federal Policies

To address inflation and housing issues, the federal government continues to roll out new plans and programs. For example, the Housing Supply Action Plan, announced in May 2022, has the following goals:

- Reward jurisdictions that have reformed zoning and land use policies.
- Deploy new financing mechanisms to build and preserve more housing where financing gaps currently exist (manufactured housing, ADUs, 2–4-unit properties, and smaller multifamily buildings).
- Expand and improve existing forms of federal financing, including for affordable multifamily development and preservation.
- Ensure that more government-owned supply of homes and other housing goes to owners who will live in them (or non-profits who will rehab them, not large institutional investors).
- Work with the private sector to address supply chain challenges and improve building techniques to finish construction in 2022 on the highest number of new homes in any year since 2006.

Transportation funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), CDBG, LIHTC, HOME, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and other Department of Transportation (DOT) and Economic Development Authority (EDA) programs will be used strategically to promote new housing development and revitalization in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Additionally, the plan calls for fixing supply chain issues and recruiting more workers for construction jobs. Overall, communities in this study should continue to monitor, apply for, and implement emerging programs that are announced after the completion of this study as needed.

### Other Strategies

Land trusts, land banks, development bonuses, employer-sponsored housing, tax incremental financing, and other strategies may be available to encourage the construction of desired housing.



## Goal and Objectives

Goals and Objectives are taken from the previous comprehensive plan. The Steering Committee should review and modify this list as needed.

### Goal

1. Allow for an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of all citizens.

### Objectives

1. Meet the housing needs of senior citizens, those with special needs, and low-income households, locating these housing units near active transportation (cycling, walking, etc.) when feasible.
2. Allow for adequate, affordable housing in every community.
3. Housing development takes into consideration the protection of natural resources and open spaces.
4. Maintain or improve the quality and integrity of existing housing and neighborhoods.
5. Local units of government work together to develop creative ways to plan for and share the benefits of growth across municipal boundaries.
6. Develop an ongoing educational program for municipal boards and the public related to housing issues.
7. Neighborhood design enhances community character.

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## Chapter 3: Transportation

### Background

#### Previous Planning Efforts

##### The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), 2021

This current federal transportation program authorizes up to \$108 billion to support federal public transportation programs, including \$91 billion in guaranteed funding. It also reauthorizes surface transportation programs for FY 2022-2026 and provides advance appropriations for certain programs. Major goals include improving safety, modernizing aging transit infrastructure and fleets, investing in cleaner transportation, and improving equity in communities with limited transportation access. Other federal legislation that frames transportation planning includes the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA); the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); and the Clean Air Act. Environmental Justice is an applicable executive order that attempts to ensure that transportation planning and programming includes underrepresented groups such as minority and low-income populations.

##### Connect 2050: Let's Connect Wisconsin, 2022

Connect 2050 is the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) long-range transportation plan for the state. Adopted in 2022, the plan addresses all forms of transportation over a 20-year planning horizon: highways, local roads, air, water, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit. It replaces Connections 2030.

##### Locally Developed, Coordinated Public Transit – Human Service Transportation Plan, 2019-2023

Portage County developed this five-year plan that was facilitated by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. The plan analyzes service gaps and needs in public transit and human services transportation and proposes strategies to address the gaps and needs.

##### Portage County Countywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, 2014

Portage County's Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan identifies needs and proposes improvements to the County's bicycle and pedestrian network. The plan's goals include:

- Strengthen bicycle and pedestrian connections while increasing nonmotorized commuting.
- Maintain and enhance infrastructure and safety.
- Enhance intergovernmental cooperation and coordination of transportation facilities.
- Encourage education and enforcement regarding high-risk activities for all road users.
- Monitor the implementation of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan.

Portage County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan has an exhaustive list of proposed improvements and new connections throughout the County along with estimated costs and potential funding sources.

### Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, 2018

This plan is a region-wide effort to improve bicycling and walking across communities within North Central Wisconsin. The plan assesses existing conditions related to bicycling and walking, identifies other potential trail and route user groups, identifies routes, and describes policies and programs to assist local governments in improving bicycling and walking to promote connectivity between communities and destinations throughout North Central Wisconsin.

The Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan contains the following four region-wide goals:

- **Mobility.** The Trail System must enhance bicyclists' ability to get around the Region including access to key destinations such as schools, parks, retail areas, and other public facilities.
- **Functionality.** New off-road routes, improved existing street routes, signage and marking, and route promotion must be combined to function as a system that is easy and desirable to use.
- **Safety.** Every bicyclist and pedestrian in the North Central Region deserves a system that is safe for travel. Improving bicyclist and pedestrian safety was a top priority of the 2004 North Central Wisconsin Regional Bicycle Facilities Plan.
- **Connectivity.** The Trail System must provide a seamless transportation system on multiple levels including; internally to all areas of a community; externally to outlying neighbors around the Region; and becoming a part of the bigger picture of a statewide trails network.

### Regional Livability Plan, 2015

Transportation is one of four elements included in the Regional Livability Plan (RLP), adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2015. The Transportation Assessment Report, a component of the plan, looks in detail at the transportation network throughout the ten-county region and identifies trends and issues facing transportation.

The Regional Livability Plan addresses three issues: the modes of transportation to work, the age of drivers in the region, and the high transportation maintenance cost. The three transportation goals of the RLP are as follows:

- Provide and improve transportation access to people of all ages and abilities to ensure lifelong mobility and accessibility.
- Fund the maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
- Enhance the regional economy by supporting airports and freight rail.

### State Trails Network Plan, 2003

This 2001 document (revised in 2003) clarifies the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) role and strategy in the provision of all types of trails. The plan identifies a series of potential trail corridors that would link existing trails, public lands, natural features, and communities. This statewide network of

interconnected trails would be owned and maintained by municipalities, private entities, and partnerships of the two. Preserving transportation corridors, such as old rail lines, is specifically discussed as a very important strategy in the creation of recreational and alternative transportation corridors.

## **Issues**

### Desire for Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements

The County's Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2014) recommends improvements to countywide infrastructure. However, unsafe conditions still exist in many parts of the County.

### Dispersed Population

Residents of smaller villages and rural towns often commute to work, raising concerns about future traffic volumes and speeding. In 2016, a proposed USH-10 bypass was cancelled due to a lack of state funding. USH 10 and ISH-39/USH-51 are used heavily during the summer for those traveling to tourist destinations in Northern Wisconsin, and vehicles often pull boats, ATVs, and other recreational vehicles. Traffic congestion is especially pronounced on State Highways 10 and 66, and in other areas throughout the County.

Additionally, disabled and senior households in these areas may not be able to drive themselves to more urban parts of the county, where necessities like grocery stores and clinics are more likely to be located. There is also a desire to revitalize these areas to provide jobs closer to home or provide broadband for remote workers. It is also sometimes difficult and expensive to find transportation to medical specialists within one of Portage County's health systems who have offices in other counties.

### Lack of a Countywide Official Map

Wisconsin State Statutes permit counties and municipalities to adopt an Official Map under Section 62.23(6). This map is used when reviewing land division and subdivision requests to ensure that adequate right-of-way is dedicated for future road expansions, reducing future land acquisition expenses. For example, a property that borders a County Highway may be required to dedicate additional frontage if said highway is planned to have a wider future right-of-way to gain subdivision approval.

### Rail and Roadway Conflicts

Rail is essential to supporting the County's economy, but trains frequently block intersections for extended periods of time. This is especially a concern for West River Drive, Clark Street, and County Highways E and M. County and local governments have little power to regulate railroad crossing, which are under federal control.

### Weight Limits on Roads

A recent State law change allows vehicles to add an extra axle while also increasing maximum weight by 10,000 pounds to 90,000 has raised concern. This is especially true in spring when the ground unfreezes and shifts underneath roads. While relatively few vehicles weigh the maximum amount, the change increases the potential for roads to degrade more rapidly.

## Inventory and Trends

The transportation system in Portage County is comprised of a road network used by automobiles, trucks, and buses, several rail lines and yards, a public airport, and private landing strips. In this section the transportation system is described examining the road network, traffic volumes and commuting patterns, network users and finally other modes. See Map 3.1 and Map 3.1a.

### Road Network

Portage County's roadway network is comprised of about 2,067.1 miles of highways and streets connecting communities and their citizens to businesses and recreational activities throughout the County, as well as to major urban centers in other Counties. Roads are classified in two ways: 1) by jurisdiction and 2) by function. The jurisdictional classification indicates who owns or is responsible for the roadway. The functional classification identifies the role or function the roadway plays in moving traffic.

#### Jurisdictional Classification

Within a jurisdictional framework, the County's roads fall into four major classifications: federal (U.S. Highways abbreviated as USH and Interstate Highways abbreviated ISH), state (state trunk highways, abbreviated as "STH"), county (county trunk highways, abbreviated as "CTH") and city, village, or town streets and roads, which are called local roads. Cities, Towns, and Villages maintain jurisdiction over the greatest mileage of the County's road system (1,344.4 miles) with about 65 percent of the total mileage. County trunk highways make up the next largest category with 443 miles, or 21.4 percent of the system, and State Highways comprise 102.3 miles, or 5 percent of the system. Finally, the presence of two U.S. Highways and an Interstate results in 62.5 miles of federal roads, or 3 percent of the County's road mileage. All remaining mileage (114.8 miles or 5.6 percent) is not managed by any government entity.

Since the 2006 Comprehensive Plan was written, only a few miles of roadway have been added to the system and that has been at the local level. In 2006, there were 1,918.9 miles of roads countywide, not including roads in the "private/other" category. In 2023, there were 33.4 more miles of federal, state, county, and local roads than in 2006, for a total of 1,952.30 miles of public roads. Table 20 gives the mileage breakdown for the jurisdictional classification of roads within Portage County.

**Table 18: Portage County Roadway Miles by Jurisdiction, 2023**

Jurisdictional Class	Mileage	Percent of Total
Federal	62.5	3.0%
State	102.3	5.0%
County	443.0	21.4%
Local	1,344.4	65.0%
Private/Other	114.8	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,067.1</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: WisDOT & NCWRPC

Interstate 39 runs in a north-south direction through the center of the County. The County contains portions of five state trunk highways (13, 22, 34, 54 and 66) and two federal highways (10 and 51), most of which form a “crossroads” in the City of Stevens Point and Village of Plover where the busiest interchanges are located. See Map 3-1 and 3-1a.

#### Functional Classification

A functional classification system groups streets and highways into classes according to the character of service they provide. The current functional classification system used in Wisconsin consists of five classifications that are divided into urban and rural categories. Functional classifications are used to determine eligibility for federal aid. For purposes of functional classification, federal regulations define urban as places of 5,000 or more population, so the rural classifications apply in municipalities with populations below this threshold. Descriptions of each functional class are as follows:

- Principal Arterials serve corridor movements having trip length and travel density characteristics of an interstate of interregional nature. These routes generally serve all urban areas greater than 5,000 population or connect major centers of activity and the highest traffic volumes and the longest trip desires.
- Minor Arterials, in conjunction with principal arterials, serve cities, large communities, and other major traffic generators, providing intracommunity continuity and service to trips of moderate length, with more emphasis on land access than principal arterials.
- Major Collectors provide service to moderate-sized communities and other inter-area traffic generators and link those generators to nearby larger population centers or higher function routes.
- Minor Collectors collect traffic from local roads and provide links to all remaining smaller communities, local important traffic generators, and higher function roads. All developed areas should be within a reasonable distance of a collector road.

- Local Roads comprise all facilities not on one of the higher systems. They serve primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and access to the higher order of systems. Local streets offer the highest level of access, but the lowest level of mobility for automobiles.

Portage County’s principal arterials include ISH 39, USH 10, USH 51, portions of STH 54 and STH 66. Minor arterials include the remaining portions of STH 54 and 66, as well as STH 34. Portions of several county highways and local roads form principal and minor arterials in the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Plover and Whiting. Collectors primarily consist of County Highways and some municipally owned roads, with remaining County Highways and municipally owned roads being classified as local roads. See Map 3-1 Transportation and Table 21 for details.

The distribution of roads within the functional categories falls within current state guidelines. The guidelines suggest that principal arterials should be between 2 and 4 percent, minor arterials 4 to 8 percent, major collectors 5 to 18 percent, minor collectors 5 to 10 percent and local roads 65 to 75 percent of the total system. When combined, guidelines promote that all arterials are between 6 and 12 percent, and all collectors are between 9 and 26 percent. All three functional classifications in Table 21 fit within these guidelines.

**Table 19: Portage County Roadway Miles by Functional Class, 2023**

Functional Class	Mileage	Percent of Total
Arterial	213.8	11.1%
Collector	412.9	21.5%
Local	1,295.3	67.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,922.0</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: WisDOT & NCWRPC

Rustic Roads

The Rustic Road program is a state program administered by WisDOT. WisDOT sees this program as a cooperative venture between state and local governments to identify scenic routes for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. Roads accepted into the program remain under local jurisdiction. To qualify, roadways must have outstanding natural features such as rugged terrain, native vegetation, and wildlife or other cultural or historic qualities that set the road apart. Portage County has one Rustic Road, which is number 17. It consists of 2.7 paved miles of Otto and Morgan Roads south of the Village of Amherst.

Rustic Road designation allows local governments to maintain the road in a rustic state if safety and drivability are maintained. Rustic Roads may be narrower or have more vegetation in the right-of-way than other roads. Maintenance is at local discretion with no oversight from the state. There are no direct financial incentives or penalties from the state in this program, however, WisDOT provides and maintains the Rustic Road signs. Other directional and regulatory signs remain the responsibility of the local unit.



## Surface Conditions

Portage County and many of the local units within the County utilize the PASER system developed by the University of Wisconsin Transportation Information Center for measuring the condition of their roadways. PASER stands for Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating System. Although there are different scales for concrete, asphalt, sealcoating, gravel, and unimproved roads, they are generally based on a scale ranging between "1" (very poor condition) to "10" (excellent condition).

The riding surface of the County Highway system is currently in good condition with the majority (73%) being rated as having good, very good, or excellent surface condition. About 26 percent of roads are in fair condition, and 1 percent are either not rated or in poor or very poor condition. However, this does not consider subsurface conditions in Portage County such as wetness, susceptibility to frost action, some shrink-swell problems and low strength substrata, all of which negatively impact the design life of a roadway.

WisDOT now requires all local units of government to submit road condition rating data every two years as part of the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR). PASER and WISLR are tools that local governments can use to manage pavements for improved decision making in budgeting and maintenance. The Portage County Highway Department uses this information in the development of its long-range highway improvement program, discussed below.

## Bridges

Bridges are critical infrastructure to support the road network. A bridge can be defined as a structure having a clear span of more than twenty feet, designed to convey vehicles (and/or pedestrians) over a watercourse, railroad, public or private right-of-way, or any depression. Structures having a clear span of less than twenty feet are generally designated as culverts.

Culverts function similar to bridges in conveying lanes of travel over underlying features. Culverts are commonly used to carry water under roadways but also serve as pedestrian, bicycle, or cattle underpasses. Culverts range from a small diameter tube to multi-celled box culverts. There are hundreds of culverts throughout the County. A common road maintenance issue with culverts is washout of culverts and roadways during periods of heavy rain.

WisDOT inspects bridges on state trunk highways on a two-year rotation and requires that local units of government have bridges on roads under their jurisdiction inspected every two years by qualified inspectors. The inspections allow WisDOT to monitor the condition of all bridges and prevent any deterioration of structural integrity that might threaten safety or level of service. Bridges with sufficiency ratings of less than 50 are eligible for replacement or rehabilitation, while those of 50 to 80 are only eligible for rehabilitation. WisDOT has an up-to-date inventory of bridges available through its Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR). There are several bridge improvements scheduled in the Six-Year Highway Improvement Program; see Table 22.

## Congestion

Traffic conditions vary considerably depending on the time of day, season, type and location of the roadway, weather, and other factors. The heaviest traffic typically occurs during travel periods most important to the economy as people are traveling to work, businesses are shipping products, or tourists are heading to their destinations. These factors tend to exacerbate the effects of traffic congestion.

Traffic congestion is used by WisDOT as a measure of mobility in the State Highway Plan. Mobility relates to the efficient movement of vehicles along the highway system. Congestion results when roadways are forced to carry more traffic than they were designed to handle safely and efficiently.

The more congested a highway, the less mobility it offers. As congestion increases, travel time increases and mobility declines. As industry increasingly relies on just-in-time delivery of materials and products, congested conditions can have a significant adverse impact on economic development as the reliability of the highway system declines. At the same time the highway system declines, the safety of the system also decreases. Congestion often leads to more crashes resulting from stop and go traffic conditions that foster unsafe driving actions due to increased driver frustration.

For Portage County, the State Highway Plan written in 1999 projected moderate levels of congestion by the year 2020 on several highways, severe congestion on USH-10 east of the City of Stevens Point, and extreme congestion along Business Highway 51 and STH 66 in the City of Stevens Point. Congestion indicates that speeds and distance between vehicles are reduced, constricting traffic flow. Freedom of drivers to maneuver within the traffic stream or enter the highway is noticeably limited. Minor incidents can result in traffic jams because the traffic stream has little space to absorb disruptions.

Since the State Highway Plan was written, some upgrades have been completed to address congestion, such as expanding portions of US-10 to four lanes, for example. Currently, WisDOT has no long-range plans for capacity improvements in these areas. The current budget situation and WisDOT's policy of accepting higher levels of congestion than in the past make it difficult to predict future improvements.

## Crashes & Safety

The number of crashes in Portage County has remained relatively stable around an average of 1,424 per year between 2015 and 2020. There has been an average of 3.7 fatal crashes in Portage County during this time. Table 22 summarizes selected traffic crashes in Portage County. Crashes result in injury, loss of life, and economic loss, as well as demand for police, fire, and ambulance services. Additional losses occur, such as lost wages during recovery, hospital costs, drug costs, rehabilitation costs, professional fees, administrative costs, legal and court costs, and property damage costs.

**Table 20 Summary of Countywide Motor Vehicle Crashes 2015-2020**

Year	Crashes	Fatal Crashes
2015	1,262	0
2016	1,376	2
2017	1,570	5
2018	1,530	8
2019	1,626	3
2020	1,182	4
Average	1,424	3.7

Source: WisDOT, Wisconsin Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES), & NCWRPC

### Access Management

WisDOT manages access along all state trunk highways in Portage County through its connection permit process. The permit process is administered under state statute 86.07 and administrative code Trans 231. The goal of access management is to limit the number and spacing of access points along a roadway. This will reduce the number of potential conflict points and create a more safe and efficient flow of traffic. Some access management techniques include:

- Restricting access points a certain distance from an intersection.
- Limiting the number of access points allowed for each property.
- Requiring shared driveways between adjacent developments.
- Promoting interconnectivity between adjacent parcels.

The County does have a driveway ordinance, which it uses to regulate access onto county highways. Some towns also have driveway ordinances for their local roads; however, these are often more concerned with emergency vehicle access to the property than the impact of access on the roadway. Local governments should consider more actively managing access, particularly those in areas with significant development and or traffic anticipated. Table 23 shows recommended minimum distances between driveways along local roadways. These lane spacings are based on average vehicle acceleration and deceleration rates and are considered necessary to maintain safe traffic operations.

**Table 21: Recommended Spacing between Direct Road Access Points**

Speed Limit	Minimum Driveway Spacing
25	105
30	125
35	150
40	185
45	230
50	275

Source: Institute of Traffic Engineers

Road Design Standards

Roads should be designed for the function they serve. Lightly traveled rural town roads may remain graveled to reduce speed levels and maintain a rural character. Where higher traffic volumes are expected, roads should be paved. Communities should consider the current and potential future usage of a road to determine if minimum design standards will be adequate or if more is needed. WisDOT has multiple resources and guidelines for facility design.

Construction of new or complete reconstruction of existing town roads are required to meet a higher level of design standards than less substantial resurfacing or reconditioning improvements. Examples of resurfacing and reconditioning improvements which may be appropriate for existing town roads include pavement rehabilitation, widening of lanes and shoulders, replacing bridge elements to correct structural deficiencies, bridge deck overlays, bridge and culvert replacement, and other improvements such as minor grading, sub-grade work, and correction of drainage problems.

Proposed Highway Improvements

WisDOT prepares a six-year improvement program that identifies improvement projects for state trunk highways statewide, including Portage County. The County Highway Department prepares its own roadway management plan identifying needed improvements on county highways. The Portage County plan takes a long-range look into the future to anticipate needs. Continually changing needs, funding availability, and political climate affect the implementation of these improvement plans each year. The most recent state six-year improvement program identifies 17 projects within Portage County for the 2023-2028 period, which are shown in Table 23.

**Table 22: WisDOT Six-Year Highway Improvement Program, 2023-2028**

Year	Highway	From	To	Milage	Type of Improvement
2023	STH 66	N. CTH J	STH 49	10.5	Preventative Maintenance
2025	IH 39	STH 54	N. 2 <sup>nd</sup> St	11.1	Resurface
2025	STH 13	2 <sup>nd</sup> St N	CTH P	6.4	Pavement Replacement
2025	STH 66	Bridges B-49-0073 & 0074		0.0	Concrete Overlay
2025	STH 66	Stevens Point Airport	E JCT CTH J	6.0	Resurface
2026	STH 34	Bridge B-49-0092		0.0	Bridge Preventive
2026	STH 66	USH 10 and STH 66 Curbs		7.8	ADA Curb Improvements
2026	STH 161	USH 10	Waupaca Co. Line	7.6	Resurface
2027-28	IH 39	USH 10	STH 34 SB	8.9	Preventative Maintenance
2027-28	STH 34	Oak Hill Rd	CTH DB	9.5	Resurface
2027-28	IH 39	Bridges B-49-57, 145 through 149		0.0	Polymer Deck Overlay
2027-28	STH 49	Cedar Rd	Lake View Rd	1.9	Resurface
2027-28	STH 49	Lake View Rd	STH 66	0.7	Resurface
2027-28	STH 54	Harding Ave	Waupaca Co. Line	16.0	Pavement Replacement
2027-28	USH 10	Bridges B-49-99, 100, 101, 102, B68-76, 144		0.0	Polymer Deck Overlay
2027-28	USH 10	Bridges B-49-103, 104 through 108		0.0	Polymer Deck Overlay
2027-28	USH 10	Bridges B49-109, 110, 113 through 116, 121, 122		0.0	Polymer Deck Overlay

Source: WisDOT

## Traffic Volumes

### Daily Traffic

Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) counts for selected locations on state and county highways in Portage County are shown in Table 25. The counts come from WisDOT's traffic counting program, providing an overview of traffic levels throughout the County. The selected counts do not necessarily reflect the peak traffic location of a given road. WisDOT places counters at selected locations along principal arterials and some higher volume minor arterials every three years. All classified roadways are counted in the County every nine years, which will occur next in 2030. Average Annual Daily Traffic counts are calculated by multiplying raw hourly traffic counts by seasonal, day-of-week, and axle adjustment factors. The daily hourly values are then averaged by hour of the day and the values are summed to create the AADT count.

**Table 23: Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) in Portage County**

Location	Oldest AADT	Date	Most Recent AADT	Date	% Change
USH 10 Between Marsh Rd & CTH E	4,400	2011	6,000	2022	36.4%
STH 34 1.5 Miles N of CTH H	3,500	2008	3,300	2021	-5.7%
I-39/USH 51 S of CTH DB	21,500	2005	21,500	2021	0.0%
STH 34 S of USH 10	2,000	2005	2,600	2021	30.0%
CTH Y S of Marathon Co Line	1,500	2011	640	2021	-57.3%
STH 66 Between STH 49 & CTH A	2,500	2005	2,300	2021	-8.0%
I-39/USH51 Between STH 66 & Bus 51	21,600	2005	26,400	2021	22.2%
I-39/USH 51 Between USH 10 & CTH HH	23,100	2005	29,900	2017	29.4%
STH 66 W Clark St Bridge over WI River	11,700	2005	6,600	2021	-43.6%
USH 10 W 1 Mile W of CTH J	15,100	2005	17,200	2021	13.9%
USH 10 E of CTH A	11,900	2005	14,600	2021	22.7%
I-39/USH 51 Between CTH B & STH 54	15,300	2005	14,100	2021	-7.8%
STH 54 Between Johnson Ave & CTH F	8,900	2008	11,900	2021	33.7%
CTH B Between Kennedy Ave & CTH J	7,100	2011	4,800	2021	-32.4%
STH 54 Between CTH K & Pleasant Dr	3,000	2005	1,900	2021	-36.7%
STH 54 Between CTH BB S & Kennedy Ave	4,300	2008	4,400	2021	2.3%
CTH W East of CTH U	1,200	2011	1,100	2021	-8.3%
CTH W East of I-39/USH 51	1,800	2011	1,500	2021	-16.7%
CTH D E of CTH BB	1,100	2011	1,100	2021	0.0%

Source: WisDOT

Table 25 compares the oldest and most recent traffic counts available on WisDOT's Traffic Counts Map. Traffic volumes throughout Portage County have not changed evenly between locations. For example, traffic volumes on State Highway 54 increased by 33.7 percent in one location and decreased by 36.7 percent in another. In general, traffic volumes increased on ISH-39/USH-51 and USH 10, but decreased on many County Highways. The biggest increase was 36.4 percent on USH 10 between Marsh Road and CTH E, and the biggest decrease was 57.3 percent on CTH Y between STH 66 and Business Highway 51.

There has been a countywide increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) over the past decade and a half. WisDOT reported 2,270,800 vehicle miles traveled daily and 828,800,000 annually for Portage County in 2009. By 2021, this had increased to 2,555,791 vehicle miles traveled daily and 932,863,715 annually, for an increase of 12.6 percent. Factors that contribute to an increase in VMT include population growth, which brings more people and more cars into the County, and tourism, as travelers utilize Portage County's north-south and east-west highways on their way to destinations in other counties.

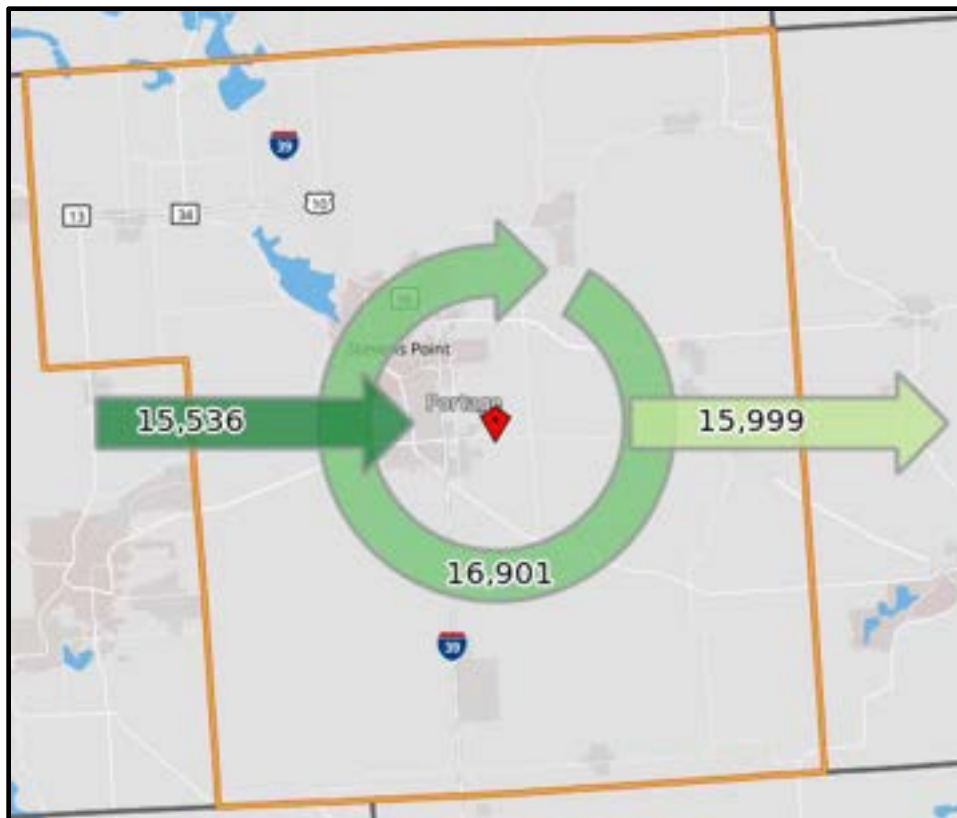
## Commuting Patterns

Below is a summary of commuter statistics from the 2020 U.S. Census-on-the-Map online tool in Table 26 and Figure 10. Portage County is somewhat dependent on surrounding counties for employment opportunities, with 463 more residents commuting to another county than the number of non-residents commuting into the County. Only 52 percent of Portage County’s workforce population works in Portage County, with the other nearly one-half of the population commuting to another County. Altogether, 16,901 Portage County residents work in Portage County out of a total of 32,437 County residents in the workforce, with the remaining 15,999 working residents commuting to other counties. The top counties that Portage County residents commute to are Wood (3,381 commuters) and Marathon (2,458 commuters) Counties, which are also the top two counties that supply workers for Portage County (2,635 and 2,746 workers, respectively). Altogether, an estimated 15,536 workers commute to Portage County every day.

**Table 24: Portage County Commuting Patterns, 2020**

County	Working in Portage County, Living in Listed County	Living in Portage County, Working in Listed County	Net Gain/Loss of Workers
<b>Portage</b>	<b>16,901</b>	<b>16,901</b>	<b>0</b>
Wood	3,381	2,635	746
Marathon	2,458	2,746	-288
Waupaca	1,208	999	209
Dane	461	761	-300
Outagamie	398	1,081	-683
Brown	394	974	-580
Milwaukee	367	591	-224
All Other Locations	6,869	6,212	657
Total	32,437	32,900	-463

Source: 2020 U.S. Census-on-the-Map

**Figure 9: Commuter Inflow and Outflow, 2020**

Source: 2020 U.S. Census-on-the-Map

It is important to note that geography, educational attainment, cost of living, wages, and industry mix impact commuter trends. For example, someone living on the edge of Portage County may only be traveling two miles to work in another county, while someone who lives and works in Portage County could be traveling 12 miles. Overall, commuters impact vehicle traffic volumes and demand for alternative forms of transportation.

## Network Users

### Trucking

According to WisDOT, designated long truck routes within the County include CTH-A, CTH-B, ISH-39, STH-13, STH-22, STH-34, STH-54, STH-66, STH-73, and USH-10. Business Highway 51 is a 65-foot restricted long truck route. These routes provide Portage 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. Mapping these local routes is beyond the scope of this study, and local issues such as safety, weight restriction and noise impacts play significant roles in the designation of local truck routes.



### Long Distance Intercity Bus Service

Lamers Bus Lines currently connects Portage County to the Wausau and Fox Cities areas, with a stop in the City of Stevens Point. WisDOT supports a route connecting the City of Wisconsin Rapids to the City of Stevens Point, where it turns south to connect to the City of Madison, however there is currently no service along this route.

### Transit & Transportation Systems

Several public transit options are available in Portage County through Central Transportation. There is a fixed route bus service that connects the City of Stevens Point, Village of Whiting, and Crossroads Commons in the Village of Plover available to anyone for a small fare. The Portage County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) merged with Stevens Point Transportation Services, which provides these services.

Other transit options specifically serve seniors and persons with disabilities. A volunteer driver program, nutrition program, and grocery shopping program allow those over age 60 or who have a disability to request rides ahead of time through the County Transportation office. A Veterans Program and Point Plus Paratransit Service are also available for those who qualify.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

The Wisconsin State Bicycle Map classifies state and county roads by bicycling conditions, or suitability. Traffic volume and pavement width are the primary factors affecting these conditions. Secondary factors include sight line, truck traffic, and speed limit are also considered when creating these maps. In addition to these maps, the North Central Wisconsin Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan that was adopted in 2018 was created to guide the development of an interconnected bikeway system for the North Central Wisconsin Region including Portage and nine other counties: Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Vilas, and Wood.

Portage County is home to bicycle and pedestrian facilities that serve residents and attract tourism from outside the County. The Green Circle is a 27-mile trail that forms a loop around the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting. It connects with an additional 45 miles of trails, which include the Hoover Road Trail, Heartland Trail, Schrader Connection, Granite Parkway, and Stevens Point Sculpture Park and Schmeckle Reserve trails. The Hoover Road Trail connects it to the Tomorrow River State Trail, a 28-mile walking, bicycling, and horseback riding trail that begins in the Village of Plover and ends in the Village of Manawa (Waupaca County). Standing Rocks Park also provides a multitude of trail uses like mountain biking and skiing. Finally, existing and future segments of the National Ice Age Scenic Trail can be found in the eastern portion of the County. See Map 4-2 for trail locations.

The Portage County Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan adopted in 2014 contains an exhaustive list of all potential improvements in the County, their design requirements, estimated costs, and potential funding sources. Since the lists of potential projects are lengthy, they are not included in this Comprehensive Plan. See the series of Appendices in the 2014 County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for details.



## Other Transportation Modes

The overall transportation network is made up of all modes of transportation, including railroads, airports and more. The following sections highlight these other modes.

### Rail

According to the 2023 Wisconsin Railroads and Harbors Map, Canadian National owns several railroad tracks that cross the County and pass through the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Amherst Junction, Junction City, Plover, and Milladore. Another rail bed has interim use status as the Tomorrow River State Trail.

### Airports

Stevens Point Municipal Airport (STE) is the only airport in Portage County, and it is classified as Large General Aviation. As of 2023, it is home to 39 aircraft and two runways with lengths of 6,208 feet and 3,635 feet. Other private grass airstrips may be found in the County as well. The nearest scheduled passenger service can be found at Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee (Marathon County), which is jointly owned by Marathon and Portage Counties, and governed by the Central Wisconsin Joint Airport Board.

### Water Transportation

No water transportation is available within Portage County. The Wisconsin River contains several dams and hydroelectric facilities along its length, but there is no locks system to provide for commercial transportation for passengers or freight. The Wisconsin River, Tomorrow River, Plover River, and other

waterways in the County provide recreational uses, such as swimming, tubing, paddling, boating, and sailing.

### Other Modes of Travel

There are a variety of miscellaneous other modes within Portage County including snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), horses, cross-country skis, and others. For the most part, however, these forms of travel are not recognized as modes of transportation, but rather as forms of recreation. As such, these alternative forms of travel will not be addressed extensively in the transportation chapter. However, it is important to be aware of interactions between recreational forms of travel and more traditional transportation systems. For example, snowmobiles have an extensive network of their own trail routes that often parallel or cross public highways. Snowmobiles and ATVs trails may compete against a bike trail for the same right-of-way, and ATVs are sometimes permitted to travel on roads. Each municipality has its own ordinances and locations where these modes of travel are permitted.

## **Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

### **Goals**

1. Develop an area-wide transportation planning and funding approach that maximizes efficiency and minimizes conflicts between modes as well as jurisdictions.

### **Objectives**

1. Prioritize maintaining and enhancing existing infrastructure before adding new infrastructure.
2. Utilize and update existing transportation related plans.
3. Support decisions regarding transportation that are consistent with other elements of the Comprehensive Plan.
4. Encourage and accommodate human-powered transportation options.
5. Ensure that transportation options are available for persons with disabilities.

### **Policies**

1. Develop an area-wide transportation planning approach for all ages, abilities, and incomes.
2. Develop a viable public transportation network.
3. Plan for and improve ATV, bicycle, pedestrian, UTV, snowmobile, and other kinds of trails to provide transportation and recreational opportunities while minimizing conflicts with other users.

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## Chapter 4: Utilities and Community Facilities

### Background

This chapter reviews utilities and community facilities in the County, which include solid waste disposal, on-site wastewater recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, transmission lines, cemeteries, health care facilities, childcare facilities, and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue facilities, libraries, schools, and other government facilities. Included in this chapter is a discussion of utility and community facility issues, background, and inventory and trends, followed by this chapter's goals, objectives, and policies.

### Previous Planning Efforts

#### American Transmission Company: 10 Year Transmission System Assessment, 2022

The American Transmission Company manages transmission infrastructure in the state. New projects are planned in surrounding counties to improve flexibility, reliability, economic factors, connectivity, and performance. One such project is the Rocky Run Transformer Replacement near the City of Stevens Point scheduled for 2023.

#### Broadband Needs Assessment, 2017

This assessment involved a survey of Portage County residents and their attitudes towards broadband expansion in the County. Generally, there was strong support to expand broadband throughout the County and use it as an economic development tool.

#### Portage County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2012

This document is required for local governments to be eligible for certain disaster mitigation programs. The report looks at general conditions in Portage County, including population, transportation, land use and economics. An inventory of utilities, community facilities and emergency services form the background for understanding how the County might respond to a disaster. Risk assessment is at the heart of the All-Hazards Mitigation program. To mitigate the risks, it's necessary to assess their relative importance. Examples of hazards include floods, tornadoes, winter storms, drought, fire, and hazardous materials accidents. The likelihood of any given hazard occurring is estimated based upon historical data and the impact of these hazards is evaluated. The plan seeks to recommend how County government should respond to such occurrences and suggests mitigation measures to reduce the risk caused by identified hazards.

#### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The existing Portage County plan was adopted in 2006. It was partially funded by the State of Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning grant program. The plan highlighted issues related to drinking water supply, stormwater management, emergency response times, recreational facilities, communication towers, and wastewater treatment in the Utilities and Community Facilities chapter.

### Portage County LIFE Report, 2023

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Portage County LIFE Report identifies several areas for improvement regarding several topics, especially behavioral health, early childhood care, education, housing, and shelter.

### Portage County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024

The County's Outdoor Recreation Plan is updated every 5 years to allow the county to receive funding under various state programs to improve outdoor recreational facilities. Goals of this plan include providing a countywide park and recreation system that meets residents' needs, protecting natural areas in an economically and environmentally sensitive way, and support the implementation of a countywide bicycle and pedestrian plan to connect outdoor recreation facilities. A list of proposed improvements to the County's park system is contained in this plan.

### Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2019-2023

To help with planning for outdoor recreation, the WDNR updates the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. The purpose of the SCORP is to offer a sourcebook and overall guide for providers of recreational activities/facilities. The SCORP identifies a number of issues such as changing demands on recreational resources, how new recreational activities compete for the same limited recreation resources as the traditional ones, and the effect of surrounding land uses on recreational areas. According to a statewide survey, over ninety percent of respondents indicated that walking for pleasure was their most common recreational activity. Hiking, bicycling, and nature study/bird watching are enjoyed by over half of the survey participants. These results emphasize the importance of planning recreational trails.

### Stevens Point Area Sewer Service Plan 2040 Update, 2023

This Plan is currently being updated, and it includes the City of Stevens Point, Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting, and surrounding Towns of Linwood, Hull, Plover, and Stockton. Sewer currently serves the City and Villages, and the plan accommodates potential growth into the Towns, which are currently not served. This Plan identifies the sewer service area's boundary between now and 2040, and it manages the extension of sewer services over time as growth occurs. It considers environmental impact and cost effectiveness, minimizing long-term conflicts.

## **Issues**

### Access to Broadband

Internet access is required for many businesses and education-related organizations. As federal funding programs continue to be released to expand broadband, especially in rural areas, Portage County can more easily enhance its broadband infrastructure. This expansion can be promoted as an economic development tool, particularly for rural areas that haven't historically had reliable access to broadband. One example is the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, and a BEAD plan is currently being developed for Portage County.

### Aging Population

Portage County's increasing aging population impacts local infrastructure, especially the healthcare system. As noted in the Housing Chapter, there are services and aging-in-place retrofits that can keep seniors in their homes longer while avoiding expensive institutional care. The quality and availability of hospitals, nursing homes, and EMS facilities is crucial to ensuring seniors can continue to live in the County. Accessibility of public facilities is a consideration not merely to the disabled, but to the entire aging population. For example, curb cuts and handicap accessible ramps make it easier for everyone to navigate. Also, the provision of transportation alternatives can open opportunities for independent living for those who cannot (or choose not to) drive.

Social support networks and nutrition programs also provide a fuller and richer life for seniors and special needs populations. According to the Portage County website, the Lincoln Center is a senior center that offers a diverse selection of educational, health, fitness, creative arts and recreational classes and activities, and it is in the City of Stevens Point.

### Childcare

There is concern over a lack of childcare in Portage County as working parents may be unable to fill open jobs when they can't find available childcare or can't afford it. Only 7 percent of survey respondents indicated they were satisfied with childcare availability in Portage County (see Attachment E). Because of childcare's impact on the County's ability to fill jobs, this subject is discussed in Chapter 6: Economic Development.

### Emergency Services

The survey administered during this Comprehensive Plan project asked respondents to rank their satisfaction with existing services. Although fire protection (80 percent), ambulance service (76 percent), and police protection (75 percent) were rated as the most satisfactory services out of all the services listed, ongoing retirements and shrinking workforce are concerning to the Comprehensive Planning Committee members as new recruitment strategies may need to be utilized to maintain these services.

### County Jail

Currently, the Portage County Jail is at capacity and is in need of new or upgraded facilities. However, as of this Plan's adoption, funding has not been approved to address this issue.

### Groundwater Protection

Groundwater is discussed extensively in Chapter 5 of this plan. Ultimately, the groundwater quality and quantity impacts the type of public facilities needed, such as wells, treatment plants, and stormwater ponds. Privately-operated wells and septic facilities also impact groundwater, especially as existing systems age and new systems are constructed. According to the survey administered during the Comprehensive Plan's creation, 45 percent of respondents indicated that groundwater quality was "good" or "excellent," but over 47 percent agreed that it had decreased in quality over the past decade. Overall, the County must consider its groundwater resources when managing both public and private facilities that serve County residents with drinking water and wastewater.



### Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Tourism

There is growing concern about Americans' sedentary lifestyles and related health implications. Infrastructure that encourages cycling or walking improves transportation options and public health. This is a challenge in rural areas as destinations are farther apart. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for transportation purposes is discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Transportation.

Trail systems can also enhance the tourism economy, as evidenced by the Green Circle and Tomorrow River Trail. The Green Circle Trail forms urban trail connections in the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting, while the Tomorrow River State Trail connects this urban core to rural areas and small villages to the east. While both facilities serve residents, they are also destinations for those traveling to the County, with the Green Circle Trail even being featured on Discover Wisconsin, a show that promotes travel within the state. Other recreational opportunities exist, such as the Buena Vista Wildlife Area, which is known internationally for being home to the lesser prairie-chicken. Tourism's impact is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6: Economic Development.

### Renewable Energy

Large-scale solar arrays have an increasing presence in Central Wisconsin due to their location near transmission lines and good air quality. The survey administered during the 2023-2024 Comprehensive Plan process revealed that over 67 percent of Portage County residents agree or strongly agree that renewable energy production is important to the future of Portage County (see Attachment E). Concerns over the location of these facilities exist and are discussed in detail in Chapter 8: Land Use.

## **Inventory and Trends**

Below is a summary of existing utilities and community facilities in Portage County, along with related facts and descriptions.

### **County Government**

Portage County Government offices are located primarily at the southern edge of Downtown Stevens Point. The County Clerk, County Board Chair, Treasurer, Register of Deeds, Corporation Counsel, Assessor, District Attorney, Circuit Courts, Clerk of Circuit Courts, Victim Witness Program, and Veterans Service offices are in the County/City Building, 1516 Church Street. The County Executive office, along with the Planning & Zoning, Personnel, Purchasing, Data Processing, Finance and University Extension offices are in the adjacent Court House Annex Building, 1462 Strongs Avenue. Also adjacent are the Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management Department at 1500 Strongs Avenue and the Department of Aging / Aging & Disability Resource Center at 1519 Water Street. Parks and Recreation offices were relocated from the Courthouse Annex to new facilities at Jordan Park, STH 66 and CTH Y, in the spring of 2006. Outlying offices include the County Health Care Center at 825 Whiting Avenue and Community Care of Portage County at 817 Whiting Avenue, both in Stevens Point; and the Solid Waste Department/Material Recovery Facility, 600 Moore Road, and Highway Department, 800 Plover Road, both in Plover.



## Water-related Facilities

### Drinking water

The City of Stevens Point and the Villages of Plover, Whiting, Amherst, and Junction City have their own municipal water systems with distribution networks, which rely solely on groundwater. Some properties in the Village of Park Ridge have access to the City of Stevens Point's water system. Several of these communities have a limited number of residential properties with an on-site drinking water source in areas of the municipality where their water system does not extend. The water quality of these systems may be protected by wellhead protection ordinances, which restrict uses that are likely to contaminate groundwater from being located within a certain distance of public wells. All incorporated communities with water service currently utilize wellhead protection ordinances. All remaining municipalities in the County rely on private wells, which follow state regulations that are administered by the County. See WDNR for more information on public and private water systems.

### Wastewater

The City of Stevens Point and the Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, Whiting, Amherst, Junction City, Almond, and Rosholt all have access to municipal wastewater systems and treatment plants. The City of Stevens Point's sewer also serves the Village of Park Ridge. Public sewer system planning and service areas are regulated by the Wisconsin DNR to "assess the condition of a sewerage system, establish a need for improvement, evaluate options to address system needs and to identify the cost-effective alternative." The current Stevens Point-Plover Sewer Service Area Plan was written in 2015, and it establishes a 20-year growth boundary for these systems. See WDNR's website for more statistics regarding public wastewater facilities.

Elsewhere in the county, private, onsite wastewater treatment systems (POWTS) serve the County's wastewater needs. A combination of County and state regulations control the installation and maintenance of privately owned wastewater disposal systems (POWTS). Traditionally onsite disposal systems have relied on drain-fields or mounds that spread effluent over a large area allowing waste to be dispersed without adversely affecting groundwater quality. The success of these systems is dependent on the depth and permeability of the soils in which they are installed.

Soil suitability characteristics in Portage County vary widely for installation of POWTS. A substantial portion of land in the western and northern half of the County holds severe limitations for these systems. A severe rating usually indicates that the soils are not desirable for the operation of a soil absorption system because of poor soil permeability, high water tables, periodic flooding, shallow depth to bedrock, and steep slopes. When these conditions prevail, the area is unsuitable for development that utilizes septic tanks for wastewater disposal.

### Stormwater

Stormwater management systems mitigate heavy rainfall and prevent flooding in erosion, especially in urban areas with extensive impervious surfaces like roofs and pavement. According to WDNR, the Village of Plover, City of Stevens Point, and University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point all have storm sewers that are separate from wastewater sewers. Private and public properties throughout the county may also have

ponds and other structures to control runoff. Portage County maintains the ditches along County Roads, and local municipalities maintain the ditches along Town roads that control stormwater. Municipal and county ordinances require stormwater plans with new development. Additional local, state, and federal regulations may apply related to erosion control and discharge of water into waterways. See the WDNR's website for more information.

### Dams

According to the 2012-2017 Portage County Hazard Mitigation Plan, there are 13 large dams in the County. Of these dams, Dubai, Stevens Point, and Upper Paper Mill are owned by utility companies, Fountain Lake and Portage County Dam Number 35 are owned by a drainage district, Amherst, McDill, Springville, and Rosholt are municipally owned, and Jordan is County-owned. Privately owned large dams include Bently Sawmill, Spring Creek, and Whiting Plover (Lower Paper Mill). Altogether, there are 80 dams in Portage County according to the WDNR. Dams provide flood control, outdoor recreation, and hydroelectric power for County residents. See Map 5: Utilities and Community Facilities for locations.

### High-Capacity Wells

High-capacity wells are discussed in detail in Chapter 5: Natural Resources, and they are defined as wells with a capacity of at least 100,000 gallons per day. Most of these wells in the County are owned and operated privately, but some are also operated by municipalities to provide drinking water for municipal water systems. See the WDNR's Water Use Viewer map or high capacity well search on the agency's website for up-to-date information about the number, location, and ownership of these wells, as well as other details.

## **Solid Waste and Recycling Facilities**

Most Portage County unincorporated and incorporated communities are part of a consortium contracting through the Portage County Solid Waste Department for solid waste collection and disposal by private waste haulers. In addition to household and commercial trash and recycling, the department offers a variety of other programs for residents including electronic, appliance, and tire recycling, waste oil and anti-freeze recycling, and household hazardous waste disposal services. Solid waste and recycling services are located at 600 Moore Road in the Village of Plover, where solid waste is transferred out of the County since the Portage County Landfill's closure in 2009.

## **Public Works**

### Town Halls and Garages

Each Town, Village, and the City have a primary public building to house government functions and other public meetings. Several communities also have other buildings are garages for the storage of road maintenance equipment as well as firefighting equipment. Many of the Town Halls are also where solid waste transfer sites are located. See Map 4-1 and Map 4-1a: Utilities & Community Facilities.

## Drainage Districts

There are two drainage districts in the County, which are discussed in Chapter 5: Natural Resources. They are the Portage and Leola Drainage Districts, which were created to improve farming. The Portage Drainage District is governed by the Portage County Drainage Board, and the Leola Drainage District is governed by the Adams County Drainage Board, where most of it is located. While these differ from urban stormwater infrastructure, they play a similar role in directing runoff away from areas that would otherwise flood or retain water. Chapter 88 of the Wisconsin Statutes governs the operation of these districts.

In 1977, drainage ditches were exempted from being considered navigable water and are not subject to the Public Trust Doctrine (ss 30.10(4)(c)) unless they had a proven stream history. The maintenance and dredging of these ditches within an active Drainage District is exempt from the requirement for a permit from DNR. Part of the maintenance of these ditches involves removal of woody plants from an area twenty feet on either side.

## Cemeteries

Cemeteries serve as unique and tangible links to our past. There are 87 cemeteries located throughout the county. Nearly every Town, Village, and the City have cemeteries located within them. Many of the existing cemeteries have substantial existing capacity and there are many undeveloped areas throughout the County suitable for new cemeteries. See Map 5: Utilities & Community Facilities.

## **Public Safety**

### Law Enforcement

The Wisconsin State Patrol, the Portage County Sheriff's Office, City of Stevens Point Police Department, UWSP University Police and Security Services, and Village of Plover Police Department are the five law enforcement agencies that operate within Portage County. The State Patrol has statewide jurisdiction on all public roads but operates mainly on State and U.S. numbered highways. The County Sheriff provides general law enforcement services throughout the County, and it operates both the County Jail and Juvenile Detention Facility, along with the County's 911 Dispatch Center, Emergency Management, and the County's Emergency Medical Services program. The City of Stevens Point and Village of Plover Police Department patrol their respective communities.

### Fire

All Portage County Fire Departments participate in a countywide mutual aid agreement ensuring compatibility between responding agencies. There are 9 Fire Districts in Portage County, which are based in the Villages of Almond, Amherst, Bancroft, Plover, and Rosholt, the Towns of Dewey, Hull, Rudolph (Wood County) and Stockton, and the City of Stevens Point. Additional fire districts, which are based in surrounding counties, overlap with portions of Portage County, including the Towns of Carson, Eau Pleine, and Linwood.

The Insurance Services Office issues ISO ratings for fire districts. For areas within five miles of a fire station, ISO ratings are determined on a scale of one to ten, with one being the highest rating. The ratings are

based on safety aspects like the availability of fire hydrants to reflect how well-prepared a fire district is to respond to fires. This impacts property insurance rates as communities with better ISO ratings tend to experience lower insurance premiums.

### Jails

The County Sheriff's Office operates a County Jail and Juvenile Detention Center in Downtown Stevens Point. In 2023, the Portage County Board voted on the location of a proposed new County Justice Center which will consist of a \$180-million first phase that would relocate County jail facilities out of downtown Stevens Point to a site on the eastern edge of the City. Funding and a timeline for this project have not been approved at this time.

### Emergency Medical Service (EMS)

There are thirteen first responder groups that service Portage County: Almond, Amherst, Bancroft/Pine Grove, Dewey, Grant, Hull, Plover, Rosholt, Rudolph, Sharon, Stevens Point, Stockton, and Wild Rose. There are three contracted ambulance providers, which are the Amherst Fire Department, Plover Fire Department, and Stevens Point Fire Department. The Town of Grant contracts with United Emergency Medical Response based in the Town of Grand Rapids in Wood County.

### **Healthcare**

The County is home to several medical facilities, and some residents near the edge of the county may have additional options in surrounding counties. Within Portage County's boundaries, there are Aspirus clinics in the City of Stevens Point and the Village of Plover. There are also two hospitals in the County, which are Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Marshfield Medical Center: River Region Stevens Point Campus. Several nursing homes with varying degrees of care can be found throughout the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Amherst and Plover. It is expected that there will be an ongoing need for additional nursing home, memory care, and/or assisted living facilities as the County's population ages.

### **Education, Recreation, and Culture**

#### Libraries

There are several public libraries throughout the County, including the University of Stevens Point and Mid-State Technical College libraries. Local libraries include:

- Almond Public Library in the Village of Almond (122 Main Street)
- Plover Library in the Village of Plover (2151 Roosevelt Drive)
- Lettie W. Jensen Library in the Village of Amherst (278 North Main Street)
- Rosholt Library in the Village of Rosholt (137 N. Main Street)
- Portage County Public Library in the City of Stevens Point (1001 Main Street)

Local libraries in Portage County are part of the South Central Library System along with Adams, Wood, Sauk, Columbia, Dane, and Green Counties, allowing the libraries to access resources across the system.

### Parks, Trails, & Natural Areas

The Green Circle State Trail, Tomorrow River State Trail, and part of Hartman Creek State Park are operated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, serving residents and visitors alike. A small portion of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail known as the Emmons and Hartman Creek Segments are partially located in the southeastern corner of the County, and another completed segment known as the New Hope segment is in the northeastern portion of the County. Future Ice Age Trail segments are planned along the Portage and Waupaca County line. Additional state natural areas are also operated by WDNR, and these are discussed in Chapter 5: Natural, Cultural, and Agricultural Resources. Overall, these state and federal facilities contribute to the County's overall health and quality of life, along with many City, Village, and Town-operated parks.

The Portage County Parks Department owns and operates several properties in the region: Al Tech Park, Becker Lake Recreation Area, Carrie Frost Park, Cate Park, Collins Park, Consolidated Park, County Cemetery, Dewey Shooting Range, DuBay Park, Galecke Park, Jordan Park, Lake Emily Park, Lake Helen Park, Lake Jacqueline Preserve, Mill Creek Preserve, Meyers Lake Boat Landing, Peterson Park, Plover River Ski Trail, Plover River Wayside, Rinehart Lake Boat Landing, Rocky Run Preserve, Standing Rocks Park, Stedman Wayside, Steinhagen Recreation Area, Sunset Beach, Tomorrow River Wayside, Wisconsin River Recreation Area, and Wolf Lake Park. The County also has an agreement to maintain the Green Circle State Trail and utilize a portion of it in winter as the Plover River Ski Trail. Lodges, campsites, and season passes can be purchased through the County's website.

Proposed improvements in the County's 2020-2024 Outdoor Recreation Plan include acquiring and developing an Urban Park Recreation Facility that is centrally located in the County, but a timeline for this project needs to be developed. Land acquisition to protect the quality of several properties is desired for Collins, DuBay, Galecke, Jordan, Lake Emily, Standing Rocks, Sunset Lake, and Wolf Lake parks as well as the Green Circle State Trail and Wisconsin River Recreation Area. This would limit development near the existing parks and leave room for some parks to expand. Proposed short-term improvements to Galecke, Jordan, and Standing Rocks Parks and long-term improvements to Cate, Collins, Jordan, Lake Emily, and Standing Rocks Parks are included in the Plan. There is also a recommendation to acquire linear corridors to provide connections and recreational opportunities between existing parks, especially along river corridors.



### Schools

The following school districts are fully or partially located in Portage County:

- Almond-Bancroft (1 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school)
- Auburndale (1 elementary and 1 middle/high school)
- Iola-Scandinavia (1 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school)
- Rosholt (1 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school)
- Stevens Point Area (Bannach, Jefferson, Kennedy, Madison, McDill, McKinley, Plover-Whiting, Roosevelt, and Washington Elementary Schools, Ben Franklin and P.J. Jacobs Junior High Schools, Stevens Point Area Senior High (SPASH) and Charles F. Hernandez Alternative High School, and Point of Discovery Charter Middle/High School)
- Tomorrow River School District (1 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school, and 1 charter school)
- Tri-County Area (1 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school)
- Wild Rose (1 elementary and 1 middle/high school)
- Wisconsin Rapids (Grant, Grove, Howe, Mead, THINK Academy, Washington, and Woodside Elementary Schools, Wisconsin Rapids Area Middle School, Lincoln and River Cities High Schools and Central Oaks Academy Charter School).

Central Sands Community High School is an independent charter school in the Town of Stockton. Private schools in Portage County include Saint Adalbert, Pacelli, Sacred Heart, St. Paul Lutheran, and Stevens Point Christian Academy. Pacelli and Stevens Point Christian Academy also include high school grades.

### Colleges and Universities

The University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point campus, located in the City of Stevens Point, was established in 1894. When combined with its satellite campuses in Marshfield and Wausau, total enrollment is 8,125. The campus offers 80 baccalaureate degrees, 17 graduate programs, and 90 minors, and is known for its robust fine arts and natural resources programs.



Mid-State Technical College also has a Stevens Point Campus that offers associate degrees, technical diplomas, and certificates. The college offers over 85 programs across its four campuses.



## Museums

Museums and other cultural destinations include the following:

- Beth Israel Synagogue Museum (C. Stevens Point)
- Food + Farm Exploration Center (V. Plover)
- Heritage Park (V. Plover)
- Historic Firehouse # 2 Museum (C. Stevens Point)
- Riverfront Arts Center (C. Stevens Point)
- Rising Star Mill (V. Nelsonville)
- Schmeckle Reserve Visitor Center (C. Stevens Point)
- Smith Scarabocchio Art Museum (C. Stevens Point)
- Stevens Point Sculpture Park (C. Stevens Point)
- UWSP Carlsten Art Gallery (C. Stevens Point)
- UWSP Museum of Natural History (C. Stevens Point)

Cultural resources are explained in more detail in Chapter 5 of this Plan.

## Childcare

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families maintains an up-to-date list of licensed daycare providers along with a search tool. According to the search tool, there are approximately 33 licensed facilities in the County, which are clustered in or near the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting. Additional resources are listed in the Economic Development chapter of this plan.

## Energy and Telecommunications

### Electric

The Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, Wisconsin Power & Light, Adams-Columbia Electric Cooperative, and Wisconsin Rapids Water Works & Lighting Commission provide electric service in Portage County. The American Transmission Company (ATC) operates several high-voltage lines that traverse the County, with many of them intersecting in the center of the County. All transmission lines are single-circuit and they range from 69 kV to 345 kV.

### Natural Gas

Natural Gas Service is provided by the Wisconsin Power and Light Company, Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, and Wisconsin Gas, depending on the location in the County. The Towns of New Hope, Lanark, and Belmont do not currently have a natural gas provider, and residents in areas with no nearby gas connection often rely on liquid propane (LP) for heating, cooking, and other uses. The Koch Refining Company operates an LP gas pipeline and an “other petroleum products” pipeline, which meet at a terminal in the City of Stevens Point (Flint Hills Resources).

### Telecommunications

Internet service continues to expand as an economic development necessity, and access to internet service varies greatly throughout the County. Landline and cellular phone service are also essential for communications. Topographic features limit where lines can be buried or where cellular signals can reach. Future expansion of broadband is expected following the completion of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Plan, which is currently being developed.

Landline phone service providers in Portage County include AT&T, Solarus, Telephone and Data Systems, and Union Telephone Company. Cable TV lines provide digital signal known as wireline access, and other providers use satellite or wireless technology. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Portage County are Amherst Telephone Company, Astrea (Wireline), Bug Tussel, Cellcom, CenturyLink/Lumen, Charter – Spectrum, Country Wireless, HughesNet, Network Professionals, Inc., Solarus, TDS, Union Telephone Company, Viasat, Inc., VSAT Systems, LLC, and Waupaca Online. Mobile internet and Cellular coverage is available from AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon, and other providers may get signal in the County where roaming agreements exist.



## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

### Goals

1. Promote lifelong learning as an opportunity in the County.
2. Provide places and activities for the youth of the County.
3. Create and protect public green space and water resources Countywide.
4. Utilize design standards to enhance urban and rural character.
5. Provide criteria and direction for protecting and developing land.
6. Share services across County or municipal borders whenever possible.
7. Plan for the provision of infrastructure, utilities, and community facilities and services to efficiently meet community needs.

### Objectives

1. Direct more intensive development to areas where a full array of utilities, community facilities and public services are available.
2. Monitor and manage the effects of high-capacity wells, land use, private on-site waste disposal systems, and solid waste disposal on the quality and quantity of groundwater in the county.
3. Continue to provide law enforcement, ambulance, fire and first responder services to residents, whether by the County or by local units of government.
4. Support high quality educational and cultural opportunities for all residents.

### Policies

1. Encourage clustering of urban and rural development so that community facilities and services can be provided in a cost-effective manner.
2. Utilize funding sources to maintain public and private infrastructure. For example, the Wisconsin Fund assists property owners in upgrading failing on-site disposal systems.
3. Meet public health and groundwater quality goals when permitting and monitoring private on-site wastewater and wells.
4. Encourage recycling by residents.
5. Ensure that schools, public safety, health care, and other community facilities are of the highest quality without placing undue financial burden on county taxpayers.

6. Encourage methods of increasing broadband Internet access to residents.
7. Support the implementation of the 2020-2024 Portage County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

## Chapter 5: Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources

### Introduction

This chapter reviews natural resources, including agricultural and cultural resources. There is also a review of ground and surface water, woodland cover, floodplains, wetlands, and topography, which are important for land use decisions and the agriculture and tourism economy. Cultural resources capture an area's history, settlement patterns, and use of natural resources, and these resources contribute to the County's identity.

The chapter is comprised of several sections including background, issues, inventory and trends, and goals, objectives, and policies. The overall purpose of this chapter is to protect and utilize these resources in a responsible and efficient manner where they will benefit the County's economy and quality of life. Future development will be guided by both the County and local level plans as they relate to natural resources.

### Natural Resources

The Natural Resources section provides an inventory of the natural resources found within the county's 824 square miles. The county ranks 29<sup>th</sup> in land mass among Wisconsin's 72 counties. Much of the county's landscape was formed during the latest glacial epoch over 12,000 years ago. Highlands to the north diverted continental glaciers around much of Portage County and most of southwestern Wisconsin. The glacial lobes rejoined to the south, thereby encircling sections of Wisconsin and neighboring states in a ring of ice demarcating what is known as the "Driftless Area" because of its lack of rocky glacial debris (or "drift"). The ice mass during this most recent glaciation only covered the eastern portion of Portage County, which is reflected in the presence of moraines and kettle lakes in the eastern side of the county. This contrasts with the flat, sandy plains of the western portion of the county, which are from the former lakebed of the no-longer-extant Glacial Lake Wisconsin. The terminus of the glacier also serves as a major groundwater and surface water divide, with water in the eastern portion of the County flowing to the Great Lakes Basin and water in the western portion of the County flowing to the Mississippi River Basin.

This Comprehensive Plan's 2023 survey indicates that there is a desire to protect the County's natural features, preserve groundwater quality, and invest in renewable energy. These topics are covered in this Chapter and survey findings are covered in greater detail in other chapters as well as in Attachment E.

### Previous Planning Efforts

#### Land Legacy Report, 2006

This draft report was prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to delineate lands that have significant value to the public. The report recommends that these lands should be protected using the State's Stewardship Fund or other means. While the report identifies land in need of protection, it does not speculate on how these lands should be acquired or managed. Land Legacy sites in Portage County are the Central Wisconsin Grasslands, Dewey Marsh and Woods, Hartman and Emmons Creeks, Little Plover River, Middle Wisconsin River, Plover River, Sand Country Trout Streams.

### NCWRPC Regional Livability Plan, 2015

This regional plan for the 10-county North Central Wisconsin region identifies natural resources as both enhancing the local quality of life but also as an economic development tool as outdoor recreation attracts workers to the region.

### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The County's former comprehensive plan, which this document replaces, addressed 14 major topics: pursuing redevelopment and rehabilitation, encouraging walkable neighborhood design, protecting natural areas, protecting farms and forests, encouraging efficient development patterns to reduce costs, preserving cultural, historic, and archaeological sites, encouraging cooperation with nearby governmental units, revitalizing main streets, providing affordable housing, providing needed infrastructure, promoting economic development, balancing property rights with county goals, preserve the variety of landscapes through land use planning, and expanding transportation systems. Several of these topics list strategies for addressing issues related to natural, agricultural, and cultural resources.

### Portage County Land & Water Resource Management Plan, 2019

This County plan was adopted to meet the state legislature's requirements for a reevaluation of the state's non-point pollution control programs. Enabling legislation was passed allowing the creation of county land and water resource management plans throughout the state. The plan provides an inventory of the County's natural resources and a series of goals and objectives intended to improve and protect these resources in the future. This plan identifies a variety of issues, including water quality concerns from urban and rural uses, impacts of unplanned development, erosion and pollution concerns, and addressing impaired waters. This Plan is updated every five years.

### Portage County Well Water Quality Project, 2017

Portage County sampled 229 drinking water wells in 2017 to determine the status of drinking water. The goal was to provide baseline data for water quality monitoring and decision-making, as well as provide information for outreach efforts. The project found that water quality was well balanced and aesthetically pleasing, though nitrates are a concern. This project was repeated in 2022 and found little change between 2017 and 2022. New samples will be taken every five years to update this report.

### Portage County Groundwater Management Plan, 2017

The Groundwater Management Plan was written to assess groundwater quality and quantity, identify the uses and users that depend on groundwater, discuss vulnerabilities to contamination and depletion, categorize the impacts and conflicts related to these uses, consider potential impacts of changes in uses, and provide options and recommendations for mediating conflicts based on groundwater sustainability. This plan is being updated as of 2023 and is set to be updated every five years.

### Portage County Soil Survey

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency that produces the Portage County, Wisconsin Soil Survey. The survey contains predictions of soil characteristics for selected land uses and highlights the limitations and hazards inherent in the County's soils. A series of detailed maps identifying the location of soil types in Portage County accompanies the survey.

### Portage County Lake Study and Lake Management Plans, 2005

Between 2003 and 2005, 32 lakes were studied for water quality, fish, aquatic organisms, wildlife, and land use. Using information from the three-year lake study project and information collected from surveys of watershed citizens, management plans were developed for all the lakes and are currently being updated as of 2023.

### State of the Central Wisconsin River Basin, 2002

This plan originated with the development of the Central Wisconsin River Water Quality Management Plan in the 1990s and the designation of the Central Wisconsin River Geographic Management Unit (GMU) by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This plan studies everything from the geology to the demographics and land use patterns of the basin and provides an interesting assessment of water quality on the "mainstream" of the Wisconsin River. This effort provided 1) an inventory and assessment of land and water resource conditions, 2) identification of major issues, priorities, and objectives, and 3) recommendations for action. Overall, this "State of the Central Wisconsin River Basin" report provides a snapshot of ecological conditions and prioritized management needs. This report also forms the basis for work planning, budget decisions, and management recommendations regarding fish, wildlife, and watersheds. The plan is updated on a six-year cycle.

## **Issues**

### Availability of Land

Over time, development of open and wooded lands has resulted in the fragmentation of existing large, contiguous parcels. This has limited the supply of land available for agriculture and woodlands. Since housing is in demand, balancing development with preservation of existing undeveloped land is desired.

### Agricultural Economic Conditions

Smaller farms, which are often family-owned, are facing economic challenges that make it harder to remain economically viable. Examples of concerns include younger workers not entering the agriculture industry and investment firms purchasing large tracts of farmland.

### Agritourism

According to the Stevens Point Area Convention & Visitor Bureau, agritourism continues to increase in popularity. Various events and businesses feature a variety of locally farmed products as well as tours and other activities that are held in agricultural settings, such as event barns. This provides a tourism and economic development opportunity that utilizes the County's agricultural resources.

## Climate Change

The increase of natural hazards like flooding and severe weather, as well as the unpredictability of weather patterns are expected to impact both rural and urban areas of the county.

## Groundwater: Quality and Quantity

Groundwater faces several threats that impact its quality and available quantity. Historically, Nitrate and Atrazine have been a concern in the County. Nitrate generally comes from both rural and urban sources, especially from fertilizers and septic systems. Atrazine is an agricultural herbicide, which is now banned in portions of Portage County. Finally, high-capacity wells and Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) raise concerns over the availability and quality of groundwater in the County as they withdraw large amounts of water. This could impact the agriculture economy and water resources in the County.

## Renewable Energy

The County isn't necessarily opposed to the use of renewable energy, but there is limited control over the location of wind turbines and large-scale solar farms, raising concerns over the availability of open land for development and farming.

## Surface Water Quality

The Plan Commission Steering Committee also expressed concern over the water quality of Mill Creek, particularly in the Towns of Carson and Linwood, as well as the Tomorrow/Waupaca River. Other surface water bodies experience algal blooms. Currently, groups like Friends of Mill Creek and Farmers of Mill Creek provide volunteer-based stream rehabilitation efforts in certain watersheds.

## **Inventory and Trends**

### **Geography**

Portage County is located in Central Wisconsin, where it borders Marathon County to the north, Waupaca County to the west, Waushara and Adams Counties to the south, and Wood County to the west. The Wisconsin River runs through the heart of the county, influencing the development of the county's more urban communities along its banks. The City of Stevens Point, which is the County Seat, forms the largest urban area in the County along with the Villages of Plover, Park Ridge, and Whiting. The rest of the county is primarily rural with small cities and villages scattered throughout. Residents enjoy a mix of natural and urban features such as lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests, historic downtowns, farms, and neighborhoods. Interstate Highway 39 and U.S. Highways 51 and 10 form a "crossroads" in the City of Stevens Point, linking the county with its surroundings.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), Portage County is divided into three ecological landscapes: the Central Sand Plains cover much of the western half of the county, the Central Sand Hills cover most of the eastern half of the county, and the Forest Transition covers the northeast and northwest corners of the county. The Central Sand Plains are a remnant of the extinct Glacial Lake Wisconsin, which left behind sandy outwash. The Central Sand Hills and Forest Transition

feature glacial features like moraines and till plains. Portage County is located in the “transition zone” where tallgrass prairies to the south meet forests to the north, there are a variety of plant species both from northern and southern Wisconsin. See Map 2-1: Natural Resources for an overview of the County’s natural features.

## **Geology and Topography**

Portage County is underlain by crystalline rocks of Precambrian age, and sandstone of Cambrian age, which is mantled by glacial deposits of Pleistocene Age. The crystalline rock is exposed and weathered in the northwest part of the County. These are generally the most poorly drained soils. However, in the southern part of the County, sandstone overlies this crystalline rock.

The eastern and southeastern portions of the County are covered with glacial drift. Deposits range from a few feet in the north to more than 350 feet in the southeast. This material is deposited in outwash plains; this is where irrigated agriculture has generally developed. It is also deposited in moraine and intermorainal drift, primarily from the Green Bay lobe of the glacier. This glacial topography of irregular hills, which are sometimes quite steep, creates problems of soil erosion due to different forms of land use.

The glacial topography varies from the rolling, terminal or end moraines oriented north to south in the eastern third of the County, to flat sand outwash plain in the southwest portion. Elevation ranges from 1,320 feet above sea level in the Town of Almond to 920 feet above sea level along the southeast border of the County.

## **Soils**

Soils in Portage County vary from loamy and silty material west of the Wisconsin River, to sand and gravel throughout the central part of the County, to sandy glacial drift in the eastern portion of the County. Alluvial and organic soils are also located throughout the County, mainly located in the northern half.

There are 27 identified soil series in Portage County grouped into 13 soil associations (Map 2-2). Four associations are generally related to the sand plain province, two to the drift province, three to the drift-crystalline rock province, and two associations are related to alluvial or organic deposits. See the Soil Survey of Portage County, Wisconsin (1978, U.S. Department of Agriculture) for a complete description of these soil associations. The 13 soil associations are:

- Fenwood-Rietbrock-Rozellville
- Fordum-Sturgeon-Dunnville
- Kennan-Rosholt-Oesterle
- Markey-Seelyeville-Cathro
- Meadland-Mosinee-Mahtomedi
- Meadland-Rozellville-Dolph
- Newson-Meehan-Friendship
- Plainfield-Friendship-Meehan
- Plainfield-Richford-Friendship
- Plainfield-Wyocena-Okee
- Point-Dancy-Mosinee
- Richford-Billett-Boyer
- Rosholt-Kennan-Seelyeville

## **Mineral Resources**

Nonmetallic mining has a presence throughout Portage County, which involve “sites” or “quarries” where rock, sand, and other aggregates are extracted. There are 23 active nonmetallic mines in Portage County.

Additionally, there are 18 mines that are reclaimed. The Portage County Zoning Section administers permitting for nonmetallic mines, and reclamation standards are enforced through Chapter 7.8 of the County's Zoning Ordinance, the Nonmetallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance. There are no known metallic deposits in Portage County.

## **Climate**

Portage County features a warm-summer humid continental climate (Dfb) according to the Köppen climate classification system. The annual average temperature for Portage County ranges from 44 degrees Fahrenheit to 45.5 degrees. The warmest month is July, with an average high temperature of 80°F; the coldest is January with an average high of 22.7°F. The average annual precipitation is 32 inches, of which about six inches (rainfall equivalent) is from snowmelt. The average annual snowfall is about 44.5 inches. The average dates from last frost to first frost is May 11th to October 1<sup>st</sup>, resulting in an average growing season of 142 days.

In Central Wisconsin, the growing season tends to be slightly longer east of the Wisconsin River than it is west of the river, and summer frost is not uncommon. While this limits agricultural opportunities, cranberries thrive in western portions of the county. Elsewhere in the county, sandy soils are irrigated by center pivot systems to produce cool season crops like potatoes, vegetables, and corn.

## **Surface Water**

Portage County is divided between the Wisconsin River drainage basin in the western half and the Wolf River basin on the east. This surface water divide is also a continental divide, as the Wisconsin River flows to the Gulf of Mexico and the Wolf River flows to Lake Michigan, and eventually the Atlantic Ocean. According to WDNR, there are 76 named lakes in the county, and 59 named streams. Combined with all unnamed water bodies, lakes total about 8,412 acres, and streams total about 683 miles altogether. There are also 11 impoundments totaling 10,272 acres. Note that acreage totals include an entire waterbody, many of which lie in multiple counties. For example, Lake Du Bay is approximately 4,919 acres of the total impoundment acres, but most of it is located in Marathon County. Altogether, when only counting portions of water bodies that are within the County's boundaries, 2.3 percent of the County's area is surface water for a total of 12,072 acres.

Lake Districts are a government entity with taxing authority that are used for lake aeration to prevent fish kills, fish stocking, invasive species management and prevention, aquatic plant management, shoreland restoration, lake management planning, and water quality monitoring, for example. There are three lake districts in Portage County: Lake Jacqueline Protection & Rehabilitation District, Lake Helen Protection & Rehabilitation District, and McDill Inland Lake and Rehabilitation District.

In addition to its recreational, ecological, and scenic value, surface waters are often a source of water withdrawal. According to the DNR, there are 63 high-capacity surface water withdrawal permits in Portage County. High-capacity withdrawal locations are defined as locations that can withdraw 100,000 or more gallons per day.



## **Watersheds and Drainage Districts**

Portage County is characterized by a variety of flat and hilly landscapes. The Johnstown Terminal Moraine in the eastern portion of the county divides between the Wisconsin River and Fox River drainage basins. A watershed is a boundary that indicates which direction water drains towards. Portage County is divided into 13 watersheds: City of Stevens Point - Wisconsin River, Flume Creek - Little Wolf River, Fourmile Creek, Fourteenmile Creek, Lake Du Bay - Wisconsin River, Little Eau Pleine River, Mill Creek, Petenwell Lake - Wisconsin River, Plover River, South Branch Little Wolf River, Tenmile Creek, Waupaca River, and Willow Creek - Frontal Lake Poygan. Detailed descriptions of each watershed can be found on WDNR's website.

Drainage districts are local government entities that manage constructed drains to remove excess water from agricultural lands. Lands within a drainage district are drained by means of common drains that cross individual property boundaries. Wisconsin Statutes establish the procedures for creating, modifying, and dissolving drainage districts. Portage County is home to two drainage districts: the Portage Drainage District covers much of the southwest quadrant of the county, and the Leola Drainage District, which is primarily located in Adams County, crosses into the far southwestern corner of the county. Maps of Wisconsin's drainage districts can be found on WDNR's website.

## **Groundwater Resources**

Groundwater is water that occupies void spaces between soil particles or cracks in the rock below the land surface. It originates as precipitation that infiltrated the ground. The type of soil and bedrock that a well is drilled into often determines the pH, saturation index, and the amount of hardness or alkalinity in water. The type of soil and bedrock in a region also determines how quickly contaminants can reach groundwater.

The source of most drinking water in Portage County is groundwater, and it supplies agricultural and industrial processes as well. Groundwater is a limited resource, and both its quality and quantity are important factors. These factors are primarily influenced by local geology and local land use. Portage County's groundwater originates in two aquifers: the sand and gravel aquifer, and the crystalline bedrock aquifer. The sand and gravel aquifer is a result of glacial drift, and it is the closest to the surface. Most wells use this aquifer as it is easier to drill into and produces faster flow rates compared to the crystalline bedrock aquifer, which is deeper. Because the gravel-sand aquifer is closer to the surface, it is more vulnerable to contamination.

Groundwater quality can be impaired by a variety of pollutants including leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs), landfills, septic tanks, over-application of pesticides and fertilizers, and spills of hazardous chemicals. The most common contaminants found in Wisconsin's groundwater are pesticides, nitrates, nitrogen, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These contaminants come from a multitude of sources including nitrogen-based fertilizers, septic systems, animal waste storage, feedlots, municipal and industrial wastewater discharges, and sludge disposal.

Portage County's 2017 Water Quality Report found that, in general, groundwater has a slightly basic level of acidity and is moderate to hard with moderate alkalinity. The eastern portion of the county tends to have harder water with higher acidity and alkalinity, and the western portion of the county tends to be

less hard, less acidic, and less alkaline. Nitrate and chloride in groundwater are a concern, and they are a result of agriculture, septic systems, and soil drainage properties. Historically, an agricultural herbicide called atrazine was widely used, but has been banned since 2006 due to groundwater contamination.

Groundwater contaminants can affect the health of humans, livestock, and wildlife. Because groundwater seeps more slowly than surface runoff, pollution that occurs today may not become evident for several years. Once polluted, the groundwater is very difficult to purify and may take many years to clean itself by the dilution process.

The DNR has developed a groundwater contamination susceptibility model. This model identifies groundwater contamination susceptibility by measuring the ease with which water (and any contaminant carried in the water) travels from the land surface to the top of the groundwater layer. Five characteristics are used to obtain the composite measurement: bedrock depth, bedrock type, soil characteristics, surficial deposits, water table depth, and contaminated source waters.

Numerous high-capacity wells are located throughout the County. According to the DNR there are 1,132 active high-capacity wells located in the County. A high capacity well is a well that has the capacity to withdraw more than 100,000 gallons per day, or a well that, together with all other wells on the same property, has a capacity of more than 100,000 gallons per day. Residential wells and fire protection wells are excluded from the definition of a high capacity well, and their pumping capacities are not included in the calculation of a property's well capacity. These wells extract water from considerable depths and may impact water quantity in aquifers.

## **Shorelands**

Shorelands, as defined in Wisconsin Administrative Rule Chapter NR 115, are: “lands within 1,000 feet of the ordinary high watermark of a lake (including ponds and flowages) or 300 feet of a navigable stream or river or to the landward extent of the floodplain (whichever distance is greater)”. Many homeowners and visitors seek out lakes and rivers as places to enjoy natural beauty in a quiet setting, yet the sheer number of users and riparian landowners can create user conflicts due to demand for limited resources. Furthermore, due to the way it can alter the natural landscape shoreland development changes the aesthetic and recreational value of lakes, rivers, and streams.

In the unincorporated areas of each county, a shoreland zoning ordinance is required by state statute to protect and maintain natural shoreland areas. A shoreland in its natural state can protect surface water by acting as a buffer for sediment and pollutants. A buffer is an undeveloped strip of land that protects water from the impacts of nearby development. If properly designed, a buffer can help protect a water body from physical, chemical, hydrological, and visual impacts. Cities and Villages may also adopt shoreland zoning if desired to address the same issues.

Shoreline development is an important consideration in lake development, particularly if the lake has a high degree of irregularity in its shoreline. More irregularity means more land area with access to the lake and therefore greater development pressure on the lakefront itself. Reservoirs and other impoundments tend to have more irregular shorelines since they reflect the flooding of existing landforms. Development impacts on these lakes are generally more severe than on natural lakes. The Portage County Shoreland Ordinance details the specific rules for the county.

## **Wetlands**

Wetlands perform many indispensable roles in the proper function of the hydrologic cycle and the local ecological system. They also act as water storage “sponges” in times of high water by absorbing excess water and then releasing it back into the watershed slowly, thereby preventing flooding and minimizing flood damage. Wetlands have valuable ground and surface water purification capabilities since potentially harmful compounds and bacteria in the water are absorbed into plant tissues thus buffering the adjacent water body. Wetlands occur in areas where the water level is usually near or above the soil surface.

The DNR identifies the location of wetlands on their Wisconsin Wetland Inventory maps and associated database. According to this database, Portage County has 99,042 acres, or 18.8% percent of its total area allocated to wetlands. Most of these wetlands are located in portions of the county with flat terrain.

Wetland vegetation in Portage County primarily includes emergent wet meadows (such as water lilies and rushes) and broad-leafed deciduous forests. Swamps, bogs, marshes, potholes, wet meadows, and sloughs are all considered wetlands. The soils in these areas are usually saturated within a few inches of the surface during the growing season and need some type of artificial drainage to be made arable. Besides their ecological value, wetlands are also an important recreational, educational, and aesthetic resource. Wetlands are a breeding and nesting ground for waterfowl and for many other animals depending upon aquatic habitats. Maintaining these breeding grounds ensures a variety and adequate amount of game for hunting and wildlife observation activities. Sometimes a particular chain of wetlands can be home to a rare or endangered species thereby provoking interest from scientists and educators. Lastly, the visual appearance of the wetlands themselves can constitute a scenic resource.

Given their important role, destruction of wetlands can negatively affect the public in many ways. The development of impermeable surfaces and the addition of fill materials can destroy the hydrological function of a wetland site while simultaneously increasing flood dangers downstream. The WDNR has adopted minimum standards for managing wetlands to help reduce the negative impacts of developing in or near wetland areas.

## **Floodplains**

Floodplains are a natural flood control system that provides an area where excess water can be accommodated. The extent to which a floodplain may become inundated depends upon the amount of water, the speed and distance that the water travels, and the topography of the area. Portage County contains approximately 36,946 acres of floodplain, or about 7 percent of the total County land area.

Given that these areas are prone to flooding, development in floodplains is usually discouraged. Even so, development does occur in these areas and in turn affects the ability of this system to function properly. The encroachment of development on the floodplain system is often mitigated by the construction of dikes, levies, or other man-made flood control devices. Unfortunately, these mitigation measures are expensive and not always adequate to control a flood or may cause other areas to flood even if they were formerly not part of the floodplain. The expense of maintaining these floodplain control measures and replacement of structures damaged by flooding is eclipsed by the potential for loss of human life due to the danger inherent from flooding.

Chapter NR 115 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code requires all municipalities to adopt reasonable and effective floodplain zoning ordinances for the purpose of protecting individuals, private property, and public investments from flood damage. Floodplain zoning regulates development in the floodway and flood fringe areas usually by requiring structures to be built above flood levels or be otherwise flood-protected. For regulatory purposes, a floodplain is generally defined as land where there is a one percent chance of flooding in any year (also known as the 100-year floodplain). Floodplain regulation can also keep communities eligible for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). FEMA offers emergency monetary assistance to flood stricken communities provided these areas follow NFIP requirements and have also completed a Flood Insurance Study.

Currently, the Villages of Amherst, Nelsonville, Plover, Rosholt, and Whiting, the City of Stevens Point, and Portage County all participate in the NFIP program, have completed the Flood Insurance Study, and have created a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that delineates those areas likely to be inundated by a 100-year flood (also known as "A" Zones). Overall, a relatively small portion of Portage County is considered a floodplain, being mostly located along the Wisconsin River and its tributaries. Floods occur only during periods of exceptionally heavy rainfall and/or snowmelt.

### **Air Quality**

WDNR and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) define and monitor a series of air contaminants known as criteria air pollutants. Portage County meets all primary and secondary standards, which are two sets of regulations used to evaluate the severity of criteria air pollutants. Therefore, the entire county is in an attainment zone, meaning there are no county-specific regulations needed to remedy air pollution issues at this time. Erosion and snow drifting is a concern in flat, open spaces in Portage County.

### **Forests**

Forests in Portage County are dominated by different trees depending on their location, including oaks, maple, aspen, red pine, and white pine. Most woodland in Portage County is privately held, with approximately 61,306 acres of privately-held forests enrolled in the Managed Forest Law (MFL) and its predecessor program – Forest Crop Law (FCL). This program is a tax assessment available to landowners willing to manage their forestland according to sound forestry practices as specified in a management plan. The annual property tax is reduced, and a portion of the balance is postponed, or deferred, until the time timber is harvested and sold. Planted trees improve soil conservation, water conservation, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics, and County forestry staff also plants and maintains trees throughout the county. There are no federal, state, or county forests in Portage County, though state, county, and municipal properties may contain forested areas that are intended to remain as such to achieve similar goals that a managed forest would.

Woodlands play a key role in the protection of environmentally sensitive areas like steep slopes, shorelands, wetlands, and flood plains. Removal of woodland cover can be detrimental to these areas in both ecological functions and to visual enjoyment. The health of a forest is measured by its capacity for renewal, for recovery from a wide range of disturbances, and for retention of its ecological resiliency. At the same time, it must meet current and future needs of people for desired levels of values, uses,

products, and services. Invasive exotic species like garlic mustard and multiflora rose present the greatest threat to the long-term health and integrity of the native woodland ecosystem. Invasive plants often dominate a community by competing for nutrients, sunlight, and space, and by altering the food web or physical environment. Invasive species like the Gypsy moth and the Asian long-horned beetle can prey on or hybridize with native species. Diseases and pests that harm trees are also a concern, such as Dutch Elm Disease, Oak Wilt, and Emerald Ash Borer.

Development patterns have caused disturbances in forest patterns over the past several decades in Portage County. This division of land has broken up the continuity of forest cover in certain areas of the County leading to difficulties in forest sustainability and health. Frequently, these parcels are used for residential uses and seasonal housing or other recreational uses. Another occurrence is the conversion of forest lands for agricultural uses. Fragmentation of forest cover may become an important issue for Portage County environmental quality, tourism, and aesthetics in the future.

### **Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

The presence of surface water, floodways, wetlands, and steep slopes creates situations where some locations are less suitable for development than others. These less suitable areas are often referred to as “environmentally sensitive areas” due to the generally negative impact development in these areas has on the environment. As a rule, the areas where development is most harmful are the same areas where development is most difficult or expensive. For example, building a house on the edge of a steep hillside requires expensive footings and erosion control measures to prevent the structure from falling. At the same time, the removal of trees and dirt for construction can compromise the integrity of the cliff and cause more stormwater erosion or landslides, thus harming the entire hill itself.

### **Steep Slopes**

Portage County is level in most of the western half of the county, with steep slopes being more common in the eastern half. Steep slopes are often unsuitable for development since they are constantly in a state of erosion due to wind and rain. Development on these surfaces would be subject to unstable foundations and exacerbate the erosion process. Development on or near these environmentally sensitive areas must be approached carefully. Map 2-1: Natural Resources identifies these areas.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

Wildlife Habitat in Portage County includes extensive grasslands, marshes, waterways, and woodlands. Present species include deer, turkey, rabbits, grouse, geese, ducks, beavers, squirrels, red foxes, woodchucks, pheasants, muskrats, gray wolves, badgers, coyotes, opossums, otters, minks, raccoons, skunks, sandhill cranes, weasels, and other various birds, raptors, and migratory waterfowl. Fish such as walleye, northern pike, perch, bass, and assorted panfish are also found in aquatic habitats.

Public lands that preserve natural features and wildlife habitat are scattered throughout the county. The DNR manages four wildlife areas in Portage County: Buena Vista (12,700 acres), Dewey Marsh (6,000 acres), George W. Mead (33,000 acres), and Paul J. Olson (2,995 acres). Note that some of these properties cross into neighboring counties. Additionally, there are 11 state natural areas (SNAs) in the county: Bradley Creek Swamp Conifers, Buena Vista Quarry Prairie, Buena Vista Prairie Chicken Meadow, Dewey

Marsh, Emmons Creek Barrens, Flume Creek Cedars, Little Bear Hemlocks, New Hope Pines, Mead Conifer Bogs, Pickerel Lake, and Upper Little Wolf. Finally, there are four state fishery areas: Emmons Creek, Little Plover River, Radley Creek, and Richard A. Hemp. Careful management of these areas ensures continued habitat for wildlife as demand for land for development and agriculture continues.



### Threatened and Endangered Species

Portage County contains a wide range of plant and wildlife resources. Human influence can have a dramatic effect on vegetative communities. Natural habitats have been greatly affected by development and agricultural practices. In most cases, these influences are directly responsible for the endangerment or threatening of certain species.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires all federal agencies to conserve endangered and threatened species. The State of Wisconsin has similar statutes. In the past, land use changes in Portage County have led to the destruction of habitats for the sharptail grouse and bison. Habitat change and market hunting resulted in the extinction of the passenger pigeon as well. Wisconsin law prohibits the “taking” of any plant or animal listed as endangered or threatened. Taking is defined as the act of killing, harming, collecting, capturing, or harassing a member of a protected species. The WDNR-Bureau of Endangered species operates the Wisconsin’s Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI), which maintains data on the location and status of rare species, natural communities, and natural features in Wisconsin.

As of 2023, the NHI lists the following endangered species in Portage County: Fassett’s Locoweed, Black Tern, Blanchard’s Cricket Frog, Loggerhead Shrike, and Regal Fritillary.

NHI also lists the following threatened species in Portage County: Dwarf Milkweed, Marsh Valerian, Pale Green Orchid, Woolly Milkweed, Big Brown Bat, Greater Prairie Chicken, Henslow’s Sparrow, Little Brown Bat, Red-shouldered Hawk, Redfin Shiner, Upland Sandpiper, and Wood Turtle.

For an up-to-date list of species, their status, and laws protecting them, view the NHI at [dnr.wisconsin.gov](https://dnr.wisconsin.gov).



## Agriculture

Portage County is home to a variety of farm products, including dairy, vegetables, and cranberries, with agricultural lands totaling 196,878 acres, or 37.4 percent of the County in 2023. Potatoes, of several russet and white varieties, are particularly suited to the well-drained, sandy soil prevalent in most parts of the county. Corn of both the sweet and field varieties is raised throughout the County, as are snap beans, soybeans, and peas. Several food processing plants are in the county. Over the decades, new irrigation systems and farming technology have resulted in larger farms, higher crop yields, and a smaller share of residents employed on farms.

Agricultural issues in Portage County are similar to those issues found throughout the world with general farming practice. Changes in climate, too much or too little rainfall, insects, invasive vegetation, erosion, and soil nutrient depletion all impact agriculture. Pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and erosion all impact the natural environment, but proper management like tilling methods or tree plantings help mitigate these concerns. Although the growing season is shorter in Central Wisconsin than in much of the country, a lack of long periods of excessive heat minimizes droughts.

Aside from soils, groundwater is the most important agricultural resource as many crops rely on center-pivot irrigation. Depletion or pollution of groundwater supplies could impact agriculture since irrigation is needed to mitigate drought, heat waves, and the maintenance of soil moisture in rapidly draining, sandy soils. Heavy application of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers can create problems for drinking water supplies as well as for fish and wildlife habitats. This is of particular concern as Portage County is a leading producer of both crops (especially vegetables) and aquaculture in Wisconsin.

### Previous Planning Efforts

#### NRCS Soil Survey for Portage County

Maps and data in this report may be useful in determining which areas of the county are most suitable for agriculture.

#### Portage County Farmland Preservation Plan, 2016

The Portage County Farmland Preservation Plan qualifies certain areas of the county to use agricultural preservation zoning where landowners can participate in agriculture-related programs in exchange for tax credits. Only the Town of Grant currently participates in this program, though other areas in the County participated prior to 2016. Goals include preserving agriculture throughout the county, maintaining the agricultural economy, improving relationships between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses, encouraging compact and sustainable urban growth, and maintaining surface and groundwater supplies.

#### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The 2006 Portage County Comprehensive Plan provides detailed, exhaustive information about agriculture in Chapter 5. Included are mapped lands based on a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) tool, assigning scores countywide ranking site suitability for agriculture.

Portage County Land and Water Resource Management Plan, 2019

This plan identifies issues related to agriculture and lists priorities and strategies to mitigate the effects agriculture has on water quality, erosion, and other natural resources.

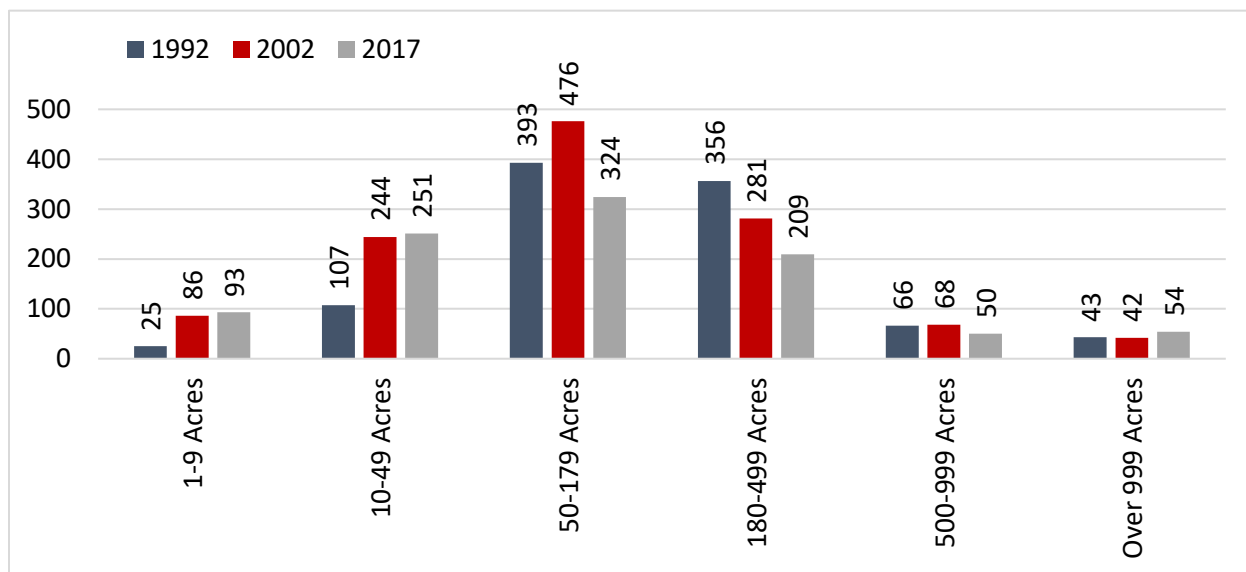




## Inventory and Trends

Farmland can be analyzed by observing the change in the total number of farms, the acreage of each farm, and the amount of revenue from farm sales. According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 982 farms in Portage County with an average size of 286 acres. This is down from 990 total farms in 1992 and 1,197 in 2002.

**Figure 10: Number of Farms by Size in Acres**



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 1992, 2002, & 2017

Total farmed acreage in 2017 was 280,410, down from 292,109 in 2002, but up from 265,731 in 1992. In 2017, 90 percent of farms were 500 acres or less. Between 2012 and 2017, crop values and farm incomes dropped slightly while expenses rose. Over one-quarter of farms made less than \$2,500 in sales and nearly one-quarter of farms made over \$100,000 in sales. See Figure 9 and Table 9.

**Table 25: Portage County Farm Statistics**

	Farm Characteristics	2017	% Change since 2012
<b>Total</b>	Number of farms	982	1%
	Acres of farmland	280,410	1%
	Average Size of Farm	286	-1%
	Market value of products sold	\$280,518,000	-5%
	Government payments	\$1,383,000	-50%
	Farm-related income	\$5,894,000	-6%
	Total farm production expenses	\$230,380,000	2%
	Net cash farm income	\$57,415,000	-27%
<b>Per Farm Average</b>	Market value of products sold	\$285,660	-6%
	Government payments	\$4,055	-27%
	Farm-related income	\$12,731	-10%
	Total farm production expenses	\$234,603	1%
	Net cash farm income	\$58,468	-28%
	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Number of farms</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>Number of farms by value of sales</b>	< \$2,500	277	28%
	\$2,500-\$4,999	106	11%
	\$5,000 - \$9,999	115	12%
	\$10,000 - \$24,999	102	10%
	\$25,000 - \$49,999	99	10%
	\$50,000 - \$99,999	50	5%
	\$100,000 or more	233	24%

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2017

## Crops

Countywide, 73% of sales revenue comes from crops, and the remaining 27% comes from livestock, poultry, and their associated products. Overall, the state ranked 1st in Wisconsin's 72 counties for total crop sales and 39th in sales for livestock, poultry, and their associated products. In terms of market value of various crops, Portage County was one of the top-producing counties in Wisconsin for the following categories: 1. Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes, and 2. Fruits, tree nuts, and berries. See Table 10.

**Table 26: Farm Sales Characteristics**

Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold	Sales (\$1,000)	State Ranking	National Ranking
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$280,518</b>	<b>14/72</b>	<b>292/3,077</b>
<b>Crops</b>	<b>\$206,010</b>	<b>1/72</b>	<b>118/3,073</b>
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	\$34,708	30/72	928/2,916
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes	\$158,142	1/72	21/2,821
Fruits, tree nuts, berries	\$5,983	5/71	192/2,748
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod	\$1,486	33/71	736/2,601
Cultivated Christmas trees, short rotation woody crops	\$310	14/64	126/1,384
Other crops and hay	\$4,981	23/72	496/3,040
<b>Livestock, Poultry, and Products</b>	<b>\$74,508</b>	<b>39/72</b>	<b>687/3,073</b>
Poultry and eggs	\$469	35/72	798/3,007
Cattle and calves	\$27,181	24/72	798/3,055
Milk from cows	\$42,534	41/68	187/1,892
Hogs and pigs	\$838	17/71	609/2,856
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	N/A	N/A	(N/A)/2,984
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	\$43	45/69	1,869/2,970
Aquaculture	N/A	2/52	(N/A)/1,251
Other animals, animal products	\$649	17/70	243/2,878

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2017

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2017. Note: Rankings show the number that Portage County ranks compared to the number of counties in the state or country producing crops in the same category. Note that “N/A” means that the product is being farmed in Portage County, but due to a relatively small number of farms producing the products, data is confidential.

### **Livestock, Poultry, and Animal Products**

Portage County produces the second highest total sales in Wisconsin for Aquaculture. All other animal and animal product categories have a presence in the County but vary in state and national rankings based on the product. Dairy farming has decreased over the years due to changing economic conditions. Although Portage County ranks 39<sup>th</sup> out of 72 counties in Wisconsin for total livestock, poultry, and their associated products, these products still have a considerable presence even though they don’t rank as highly as crops.

## **Productive Agricultural Areas**

Productive agricultural areas are scattered throughout the county, and the most contiguous, undeveloped tracts are in the southern half of the county. Farmland is more broken up by wooded areas in the eastern and northern portions of the county. Much of the county is relatively flat and therefore conducive to the use of large farm machinery and the efficient application of chemicals. Areas with high water tables and steep slopes generally result in higher rates of soil erosion and lower rates of productivity. Prime farmland describes areas with highly productive soils, and these areas are identified more specifically in the town plans. Agricultural land in Portage County has generally gained value over the past decade. The number of agricultural land sale transactions varies per year. According to the University of Wisconsin – Extension, there were 5 farmland real estate transactions with an average price of \$4,219 per acre for Portage County in 2022. Statewide, the average land value was \$5,416 per acre in 2022.

## **Farmland Preservation**

The Town of Grant is the only municipality in Portage County with a farmland preservation zoning district. Landowners can participate in this program to receive tax credits for maintaining farmland in the areas identified in the Farmland Preservation Plan. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) administers this program, and up-to-date information about farmland preservation in Portage County can be viewed on the department's website.

## **Agricultural Infrastructure**

Quality roads are necessary for farmers to transport wholesale farm products to markets, processing plants, and distribution centers in the County. Weight limits on rural roads are a consideration in Wisconsin's climate as freeze-thaw cycles cause roads to degrade under heavy loads more quickly during certain times of year. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3: Transportation.

Depending upon the type of farming, irrigation wells may also be extremely important. Irrigation systems are a common sight in Portage County as they seek to maintain proper soil moisture in the rapidly draining, sandy soil. Ditching is also used with great effectiveness in draining low fields and in the maintenance of cranberry operations.

## **Cultural Resources**

Portage County's character consists of a core urban area around Stevens Point, the County Seat, with rural areas and scattered villages throughout the rest of the county. Geographic features like the Wisconsin River played an instrumental role in the county's history, and indigenous and post-settlement historical sites are scattered throughout the county. This section of the plan identifies existing and potential historic landmarks along with a series of strategies to ensure continued preservation of the county's history.

## **History**

A detailed history of Portage County can be found in its 2006 Comprehensive Plan. In summary, the Wisconsin River has been inhabited for over 10,000 years. Members of Ho-Chunk, Menomonie, and Ojibwe tribes occupied present-day Portage County prior to an influx of European Settlement. Settlement

in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century brought agriculture and industry that used the Wisconsin River's power, such as logging, woodworking, and paper mills. Railroads and what is now the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the County's economy is driven by a mix of education, agriculture, manufacturing, and other industries.

## **Previous Planning Efforts**

### The Wisconsin Historic Preservation Plan 2006-2015

This Wisconsin Historical Society administers this strategic plan, which provides goals and objectives for historic preservation in Wisconsin. The plan is used to prioritize tasks and to focus efforts on five critical issues identified in the planning process:

1. Wisconsin must build a strong network of parties interested in historic preservation.
2. Wisconsin must have a strong educational structure for historic preservation.
3. Preservation must become a core value for Wisconsinites.
4. Wisconsin needs financial stability for preservation activities, ranging from the State Historic Preservation Office to property owners.
5. Citizens and local governments need tools to preserve the state's most threatened cultural resources.

## **Issues**

The practice of preserving historic sites and structures recognizes the architectural, engineering, archaeological, cultural, or historic importance of these assets to a community. In 1994, the Wisconsin Legislature enacted statutes requiring cities and villages with property listed in the National Register of Historic Places or the State Register of Historic Places to enact an ordinance to preserve these places. The City of Stevens Point is the only municipality in Portage County with a historic preservation ordinance, however several municipalities have historic preservation organizations.

In addition to the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the Wisconsin Historical Society has an online database called the Architecture and History Inventory (AHI). This tool provides historical and architectural information for approximately 120,000 properties in Wisconsin. The AHI contains data on structures that illustrate Wisconsin's unique history and cultural landscape. Inclusion in this inventory affords no special protection to structures nor does it convey special status, rights, or benefits to owners.

Similar to the AHI, the Archaeological Site Inventory (ASI) is the most comprehensive list of the archaeological sites, mounds, marked and unmarked cemeteries, and cultural sites in the state. However, it includes only those sites that have been reported to the Wisconsin Historical Society and therefore does not include all possible sites and cemeteries of archeological significance in the state. This inventory has been developed over a period of 150 years, therefore, each entry in the database varies widely and the information has not been verified in all cases.

## Inventory and Trends

### Historical Structures and Sites

The WHS AHI returns a total of 1,199 property records that may be historically significant in Portage County. This source is the most complete, up-to-date list of properties, though some recorded in the database may no longer exist due to demolition. The most significant structures in the County are those that are listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. There are 21 of these structures in Portage County:

- August G. and Theresa Green House (1501 Main St., Stevens Point)
- Christina Kuhl House (1416 Main St., Stevens Point)
- David McMillan House (1924 Pine St., Stevens Point)
- Folding Furniture Works Building (1020 First St., Stevens Point)
- Fox Theater (1116-1128 Main St., Stevens Point)
- Hardware Mutual Insurance Companies Building (1421 Strongs Ave., Stevens Point)
- Hotel Whiting (1408 Strongs Ave., Stevens Point)
- J.L. Jensen House (1100 Brawley St., Stevens Point)
- John Gilbert Rosholt House (237 N Main St., Rosholt)
- L.A. Pomeroy House (203 Laconia St., Amherst)
- Main Street Historical District, Stevens Point (Bounded by Prentice, Clark, Freemont, and Main Streets)
- Mathias Mitchell Public Square, Stevens Point (Main St. from Strongs Ave. to Second St.)
- Nelson Hall (1209 Fremont St., Stevens Point)
- New Hope Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church and Cemetery (1410 CTH T, New Hope)
- Old Plover Methodist Church (Madison Ave., Plover)
- Pipe School (Junction of Pipe Rd. and CTH T, Lanark)
- Rising Star Flouring Mill (3190 CTH Q, Nelsonville)
- Severance-Pipe Farmstead (Pipe Rd., E of CTH T, Lanark)
- Sisters of St. Joseph Convent (1300 Maria Dr., Stevens Point)
- Stevens Point State Normal School (2100 Main St., Stevens Point)
- Temple Beth Israel (1475 Water St., Stevens Point)

The Portage County Historical Society owns Old Plover Methodist Church, which is now part of a site with historical exhibits known as Heritage Park. This park is the location of the original Plover settlement when it was the seat of Portage County, and it features several historical structures, many of which have been restored. The Portage County Historical Society also has a photo collection at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point Library, and the Society also runs the Synagogue Museum and Rising Star Mill. Portage County is also home to many archaeological sites, such as burial mounds which can be found in several County Parks. Due to their vulnerability, locations of archaeological sites are often not disclosed to the public.

## Community Design and Character

The shape and appearance of a community often changes over time. Styles of building and development react to changing economic conditions and technologies, and to changing tastes. For example, a historic main street often features dense, mixed-use buildings built up against the sidewalk. This contrasts with a newer rural housing development where homes are set back from roads and buffered by wooded areas. Old and new buildings must meet Portage County’s present needs, and careful planning can successfully improve the quality and appearance of revitalized structures and new construction. Land use planning and zoning also ensure that higher density development is located where infrastructure can support it and where it is visually compatible with its surroundings. Planning and zoning can also be used to maintain rural tracts of open land to facilitate farming and preserve rural character. Overall, carefully guiding development allows municipalities in Portage County to retain their individual identities and character while accommodating development needs.

## Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resource Programs

### Aquatic Habitat Protection Program

The WDNR provides basic aquatic habitat protection services through their staff. Staff members include Water Management (Regulation) Specialists, Zoning Specialists, Rivers (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission-FERC) Specialists, Lakes Specialists, Water Management Engineers, and their assistants (LTEs). The program assists with water regulation permits, zoning assistance, coordination of rivers, lake management, and engineering.

### Central Wisconsin Windshed Partnership Group (CWWP)

CWWP is collaborative effort in Portage County that installs wind breaks and fences using vegetation to prevent soil erosion by wind and snow drifting.

### Discovery Farms Program

Discovery Farms is a program administered by UW-Extension that works with over 40 farmers across the state of Wisconsin. The program’s mission is to “develop on-farm and related research to determine the economic and environmental effects of agricultural practices on a diverse group of Wisconsin farms; and educates and improves communications among the agricultural community, consumers, researchers and policymakers to better identify and implement effective environmental management practices that are compatible with profitable agriculture.” On-Farm projects fall under one the following categories: Nitrogen Use Efficiency, Tile Monitoring, Leachate Collection Systems, Watershed water quality, and Edge-of-Field Runoff Monitoring.

### Drinking Water and Groundwater Program

This WDNR program is responsible for assuring safe, high quality drinking water and for protecting groundwater. This is achieved by enforcing minimum well construction and pump installation requirements, conducting surveys and inspections of water systems, the investigation and sampling of drinking water quality problems, and requiring drinking water quality monitoring and reporting. A team

of specialists, engineers, hydrogeologists, and a program expert and program assistants staff the program. WDNR staff provide assistance to public and private well owners to help solve water quality complaints and water system problems. They also provide interested citizens with informational or educational materials about drinking water supplies and groundwater.

The Center for Watershed Science and Education (CWSE) allows residents in Central Wisconsin to determine the safety of their well water by providing the opportunity to have their well water tested. Residents can send in water samples of their well water to any state-certified testing laboratory, including the Water and Environmental Analysis Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, which houses CWSE.

#### Endangered Resources Program

The DNR's Endangered Resources staff provides expertise and advice on endangered resources. They manage the Natural Heritage Inventory Program (NHI), which is used to determine the existence and location of native plant and animal communities and Endangered or Threatened Species of Special Concern. The NHI helps identify and prioritize areas suitable for State Natural Area (SNA) designation, provides information needed for feasibility studies and master plans, and maintains the list of endangered and threatened species. All management activities conducted by Wildlife Management and Forestry staff must be reviewed to determine the impact on NHI-designated species. A permit for the incidental take of an Endangered or Threatened species is required under the State Endangered Species Law. The Endangered Resources Program oversees the permit process, reviews applications, and makes permit decisions. Funding for the Endangered Species Program comes from a number of sources, including tax checkoff revenue, license plates, general program revenues (GPR), gaming revenue, Natural Heritage Inventory chargebacks, wild rice permits, general gifts and Pittman Robertson grants.

#### Farmland Preservation Program

To protect farmland from being converted to some other use, the state enacted the Farmland Preservation Program. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection provides oversight to the program. This program requires that each county develop a county Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) and states that the plan becomes a part of the county comprehensive plan as well. Portage County adopted a Farmland Preservation Plan in 2016.

#### Fisheries Management Program

The WDNR funds this program primarily through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. The program assists with fishery surveys, fish habitat improvement/protection, and fish community manipulation. This program may also be used to fund public relations events and a variety of permitting and administrative activities involving fisheries.

#### Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development

Founded in 1972 and based in the City of Stevens Point, Golden Sands is a nonprofit that serves 13 counties in Central Wisconsin. The nonprofit organizes volunteers, citizen groups, and government agencies to accomplish environmental quality projects related to water, farming, and forestry.



### Little Plover River Watershed Enhancement Project (LPRWEP)

The LPRWEP is a multiparty collaboration convened by the Village of Plover to improve the health of the Little Plover River by using data to increase the flow and improve aquatic health, improve surface and groundwater connections and water retention, alleviate storm water-driven flooding, and improve and expand fish and wildlife habitat and public recreation opportunities and access for the Little Plover River.

### Managed Forest Law (MFL)

The purpose of the MFL is to promote good forest management through property tax incentives. Management practices are required by way of an approved forest management plan. Landowners with a minimum of 10 contiguous acres (80% must be capable of producing merchantable timber) are eligible and may contract for 25 or 50 years. Open lands must allow hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, and sight-seeing; however, up to 80 acres may be closed to public access by the landowner. There is a 5% yield tax applied to any wood products harvested. Contact the WDNR for further information.

### Nonpoint Source Program (NSP)

Wisconsin's NPS Program, through a comprehensive network of federal, state, and local agencies working in partnership with other organizations and citizens, addresses the significant nonpoint sources in the state. This program combines voluntary and regulatory approaches with financial and technical assistance. Abatement activities include agriculture, urban, forestry, wetlands, and hydrologic modifications. The core activities of the program — research, monitoring, data assessment and management, regulation and enforcement, financial and technical assistance, education and outreach and public involvement — work to address current water quality impairments and prevent future threats caused by NPS pollution. Contact the WDNR for more information.

### NRCS Conservation Programs

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) natural resources conservation programs help people reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters. NRCS provides funding opportunities for agricultural producers and other landowners through these programs:

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) by USDA's Farm Service Agency
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- Small, Limited, and Beginning Farmer Assistance
- Working Lands for Wildlife

### Parks and Recreation Program

The WDNR gets authority for administering the Parks and Recreation Program from Chapter 27 Wisconsin Statutes. This program provides assistance in the development of public parks and recreation facilities.

Funding sources include the general fund, the Stewardship Program, Land and Water Conservation fund (LAWCON), and program revenue funds.

### Private Forestry

The WDNR's goal is to motivate private forest landowners to practice sustainable forestry by providing technical forestry assistance, state and federal cost-sharing on management practices, sale of state produced nursery stock for reforestation, enrollment in Wisconsin's Forest Tax Law Programs, advice for the protection of endangered and threatened species, and assistance with forest disease and insect problems. Each county has at least one Department forester assigned to respond to requests for private forestland assistance. These foresters also provide educational programs for landowners, schools, and the public. Both private and industrial forest landowners have enrolled their lands under the Managed Forest Law.

### Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

The Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP) provides funding to producer-led groups that focus on nonpoint source pollution abatement activities through the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program (PLWPG). The goal is to improve Wisconsin's soil and water quality by supporting and advancing producer-led conservation solutions by increasing on the ground practices and farmer participation in these efforts.

### Stewardship Grants for Nonprofit Conservation Organizations

Nonprofit conservation organizations are eligible to obtain funding for the acquisition of land or easements for conservation purposes and restoration of wildlife habitat. Priorities include acquisition of wildlife habitat, acquisition of lands with special scientific or ecological value, protection of rare and endangered habitats and species, acquisition of stream corridors, acquisition of land for state trails including the Ice Age Trail and North Country Trail, and restoration of wetlands and grasslands. Eligible types of projects include fee simple and easement acquisitions and habitat restoration projects. Contact the WDNR for further information.

### Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farm Network

The Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farm Network launched in 2019 involving the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS), and Waupaca County Land & Water Conservation Department, in partnership with the counties of Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Outagamie, Portage, Shawano, and Winnebago Counties, and the Green Lake Association. The Network supports producers on a voluntary basis to address erosion control and non-point source pollution.

### Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program which was established to restore wetlands on lands which were previously altered for agricultural use. The program is administered by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service in consultation with the Farm Service Agency and other federal agencies.

Land is eligible for enrollment in the WRP if the landowner has owned that land for at least one year, and the land is restorable and suitable for wildlife benefits. Landowners may choose to restore wetlands with a permanent or 30-year easement or enter into a cost-share restoration agreement with the USDA. If a permanent easement is established, the landowner will receive payment up to the agricultural value of the land and 100% of the wetland restoration costs. The 30-year easement payment is just 75% of what would be provided for a permanent easement on the same site, and 75% of the restoration costs. Voluntary cost-share restoration agreements are generally for a minimum of 10 years, and 75% of the cost of restoring the land to wetlands is provided. In all instances, landowners continue to control access to their land.

#### Wildlife Management Program

The DNR's Bureau of Wildlife Management oversees a complex web of programs that incorporate state, federal and local initiatives primarily directed toward wildlife habitat management and enhancement. Programs include land acquisition, development and maintenance of State Wildlife Areas, and other wild land programs such as State Natural Areas. Wildlife Staff work closely with staff of state and county forests to maintain, enhance, and restore wildlife habitat. Wildlife Management staff conduct wildlife population and habitat surveys, prepare property needs analysis's, develop basin wildlife management plans, and collaborate with other DNR planning efforts such as Park, Forestry or Fishery Area Property Master Plans to assure sound habitat management. Funding comes from the federal government in the form of Endangered Species grants and Pittman-Robertson grants and from state government in the form of hunting and trapping license revenues, voluntary income tax contributions, general program revenue and Stewardship funds.

#### Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Wisconsin Historical Society

This office is part of the Wisconsin Historical Society and serves as the principal historic preservation agency in the state. In partnership with communities, organizations, and individuals, the SHPO works to identify, interpret, and preserve historic places for the benefit of present and future generations.

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

### Natural Resources Goals

1. Manage the natural resources that support and sustain us.
2. Development takes into consideration the protection of natural resources.

### Natural Resources Objectives

1. Identify, manage, preserve, and protect natural resources throughout Portage County.
2. Natural resources that provide recreational opportunities on public land are managed to ensure their lasting presence.
3. Metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources are identified for their extraction potential.

### Natural Resources Policies

1. Utilize agricultural practices that are environmentally sensitive and protect air, soil, water, and wildlife resources.
2. Local units of government work together to define and develop appropriate public access to natural resources.
3. Develop an ongoing educational program for municipal boards and the public related to natural resource issues.
4. Develop partnership efforts that result in the preservation and restoration of natural resources.

### Agriculture Goals

1. Sustain an economically viable agriculture industry.
2. Agricultural practices are unencumbered by development.

### Agriculture Objectives

1. Educate the public about the operations and activities of the agricultural community.
2. Preserve productive agricultural land countywide.

### Agriculture Policies

1. Develop a process where the general public shares in the cost of protecting agricultural resources.
2. Utilize agricultural practices that are environmentally sensitive and protect air, soil, water, and wildlife resources.

**Cultural Goal**

1. Encourage identification and protection of historic and cultural resources.

**Cultural Objectives**

2. Historic and Cultural Arts become an integral part of our communities.
3. Make the public more aware of cultural resources.

**Cultural Policy**

1. Develop guidelines for identifying and protecting cultural and historic resources.

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## Chapter 6: Economic Development

### Background

This chapter examines the County's economy and compares it to statewide and national trends. The analysis includes location quotients and other economic methods to identify local strengths. The reuse of environmentally contaminated sites for commercial and industrial redevelopment is discussed, as are the different economic development programs available at the local, regional, state, and federal levels. Included is an overview of issues, trends, and goals, objectives, and policies.

### Previous Plans and Studies

#### North Central Wisconsin Regional Entrepreneurship Assessment & Strategy, 2023

In 2023, NCWRPC surveyed businesses across its ten-county region to assess how business-friendly the region is for entrepreneurs. Included in this report are survey findings, recommendations, and an inventory of all programs and facilities that support entrepreneurship. An Entrepreneurship Portal containing these resources is found on NCWRPC's website.

#### 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.

#### North Central Region Industrial Park Inventory, Absorption, and Needs Study, 2022.

NCWRPC conducted a 10-county study of available industrial park acreage, the rate at which it is being developed, and how much acreage is needed in the future. The study includes industrial park planning recommendations along with up-to-date maps of Portage County's six industrial parks. Using absorption rates from 2000 to 2020, it estimates that Portage County has an estimated 44- to 66-year supply of available industrial park acreage.

#### Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), 2021

Portage 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.

### Regional Livability Plan (RLP), 2015

Economic Development is one of four elements included in the RLP, adopted by the NCWRPC in 2015. The Economic Development Assessment Report within the RLP observes in detail the economic health of the ten-county region and identifies trends and issues facing the local economy. The RLP addresses three economic development issues:

- **Available Labor Force and Employment.** Businesses need a workforce with the proper education to meet the demands of an ever-changing job market. High labor needs combined with an older workforce preparing for retirement will result in a labor force shortage and inability to meet the workforce needs of area businesses. The future availability of a quality labor force is a major concern for the business community.
- **Living Wage.** Over the past ten years, the region’s cost of living (i.e. home prices and rent) have increased faster than per capita and household incomes. Consequently, many working adults must seek public assistance and/or hold multiple jobs to meet the basic needs of their families. Occupations paying a living wage provide families resources for savings, investments, education, and the purchasing of goods which improves the local economy and increases the quality of life of the region’s population.
- **Broadband.** High-speed broadband connections are crucial for government services, healthcare, education, library systems, private businesses, and residents. Improving the region’s telecommunication network can assist existing businesses, attract new businesses, and allow residents to access education opportunities.

### ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Wisconsin, 2023

This report, developed by the United Way, describes households in Portage County that are above the federal poverty level, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities, or “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.

The ALICE report shows that 20 percent of Portage County households are considered ALICE households, and another 11 percent live in poverty, indicating that the average household in Portage County is slightly less financially strained than the average State of Wisconsin household (23 percent ALICE, 11 percent in poverty). Percentages of ALICE households range between 15 and 46 percent in Portage County depending on the municipality. County fact sheets are available on United Way Wisconsin’s website.



## Issues

### Aging Population

Though the presence of college students in Portage County results in a median age that is younger than the state average, the remainder of the County's population is aging. As retirements continue and demand for senior-oriented services increases, the County's economy is expected to shift. Attracting and retaining workers to support the economy will also be a challenge as household size continues to shrink.

### Agricultural, Cultural, and Natural Resource Tourism

Portage County's combination of agricultural, cultural, and natural amenities support tourism-based businesses. With a projected increase in employment in these industries as discussed later in this Chapter, there is an opportunity to enhance this aspect of the County's economy. For more information on existing amenities, visit the websites for Stevens Point Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Plover Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, and CREATE Portage County.

### Broadband

Broadband expansion is desired, especially in rural areas, as an economic development tool. With remote work and learning, rural Towns and Villages may see renewed interest as young families are priced out of larger cities. Other areas in the County already served by internet may wish for more internet service provider choices. Portage County is central to metropolitan areas including Madison, Milwaukee, the Fox Cities, Wausau, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Chicago, making it an affordable option within a half day's drive of these major employment centers. Currently, the Federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program is being used to develop a broadband plan for Portage County.

### Childcare

It is becoming increasingly difficult for families to find childcare with availability that is affordable, removing potential employees who are parents from filling vacant jobs.

## Inventory and Trends

This analysis provides insight regarding how industries in Portage County are performing by comparing the County with state and national statistics. Using U.S. Census and Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) data, Portage County's economic strengths and weaknesses are identified, along with a series of strategies. Additional economic data dating back to the 1960s can be found in Portage County's previous Comprehensive Plan (2006).



## Economic Overview

Chapter 1 discussed how Portage County is growing, but at a much slower rate than the State of Wisconsin and the nation. Urban areas in the County have growth slightly faster than rural areas, and growth is expected to continue for the County as a whole through 2040. Urban areas are expected to drive growth, with rural areas forecasted to peak in 2030 followed by a slight decline in population through 2040. While growth brings development pressure to the County, there are concerns if there will be a big enough working population to support the growing retired population. Retirees from other locations may find the County attractive due to its relative affordability and proximity to good healthcare and services.

Education, healthcare, social assistance, and manufacturing combined employ over one-third of County residents, which is partially due to the presence of the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, Mid-State Technical College, Marshfield Clinic, and Aspirus Health Care campuses, as well as extensive industrial parkland in multiple municipalities. Though agriculture doesn't employ as many individuals as these industries, the County is known throughout the State for producing the most vegetables of any Wisconsin County, highlighting this industry's significance to the local economy.

## Economic Sectors

In 2021, there were an estimated 37,801 Portage County residents who were employed, and this figure includes jobs that may be in other counties. Overall, the number of employed residents increased by 6 percent between 2000 and 2021, which is slower than the state (9.4 percent) and nation (21.4 percent) during the same time. This could change in the future, however, as Portage County's affordability, good schools, and healthcare may attract workers from other regions of the country that have a higher cost of living, vulnerability to natural hazards, or other concerns that may make places like Central Wisconsin more appealing.

Industries that increased the most from 2000-2021 in terms of total employment include Public Administration (40.9 percent), Construction (21.4 percent), and Education/Healthcare/Social Assistance (20.0 percent). Industries that declined considerably during this time include wholesale trade (-44.3

percent) and information (-34.5 percent). Training, education, and recruitment will ensure that Portage County will continue to fulfill employers' needs as conditions continue to change. It is important to note that the data in Table 27 is self-reported, so there could be more employees in certain industries that are in self-employed or family-owned businesses that are not reflected in the data.

**Table 27: Employment by Industries**

Industry	2000	2010	2021	2000 - 2021 Net Change	2000 - 2021 % Change
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1,241	1,376	1,254	13	1.0%
Construction	1,707	1,695	2,073	366	21.4%
Manufacturing	6,314	5,170	5,806	-508	-8.0%
Wholesale trade	1,235	1,006	688	-547	-44.3%
Retail trade	4,813	4,757	4,123	-690	-14.3%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	1,948	2,061	1,877	-71	-3.6%
Information	835	771	547	-288	-34.5%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	3,682	3,639	3,483	-199	-5.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1,627	2,038	3,125	1,498	92.1%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	7,192	7,792	8,627	1,435	20.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	3,005	3,581	3,585	580	19.3%
Other services, except public administration	1,236	1,509	1,427	191	15.5%
Public administration	842	1,000	1,186	344	40.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,677</b>	<b>36,395</b>	<b>37,801</b>	<b>2,124</b>	<b>6.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2021

Portage County’s largest employers are displayed in Table 28. The largest employers are Sentry Insurance Group, R.R. Donnelley, and Metro Market. Note that some of the data provided by DWD may be out of date, and company names and/or statistics may have changed in recent years.

**Table 28: Major Employers**

Largest Employers	
Sentry Insurance Group	University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point
McCain Foods USA, Inc.	City of Stevens Point Government
R.R. Donnelley	Portage County Government
Associated Bank	Skyward, Inc.
H.O. Wolding, Inc./Bison Transportation	Monogram Foods
Donaldson Co.	CJK Group (Sheridan Worzalla)
Worzalla	Marten Machining
Aspirus Health	Lineage Logistics
Walmart Supercenter	Pointe Precision, Inc.
Stevens Point Area School District	AIG/Travel Guard Insurance
Metro Market	Lands' End
Stevens Point Area YMCA	Ki Mobility
Ortho Molecular Products, Inc.	Team Schierl Companies
Wysocki Family of Companies	Jay-Mar, Inc.
Tomorrow River School District	Steel King Industries
Festival Foods	Marshfield Clinic
Mativ Holdings, Inc	Gamber-Johnson
Delta Dental of Wisconsin	Herrschners, Inc.
Pacelli Catholic Schools	

Source: Portage County Business Council and Wisconsin DWD, 2023

**Economic Analysis**

This section uses Location Quotient to provide detailed information on Portage County’s economy. Location Quotient identifies which economic sectors are currently at a higher or lower concentration compared to state and national averages. Additionally, future job projections are also included. Most data in this section are from Lightcast (formerly EMSI), a private company that specializes in global labor market analytics.

Location Quotient

Location quotient (LQ) compares local, state, and national employment data by economic sector. It measures the ratio of jobs that a locality has in an economic sector compared to state and national ratios. For example, Southeastern Wisconsin is known for having a “water cluster,” which is based on its high ratio of jobs in water research and industry compared to state and national ratios.

LQ is based on a model that the local economy can be divided into two sectors: The “basic” (or non-local) sector, which are employers providing goods and services that are purchased or consumed by customers outside Portage County, and the “non-basic” (or local) sector, which are goods and services consumed in Portage County. The basic economy generates revenue by providing goods and services that other regions desire, but do not have. It is also known as the export economy, and it is usually the goal of many economic development programs. If a County’s basic sector of the economy is weak, residents depend more on buying goods and services from other locations, which is known as industry sector leakage.

Economic decline occurs when a county’s residents depend heavily on importing goods and services and have relatively few desirable goods and services to export to other places. When the basic sector of the economy is strong, revenue is generated, which is circulated within the local economy by both basic and non-basic employees. As a result, attracting and retaining businesses and employees is essential to the County’s economic well-being.

The location quotient can be described by the following equation:

$$LQ_i = (e_i^t / e_T^t) / (E_i^t / E_T^t)$$

where:

$e_i^t$  = regional (County) employment in industry  $i$  in year  $t$

$e_T^t$  = total regional (County) employment in year  $t$

$E_i^t$  = national employment in industry  $i$  in year  $t$

$E_T^t$  = total national employment in year  $t$

If  $LQ_i$  is greater than 1.00, it is determined to be an exporting sector, while if it is below 1.00, it is determined to be an importing sector. Exports bring money from outside the county into the local economy and imports represent local dollars flowing outside the county. Table 29 provides a summary of the location quotient analysis results.

**Table 29: Location Quotient by Major Category, 2021**

Industry	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2.55
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.26
Utilities	0.68
Construction	0.62
Manufacturing	1.69
Wholesale Trade	0.82
Retail Trade	1.22
Transportation and Warehousing	1.63
Information	0.27
Finance and Insurance	2.89
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0.39
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.56
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.27
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	0.50
Educational Services	0.13
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.72
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	0.54
Accommodation and Food Services	1.04
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1.32
Government	0.84

Source: Lightcast (Formerly EMSI), 2021. Some categories are estimates because of non-disclosure.

Location quotients for non-government industries are described below:

**Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting** is the second largest export industry in Portage County, with an LQ of 2.55, despite only comprising a small share of all jobs in Portage County. Crop production, animal production, hunting, and trapping are top exports in this category.

**Manufacturing** is a significant export industry (LQ = 1.69), with many industrial parks and businesses existing in Portage County. Though employment declined by 8 percent from 2000 to 2021, manufacturing still employs 15 percent of Portage County's workforce. Top exports include fruit and vegetable preserving, specialty food manufacturing, and paper/pulp products.

**Retail Trade** is an export industry, with an LQ of 1.22, despite a 14 percent decrease in the number of jobs between 2000 and 2021. This trend could be influenced by the rise in e-commerce since 2000. Top exports include miscellaneous retail, used merchandise retail, and gasoline stations.

**Transportation and Warehousing** is another export industry, with an LQ of 1.63. Many of these jobs support the distribution of manufactured or farmed products created in Portage County.

General freight trucking, support activities for road transportation, and specialized freight trucking are top exports.

**Finance and Insurance** is the largest export industry in Portage County, with Sentry Insurance Group, Delta Dental of Wisconsin, and Associated Bank all ranking in the list of largest employers in the County. The LQ for Finance and Insurance is 2.89. Insurance carriers, activities related to credit intermediation, agencies, and brokerages are the top exports in this industry.

**Accommodation and Food Services** is an export industry in Portage County, which could be due to its location near a “crossroads” of several main highways, presence of several college campuses, and lineup of attractions that attract tourism, such as the SentryWorld Golf Course. This results in a considerable number of people traveling through or to Portage County, giving the industry an LQ of 1.04. This is reflected in Recreational Vehicle (RV) parks and camps as well as places that serve alcohol being the top exports in this industry.

**Other Services (except Public Administration)** is an export industry, with an LQ of 1.32. This is impressive, considering that this industry only employs 191 out of the County’s 37,801 total employees. Institutions related to civic, social, and social advocacy programs are this industry’s top exports.

The following are import industries in Portage County:

- Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction
- Utilities
- Construction
- Wholesale Trade
- Information
- Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Management of Companies and Enterprises
- Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services
- Educational Services
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation

Note that utilities could become an export industry if solar farms continue to be constructed in Portage County. Additionally, the number of Construction jobs grew by 20 percent between 2000 and 2021, despite currently being an import industry. This contrasts with industries like Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction, which are highly dependent on geology. Since Portage County is not known for deposits of fossil fuels or precious metals, this industry is not expected to become an export industry. While this LQ analysis provides insight into current conditions, it does not predict future economic conditions. The next section will describe predicted changes in number of jobs by industry in Portage County.

## Employment Projections

Based on analyses of historical and national data, Lightcast projects predicted employment for industries and occupations for the next decade. Using 2021 data to remain consistent with other data in this plan, Table 30 summarizes the projected number of jobs between 2021 and 2031. These numbers are based on the average of short-, mid-, and long-term County and industry trends. The numbers are adjusted to complement projections from other sources, such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Note that, because Lightcast's data is difference from the U.S. Census Bureau's, the total number of jobs in each industry varies between the two sources despite using 2021 data for both. Additionally, the U.S. Census records the number of Portage County residents who have a job (within or outside Portage County), while Lightcast records the number of jobs that exist within Portage County (even if workers reside in another county).

**Table 30: Employment Projections**

Industry	2021 Jobs	2031 Jobs	Net Change	% Change
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	717	590	-127	-18%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	31	29	-2	-6%
Utilities	84	90	6	7%
Construction	1,042	1,257	215	21%
Manufacturing	4,690	5,053	363	8%
Wholesale Trade	1,053	1,302	249	24%
Retail Trade	4,230	3,658	-572	-14%
Transportation and Warehousing	2,188	1,983	-205	-9%
Information	175	252	77	44%
Finance and Insurance	4,006	4,345	339	8%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	194	235	41	21%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,244	1,531	287	23%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	144	248	104	72%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,024	1,093	69	7%
Educational Services	86	94	8	9%
Health Care and Social Assistance	3,219	3,321	102	3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	243	548	305	126%
Accommodation and Food Services	2,850	2,744	-106	-4%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,237	1,223	-14	-1%
Government	3,967	3,951	-16	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,423</b>	<b>33,547</b>	<b>1,124</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: Lightcast (formerly EMSI), 2021



The data in Table 30 predicts that there will be over twice the number of arts, entertainment, and recreation jobs than there are currently, and the increase would result in the industry ranking third in total number of jobs in the County. This is followed by jobs in management and information, which are predicted to grow by 72 percent and 44 percent, respectively. Industries predicted to gain the largest number of jobs are manufacturing (363 jobs) and finance and insurance (339 jobs). Note that the number of jobs in 2021 listed here is considerably lower than the number of jobs reported by the Census in Chapter 1 of this plan. This is because Lightcast tracks the number of jobs in Portage County, and Census tracks the number of County residents with jobs, regardless of if they work in Portage County or another county.

Industries that are predicted to have the greatest rate of jobs loss are agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (18 percent) and retail trade (14 percent). The agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industry is also predicted to have the second largest decrease in total number of jobs (127 jobs). Other industries predicted to lose the most jobs include retail trade (572 jobs) and accommodation and food services (106 jobs).

Overall, there is predicted to be variability between the number of jobs created or lost in different industries, but the overall ranking of each industry’s total employment is not expected to shift considerably over the next decade.

**Labor Force Analysis**

This section examines four factors related to the County’s labor force. These factors are labor force, unemployment, workforce participation, and education & training. Table 32 displays a variety of information related to the County’s labor force.

**Table 31: Labor Force Indicators**

Indicator	2000	2010	2021	2000-2021 % County Change	2000-2021 % State Change
Labor Force	37,932	38,773	39,117	3.1%	8.9%
Employed	35,677	36,395	37,801	6.0%	10.2%
Unemployed	2,255	2,378	1,316	-41.6%	-18.8%
Unemployment Rate	5.9%	7.1%	3.4%	-42.4%	-25.4%
Participation Rate	71.4%	68.7%	66.9%	-6.3%	-4.3%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2010 & 2021

Labor Force

The labor force is defined as the number of County residents sixteen and over, employed or looking to be employed. Persons over sixteen who are students, stay-at-home parents, retired, institutionalized, or unable or unwilling to seek employment are not considered part of the labor force. Overall, the size of the labor force increased by 3.1 percent between 2000 and 2021 in Portage County, for an increase of 1,725 individuals. Note this is the number of people who live in the County, not the number of jobs in the County, and some workers work in other counties. While the labor force grew during the past few decades, the State of Wisconsin’s labor force grew at a rate nearly three times the County rate.

## Unemployment

In 2000, the County had 5.9 percent unemployment compared to the state rate of 4.7 percent. This rose to 7.1 percent in 2010 due to the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis, but has since dropped to 3.4 percent, slightly under the statewide unemployment rate of 3.5 percent. 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.

## Workforce Participation

In 2000, over 71 percent of Portage County residents over the age of 16 were in the labor force, but this decreased to 66.9 percent by 2021. This is slightly higher than the statewide participation rate of 66 percent. The decrease is partially due to the large number of baby boomers who are retiring but can also be due to other factors including a lack of childcare.

Workforce participation is a measure expressed in terms of a percentage of persons not actively seeking employment divided by the total working age population. These persons may not seek employment due to retirement, disability, choose to be a home care provider, or simply are not looking for work.

## Education and Training

Worker productivity has often been cited as one important reason for the strength of Wisconsin's economy. Both education and training are critical to maintaining that productivity. The level of educational attainment is an important indicator of the skills of the labor force. Formal education and job training reflect a community's ability to provide a labor force for certain types of industry. As identified earlier in the plan, educational attainment in the county is similar to the statewide average in terms of those with a high school diploma or better, and bachelor's degrees or higher. The County has higher educational attainment rates than the nationwide average.

Training is another labor force indicator. Partnerships between local businesses, governments, and educational institutions are very useful in developing the County's economy. Institutions such as UW-Stevens Point and Midstate Technical College often direct their programs to the training needs of local workers and businesses. Training services for dislocated workers is provided at the Job Center of Wisconsin location in the City of Wisconsin Rapids (Wood County). The center is intended to be a one-stop resource for employers to meet their workforce needs and job seekers to get the career planning, job placement, and training services they need to obtain jobs. Organizations such as the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board are important to this process as well.

## Income and Wages

There are two basic 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. As identified earlier in this plan, the Median Household income in 2000 was \$43,487 and the Per Capita income was \$19,854. Both Median and Per Capita Incomes have risen over the last fifteen years, by 51 and 76 percent

respectively. Median household income grew at a slower rate during this time period than in Wisconsin, while per capita incomes grew faster in Portage County than in the state as a whole.

Table 33 provides average annual wage data by industry as reported by the 2021 American Community Survey. While average wages in Portage County are overall similar to neighboring counties, they are lower than statewide figures. This is offset by a cost of living that is lower than the statewide average. Some industries have higher wages than both neighboring counties and statewide figures, such as transportation and warehousing, and utilities.

**Table 32: Median Annual Income by Industry, 2021**

Industry	Portage	Marathon	Wood	Wisconsin
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining:	\$32,226	\$27,154	\$37,273	\$33,140
Construction	\$43,125	\$49,296	\$47,710	\$51,433
Manufacturing	\$45,692	\$46,672	\$46,136	\$50,316
Wholesale trade	\$54,167	\$54,868	\$42,109	\$52,719
Retail trade	\$23,466	\$30,095	\$23,631	\$26,593
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	\$53,540	\$48,673	\$52,005	\$49,491
Information	\$39,408	\$42,417	\$42,156	\$49,575
Finance and insurance, and real estate, and rental and leasing:	\$55,759	\$50,064	\$42,741	\$54,982
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative, and waste management services:	\$45,135	\$43,799	\$37,286	\$48,187
Educational services, and health care and social assistance:	\$32,418	\$42,514	\$37,775	\$40,810
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services:	\$13,579	\$15,532	\$14,563	\$15,356
Other services, except public administration	\$34,721	\$28,912	\$25,704	\$31,109
Public administration	\$51,250	\$52,553	\$47,922	\$56,259

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021

## Redevelopment

Generally, redevelopment areas are those that are underutilized or vacant and there is some existing infrastructure and public services in place. Often these might be called blighted or deteriorated, or even condemned. These areas are efficiently redeveloped since they will utilize existing infrastructure and services.

In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) lists information on contaminated properties and documents activities relating to eventual reuse and cleanup of “brownfield” lands through

the Wisconsin Bureau for Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS). The five types of sites tracked by BRRTS include Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) sites, Environmental Repair (ERP) sites, Spills, Liability Exemption (VPLE) sites, and Abandoned Container sites. According to BRRTS, there are three open ERP sites in the County as of August 2023.

Another widely used redevelopment tool is Tax Increment Financing (TIF). This tool involves creating a Tax Increment District (TID), where the property's baseline taxes continue to fund all taxing jurisdictions at its current rate. But as improvements are built and the property's taxable value increases, the "increment," or additional property tax revenue generated, goes directly towards projects within the TID. This can be used to finance infrastructure serving the site, environmental cleanup, and/or other projects needed to make a project happen. When TID-related costs are paid by the increment, the TID closes and the TID's entire property taxes go towards all taxing jurisdictions, adding to the tax base. A proposed project using TIF must pass the "but-for" test, meaning that the applicant must demonstrate that the project is not feasible without the use of TIF. The value of all properties in TID districts in any given municipality is limited by state law to a certain percentage of the municipality's total equalized value.

### **Economic Development Infrastructure**

Portage County's economic development infrastructure is concentrated along main highways, especially USH-51/ISH-39 and USH-10. This infrastructure investment provides a wider range of opportunities for prospective entrepreneurs and greatly increases the county's chances of developing and maintaining a stable employment base for its workforce in the future. There are six industrial parks totaling approximately 1,860 acres. Although each park is served by infrastructure, portions of some are only partially developed, and future development on land that is already acquired will need infrastructure to be extended. See Chapter 3 for a complete list of truck routes, railroads, highways, airports, and other forms of transportation that facilitate economic development.

Industrial Parks are the critical economic development infrastructure in the county. The creation of industrial parks enables communities to compete with other communities to attract new businesses or to relocate existing businesses for expansions. An industrial park is a parcel of land that has been developed according to a plan that provides sites for potential industrial firms. The park is designed in such a way that it ensures compatibility between industrial operations and the existing activities of the area in which the park is located. Zoning or covenants provide for appropriate building setbacks, lot sizes, building to land ratios, architectural specifications, and landscaping required by the local codes and as necessitated by the nature of industrial activity. As of now, the 2022 North Central Regional Industrial Park Inventory found that Portage County has sufficient industrial park acreage to meet demand for several decades.

### **Economic Development Programs**

There are several economic development programs available to businesses and local government units in Portage County. The following is a partial list of those programs.

## Local

### Central Wisconsin SCORE

Central Wisconsin SCORE consists of a team of experienced entrepreneurs who volunteer their experience and knowledge to help small business professionals start, develop, and grow businesses. SCORE offers free business advice, business training, and numerous templates and tools. SCORE also offers the opportunity to be connected with mentors and provides business education tools such as events, online courses, recorded webinars, and a startup roadmap.

### CREATE Portage County

CREATE Portage County's mission is to "accelerate creativity, connection, and collaboration to advance vibrant and welcoming communities." This nonprofit organization operates the IDEA Center in Downtown Stevens Point, which is a co-working space with conference rooms, studios, 3-D printers, and other rentable equipment and spaces that support the creative economy.

### Impact Seven Business Lending Loans

This program provides flexible, affordable loans to a wide variety of business types, specializing in commercial and mixed-use real estate and affordable housing. From large catalytic development projects to Main Street businesses, Impact Seven invests in the people and places that build community.

### Plover Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Known as PACVB, this organization promotes attractions, tourism, recreation, and commerce in the Plover area.

### Portage County Business Council

The Portage County Business Council is the County's official Chamber of Commerce. The organization is dedicated to the development of the County's business community by offering information on local business and industry as well as providing a variety of programs designed to assist business development.

### Stevens Point Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

According to this organization's website, the mission of the Stevens Point Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is to lead the region's tourism industry and aggressively market the Stevens Point Area as an attractive destination for leisure and business travel to create a positive economic impact and, thus, enhance the area's quality of life.

### Stevens Point Business Improvement District (BID)

New in 2023, the Stevens Point BID is an area in the City's downtown that is governed by board members with support from City staff. The BID levies a tax for downtown properties within its boundaries with the goal of enhancing public spaces, reinvesting in vacant storefronts, and maintaining its Main Street Community Designation.

Stevens Point Downtown Business Alliance

This organization promotes downtown Stevens Point businesses and events, and advocates on behalf of Downtown Stevens Point to local and state government. Several members of this organization helped launch the Downtown Business Improvement District, which is supported by City staff.

Tomorrow River Business Association

This association includes the Villages of Amherst, Amherst Junction, and Nelsonville, who work together to support local businesses and events.

**Regional**Centergy, Inc.

Centergy, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to assist area counties and communities in their efforts to recruit and retain businesses, stimulate new job creation, and to foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurial growth. It was created to foster cooperation among economic development partners and foster economic growth efforts in Adams, Lincoln, Marathon, Portage, and Wood Counties.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

The County is a member of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, as are all local governments 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 North Central Wisconsin Development Corporation 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 Economic Development (CWED) Fund

Revolving loan funds are available to entrepreneurs and their lenders to structure financing packages for start-up and expanding businesses to encourage economic growth in the area. 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.

Childcaring, Inc.

Childcaring, Inc. is Portage County's local Child Care Resources and Referral Agency (CCRR). This organization works with business owners and those looking to open a childcare location by sharing opportunities and resources regarding how to create and operate a childcare program. They also share funding opportunities as they arise and work with existing childcare programs to enhance their services.

## State

### Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation 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, including:

- 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 (see below)
- Wisconsin Investment Fund
- Technology Development Loan Program

Additionally, WEDC supported the development of the Business-Child Care Partnership Tool Kit that helps childcare providers partner with communities and businesses to build capacity. This Tool Kit is located on the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) website.

### Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Forgivable Loan Program

The Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce (HWCC) now has a new Forgivable Loan Program designed for new and existing HWCC clients. This program offers loan forgiveness of up to 25% of the approved loan for new clients, and up to 25% of the original loan amount with a maximum of \$10,000 for existing clients (not to exceed \$10,000).

### 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.

### 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 Department of Children and Families (DCF)

DCF has partnered with the nonprofit First Children’s Finance to finance small business loans to childcare entrepreneurs. They work with other lenders, community partners, economic developers, and directly with childcare businesses to provide financing.

### Wisconsin Fast Forward

This program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, is a nationally recognized, innovative talent development solution driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. Grant funds support employer-led worker training projects that:

- Encourage increased collaboration between Wisconsin businesses and workforce training partners.
- Fill current and ongoing skill requirements of Wisconsin employers.
- Place workers in long-term positions with opportunities for professional growth and economic advancement.

### Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

WHEDA administers a variety of programs to support small businesses, with several programs designed specifically for agribusiness.

### Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP)

As part of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the Office of Rural Prosperity seeks to foster vibrant, prosperous, and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin. ORP functions as a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and businesses. ORP’s website contains a list of available grant programs, grant writing consultants, and grant writing training opportunities.

### Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The UW-Stevens Point 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.

### 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 the acquisition of real estate, buildings, or equipment; construction, expansion, or remodeling; and working capital for inventory and direct labor.



### Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

WWBIC makes loans to small and micro businesses up to \$350,000. They work with both women and men in analyzing their business' financial needs and guiding them through the loan process.

## **Federal**

### America's Seed Fund: SBIR & STTR

Through the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs, America's Seed Fund provides technology-focused entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses with funding to develop their ideas and a pathway to commercialization. Powered by a network of federal agencies, entrepreneur support organizations, and the Small Business Administration, America's Seed Fund advances federal missions and fosters a culture of innovation in the United States

### The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)

This Planning Grant from the Federal Communications Commission, administered by Wisconsin Public Service, enables eligible entities to opt-in to receive formula funding to participate in broadband planning activities that will inform the state Five-Year Action Plan which will guide broadband deployment and implementation of the BEAD program.

### Economic Development Administration (EDA)

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

### 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.

### U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA – RD)

The USDA Rural Development program is committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life in 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.

## Goal, Objectives, and Policies

### Goal

1. Promote the stabilization and expansion of the current economic base and the creation of a range of sustainable employment opportunities.

### Objectives

1. Ensure the County meets the needs of existing and potential employers while maintaining a high quality of life for workers and their families.
2. Ensure that an adequate skilled workforce is available for the business community through retention and recruitment strategies.
3. Coordinate public and private educational efforts to maximize the investment in the County's workforce.
4. Identify established and planned development areas throughout the County.
5. Appropriately support commerce, cultural opportunities, and tourism throughout the County.
6. Identify and preserve productive agricultural land Countywide.

### Policies

1. Work closely with and support the Portage Business Council's and Portage County Economic Development Committee's efforts to retain and expand businesses and workforce within the County.
2. Support the expansion of affordable childcare in Portage County.
3. Utilize planning and zoning tools to facilitate new development and preserve productive farmland.
4. Partner with local, state, and federal economic development organizations as opportunities arise.

## Chapter 7: Intergovernmental Cooperation

### Background

This chapter is based on the statutory requirement for a “compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions, including school districts and adjacent communities, for siting and building public facilities and sharing public services.” The chapter also examines the relationship of the County with area school districts and adjacent local units of government, the state and other governmental agencies. In addition, this element shall identify existing or potential conflicts between the County and other governmental units that are specified in this paragraph and describe processes to resolve such conflicts.

This Comprehensive Plan provides overall recommendations for relationships with adjacent, local, and overlapping jurisdictions to achieve visions for future growth, avoid inefficient or conflicting development patterns, and promote intergovernmental agreements.

### Previous Studies

#### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The County’s former Comprehensive Plan contained an exhaustive list of existing and potential intergovernmental efforts. Many of them have been brought forward into this chapter, reviewed, and updated.

#### Regional Livability Plan, 2015

This plan was prepared by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission as the regional comprehensive plan. The Regional Livability Plan (RLP) is only advisory and seeks to provide a framework for local planning efforts, informing local governing bodies about the context for their planning. Although at this time the need for consistency between plans of governmental bodies at various levels is not yet entirely clear, the degree to which planning efforts in various jurisdictions can be coordinated makes subsequent problems of inconsistency less likely.

The RLP focuses on land use, housing, economic development, and transportation, as well as briefly describing intergovernmental cooperation, cooperative agreements, and other methods that local governments can use to address common issues. Not all conflicts between local governments can be settled using these methods, but by looking at problems that transcend local boundaries in a regional context, solutions are more likely to be discovered.

### Intergovernmental Issues

#### Consistency of Plans

Since 2010, state law requires land use control actions be consistent with an adopted plan. An attempt should be made to make policies between adjoining jurisdictions consistent with one another, to the greatest degree possible. The consistency requirement in the comprehensive planning statutes address

the need for land use decisions to be consistent with the plan, but there is no legal requirement that plans be consistent one with the other, except that where a Town is under County zoning, then the adopted plan of the Town should be consistent with the County plan, so that decisions that affect the town reflect a common policy direction.

Inconsistency between Town and County plans would put those charged with making land use decisions in the difficult position of choosing between competing visions for the proper policy course. Although the ultimate responsibility for defining the extent to which local plans must be consistent will fall to the courts, prudence would demand an attempt to resolve conflict between plans, especially where more than one level of government has a say in a single land use decision. An obvious example is rezoning, where the Town can reject a decision made by the County. If the Town and the County plans have conflicting future land use maps, it will be hard for decision makers to be consistent with each. Therefore, the City, Villages, Towns, and County should review and update their Comprehensive Plans at a minimum of ten years to ensure these maps remain consistent with each other.

### Shared Services

Portage County presents opportunities for local governments to share services. Whether this involves one town contracting with another for fire or EMS service, or the County agreeing to work with an adjacent county to solve a common problem, the goal is to maximize the benefit from the expenditure of public dollars. The economies of scale that result from a single entity providing service to several jurisdictions can benefit all by reducing cost and at the same time improving the quality of services received.

The mutual aid agreements and fire districts described in Chapter 4 illustrate an example of these shared services within the County. Changing demographics is having an impact on many fire departments that have relied on volunteers. With an overall aging of the population, there are fewer people able and willing to volunteer.

### Overlapping Jurisdiction

Corporate boundaries of towns and counties often do not coincide with the boundaries of other functional service providing agencies, especially school districts. Of the nine school districts that operate in Portage County only the Tomorrow River School District is entirely in Portage County. Other districts cross into Adams, Marathon, Waupaca, Waushara, and Wood Counties. School district boundaries are set based on the location of school buildings, where the students live, and the efficiency of transporting children to a given school. Another example is the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee, which is located in Marathon County, but jointly owned by Marathon and Portage Counties.

In planning for intergovernmental cooperation, it is important to remember that jurisdictional boundaries can present an obstacle to efficient service delivery. While there are no known issues at this time, there can also be inconsistency between service delivery districts and other entities. All these overlapping jurisdictions must be taken into consideration when considering how best to effectuate intergovernmental agreements and how best to deliver services to citizens.

## Overview of Efforts

This portion of the chapter examines the various existing governmental cooperation agreements, identifies some potential efforts, and provides a summary of the surrounding county planning efforts.

### Existing Efforts

#### Local Efforts

The following departments and agencies work across municipal boundaries countywide:

- The Planning and Zoning department assists municipalities with zoning, planning, groundwater management, surface water management, code administration, and land conservation. The Portage County Drainage District utilizes this department for code enforcement and record keeping.
- The Highway Department maintains and plows State and County roads in Towns, contracts with Towns to provide plowing and maintenance on Town roads, and disperses state funding for local road projects.
- The Sheriff's Office provides protective services to all municipalities in the County, except the City of Stevens Point and Village of Plover, which have their police departments. All law enforcement agencies in the County have a mutual aid agreement that allows them to assist each other. Portage County's Animal Control Ordinance delegates animal complaints and investigations to the Portage County Humane Society.
- The Clerk's Office manages the County's website, dog licensing, resolution and ordinance adoption, property tax information, DNR licensing, and more. This office also works with the State Elections Board to manage elections.
- The Portage County Sanitary Landfill is owned by Portage County and managed by the Portage County Solid Waste Management Board. The Board approves contracts for Towns to collect waste using private haulers.
- The Portage County Housing Authority administers rental subsidies for low-income households in both authority-owned and participating privately-owned housing units.

Additional services include fire, ambulance, and EMS services, which are also provided countywide, crossing municipal boundaries as described in Chapter 4: Utilities and Community Facilities.

Finally, it is important to recognize the importance of the County's educational and cultural opportunities such as its School Districts, Mid-State Technical College, and the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, and their positive impact on the County's educational attainment and economy. Organizations like the CREATE Portage County and Stevens Point Area Convention & Visitors Bureau also contribute to the County's entrepreneurial and tourism infrastructure. Regular communication and coordination to meet these entities' needs is essential to maintaining the County's overall quality of life.

## Regional Efforts

Portage County participates in several regional efforts:

- Opening in 1969, the Central Wisconsin Airport is jointly owned by Marathon and Portage Counties as described in Chapter 3: Transportation. Marathon County staffs the airport, and the facility is generally self-sustaining. Expenses and liabilities not covered by the airport's revenue are shared between the two Counties, with 65 percent of costs coming from Marathon County and 35 percent from Portage County.
- The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC), who assisted in the creation of this Plan, provides planning and economic development assistance to 10 counties in Central Wisconsin (Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood). As a member of this organization, Portage County is eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding (see Chapter 6: Economic Development) as well as cost-effective planning projects led by NCWRPC staff.

## State Efforts

The County primarily will coordinate with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and Department of Administration (DOA) to implement goals, objectives, and policies of this Plan. The level of involvement of these agencies is described in detail through the various chapters of this Plan, especially Chapter 5 (DNR) and Chapter 3 (WisDOT). Additionally, DOA provides demographic data to the County each year and is the agency responsible for monitoring Comprehensive Plans among all of Wisconsin's Cities, Counties, Towns, and Villages.

## Existing Intergovernmental Agreements

Existing intergovernmental agreements meet the County's needs as well as the needs of its municipalities at this time. These agreements are periodically reviewed and updated as conditions change. There is potential for additional agreements as conflicts arise.

## **Potential Efforts**

Past surveys and the previous Comprehensive Plan (2006) indicated a desire for additional communication between County staff, municipal staff, and school districts. Historically, there has been a desire to improve the County's code enforcement program and address concerns over annexation and the loss of Town tax base and open lands as urban areas develop and expand. A public survey conducted during the 2023 Comprehensive Plan process confirmed that at least 77 percent of the County supports regulating land use and over 74 percent of respondents agreed that zoning was beneficial.

Overall, the County has routinely identified an overall goal of providing desired services in the most cost-effective and efficient manner while ensuring coordination with all surrounding and overlapping jurisdictions and agencies, and is continually looking for ways to adjust its operations to meet that goal. Following the adoption of this Plan, the County should encourage all municipalities to review and update

Comprehensive Plans that were adopted more than 10 years ago to ensure all planning documents are up-to-date Countywide to minimize future conflicts.

### **Surrounding Efforts**

It is important for every local jurisdiction to look beyond its boundary to see if there are plans in adjacent jurisdictions that will impact them. There could be potential conflicts or there might be opportunities to work cooperatively, such as related to service delivery. Each of the six counties surrounding Portage County has an adopted comprehensive plan. Some of these plans need to be updated, while others have recently been updated. None of these plans appear to highlight any conflict or issues with Portage County.



## Goal, Objectives, and Policies

### Goal

1. Encourage cooperation between local units of government to ensure efficient delivery of services.

### Objectives

1. A central economic development organization should actively maintain the growth and informational resources in the community.
2. Support commerce and tourism throughout the County.
3. Planned development areas should be identified and/or established throughout the County.
4. Preserve productive agricultural land Countywide.
5. Develop partnership efforts that result in the preservation and restoration of natural resources.
6. Local units of government should work together to develop public access to natural resources.
7. Identify, manage, preserve, and protect natural resources throughout the County.
8. Share services across county or municipal borders whenever possible.
9. Create and protect public green space and water resources countywide.
10. Develop a viable public transportation network.
11. Develop an area-wide transportation planning approach.

### Policies

1. Local units of government work together to develop creative ways to plan for and share the benefits of growth across municipal boundaries.
2. Planning documents, agreements, and other tools are regularly reviewed and updated in response to changing conditions.



## Chapter 8: Land Use

### Background

Land use analysis is a means of broadly classifying how land is used. Each type of use has its own characteristics that can determine compatibility, location, and preference to other land uses in the Town. The land use plan brings together consideration for both the physical development as well as the social characteristics of the town. Land use mapping and related information is used to analyze the current pattern of development and serves as the framework for formulating how land will be used in the future.

To implement a land use plan that is effective, the plan must account for past development activity as well as current market factors and conditions that shape where and how land will be developed. This Chapter discusses uses of land in Portage County. The existing land use types are defined, current land uses are analyzed, and existing and potential land use conflicts are identified.

### Previous Plans and Studies

#### Portage County Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The County's former Comprehensive Plan contains a detailed history of planning projects leading up to its creation. Many of the land issues discussed in 2006 Plan are relevant today, such as conflicts between farming and other land uses, concern over groundwater contamination, development pressure on natural resources, flooding and drainage concerns, traffic and safety concerns on major roads and in commercial districts, costly extension of utilities into unincorporated areas, annexation issues, inconsistent zoning between Towns, and increase in cost for government services due to a scattered development pattern.

#### Regional Livability Plan, 2015

Land use is one of the four elements included in the RLP, adopted by NCWRPC in 2015. The Land Use Assessment Report, a component of the plan, looks in detail at the land uses throughout the ten-county region and identifies issues and trends related to land use: housing density and farmland preservation. The two land use goals of the plan are as follows:

- Preserve and protect the Region's landscape, environmental resources and sensitive lands while encouraging healthy communities.
- Manage and reduce vacant land and structures.

#### Other County Plans

The County has a variety of other specialized plans which influence the comprehensive plan. These are:

- Portage County Land & Water Resource Management Plan, 2019: The primary intent of this plan is to identify strategies to protect the quality and quantity of the county's soil and water resources.

- Portage County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2019: This plan’s primary purpose is to identify how to prevent injury and property damage from natural and manmade hazards.
- Portage County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024: This plan’s primary purpose is to identify existing recreational facilities and identify needed facilities for a five-year period.

### Local Planning Efforts

Local Comprehensive Plans of each municipality in Portage County were used to “build” the County Comprehensive Plan, especially this Chapter’s Future Land Use Map. Table 33 is an inventory of each municipality’s Comprehensive Plan status. Since these plans must be updated every 10 years, and not every Town has an updated plan adopted, the most recent version of each plan was used when available. Note that the “plan status” designation is based on the date of the most recent update to the entire plan document, rather than small amendments to portions of the document.

### Surrounding County Efforts

Portage County borders six other counties: Adams, Marathon, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, and Wood. These counties have prepared comprehensive plans. These plans are important to review, especially the land use maps. Additional planning efforts “upstream” of Portage County impact the County’s land and water as well. For example, the Mill Creek Watershed crosses into Portage County from Wood County, and various plans and volunteer groups have been involved with managing this natural resource.

No major land use conflicts have been identified; however, discussions with adjoining communities are important to be aware of development or other issues before they arise. The Intergovernmental Cooperation Chapter discusses issues related to surrounding and overlapping jurisdictions in detail.

### State Planning Efforts

The state is involved in a variety of planning efforts that impact Portage County. Examples include the Greater Prairie Chicken Management Plan, which was adopted in 2022. This plan acknowledges the statewide reduction in the species’ range, which only now exists in Central Wisconsin. It also provides management strategies to prevent further loss of habitat for this species. Additionally, Portage County overlaps with three ecological landscapes: the Central Sand Plains, Central Sand Hills, and Forest Transition. These ecological landscapes have master plans that are drafted by WDNR and adopted by the Natural Resources Board to manage state-owned properties in these regions in an ecologically appropriate manner.

**Table 33: Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Status by Municipality**

Minor Civil Division	General Zoning	Local Plan Adopted/Updated	Plan Status
C. Stevens Point	City	2006	Overdue
V. Plover	Village	2005	Overdue
V. Whiting	Village	2004	Overdue
V. Park Ridge	Village	2022	Complete
V. Almond	Village	None	Overdue
V. Amherst	Village	2016	Complete
V. Amherst Jct.	None	2005	Overdue
V. Junction City	None	2005	Overdue
V. Nelsonville	Village	2017	Complete
V. Rosholt	Village	2008	Overdue
T. Alban	County	2009	Overdue
T. Almond	County	2004	Overdue
T. Amherst	County	2015	Complete
T. Belmont	County	2005	Overdue
T. Buena Vista	County	2015	Complete
T. Carson	County	2021	Complete
T. Dewey	County	2021	Complete
T. Eau Pleine	County	2014	Complete
T. Grant	Town	2018	Complete
T. Hull	County	2006	Overdue
T. Lanark	County	2021	Complete
T. Linwood	County	2022	Complete
T. New Hope	County	2017	Complete
T. Pine Grove	None	2005	Overdue
T. Plover	County	2021	Complete
T. Sharon	County	2016	Complete
T. Stockton	County	2016	Complete

Source: Portage County

**Issues****Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

Wetlands, rivers, streams, lakes, steep terrain, grasslands, prairies, and other natural features are often in conflict with human development. Over-development along shorelines and in other riparian areas can cause pollution and destruction of an area's natural beauty as well as detrimental impact on flora and fauna. Gravel pits consume woodland and farmland while generating noise and truck traffic. This, in turn, may negatively impact agriculture and recreational activities, and subsequently, the economy of the County. In existing protected areas like the Buena Vista Marsh, there are several competing management

goals that conflict with one another, impacting drainage, agriculture, and protection of the prairie chicken. This property, which is one of the largest grasslands east of the Mississippi River, represents a landscape that was commonly found throughout Wisconsin prior to settlement that is now relatively rare.

Significant portions of Portage County are underlain by permeable sandy soils, highly susceptible to contamination sources. Many point and non-point sources can cause contamination of surface water bodies and groundwater reducing recreational attractions and increasing health risks. Areas east of the Wisconsin River are prone to contamination because of permeable soils over shallow water, which certain land uses can impact. When making decisions regarding land and water regulation or use, the overall economic, social, and environmental impacts must be weighed in the decision to create the best solution. Steep slopes or other areas unsuitable for building foundations should be avoided for development because the shifting earth can cause great damage to a structure's foundation over time.

### Flooding and Drainage

Poor surface drainage, the presence of floodplains, and the presence of impoundments causes concerns over flooding in portions of the County, especially along portions of Rocky Run Creek, Mill Creek, and the Wisconsin River, and large portions of the Town of Linwood.

### Renewable Energy

Due to Central Wisconsin's good air quality and proximity to transmission lines, several large solar projects have been installed or proposed in Portage County in recent years. This raises concerns regarding the loss of farmland or the potential for growing communities to be "landlocked" as undeveloped land is converted to solar use. With current legislation allowing very little input as to the development of these solar projects in the County, information should be gathered and shared with legislators as to the impacts this causes the County economically, socially, and environmentally.

### Sprawl

Unmanaged development increases traffic, landscape fragmentation, and land use conflicts in both quiet rural settings as well as busy interchange areas. A common example is when a new home is built near farmland, and residents are not aware of the noise, dust, and odors that are present with agricultural land uses until after moving in.

Additionally, "leapfrog" growth in incorporated areas places an excess burden on taxpayers when utilities and roads are extended to undeveloped areas before existing vacant sites closer to infrastructure are developed. Both the annexation of Town lands and the acquisition of land for tax-exempt public use lead to concerns over loss of tax base, especially for towns. The goal of the land use plan in this document is to minimize these issues as pressure to meet housing and nonresidential demand persists.

## **Inventory and Trends**

The inventory and trends section identifies the County's land uses. It also looks at the change over the last twenty years and makes projections into the future. The element relies on many things discussed in earlier elements, such as population and natural resources.

## Overview of Natural Landscape

As discussed in the Natural Resources Chapter of this plan, the County has an abundance environmentally sensitive areas, which includes open water, wetlands, floodplains, as well as soils with limitations for development, groundwater contamination susceptibility, steep slopes, large tract forest and areas of prime agricultural soils. Many of these natural features have an impact on where development can and cannot occur.

The Wisconsin River is the County's primary landscape feature, providing scenic views and recreational opportunities along with its tributaries and floodplains. Lakes and impoundments can also be found throughout the County. To minimize flood damage, protect human life, and preserve the River's ecology, these features are protected by shoreland, wetland, and floodplain zoning. Wetlands and groundwater that is easily contaminated are also common in the County. Wetlands should be preserved whenever possible as they filter surface water before it enters the groundwater supply. State and County regulations manage how development impacts wetlands. Acreage totals for these natural features are described in Chapter 5: Natural Resources.

Steep slopes often home to rare habitat communities and are prone to erosion, and therefore regulations prevent these slopes from being developed. Soil composition also impacts the desirability of farmland and the feasibility of supporting development. Certain soil types can cause erosion or foundation issues in buildings. Therefore, it is important to consider all natural features when reviewing new development. Where County Zoning is applicable, the Conservancy District currently identifies these vulnerable natural features.

Large tracts of farmland and forestland provide scenic, recreational, and economic value to Portage County. When nonfarm housing is built in these rural areas, fragmentation of the landscape leads to habitat loss and a decrease in desirability in land for economic purposes. It is easier to run a farm or logging business with large, contiguous pieces of land without potential opposition from neighbors. Therefore, preservation of these lands has both ecological and economic benefits.

## Overview of the Built Environment

Portage County is approximately 30 miles north-to-south by 30 miles east-to-west at its widest point, covering a total of 824 square miles. Farmland, woodland, and clusters of development are found across the County, with relatively flat terrain on its west side, and hillier terrain to the east. The Stevens Point Metropolitan Statistical Area forms an urban core in the center of the County. Several impoundments were constructed following World War II, especially on the Wisconsin River, to provide hydroelectric power and lake-based recreation. Other rivers, lakes, and wetlands can be found throughout the County as well. Several main highways intersect in the County, linking it to other regions in Wisconsin.

## Existing Land Use

Agriculture and Woodlands dominate the County's landscape, comprising almost 83 percent of total acreage. Out of the developed land use categories, residential occupies the most acreage, for a total of 7.2 percent of the County's area. Open lands and water make up another 5.6 percent of the County's land area, and all other uses are less than 5 percent of the County's acreage. See Table 34.

**Table 34: Countywide Existing Land Use**

Existing Land Use	Total Acres	% of County
Agriculture	201,103	38.2%
Commercial	2,883	0.5%
Cranberry Bog	1,986	0.4%
Governmental / Institutional	2,330	0.4%
Industrial	3,229	0.6%
Open Lands	16,265	3.1%
Outdoor Recreation	1,680	0.3%
Residential	38,131	7.2%
Transportation	11,485	2.2%
Water	12,902	2.5%
Woodlands	234,478	44.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>526,473</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: NCWRPC

### Public Ownership

A variety of federal- and state-owned lands are scattered throughout the County, in addition to County, Town, City, Village, School District, and other lands owned by public entities. According to Table 35, combined, federal, state, County, and town governments own over ten percent of the land in Portage County. This relatively high percentage of public lands is partly due to the presence of several large state wildlife areas. Additionally, there are over 63,000 acres of privately-owned land in WDNR's Managed Forest Law (MFL), which can allow for some public access. See WDNR for more information about the MFL program.

**Table 35: Land in Public Ownership**

Ownership	Total Acres
County	3,949
Managed Forest Law*	63,220
Municipal / Other	14,350
State	37,797
<b>Total</b>	<b>119,316</b>

Source: NCWRPC, WDNR

## Land Breakdown

The County's total area is approximately 526,335 acres. Many of the County's Towns are laid out in a typical 6-mile-by-6-mile square pattern in the eastern half of the County, but the Wisconsin River has a stronger influence on each Town's boundaries in the western half of the County. Some towns are 1.5 to 2 times larger than the typical 36-square-mile blocks, such as Grant and Buena Vista, and others are much smaller. This results in the Town of Grant being the largest Town at 45,589 acres and the Town of Hull being the smallest at 20,009 acres. The City of Stevens Point is the largest incorporated municipality with approximately 10,967 acres, followed by the largest Village, the Village of Plover, at 7,049 acres. The smallest incorporated municipality entirely within the County's borders is the Village of Almond with 671 acres, and just one acre of the Village of Milladore crosses into Portage County from neighboring Wood County. See Table 36.

## Real Estate Values

### Equalized Values

Over the past 23 years, there has been a substantial increase in real estate value in every municipality in the County. Countywide, this growth was 174.1 percent between 2000 and 2023 according to the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (WDOR). Table 37 summarizes this data and breaks it down by municipality, though it is not adjusted for inflation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), inflation increased 77 percent between January 2000 and January 2023. Therefore, most of the County saw an increase in equalized real estate value that greatly surpassed the rate of inflation. The Village of Amherst saw the greatest percent growth during this time of over 229 percent, and the Town of Plover saw the lowest percent growth of almost 65 percent. This could be due to annexations into the Village of Plover due to urban growth in the past few decades.

**Table 36: Total Acreage by Municipality**

Minor Civil Division	Total Acres	% of County
C. Stevens Point	10,967	2.1%
T. Alban	23,140	4.4%
T. Almond	27,619	5.2%
T. Amherst	24,478	4.7%
T. Belmont	23,221	4.4%
T. Buena Vista	39,257	7.5%
T. Carson	35,302	6.7%
T. Dewey	30,071	5.7%
T. Eau Pleine	36,675	7.0%
T. Grant	45,589	8.7%
T. Hull	20,009	3.8%
T. Lanark	23,110	4.4%
T. Linwood	21,539	4.1%
T. New Hope	23,304	4.4%
T. Pine Grove	24,138	4.6%
T. Plover	26,240	5.0%
T. Sharon	41,451	7.9%
T. Stockon	37,022	7.0%
V. Almond	671	0.1%
V. Amherst	848	0.2%
V. Amherst Junction	792	0.2%
V. Junction City	967	0.2%
V. Milladore*	1	0.0%
V. Nelsonville	675	0.1%
V. Park Ridge	143	0.0%
V. Plover	7,049	1.3%
V. Rosholt	695	0.1%
V. Whiting	1,361	0.3%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>526,335</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: NCWRPC

*\*The Village of Milladore is located primarily in Wood County. It is excluded from other tables in this Plan since the portion of it in Portage County is too small to influence demographics, housing, and other topics, but it is included here so land use totals add up properly.*



**Table 37: Equalized Real Estate Values**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2023	2000-2023 % Change
C. Stevens Point	\$1,055,747,200	\$1,576,688,200	\$2,810,324,500	166.2%
V. Plover	\$516,346,800	\$941,948,100	\$1,689,932,800	227.3%
V. Whiting	\$106,045,700	\$138,311,600	\$190,098,900	79.3%
V. Park Ridge	\$32,304,700	\$47,975,800	\$79,454,100	146.0%
V. Almond	\$11,798,800	\$17,261,000	\$31,860,300	170.0%
V. Amherst	\$32,921,900	\$55,166,200	\$108,386,200	229.2%
V. Amherst Jct.	\$14,268,000	\$26,273,200	\$44,008,500	67.5%
V. Junction City	\$11,553,700	\$16,221,400	\$26,699,300	131.1%
V. Nelsonville	\$7,387,800	\$9,626,200	\$16,217,100	119.5%
V. Rosholt	\$15,736,700	\$19,498,500	\$28,081,700	78.4%
T. Alban	\$47,402,600	\$78,585,700	\$132,718,700	180.0%
T. Almond	\$34,216,300	\$51,204,600	\$83,953,700	145.4%
T. Amherst	\$71,884,000	\$120,362,900	\$219,048,800	204.7%
T. Belmont	\$34,953,900	\$60,873,700	\$91,125,100	160.7%
T. Buena Vista	\$53,534,500	\$92,454,100	\$145,417,900	171.6%
T. Carson	\$83,098,600	\$127,781,900	\$213,058,200	156.4%
T. Dewey	\$62,315,200	\$95,882,000	\$184,225,300	195.6%
T. Eau Pleine	\$59,623,400	\$97,043,200	\$185,607,100	211.3%
T. Grant	\$92,871,700	\$144,558,400	\$245,450,800	164.3%
T. Hull	\$238,629,400	\$364,295,600	\$642,684,000	169.3%
T. Lanark	\$72,136,600	\$116,071,700	\$201,275,400	179.0%
T. Linwood	\$57,055,200	\$93,585,400	\$164,282,000	187.9%
T. New Hope	\$44,511,500	\$82,144,400	\$130,031,300	192.1%
T. Pine Grove	\$30,730,200	\$48,617,100	\$74,847,600	143.6%
T. Plover	\$158,519,100	\$175,029,400	\$261,188,500	64.8%
T. Sharon	\$95,495,700	\$158,855,200	\$297,000,400	211.0%
T. Stockton	\$137,230,600	\$224,281,400	\$415,337,200	202.7%
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>\$3,178,319,800</b>	<b>\$4,980,596,900</b>	<b>\$8,712,315,400</b>	<b>174.1%</b>

Source: Wisconsin Department of Revenue

## Opportunities for Redevelopment and Growth

The most efficient development utilizes existing public services and infrastructure, which are typically only found in incorporated communities. However, agreements to extend utilities can exist between incorporated and unincorporated communities, especially for water and sewer, which are often required for most forms of development. Currently, most existing services are located in the City of Stevens Point and Villages of Park Ridge, Plover, and Whiting. The Villages of Amherst and Junction City also have water and sewer service, and the Villages of Almond and Rosholt have sewer service.

The use of existing infrastructure and services is more cost-effective, and new commercial, industrial, and higher density residential development should be in these areas. Local plans identify areas already served and those areas that are most efficiently served by existing infrastructure and services. Areas where sewer, water, and other infrastructure and services are not available should have minimal industrial and commercial development and only scattered residential development where appropriate.

## Demographics Affecting Land Use

Population, housing, and employment are critical demographic factors that influence land use patterns. To examine future land use needs, projections were completed for population, housing units, and employment. The result provides projections for the future land demand, the number of additional persons, housing units, and jobs that will be added to the County.

The population of Portage County has continued to grow over the last several decades. In 2021, there were over 70,000 people living in the County. Between 2000 and 2021, the population grew by about 1.4 percent, while jobs increased at 6 percent and housing increased by 16.8 percent. The larger increase in jobs and housing units relative to the population increase is due to a decrease in household size. Population, employment, and housing all impact land use.

### Population

Population density is an indicator that compares the number of people occupying a specific geographic area. A rural area would have fewer people per square mile, while an urban area would have more people per square mile. Table 38 shows the number of people per square mile, with the Village of Park Ridge having the most people per square mile (2,063), and the Town of Almond having the fewest (12). The County's population density of 85.6 is only slightly lower than the statewide average of 89.6.

### Housing

Similar to population, the number of housing units per square mile is also displayed in Table 38. The City of Stevens Point has the most housing units per square mile (425.5), and the Town of Plover has the fewest housing units per square mile (1.1). The Countywide housing density of 17.7 is considerably lower than the statewide average of 41.5. This could be due to large cities like Madison and Milwaukee and the stronger presence of seasonal or vacation homes in other counties when compared to Portage County, which does not have a large urban or seasonal population.

**Table 38: Population and Housing Unit Density**

Minor Civil Division	People per Square Mile	Housing Units per Square Mile
C. Stevens Point	1,502.8	425.5
V. Plover	1,219.8	244.0
V. Whiting	721.8	107.7
V. Park Ridge	2,063.2	228.3
V. Almond	420.6	52.5
V. Amherst	766.0	186.4
V. Amherst Jct.	235.2	38.0
V. Junction City	252.8	60.2
V. Nelsonville	183.0	27.5
V. Rosholt	426.4	60.8
T. Alban	22.7	4.0
T. Almond	12.0	2.9
T. Amherst	37.9	6.0
T. Belmont	16.6	5.2
T. Buena Vista	18.9	2.1
T. Carson	23.4	3.1
T. Dewey	24.9	3.9
T. Eau Pleine	16.4	2.8
T. Grant	27.6	2.9
T. Hull	169.3	16.3
T. Lanark	49.4	10.9
T. Linwood	34.5	6.2
T. New Hope	18.0	5.1
T. Pine Grove	27.5	2.2
T. Plover	38.0	1.1
T. Sharon	30.7	5.5
T. Stockton	52.0	6.9
<b>Portage County</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>17.7</b>
Wisconsin	89.6	41.5

### Employment

As discussed in Chapter 6, employment in Portage County is expected increase by 3 percent over the next decade, for an estimated total of 1,124 new jobs added between 2021 and 2031. Jobs in arts, entertainment, and recreation are expected to grow by 126 percent, followed by management jobs (72 percent) and information jobs (44 percent). These jobs will benefit from partnerships with local educational and cultural institutions as well as proximity to recreational amenities.

## Land Demand

Population, housing, and employment are some of the major factors driving land consumption, along with agriculture and forestry demands. Since residential, commercial, and industrial growth that provides housing and employment requires vacant land to be constructed, this section uses population projections and the current acres of each land use per person to estimate demand.

Figure 1 in Chapter 1 shows historic population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau and future population projections provided by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. The main drawback of these projections is that they are from 2013, meaning they need revision based on 2020 Census findings. When comparing the County's 2021 population of 70,378 to the DOA's projected population of 73,680 for the year 2020, there is a gap of 3,302 people between what was projected and what the most recent population count is. Therefore, Table 39 uses the same growth rate as the DOA projections in Figure 1 (Chapter 1) but subtracts 3,302 people from each projection. The result is a projected population of 73,563 people by 2040, compared to 76,865 that DOA projected for 2040. These adjusted projections are used to calculate land demand in acres in Table 39.

**Table 39: Land Demand Projections 2021-2040**

Future Demand	2025	2030	2035	2040
Adjusted Population Projections	71,828	72,873	73,448	73,563
Additional Residents (Cumulative)	1,450	2,495	3,070	3,185
Residential Demand (0.54 acres/person)	783	1,347	1,658	1,720
Commercial Acres (0.04 acres/person)	58	100	123	127
Industrial Acres (0.05 acres/person)	73	125	154	159
<b>Total Demand in Acres (Cumulative)</b>	<b>914</b>	<b>1,572</b>	<b>1,934</b>	<b>2,007</b>

Source: Wisconsin DOA, NCWRPC

Overall, an estimated 2,007 acres are projected to be needed by 2040 to meet demand if development patterns and densities remain similar to current conditions. Given that 451,846 acres, or 86 percent of the County is agriculture, open lands, or woodlands, it is unlikely that Portage County will struggle to identify land for development. But strategic redevelopment and infill development will maximize existing infrastructure investments and reduce the need to convert valuable farmland and other environmentally sensitive areas to new development, preserving the County's economy and aesthetics.

## Future Land Use

The future land use map represents the preferred long-term land uses in the County as developed by the local units of government. Despite their similarities, the future land use map is not the same as the existing land use map. The existing land use map categorizes the way land is being used today, while the future land use map identifies areas for future development. The map is advisory and does not have the authority of zoning, but it reflects community desires and serves as a guide for local officials to coordinate and manage future development and rezoning requests.

To create a Future Land Use Map, natural and built environments are inventoried and demographic information is collected. Then, land uses are located where they complement existing uses and where

they do not negatively impact the natural environment. All towns as well as the city and villages completed this process, although, some of the towns need to update their future land use maps. In general, the future land use map is a compilation of future land use maps developed by towns, villages, and cities combined into one map. See Map 9: Future Land Use.

### Future Land Use Categories

Since different municipalities in Portage County may be using different land use categories on individual future land use maps, this plan uses 11 broad land use categories to accommodate variances between the municipal plan maps. See local plans for details. A general description of each classification follows:

#### **Agriculture**

Identifies areas to be preserved for the purpose of general crop farming or the raising of livestock.

#### **Commercial**

Identifies areas recommended for commercial development, as well as existing commercial establishments located throughout the County.

#### **Industrial**

Identifies areas recommended for industrial development, as well as existing industrial areas located throughout the County.

#### **Institutional**

Identifies existing or planned governmental, public, or institutional facilities within the County.

#### **Multifamily**

Identifies areas that are suitable for multifamily residential, such as apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and other attached structures.

#### **Natural Areas**

Identifies areas that include woodlands, DNR wetlands, 100-year FEMA floodplains, shoreland areas, steep slopes, sensitive environmental areas, and other undeveloped areas with natural settings.

#### **Non-Metallic Mining**

Identifies areas with non-metallic mines present.

**Outdoor Recreation**

Identifies developed outdoor recreation activities like ballfields, golf courses, etc. It generally does not identify undeveloped recreation activities like hiking, which fall into the “natural areas” category.

**Residential**

Identifies areas that are suitable for residential development, primarily in the form of single-family homes, twin homes, and duplexes on smaller lots that are typically 2 acres or less.

**Rural Residential**

Identifies areas that are recommended for less dense residential development, consisting of larger minimum lot sizes than the residential category. These areas utilize lot sizes that are typically larger than 2 acres and provide a transition from more dense development to the rural countryside.

**Transportation**

Identifies the existing road, rail, and airport networks along with areas for potential expansion of transportation facilities.

The categories above are depicted in Map 8-2. Since the future land use map is not a zoning map, areas identified for development should not be assumed to automatically be ready for rezoning and development. Other factors like municipal boundaries and proximity to utilities determine which properties are most likely to develop in the short-term.

Additionally, the goal of the future land use map is to provide a long-term vision, even though development occurs slowly over time as proposals are brought forward. Therefore, in some cases, an immediate rezoning may be appropriate to prepare for a land use change even if it is several years away.

Finally, there are likely many instances where zoning and future land use categories align appropriately, but additional barriers exist. In some cases, amendments to zoning ordinance text may be appropriate to enable the type of development that is desired for a particular site.

**Overview of Local Plans**

The future land use map displayed represents the desired arrangement of preferred land uses for the future at this time by each town, the city, and villages. The major future land uses continue to be forestry and agriculture, but numerous areas have been identified for residential, particularly rural residential in the towns, and new commercial and industrial uses. Overall, there appears to be sufficient land acres identified on the future land use map to meet expected demands in Portage County in the future. Amendments to this map may be initiated in the future should conditions change.

A public survey administered as part of the 2023-2024 Comprehensive Plan process indicated that support for development of various land uses was relatively evenly distributed, with single family homes (82 percent) and small businesses (82 percent) being the most valued types of development. Large corporate farms (7 percent) and heavy industry (23 percent) were the least desired land uses. Note that, although

the term “large corporate farms” was used in the survey, committee members noted that respondents could have been thinking of CAFOs specifically, since “corporate” is a form of ownership and not a physical characteristic. Protection of all types of undeveloped land uses was relatively evenly supported, with the exception of nonproductive agricultural lands (32 percent). The most strongly supported protections were for groundwater and drinking water resources (90 percent), lakes, rivers, and streams (87 percent), and woodlands (80 percent). Regarding housing unit types, single family housing had the highest rates of support in both rural and urban areas (over 60 percent), but there was still demand for duplexes (29 percent), multifamily apartments (17 percent), and mobile home parks (10 percent). See Attachment E for detailed survey results.

## **Land Use Tools**

The principal land use program in Wisconsin is the comprehensive planning program. The primary land use tools are zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and official mapping.

### Zoning

Under Wisconsin Statutes, counties and local units of government are authorized to adopt zoning ordinances. Zoning is a method for implementing or carrying out the land use plan by predetermining a logical pattern of land use development. Portage County administers zoning for all Towns except for the Towns of Grant and Pine Grove.

A zoning ordinance consists of a map and written text. The zoning map identifies districts or zones, such as agriculture, residential, commercial, or industrial. Within each of these districts, the text of zoning ordinance specifies the permitted land uses, the size of buildings, yard or lot dimensions, and other prerequisites in obtaining permission to develop. The goal of the zoning ordinance is to set a reasonable development pattern by keeping similar and related uses together and separating dissimilar, unrelated, incompatible uses, particularly in relationship to transportation facilities, utilities and public services and facilities.

### Shoreland Zoning

Shoreland Zoning is administered by Portage County in all unincorporated areas. All counties are mandated by Wisconsin law to adopt and administer a zoning ordinance that regulates development in shoreland and floodplain areas for the entire county outside of villages and cities in accordance with state shoreland zoning standards. Towns may apply their own zoning in shoreland areas if it does not impose requirements on matters regulated by a county.

### Farmland Preservation Zoning

Farmland preservation zoning is a voluntary zoning classification that is intended to minimize fragmentation of farmland by imposing development limitations consistent with or more restrictive than the provisions listed in Chapter 91 of WI Statutes. To adopt farmland preservation zoning, a municipality must be enrolled in the Farmland Preservation Program. The Town of Grant is the only municipality that has a farmland preservation ordinance.

### Wellhead Protection

Wellhead Protection ordinances restrict the land use activities that take place within a certain radius of public wells to protect what is known as the “recharge” area. This ensures that contaminants like chemicals will not easily travel into groundwater and contaminate sources of drinking water. Portage County currently has a wellhead protection ordinance. Municipalities may also adopt wellhead protection ordinances.

### Land Division

Portage County administers land division (or subdivision) ordinances in all unincorporated Towns. Subdivision regulation relates to the way in which land is divided and accessed. A community can control the subdivision of land by requiring a developer to meet certain conditions when recording a plat. While imposing conditions restricts the use of private property, the cumulative effect of land subdivision on the health, safety, and welfare of a community is so great as to justify public control of the process. The City and Villages have authority to review subdivisions proposed within a certain radius of its boundaries, known as the extraterritorial jurisdiction, as described in detail in Chapter 9: Implementation.

There is some overlap between zoning and subdivision codes in terms of standards. Both ordinances, for example, can set minimum lot sizes. Both can assess the suitability of land for development. Implementing important plan techniques such as rural cluster development often requires use of the zoning ordinance and the subdivision ordinance together.

A County land division code can provide each town the means to review and regulate new divisions of land to ensure consistency with the vision, goals, objectives, land protection criteria, and other recommendations of an adopted Comprehensive Plan. The ordinance would require administration and enforcement by the town. Therefore, local control of divisions of land would require town funding. It also adds a layer of government involved in regulating proposals for land divisions.

### Official Mapping

An Official Map is a map adopted by a County that specifies locations of future roads and other utilities or public facilities, along with right-of-way widths and other specifications. When a land division is approved, it must accommodate dimensions for future facilities according to the Official Map. Currently, Portage County does not have an official map.

### Other Tools

Additional tools and approaches can be utilized by the County to achieve the goals of the plan. These include but are certainly not limited to the following: fee simple land acquisition, easements (purchased or volunteered), deed restrictions, land dedication, and ordinances or programs regulating activities such as impact fees, land division, building permits, and erosion control.

The North Central Conservancy Trust is an example of a local nonprofit that works with private landowners to protect land through easements, land swaps, land purchases, tax credits, and land donations.



## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

### Goals

1. Ensure land use plans are unified between the County and local units of government.
2. Support decisions that enable beneficial land use and development opportunities while protecting natural, agricultural, and cultural resources.
3. Collaborate with municipalities to manage urban expansion while minimizing land use conflicts.
4. Encourage cost-effective development that maximizes existing infrastructure while minimizing the need to prematurely extend utilities and services.

### Objectives

1. Maintain existing property values while minimizing crime, traffic, and health and safety issues throughout the County.
2. Encourage the construction of a variety of housing styles and densities to meet the needs of current and future County residents, incorporating innovative housing and development styles and densities as they emerge.
3. Plan transportation infrastructure to minimize traffic impacts to residential areas while allowing for adequate access for services like emergency vehicles, buses, or other forms of transportation.
4. Guide development away from productive farmland and environmentally sensitive areas that could be degraded or vulnerable to contamination.
5. Support and enhance central business districts and business parks as hubs for commercial and industrial activity and locate traffic-generating uses near main highways. Ensure these areas have adequate access to utilities and transportation infrastructure.
6. Manage waste and other land use impacts to protect groundwater and surface water quality and quantity.

### Policies

1. Guide new development to areas already served by infrastructure to minimize taxpayer expenses by identifying infill and redevelopment sites and assisting as needed in infill/redevelopment efforts.
2. Utilize zoning and subdivision ordinances to appropriately guide land use developments which enhance safety and livability.
3. Review and update planning documents, land use maps, zoning ordinances, and subdivision ordinances as changes in conditions occur.

4. Regularly communicate with municipalities regarding land use and development issues to determine the best planning, subdivision, and zoning practices should be.
5. Require well-planned road networks, especially near highway interchanges, to minimize conflicts with new commercial and industrial development.
6. Identify productive agricultural areas and locations with natural or cultural resources and discourage the division or conversion of these lands for other uses.
7. Encourage revitalization of outlying villages rather than the development of nonfarm housing in agricultural areas.
8. Support the Portage County Land and Water Conservation Plan's goals and recommendations.
9. Provide educational materials regarding land use regulations and land use impacts to the environment.
10. Encourage all Portage County municipalities to regularly update their Comprehensive Plans a minimum of every ten years.



## Chapter 9: Implementation

### Background

This Chapter describes implementation tools available to the County and explains how each of the Chapters of this Comprehensive Plan functions with one another. Also included is an overview of the process to adopt, amend, update, and evaluate the Comprehensive Plan. The Portage County Comprehensive Plan, along with locally adopted comprehensive plans, is intended to help guide growth and development in the County. To be effective, this plan should be actively used as a tool to guide decisions concerning:

1. The development and implementation of programs and support systems that further the goals and objectives set forth in this Plan.
2. The implementation of specific actions as identified in this Plan.
3. The implementation and enforcement of regulatory ordinances based on the goals and objectives identified in this Plan.
4. The establishment of a continued planning process providing for periodic review and updates to this Plan.

### Existing Implementation Tools

There are two primary types of implementation tools: Non-regulatory and Regulatory. Nonregulatory approaches generally involve decisions related to policy and about how the County will spend its financial resources. Regulatory approaches involve implementing various rules and regulations, mainly related to land use regulations. In particular, the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations comprise the principal regulatory devices used to protect existing development and guide future growth and development.

#### Non-regulatory Tools

Portage County annually prepares both an operational budget as well as a capital improvement plan. In addition, each County department, as well as agencies funded by the County, set objectives and prepare work plans. Another major policy effort to be undertaken by the County is the Strategic Plan.

#### Annual Operating Budget

Portage County prepares a budget each year and it is one of the most important policy documents prepared. It is a statement of the prioritization and allocation of financial resources to achieve certain objectives over a specific time. The budget is based on the needs of County residents, priorities set by the County Board, and the related work plans identified by each County department.

The budget and the services provided by that budget are instrumental in achieving the goals and objectives of the plan. The 2023 County operating budget is about \$126 million, which includes funding for all departments. The largest components of the budget are public works (27 percent), health and

human services (25 percent), general government (19 percent), and public safety (15 percent). Combined, these functions comprise over 86 percent of the budget. The budget is prepared by the County Executive along with Department Heads. The Finance Committee provides oversight, and the budget is adopted by the County Board.

### Capital Improvement Plan

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) of Capital Fund is a blueprint for planning the County's major capital expenditures. A Capital Fund is simply a method of planning for and scheduling expenditures for public improvements over a period of several years to maximize the use of limited public funds. CIPs must consider short- and long-term expenses of maintaining existing infrastructure while upgrading it as needed. Roads, for example, are one aspect of the County's infrastructure that must be invested in for routine maintenance to save money in the long-term, as an unmaintained road has a shorter life expectancy and is expensive to replace.

The Capital Improvement Program is typically composed of two parts: a capital budget and a capital program. The capital budget is the upcoming year's spending plan for capital items. The capital program is a plan for capital expenditures that extends five years beyond the capital budget. Public improvements or expenditures typically considered in a CIP include major non-recurring costs, assets with a cost of over \$25,000 and a service life of 7 years or more, and rolling stock and equipment replacement that is of critical importance to the functioning of the department involved.

Each year the CIP is reviewed and extended one year to compensate for the previous year that was completed. This keeps the improvement program current and allows for modifications to meet changing needs. It coordinates community planning, financial capacity, and physical development. The preparation of a CIP is a joint responsibility between County administration and various departments. The County Board approves the CIP as part of the Annual Budget.

### Strategic Plan

Strategic planning is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. It usually focuses on a 3-to-5-year time-period. There is currently no active Portage County strategic plan.

### **Regulatory Tools**

There are three basic implementation tools that the County can use to implement this comprehensive plan. These are 1) General & Shoreland Zoning, 2) Land Division Ordinance, and 3) Official Mapping. These tools apply to different degrees in different areas of the County. General zoning applies only to towns that have adopted County zoning, while Shoreland zoning applies to the entire county outside of its City and Villages. Meanwhile, the land division ordinance applies to the entire County outside of the City and Villages unless a town has adopted a more restrictive ordinance. Official mapping applies throughout the

entire County, but it is a very limited tool which Portage County currently doesn't utilize. See Chapter 8: Land Use for a detailed description of these tools.

### **Other Planning and Zoning Tools**

Although the County is usually not directly involved in either annexation or extraterritorial zoning, County staff may be consulted for general information or recommendations related to either of these.

Annexation is the statutory process for transferring lands from unincorporated areas (towns) to incorporated areas (cities and villages). Annexations are usually initiated by landowners to transfer their land into a city or village. Cities and villages can only accept or reject the petition. As a result, annexations often become contentious between local governments. Annexations often provide the trigger for lengthy and expensive legal struggles between competing community land use visions, and for tax base and community identity. A more constructive approach may be to explore intergovernmental agreements. The methods of intergovernmental cooperation available to address annexation-related issues include general intergovernmental agreements, municipal boundaries fixed by court judgment, boundary change by cooperative plan agreement, and revenue sharing agreements.

Like annexation, extraterritorial zoning and land division ordinances are useful but contentious tools to assist with a municipality's growth. For Cities and Villages, state law allows for extraterritorial zoning and land division regulations which can extend 1½ (Villages) to 3 miles (Cities) beyond the municipal boundary. This applies automatically if the city or village adopts a subdivision ordinance or an official map, and it allows the city or village to influence the pattern of development outside their corporate limits through zoning and land division. Currently, land divisions in unincorporated towns are sent to the City or Villages if they are proposed within the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).

To exercise extraterritorial zoning (ETZ), it is necessary for a city or village to form a committee with the adjacent town, in which both parties have three representatives. A majority of committee members must agree, and the governing body of both jurisdictions must adopt whatever agreement is reached in order for extraterritorial zoning to go into effect. As of right now, no communities in Portage County exercise ETZ. The goal of extraterritorial zoning and land division is to reserve space for future roads and land use patterns so an incorporated community doesn't become landlocked by unincorporated development as it grows.

### **Consistency Review**

The State of Wisconsin planning legislation requires that the Comprehensive Plan describe how each of the required chapters will be integrated and made consistent with the other chapters of the plan. Since Portage County completed all Comprehensive Plan chapters simultaneously, no known inconsistencies exist. It is noted that some overlap naturally exists between chapters. The Comprehensive Plan also references previous and concurrent related planning efforts to ensure they are considered in planning decisions in conjunction with the recommendations of this document. Recommendations from other plans have been incorporated in this plan as deemed appropriate, to foster coordination and consistency between plans. Some related plans are incorporated by reference in this plan and are essentially considered appendices of this plan even though they are separate documents. In the future, as plan amendments occur, it is important that reviews for consistency be conducted to ensure that the Plan is

up to date. It is also critical that as towns make comprehensive plan amendments, those amendments are forwarded to the County for inclusion in the Portage County Comprehensive Plan. This should ensure that the Planning & Zoning Committee is using the most current information available.

## **Plan Adoption, Amendments, Updates, and Evaluation**

While this comprehensive plan is intended to provide a long-term framework to guide general development, it must also respond to continuous changes that occur that may not have been foreseen when the plan was adopted. It is appropriate that some chapters of the Plan are rarely amended while others are subject to updating on a more regular basis. Plan maps should also be updated periodically. In general, key maps, such as the Future Land Use Map, should be reviewed annually to make sure they remain current.

### **Plan Adoption**

The first step in implementing this plan involves the Planning and Zoning Committee passing a resolution recommending adoption of the Portage County Comprehensive Plan by the County Board. Next a public hearing is held to allow public comment on the document. Following that the County Board must adopt the plan by ordinance. Adoption formalizes the plan document as the framework to guide local development decisions over the next 10 to 20 years. The adopted plan should also be recognized as a tool for communicating the County's land use policy and goals and objectives regarding coordination of growth and development.

Upon plan adoption, Portage County should review the Portage County Zoning Ordinance, including both map and text, to be consistent with local comprehensive plans. In addition, the various departments that are impacted by this plan should develop actions to implement the plan.

### **Plan Amendments**

From time to time the plan may need to be amended. If circumstances do arise that require text or maps to change, the Planning and Zoning Committee should review and recommend adoption by the County Board. Amendments may be appropriate throughout the lifecycle of the plan, particularly if new issues emerge or trends change. These amendments will typically consist of minor changes to the plan text or maps. Large-scale changes or frequent amendments to meet individual development proposals should be avoided or the plan loses integrity. The public should be notified of proposed plan amendments to allow an opportunity for review and comment.

In towns where an officially adopted comprehensive plan exists, future amendments and updates to any town plan must be promptly forwarded to the Portage County Planning & Zoning Department. Receipt of the town plan will allow staff and the planning & zoning committee to make recommendations that are based on the amended town plan. These local future land use maps will also become the basis for future amendments to the County's Future Land Use Map.

## **Plan Updates**

According to the State comprehensive planning law, State Statute 66.1001, comprehensive plans must be updated at least once every ten years. As opposed to the more routine amendments described above, plan updates should involve re-writing of whole sections of the plan document and significant changes to supporting maps and data. A plan update should include a thorough examination of the County's goals and objectives based on an analysis of current growth trends and major changes that have occurred since the plan was initially adopted or last amended. Plan updates must be formally adopted following the same procedure described above for initial plan adoption.

## **Plan Evaluation**

This plan should be evaluated at least every 5 years. Members of the County Board, standing committees, County staff, and any other local decision-making bodies should periodically review the plan and identify areas that might need to be updated. The evaluation should involve first reviewing the goals and objectives to ensure they are still relevant and reflect current community desires. Then the strategies and actions should be reviewed and refined to eliminate completed tasks and identify new approaches if appropriate. Many of the policies identified in the plan are continuous or ongoing and should also be monitored to measure the plan's overall success. Thus, many of the objectives and their related actions can be accomplished in the short term, say 1 to 5 years. However, some will take longer to accomplish, say 6 to 10 or more years.

As part of the comprehensive planning process, several goals, objectives, and policies were developed. When implemented, these are intended to provide direction to County staff and its committees, as well as the board of supervisors. To measure progress towards meeting these goals, objectives, and policies, a variety of actions need to take place. Therefore, the task of measuring plan progress, is as simple as determining if any action was taken or not. That information will provide guidance to the County Board on when specific actions are to be initiated. Based on the targets, measures of progress in achieving implementation of the comprehensive plan can be examined.

A periodic "Plan Status" report may be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. This report might be jointly developed by various County departments, as related to their involvement in the implementation of the goals, objectives, and policies developed within this plan.



## Conclusion

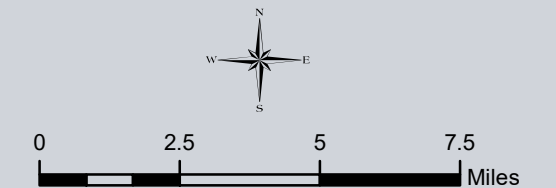
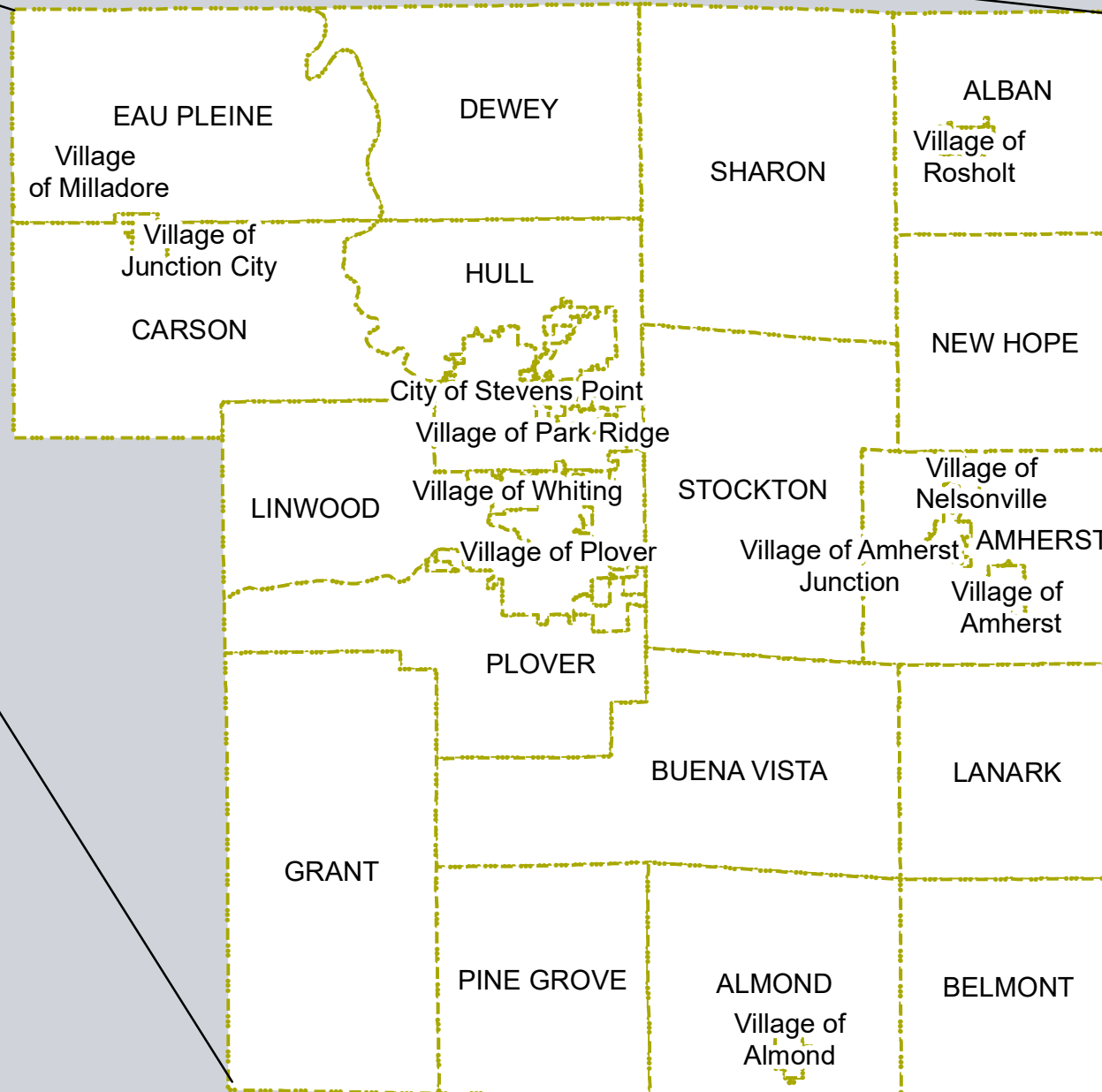
The Portage County Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a “living” document. Periodic amendment and update of the plan is critical to ensure that it is accurate and consistent with the needs and desires of the County. The specific policy statements are meant to serve as the mechanisms for achieving the goals and objectives, which were defined throughout the planning process. Ultimately, the success of the planning process will be measured by the future quality of life experienced by both residents and visitors to Portage County.

To move the plan forward, a strategic planning process may occur as the next step in the planning process. As part of that effort, goals will be prioritized, benchmarks will be established, and responsible parties will be identified. The result will be a framework for the county in the coming years to help implement the comprehensive plan.





DRAFT



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Portage County

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Prepared By:  
**North Central  
 Wisconsin Regional  
 Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403  
 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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**DRAFT**

**Legend**

**Functional Class**

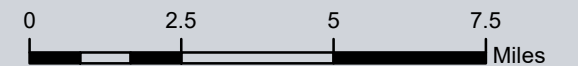
- Rural Major Collector
- Rural Minor Arterial
- Rural Minor Collector
- Rural Principal Arterial
- Urban Collector
- Urban Minor Arterial
- Urban Principal Arterial
- Local Road
- - - Private Road

**Traffic\_Counts**

**AADT**

- 40 - 100
- 101 - 2000
- 2001 - 5000
- 5001 - 20000
- 20001 - 33800

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water



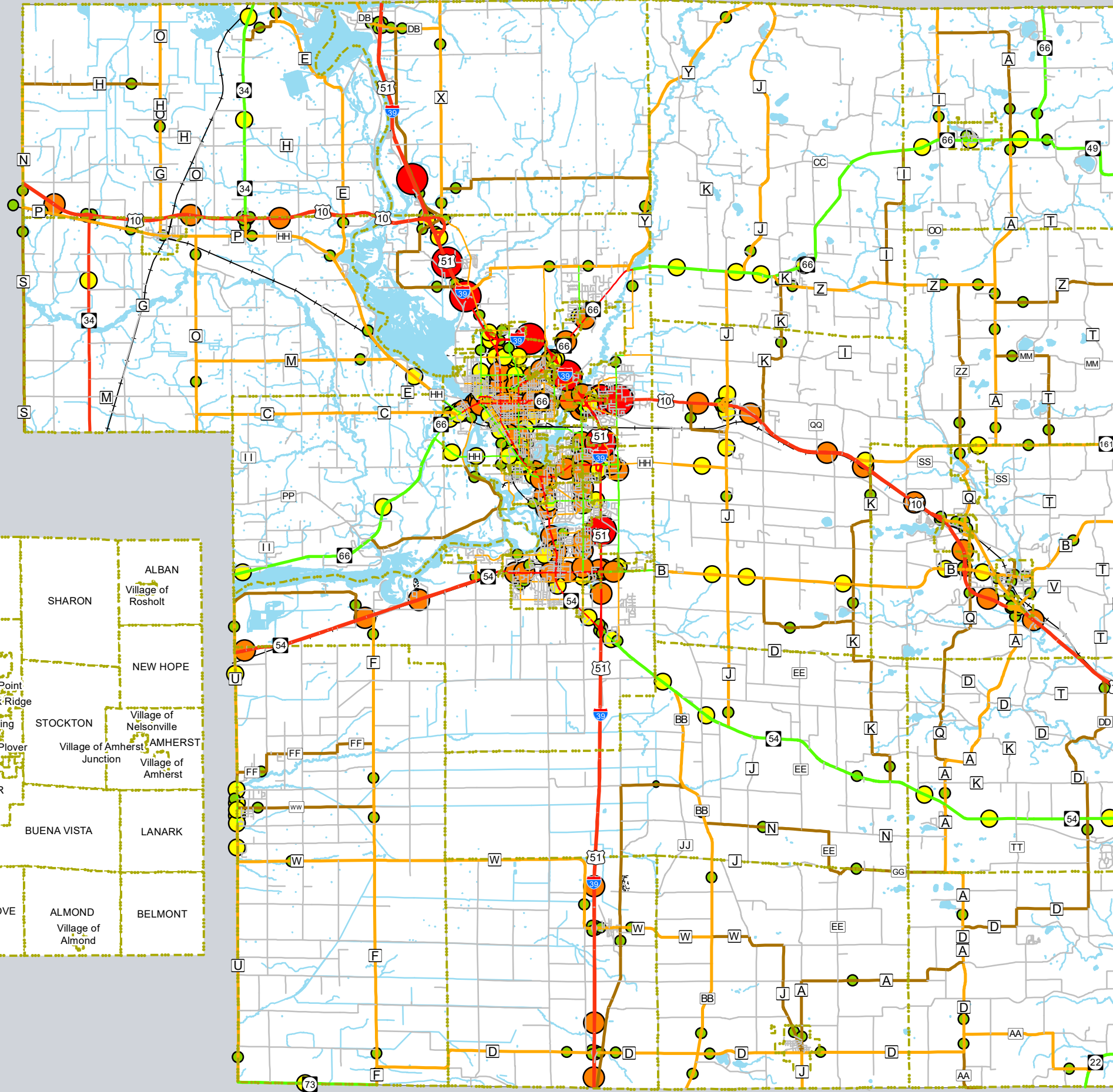
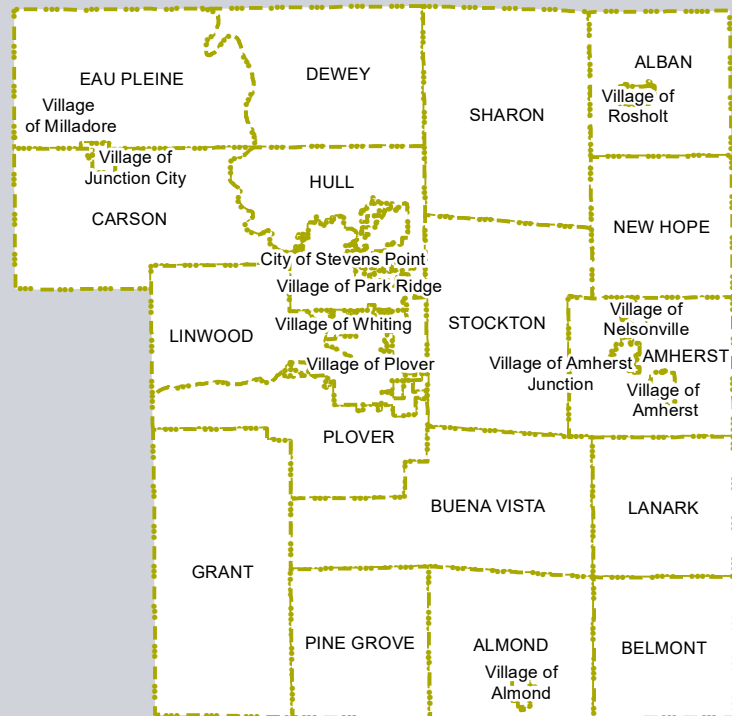
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Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403  
715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org



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**DRAFT**

**Legend**

**Functional Class**

- Rural Major Collector
- Rural Minor Arterial
- Rural Minor Collector
- Rural Principal Arterial
- Urban Collector
- Urban Minor Arterial
- Urban Principal Arterial
- Local Road
- - - Private Road

**Traffic\_Counts**

**AADT**

- 40 - 100
- 101 - 2000
- 2001 - 5000
- 5001 - 20000
- 20001 - 33800

- - - Minor Civil Divisions
- Water



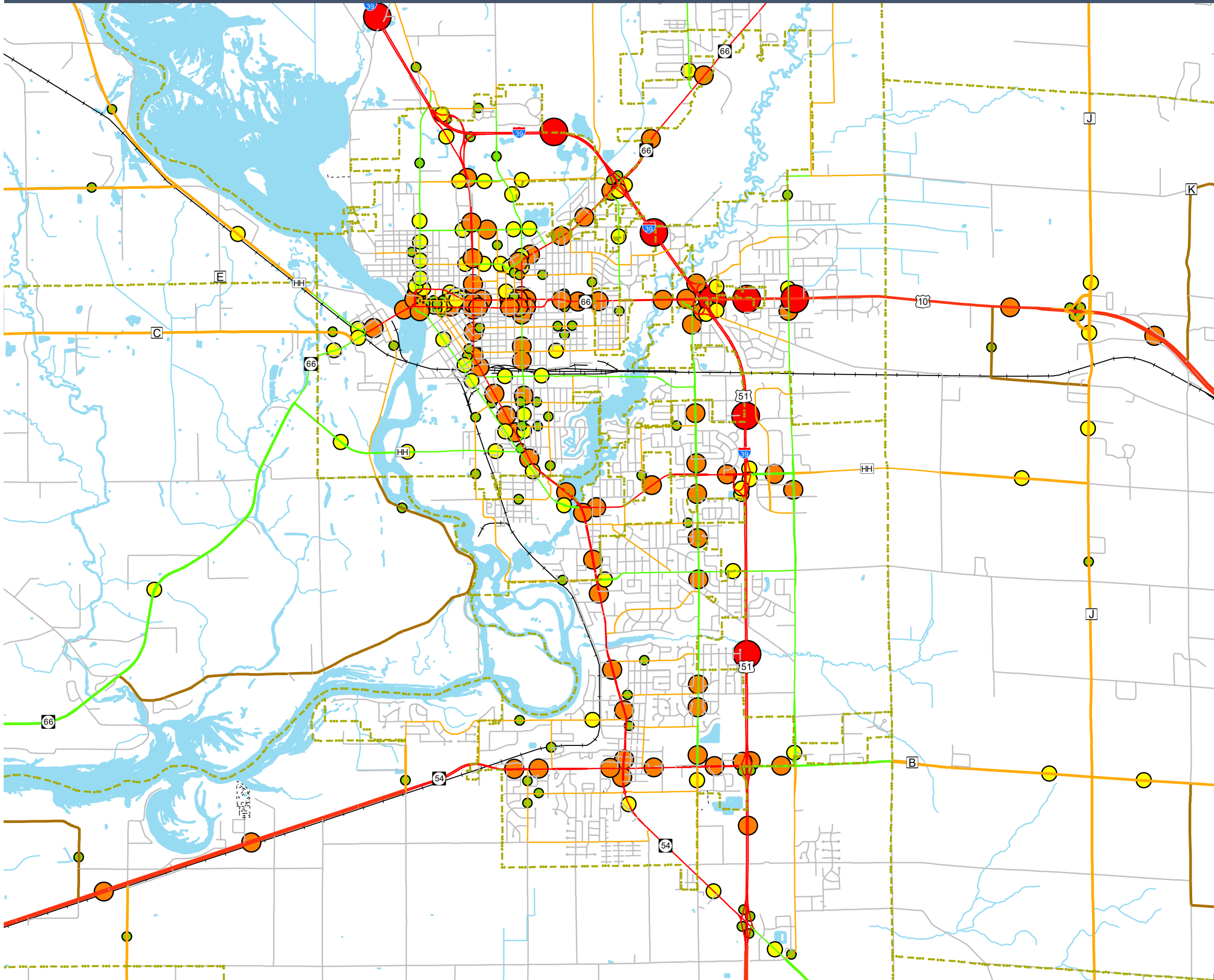
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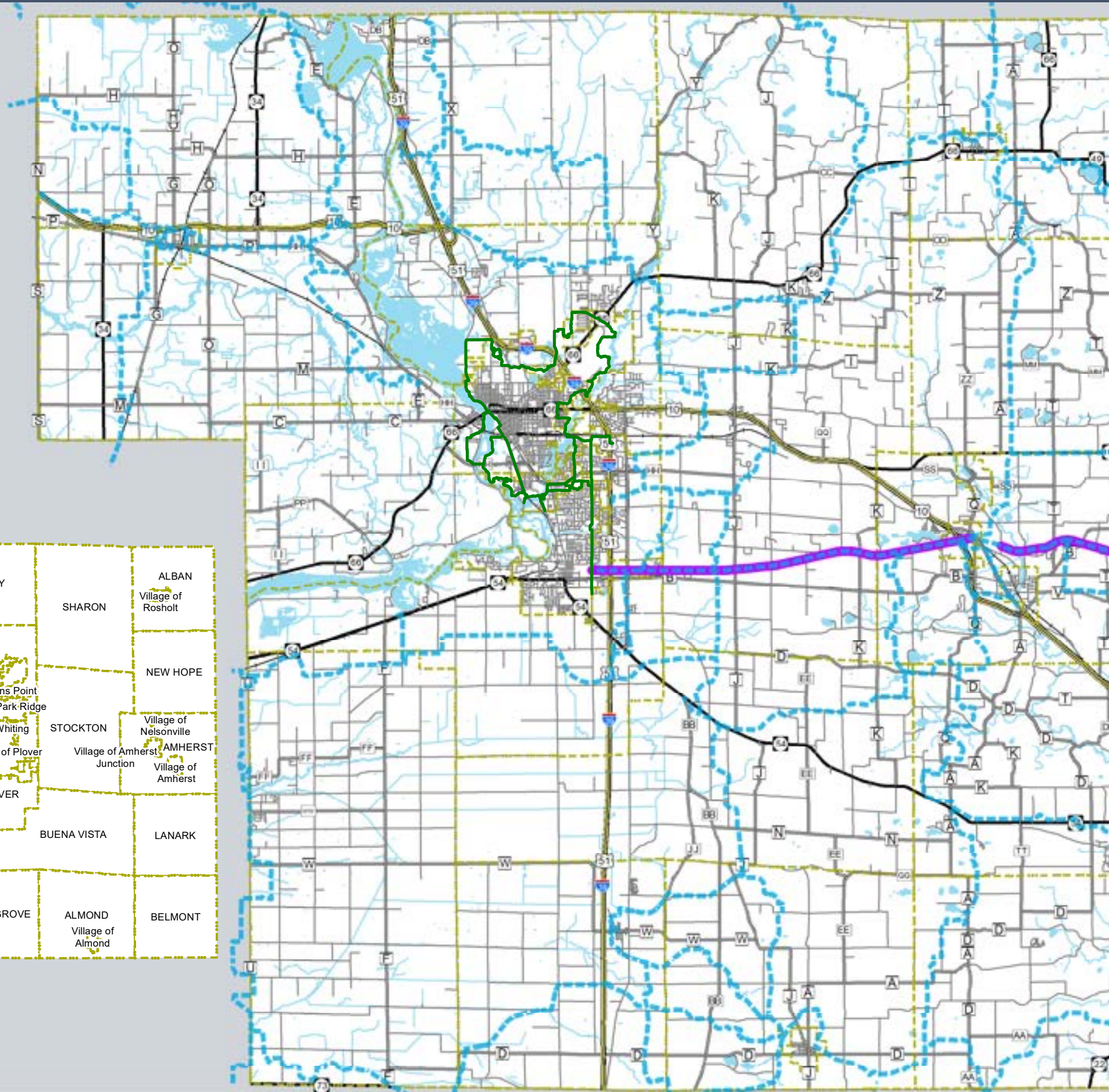
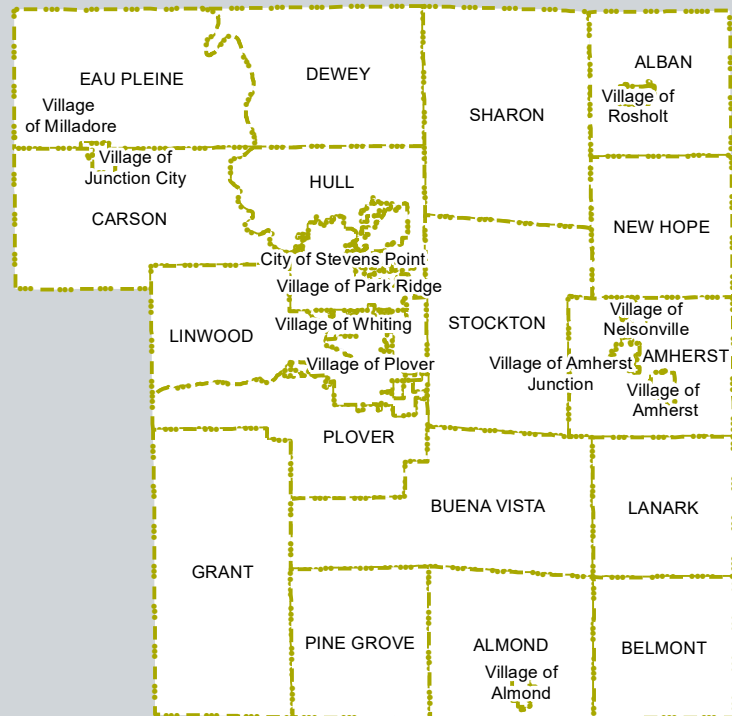
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**DRAFT**

**Legend**

-  U.S. Highways
-  State Highways
-  County Highways
-  Local Roads
-  Minor Civil Divisions
-  Water
-  Green Circle Trail
-  Tomorrow River State Trail
-  Snowmobile Trails



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

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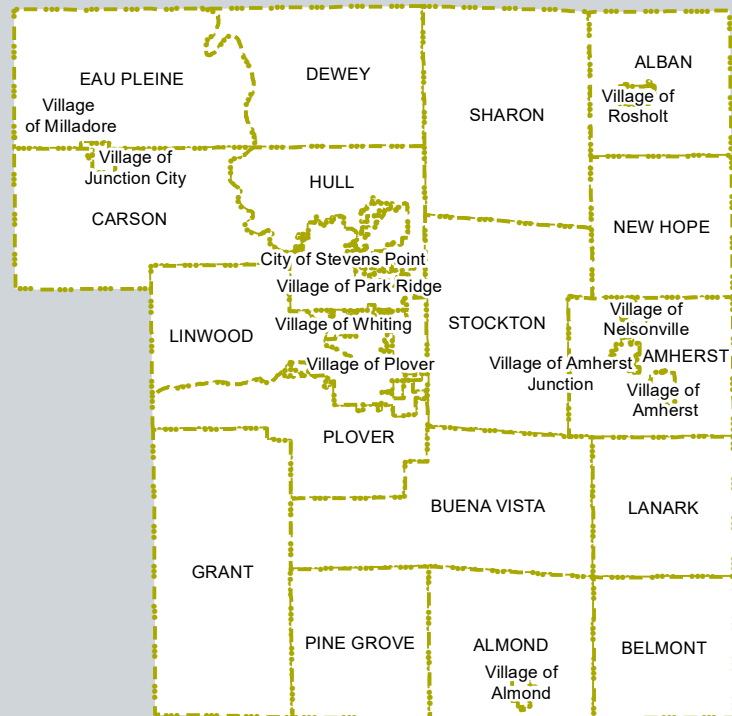
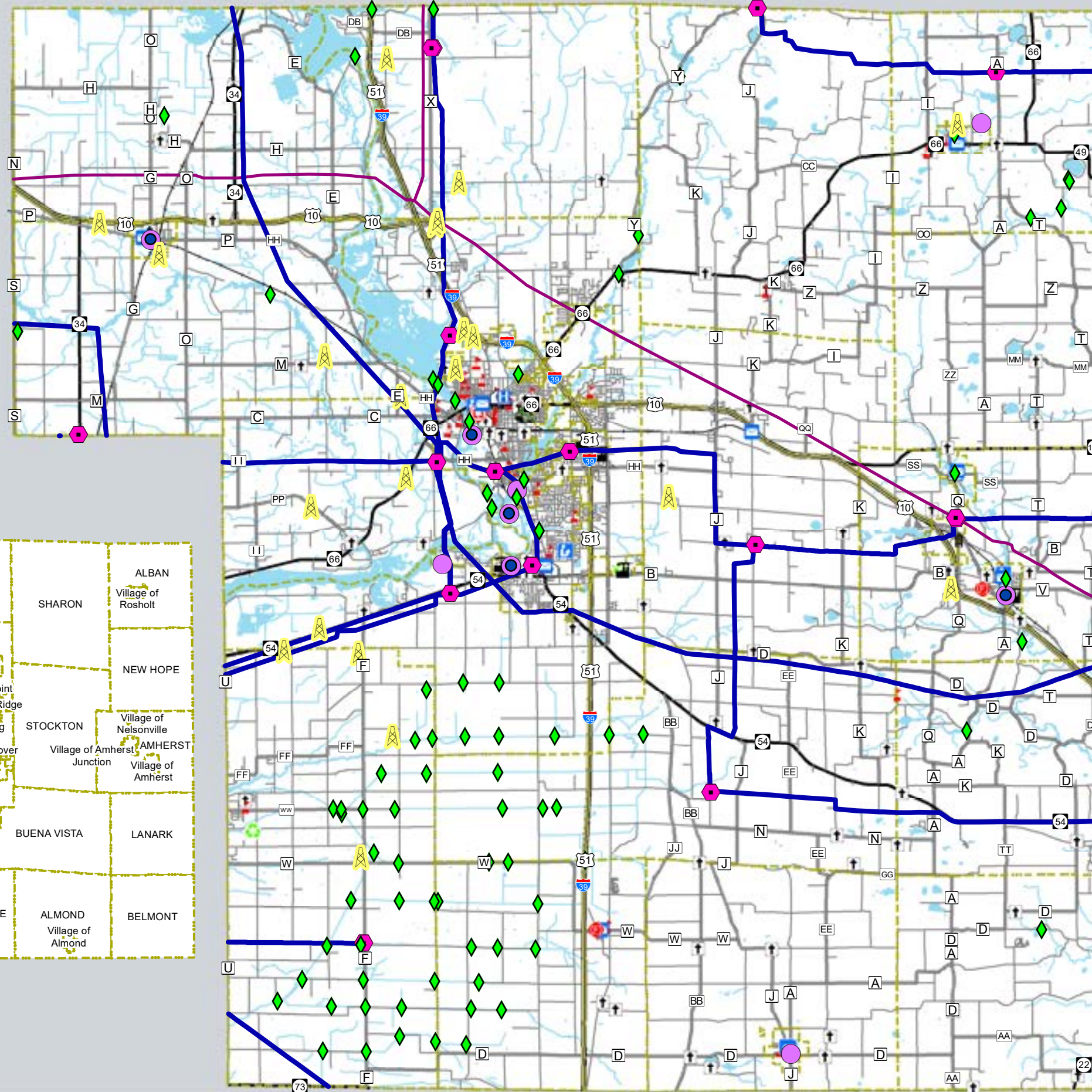


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Wisconsin Regional  
Planning Commission**

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Legend

- Communication Towers
- Dams
- Municipal Water Supply
- Substations
- Waste Water Treatment Plan
- High\_Voltage Powerline
- Pipeline
- Cemeteries
- City Hall
- College
- Courthouse
- EMS
- Emergency Operations Center
- Fire Station
- Hospital
- Industrial Park
- Library
- Municipal Building
- Museum
- National Guard Army
- Police Department
- Post Office
- Schools
- Technical College
- Transfer Site
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

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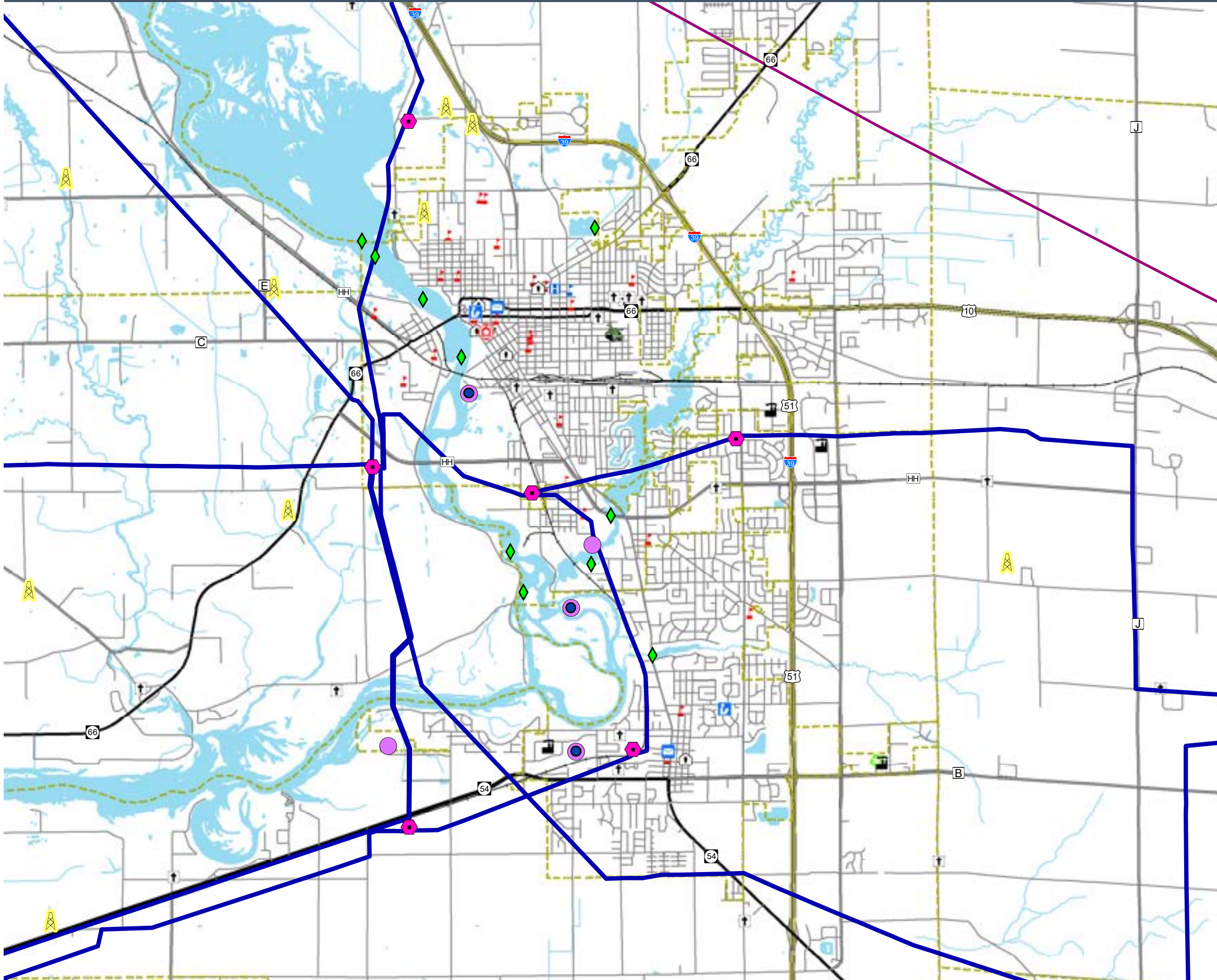
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 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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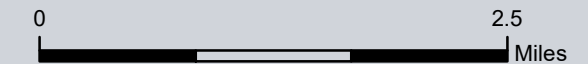


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Legend

- Communication Towers
- Dams
- Municipal Water Supply
- Substations
- Waste Watter Treatment Plan
- High\_Voltage Powerline
- Pipeline
- Cemeteries
- City Hall
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- Emergency Operations Center
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- Industrial Park
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- Water



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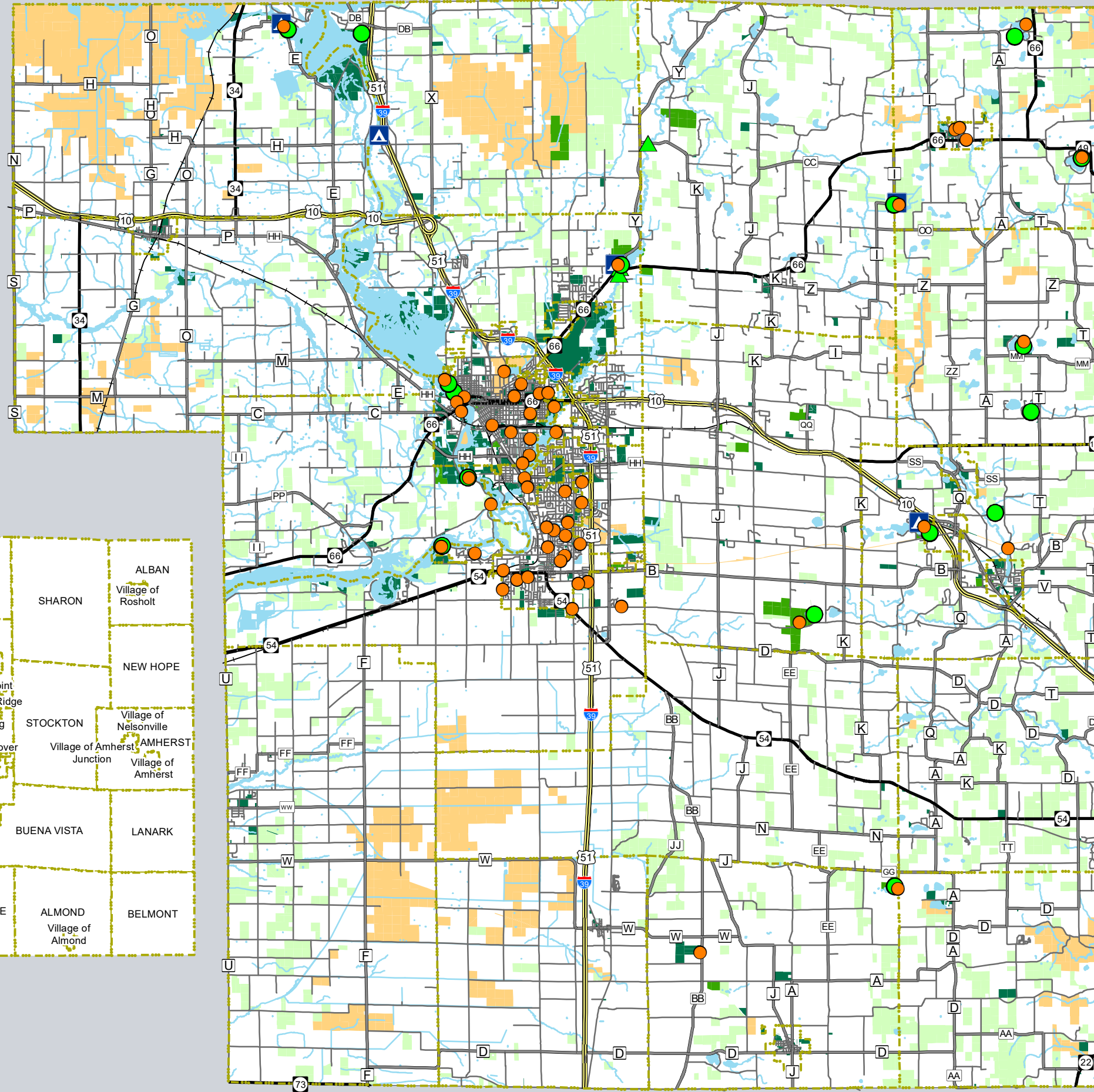


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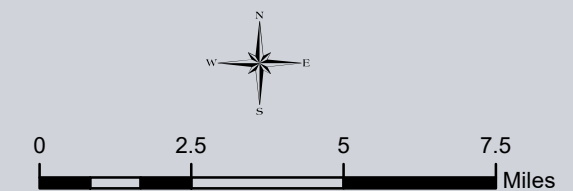
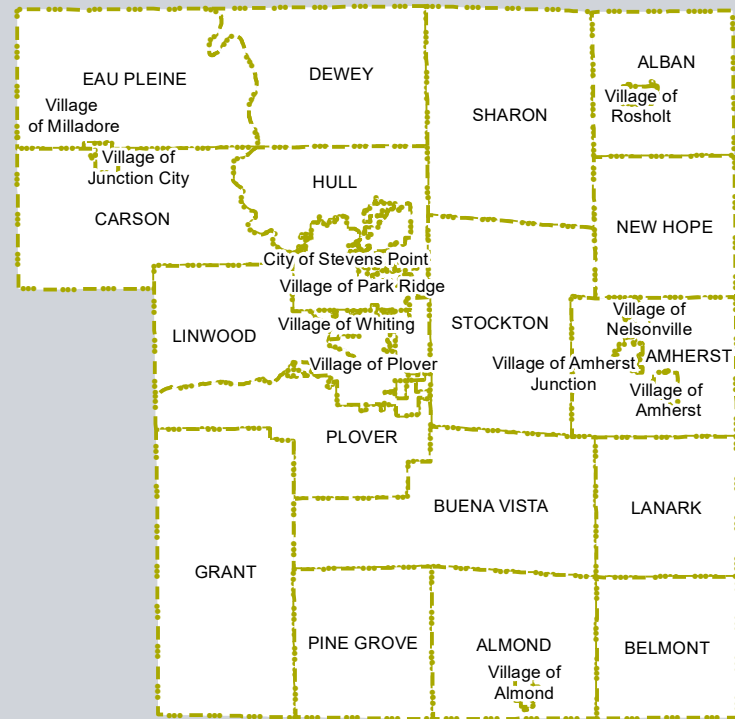
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**Legend**

- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Parks
- Boat Landings
- Canoe Access
- Campgrounds
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water
- Municipal / Other
- County
- State
- MFL



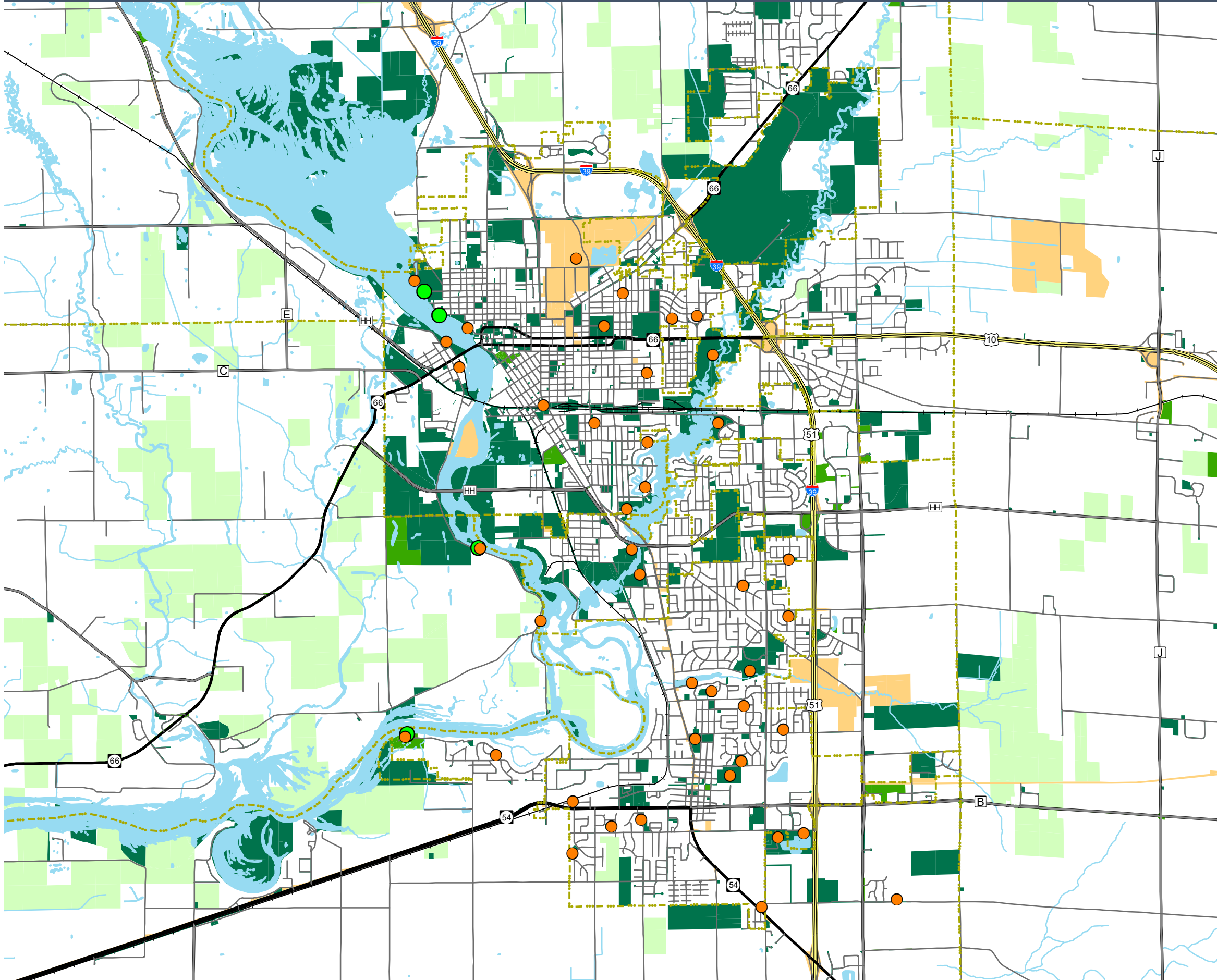
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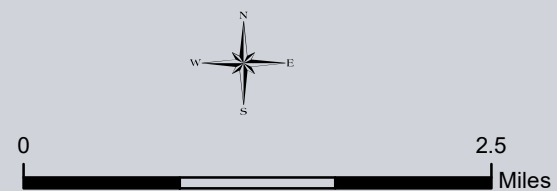
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 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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**Legend**

- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Parks
- Boat Landings
- Canoe Access
- Campgrounds
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water
- Municipal / Other
- County
- State
- MFL



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**Legend**

- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Watershed Boundaries
- Wetlands
- Floodplain
- Water

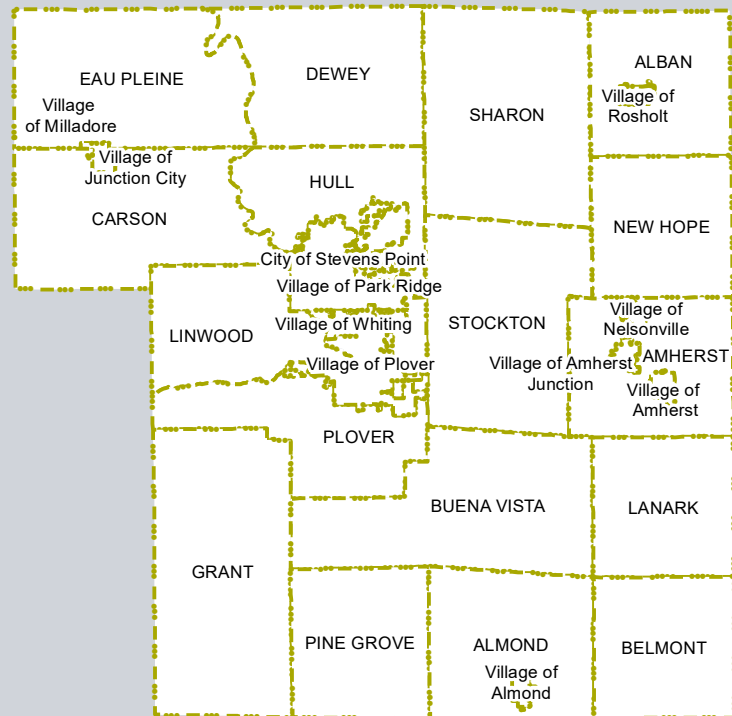
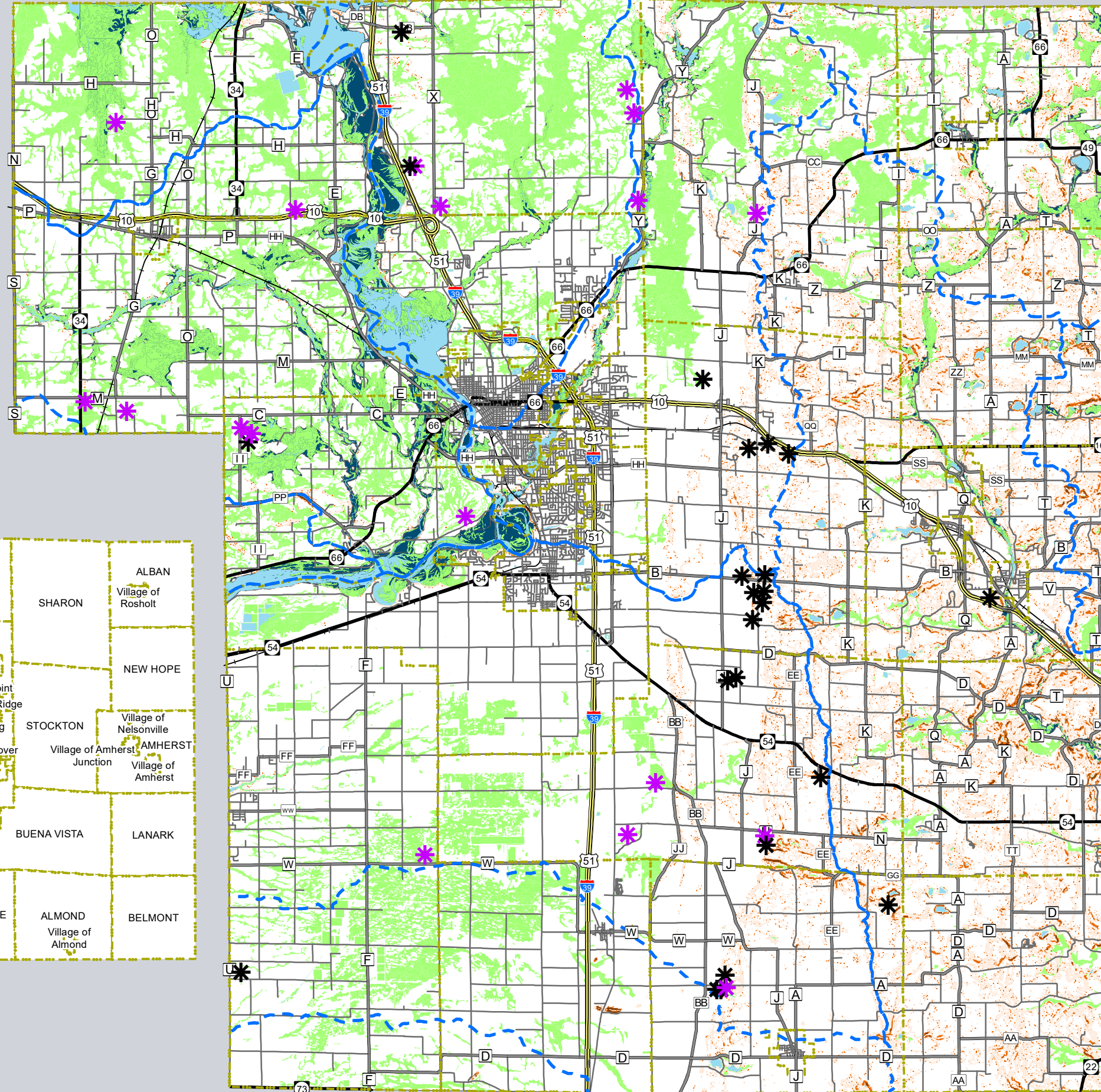
**Non-Metallic Mines**

**STATUS**

- ACTIVE
- RECLAIMED

**Slopes**

- Level to Gentle Slopes (0-6%)
- Slopes (6-12%)
- Moderately Slopes (12-20%)
- Steep Slopes (>20%)



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

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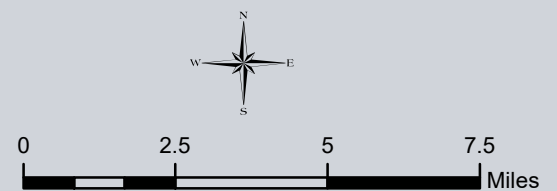
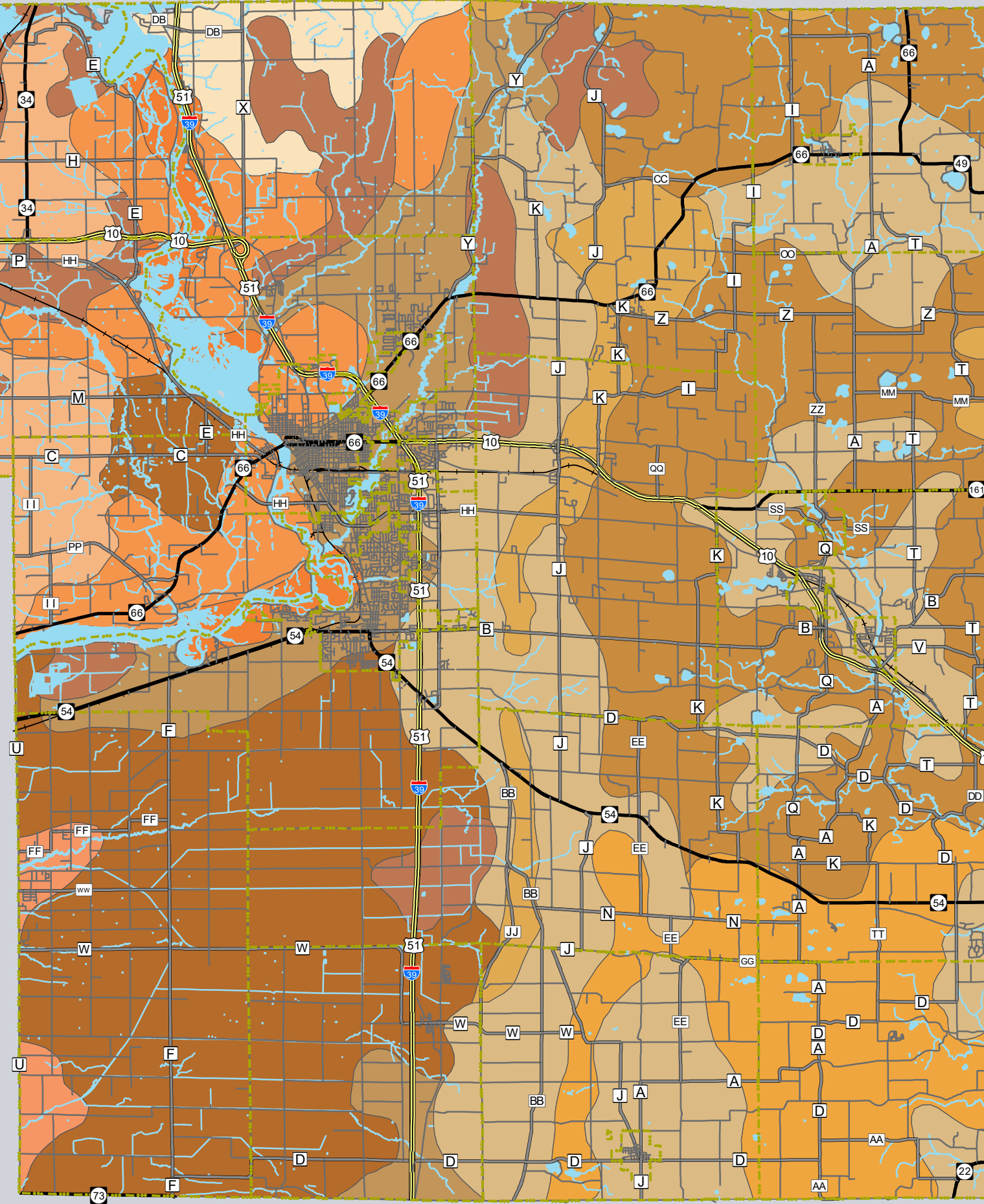
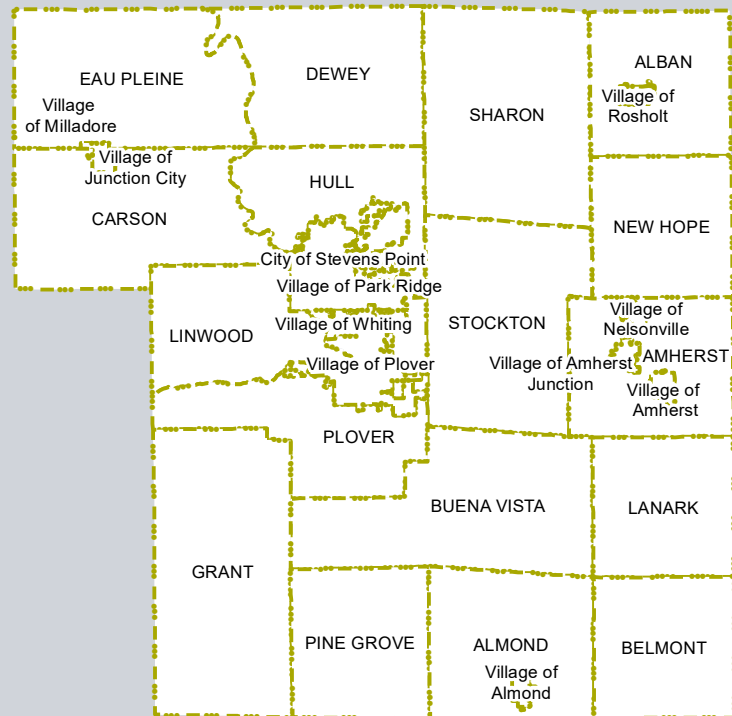
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**DRAFT**

**Legend**

-  U.S. Highways
-  State Highways
-  County Highways
-  Local Roads
-  Minor Civil Divisions
-  Water
-  FENWOOD-RIETBROCK-ROZELLVILLE (WI027)
-  FORDUM-STURGEON-DUNNVILLE (WI045)
-  KENNAN-ROSHOLT-OESTERLE (WI028)
-  MARKEY-SEELYEVILLE-CATHRO (WI064)
-  MEADLAND-MOSINEE-MAHTOMEDI (WI060)
-  MEADLAND-ROZELLVILLE-DOLPH (WI065)
-  NEWSON-MEEHAN-FRIENDSHIP (WI085)
-  PLAINFIELD-FRIENDSHIP-MEEHAN (WI084)
-  PLAINFIELD-RICHFORD-FRIENDSHIP (WI083)
-  PLAINFIELD-WYOCENA-OKEE (WI069)
-  POINT-DANCY-MOSINEE (WI066)
-  RICHFORD-BILLETT-BOYER (WI067)
-  ROSHOLT-KENNAN-SEELYEVILLE (WI029)



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

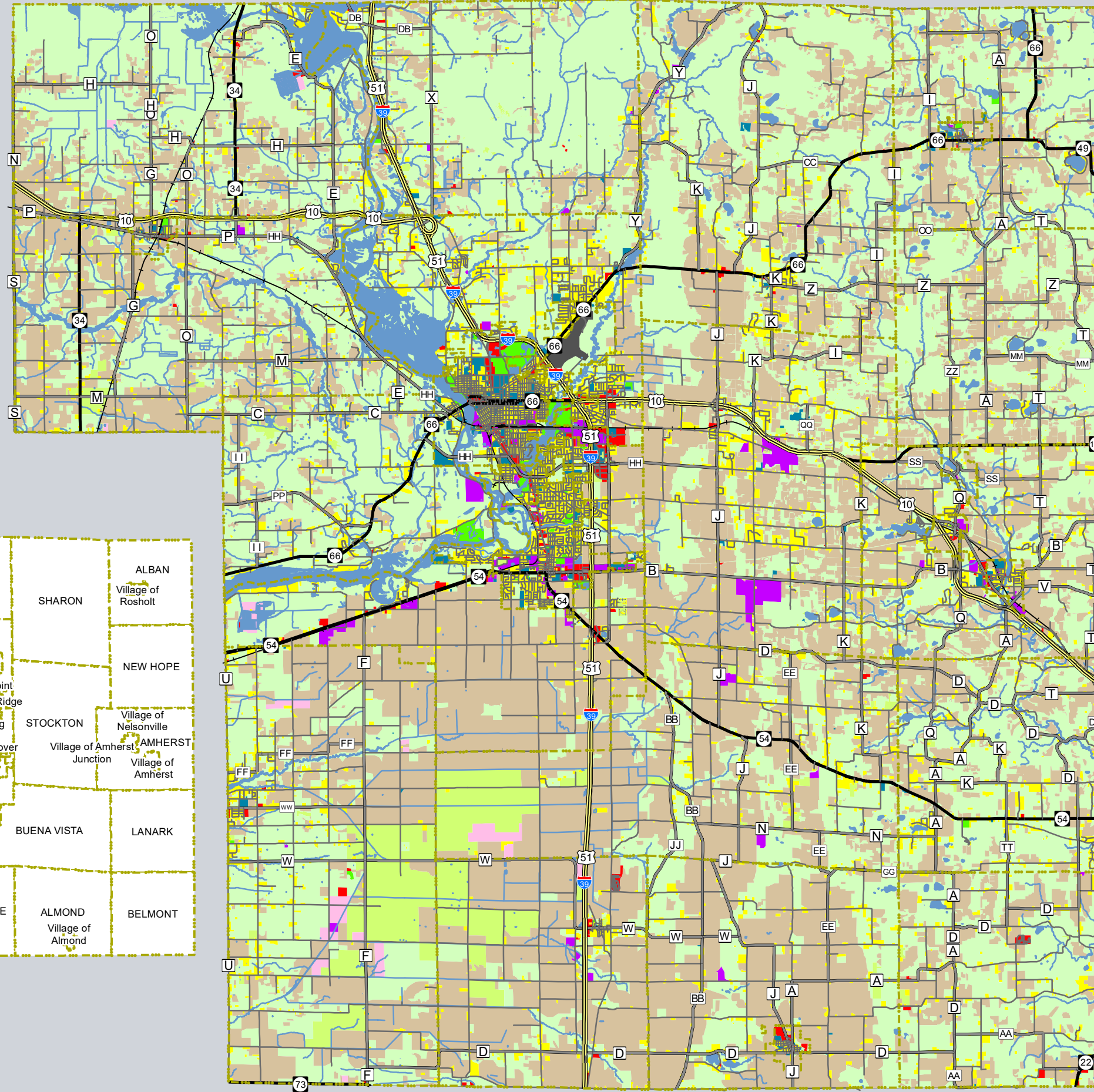
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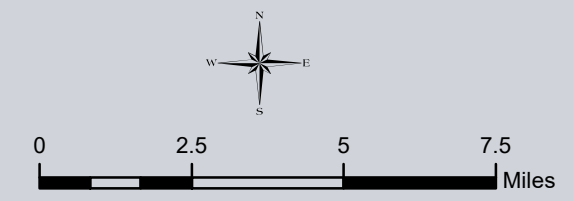
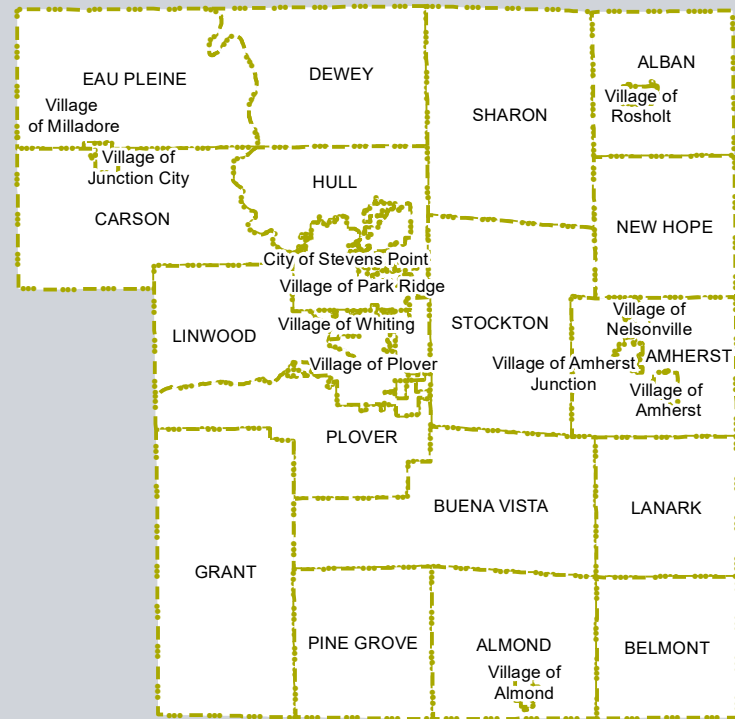
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**Legend**

- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Cranberry Bog
- Governmental / Institutional
- Industrial
- Open Lands
- Outdoor Recreation
- Residential
- Transportation
- Woodlands
- Water



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as one. This drawing is a compilation of records, information and data used for reference purposes only. NCWRPC is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained.

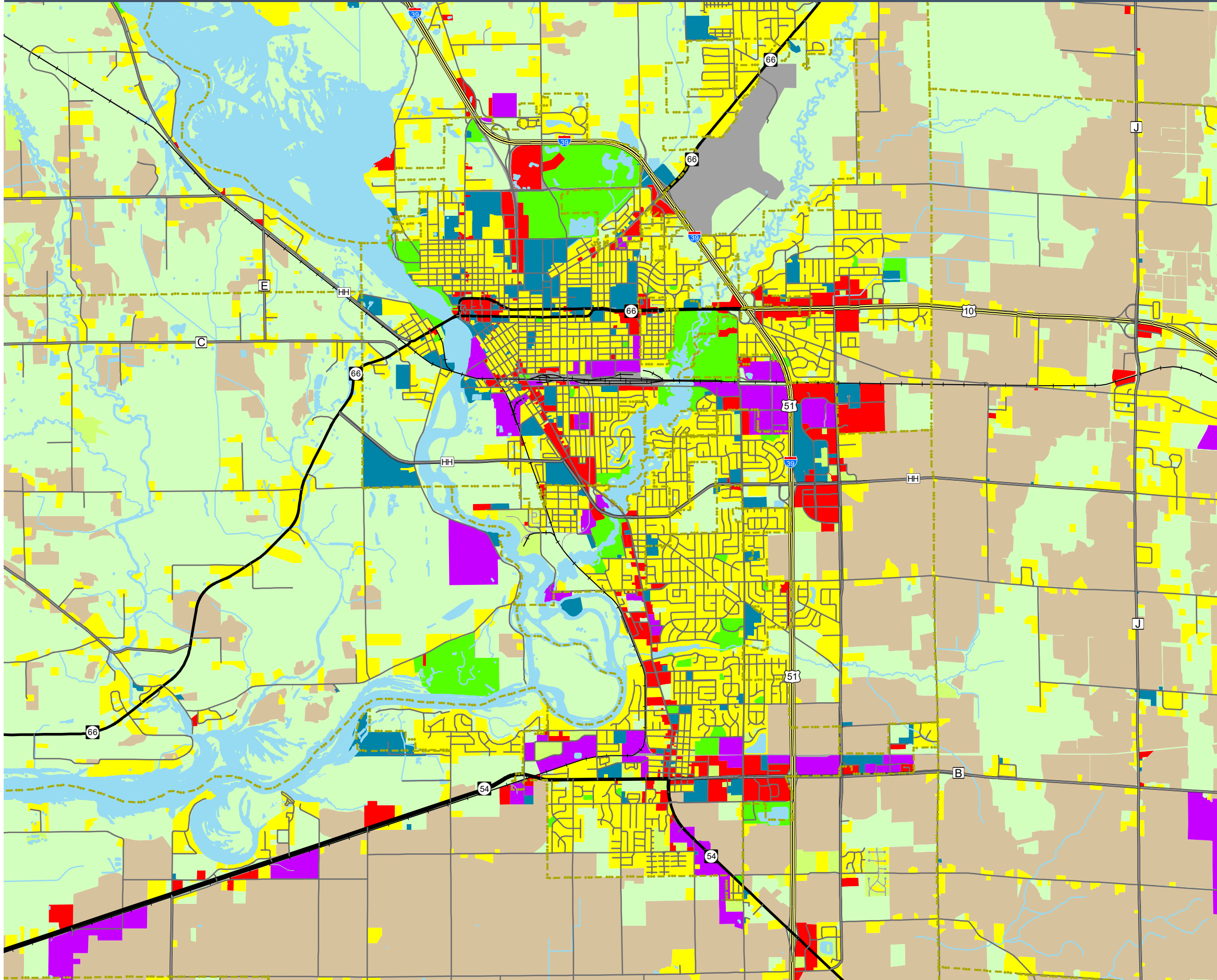
Prepared By:  
**North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403  
 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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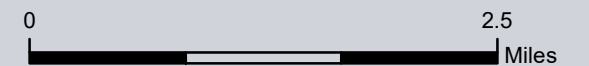


DRAFT



**Legend**

- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Existing Land Use**
- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Cranberry Bog
- Governmental / Institutional
- Industrial
- Open Lands
- Outdoor Recreation
- Residential
- Transportation
- Woodlands
- Water



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

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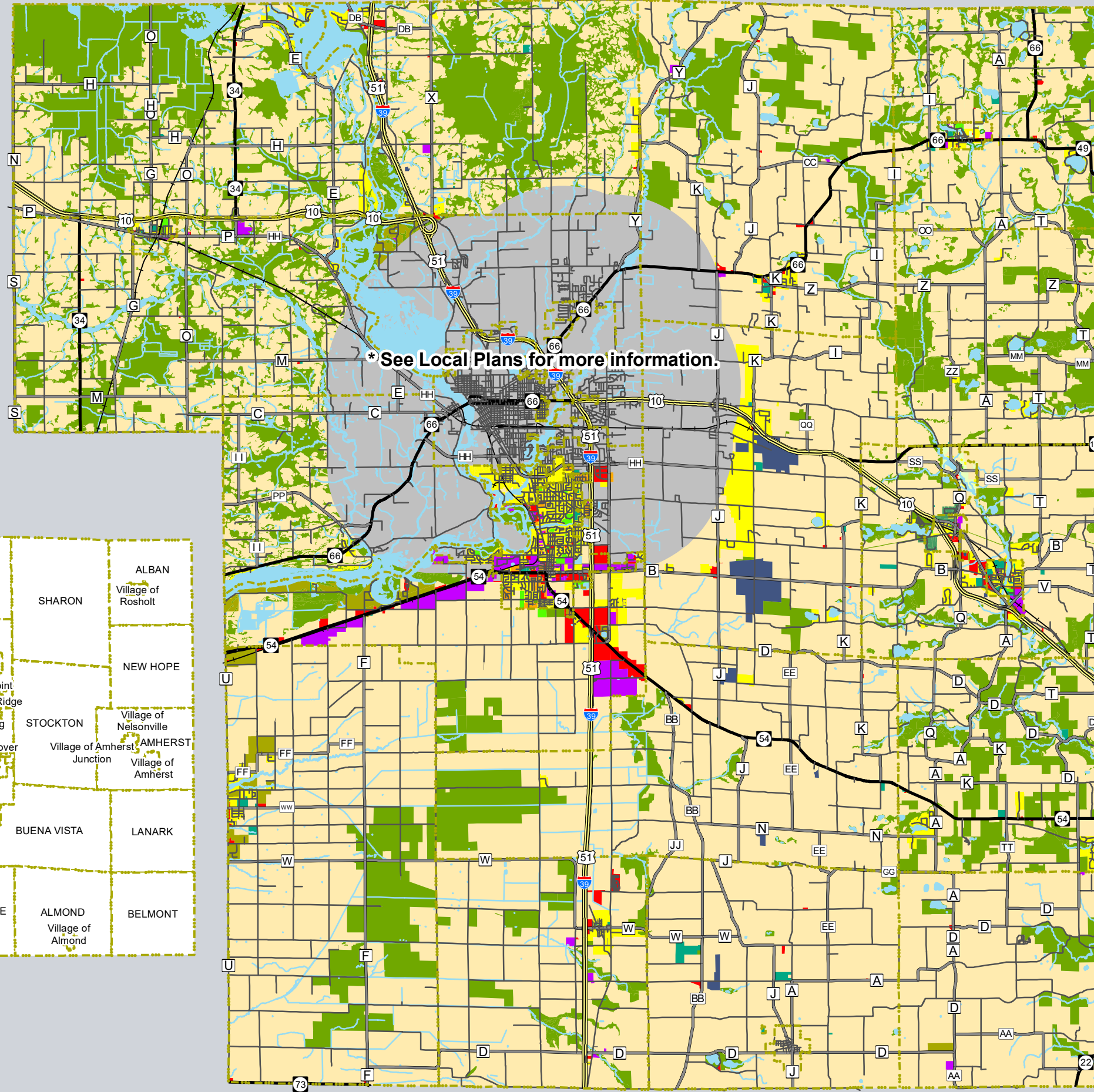


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715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org



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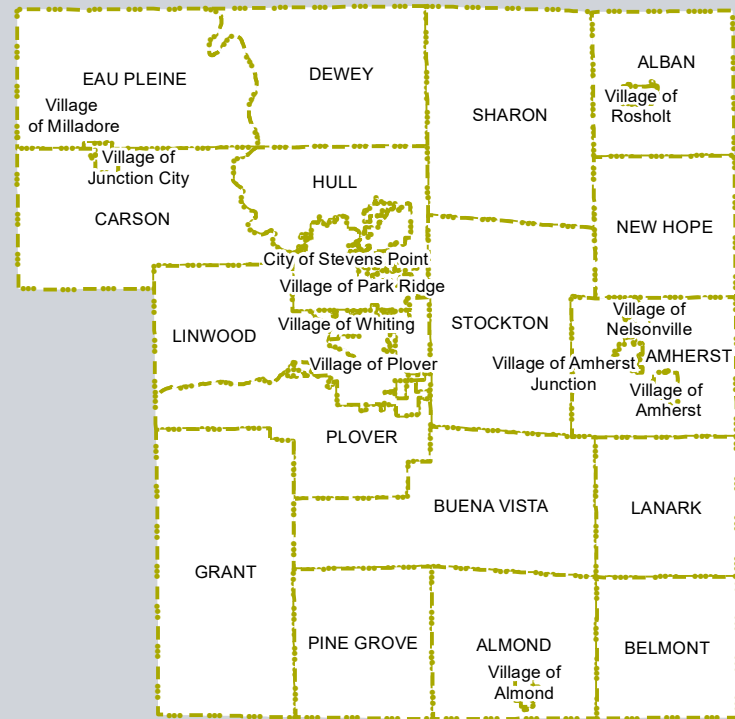


**Legend**

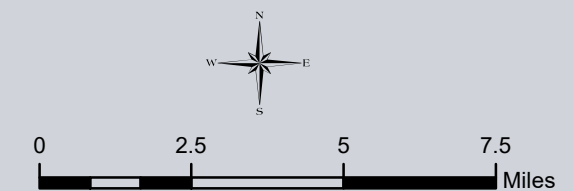
- U.S. Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water

**Generalized Future Land Use**

- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Multi Family
- Natural Areas
- Non-Metallic Mining
- Outdoor Recreation
- Residential
- Rural Residential
- Transportation
- \* See Local Plans for more information



This map combines each local future land use map in Portage County and places them into broad future land categories where data was available as of 2023. For up-to-date, detailed future land maps, see local comprehensive plans.

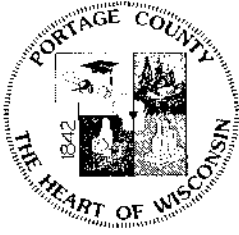


Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, FEMA

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 NCWRPC  
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 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

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## Portage County Clerk

Maria N. Davis  
1516 Church Street  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
Email: [davism@co.portage.wi.gov](mailto:davism@co.portage.wi.gov)  
Phone: 715-346-1351 Fax: 715-346-1486

### CERTIFICATION

I, Maria N. Davis, Clerk of the County of Portage, Wisconsin do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of:

RESOLUTION NO. 123-2022-2024  
RE: APPROVING AND ADOPTING THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR  
PORTAGE COUNTY'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

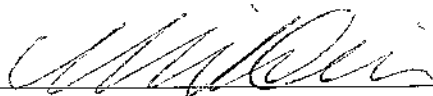
which was considered by the County Board by a vote of:

25     for  
  
          against  
  
          abstained  
  
          absent  
  
          excused  
  
          vacant

at an Adjourned Session of the Portage County Board of Supervisors, held on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of June 2023, and recorded in the minutes of said meeting, a quorum of members being present.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the County of Portage, Wisconsin, this 29<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2023.



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Maria N. Davis  
Portage County Clerk



## **Portage County Public Participation Plan (PPP)**

Portage County recognizes the importance of public participation in the planning process. As such, a goal during the comprehensive planning process will be to inform and involve the public in the planning process.

### **I. Plan Development:**

Throughout the plan process, the Planning and Zoning Committee will provide oversight for the update of the Comprehensive Plan. The P&Z Committee will also recommend adoption of the Public Participation Plan to the County Board.

The public participation plan will incorporate the following:

1. All meetings for the planning process will be posted and open to the public.
2. All Local Units will be contacted periodically throughout the process.
3. A community wide plan oversight committee will be established.
4. Plan-related materials will be available at the Portage County Planning & Zoning Office for public review.
5. The draft plan and maps will be available on a website for public review.
6. A public hearing will be held to solicit comments from the public.
7. The Comprehensive Plan will be distributed as outlined in state statute.

The Planning and Zoning Committee will review and recommend adoption of the Comprehensive Plan by Resolution. The County Board will adopt the comprehensive plan by Ordinance.

### **II. Implementation, Evaluation & Update:**

The Comprehensive Plan will be used as a general guideline for future development in the County. The plan will support the existing zoning and other regulations that are in place. As with all plans, it is critical for the Comprehensive Plan to be maintained and updated on a regular basis to keep it current as things change.

---

Any planning process is subject to change, and this public participation plan is no different. Over the planning period the process may vary from that presented.

## **Attachment B: Resolution**

(Insert after adoption)





## **Attachment C: Public Hearing Notice**

(Insert after adoption)

## **Attachment D: Ordinance**

(Insert after adoption)

## Attachment E: Survey Results

(Insert after adoption)