

# Chapter 1: Issues and Opportunities (Demographics)

## Vision Statement

The Town of Weston will guide the growth and development of the Town in such a way as to preserve its rural, natural, and agricultural character, while maintaining property owner rights, property values, and an affordable Town Tax Rate.

## Background

The Town of Weston's Comprehensive Plan guides the future growth and preservation of the Town over the next 10 to 20 years. This volume of the Comprehensive Plan provides the Town's vision and directions for land use, natural area and farmland preservation, housing development, transportation and community facilities, intergovernmental relations, and other factors that together form the Town's future. Before planning where the Town of Weston should head, the Town must first understand its history, current conditions, and trends. An exploration of existing conditions and issues can help the Town identify and take advantage of its assets and opportunities. It can also help prevent poor planning and development; costly mistakes; environmental damage; and inefficient road, utility, and service delivery.

## Location and Context

The Town of Weston is in Marathon County, located in Central Wisconsin. It is east of Interstate 39/U.S. Highway (USH) 51 and north of State Trunk Highway (STH) 29. The Town of Weston is connected to other urban areas in the State and Midwest via this highway network. The Town shares borders with the Town of Wausau to its north, the City of Wausau and City of Schofield to its west, the Town of Ringle to its east, the Village of Weston to its south, and the Town of Easton to its northeast.

The Town had a 2024 population of 780, according to the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. This modest population reflects the Town's small land area, much of which remains open. The Town has an area of approximately 8.68 square miles, two-thirds of which is located within the Village of Weston/Town of Weston extraterritorial zoning area.

## Village History

The origins of the Town of Weston go back to the mid-1850s. The Marathon County Board designated it as the Town of Eau Claire on November 12, 1856. This original Town consisted of land in the current Village of Weston, Village of Kronenwetter, Town of Rib Mountain, City of Schofield, and Village of Rothschild. The Town's boundaries were reduced, and the name was changed in 1859 to the Town of Weston. The Town's boundaries changed again in 1996 when the urban center was incorporated as the Village of Weston, leaving the rural sections north of the Eau Claire River as the Town of Weston.

Land in what is now the Town of Weston was originally heavily wooded (Hemlock, White Pine, and Red Pine) and inhabited only by Native Americans. In 1836, the Menomonee Indians signed a treaty giving European settlers title to a strip of land six miles wide along the Wisconsin River as far north as Wausau. The first commerce consisted almost exclusively of hunting and fur trading.

In 1839, the lumber industry developed in the area. Lumbermen began cutting the virgin pine trees and sending them down the Wisconsin River to mills in Mosinee and Stevens Point. As time passed, lumber mills

developed in Schofield and Wausau on the Wisconsin River, and in the Town of Weston on the Eau Claire River. At the height of the lumbering era, there were several mills located along the Eau Claire River. Most notably, there were lumber mills near the Ross Avenue Bridge, near Kellyland Park, and at the current site of the Dells of the Eau Claire River County Park. By the early 20th Century, the virgin forests were clear-cut, and the lumber mills ceased to operate.

After the lumbering era, agriculture developed as the Town's main form of commerce. The gently rolling lands that remained after logging were fertile, and suitable for a variety of types of development. Eventually, other businesses developed, residential areas grew, and municipal services followed.

Few reminders of the early history of the Town of Weston remain. There are a few residences and other structures in the Town that are more than one hundred years old. However, all the old lumber mills on the Eau Claire River have either been destroyed or fallen apart and disintegrated. The only evidence of these mills is a few pilings along the Eau Claire River that have survived the elements. The best example of these pilings can be seen east of the Ross Avenue Bridge in the Eau Claire River. Remaining forested areas are second or third growth wood lots, wetlands, and wooded areas along rivers and streams.

The greater Weston area has been one of the fastest growing parts of North Central Wisconsin. The Town of Weston's population grew by almost 28 percent between 2000 and 2020 to reach a population of 657 residents in 2020, according to the U.S. Census. The population for the Village of Weston had a slightly higher rate of growth during this period, increasing by 30 percent. Since 2010, population growth in the Weston area has slowed compared to previous decades when looking at the increase of only 2.8 percent in the Town's population between the 2010 and 2020 Census and 5.8 percent for the Village. However, 2024 American Community Survey estimates show the Town's population increasing rapidly compared to the Village, County, and State, with a 21.5 percent increase in population between 2010 and 2024 for an estimated population of 780. It is important to note that the American Community Survey has some accuracy issues, especially for places with small populations like the Town of Weston, which are discussed later in this Chapter.

The Town maintained an annual new housing start rate of approximately five new housing units per year between 2000 and 2016. Between 2017 and 2025, there were a total of 28 new housing starts, resulting in an average that was closer to three new housing starts annually. The Town's proximity to the City of Wausau and Village of Weston, in addition to its excellent connection to the regional highway system, have made it a desirable location for new residential development in the North Central Wisconsin area.

### **Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law**

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

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

## Planning Process

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) began the comprehensive planning process by updating the 2017 Comprehensive Plan based on new data, studies, and other information. As chapters were drafted, Plan Commission held several meetings to review them and provide feedback for various chapters. NCWRPC then produced a final draft based on this feedback and the Town held a public hearing for input on the proposed plan. Plan Commission then adopted a resolution recommending the plan for adoption to the Town Board, which adopted the plan via ordinance on (Insert date here when complete).

## Data Sources

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

U.S. Census	American Community Survey (ACS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Counts population, households, etc.</li><li>• Based on former Census “short form”</li><li>• Mailed to every household in the U.S.</li><li>• Mailed every decade (2010, 2020, etc.)</li><li>• Self-reported data that is published</li><li>• Typically more accurate than ACS</li><li>• No data for non-Census years</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Counts U.S. Census info plus additional topics</li><li>• Based on former Census “long form”</li><li>• Mailed to a limited number of households</li><li>• Mailed every year (2024, 2025, etc.)</li><li>• Self-reported data used to produce estimates</li><li>• Typically less accurate than Census</li><li>• Provides data for non-Census years</li></ul>

The ACS evolved from the “long form” that some households used to receive with the Census. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau began releasing ACS data for all populations on a yearly basis. The availability of these surveys means that communities do not need to wait ten years for the census to assess current trends, but they are only estimates based on a limited sample size. Trends are generally analyzed for the thirteen-year time frame from 2010 to 2024 in this report since 2024 data was released in early 2026.

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

## Demographics

This analysis is intended to describe the existing demographics of the Town of Weston and identify major demographic trends. Note that a large portion of the Town’s developed area became part of the incorporated Village in 1996. This change in jurisdiction renders historical trends limited and rather difficult to analyze, and therefore, only data after 2000 is included.

### Population and Households

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, between 2000 and 2010, population and household growth in the Village and Town of Weston grew at a much faster rate than either Marathon County or the State. The increase in total households between 2000 and 2010 was higher than the increase in population. This is likely due to decreases in household size, which can in turn be attributed to the growth of “empty nesters” and an aging population base and families having fewer children or no children at all compared to the past. These trends continued through 2024, though growth was generally slower between 2010 and 2020 than prior to 2010.

Despite the Village, County, and State growing at rates of 5.9 percent, 3.2 percent, and 4.0 percent between 2010 and 2024, the Town is estimated to have grown by 21.5 percent, with 18.7 percent of that growth occurring between 2020 and 2024. This could be a data accuracy issue that is common in American Community Survey 2024 data for smaller municipalities. The fact that there was an estimated decrease between 2020 and 2024 in the total number of households despite 15 new housing starts between 2020 and 2025 also could be an accuracy issue. It is important to note that the Green Tree Subdivision between Ross Avenue and Machmueller Park was annexed into the Village in 2023; this boundary change may also impact accuracy of the ACS data.

Overall, given continued development in both the Town and Village, it is likely that the population has increased for both municipalities since 2020, and it is possible that the number of households also increased. For the remainder of the Comprehensive Plan, it is assumed that 2020 data is more accurate than 2024 data, and that the Town has seen a continued increase in population since 2020.

**Table 1: Population**

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2000-2010 % Change	2000-2010 Net Change	2000-2024 % Change	2000-2024 Net Change
T. Weston	514	639	657	780	24.3%	125	51.8%	266
V. Weston	12,079	14,868	15,723	15,749	23.1%	2,789	30.4%	3,670
Marathon Co.	125,834	134,063	138,013	138,403	6.5%	8,229	16.2%	12,569
Wisconsin	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	5,914,872	6.0%	323,311	16.3%	551,197

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

**Table 2: Households**

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2000-2010 % Change	2000-2010 Net Change	2000-2024 % Change	2000-2024 Net Change
T. Weston	179	228	268	263	27.4%	49	46.9%	84
V. Weston	4,572	5,772	6,358	7,058	26.2%	1,200	54.4%	2,486
Marathon Co.	47,402	53,176	55,998	57,866	12.2%	5,774	22.1%	10,464
Wisconsin	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,428,361	2,479,480	9.4%	195,224	18.9%	394,936

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

The Town currently has an average household size of 2.97 persons and 7.6 percent of all households are classified as “householder living alone.” Nearly 18.3 percent of Town households have a householder 65 years or older. Compared to the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, this reflects a slight increase in household size, which is not typical in recent years, as well as a slight decrease in the share of households who live alone or who have a householder 65 years of age or older. This could indicate that younger families with children may be moving into the Town at a higher rate than the Village, County, and State, which are all experiencing a decrease in household size and a rising median age. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Average Household Size**

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2000-2024 Change
T. Weston	2.87	2.77	2.69	2.97	0.10
V. Weston	2.61	2.54	2.36	2.19	-0.42
Marathon Co.	2.60	2.49	2.39	2.36	-0.24
Wisconsin	2.50	2.43	2.36	2.33	-0.17

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

### Population Projections

Projections offer a municipality a glimpse of future growth potential. Population, household, and employment projections are used to shape the Town of Weston’s policies and initiatives. Population and household projections for the Town of Weston, Village of Weston and Marathon County, shown in Table 4, were obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Administration and are based on the 2020 Census. Previous projections from the Department based on the 2010 Census were generally higher across the state compared to Wisconsin’s observed population growth, whereas the latest projections from 2024, which is based on the 2020 Census, show a statewide decline of about 200,000 residents.

**Table 4: Population Projections**

	2020	2030	2040	2050
T. Weston	657	664	666	656
V. Weston	15,723	15,575	15,328	14,842
Marathon Co.	138,013	136,750	134,615	130,380
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120

Source: U.S. Census 2020; WDOA 2030-2050

The Department of Administration projects the Town population to increase by 9 people between 2020 and 2040, followed by a decrease of 10 people between 2040 and 2050. This is because the large Baby Boomer generation will enter the highest age brackets while younger age groups are smaller by comparison. Note that all population projections have already been exceeded by the 2024 ACS estimate, which is thought to be somewhat inaccurate, but it is possible that the Town's population has already exceeded its projected 2040 peak.

Typically, the Department of Administration does not consider potential future annexation when projecting future population growth. As a result, it is possible that some projected Town of Weston residents may be Village of Weston residents, resulting from new subdivisions occurring following annexation. Additionally, the projections are mainly based on existing age cohorts, death rates, and fertility rates. Sudden shifts in the economy or migration patterns are not a factor since they are too difficult to predict.

### **Household Projections**

Following previous Census years, DOA also would release household projections. Though population projections were updated in 2024, updated household projections were never released. Table 5 uses the population projections in Table 4 and divides them by the average household size in 2020 in Table 3 to provide population projections. If household sizes trend upward or downward over time, household projections would be impacted even if population projections remained accurate.

Like the population projections in Table 4, Table 5 shows a slight increase through 2040 followed by a slight decrease by 2050. Again, these projections likely do not factor in the effect of future annexations. If many of these projected new households locate in Weston following annexation of the associated lands, they will not actually be Town of Weston residents.

**Table 5: Household Projections**

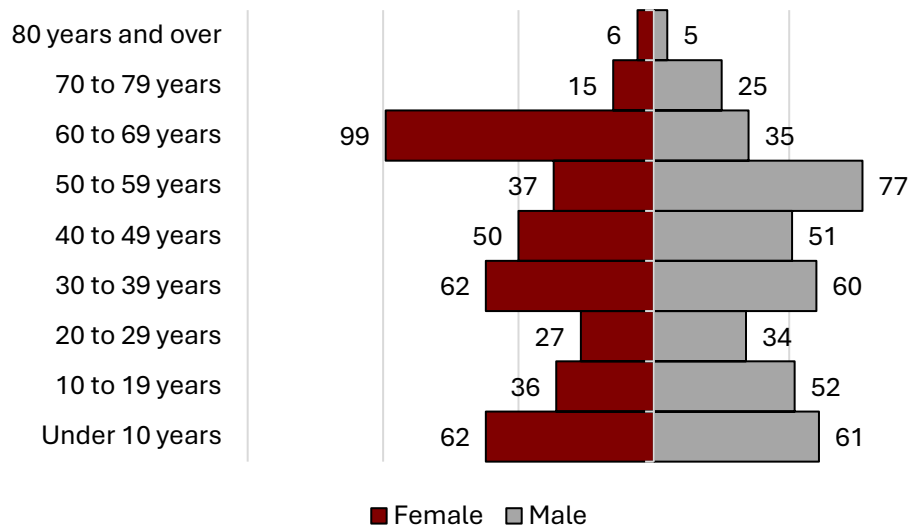
	2020	2030	2040	2050
T. Weston	244	247	248	244
V. Weston	6,662	6,600	6,495	6,289
Marathon Co.	57,746	57,218	56,324	54,552
Wisconsin	2,497,338	2,496,150	2,475,263	2,419,542

Source: U.S. Census 2020; WDOA 2030-2050; NCWRPC

## Age Distribution

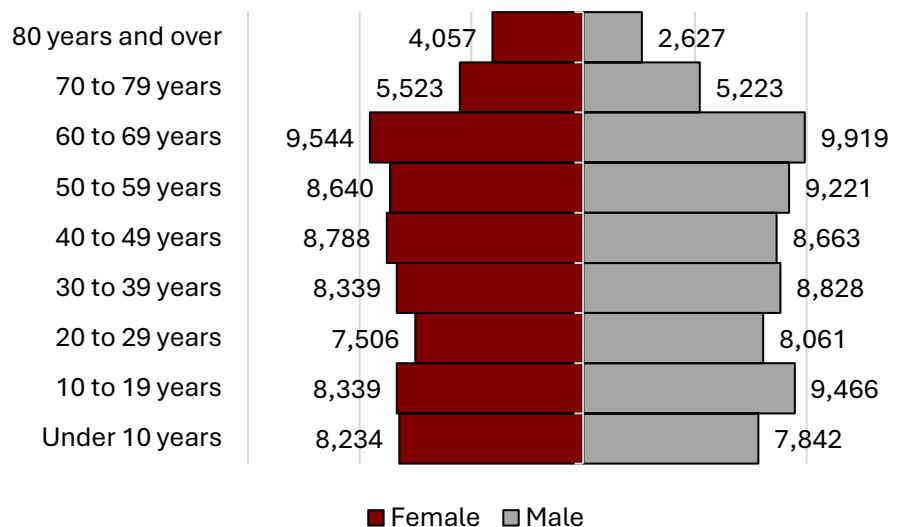
Figures 1 and 2 show population by age group in 2024 for the Town of Weston and Marathon County, respectively. The Town's largest age cohorts were 50 to 59 years old (191 total), under 10 years old (184), and between 30 and 39 years old (182). This reflects the observations discussed earlier in this Chapter: though the area's population is aging, younger families with children find the Town a desirable place to live. This is reflected in a decrease in the Town's median age from 43.6 in 2010 to 39.6 in 2024, while the Village, County, and State all saw an increase in median age.

**Figure 1: Age Distribution, Town of Weston**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

**Figure 2: Age Distribution, Marathon County**



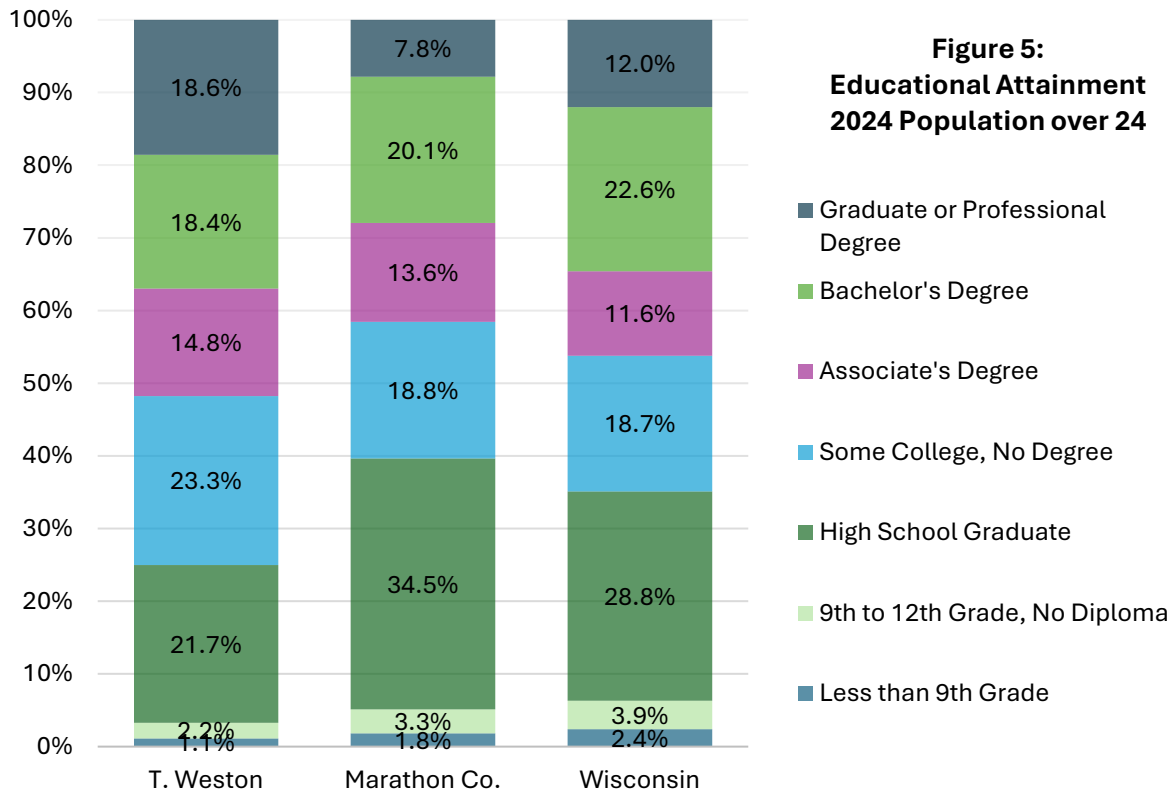
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

The decrease in median age also could be a result of older households downsizing and selling their larger properties in the Town and moving to more compact living arrangements in more urban areas where they are closer to more services and amenities and have less to maintain. In general, the presence of younger families in the Town helps stabilize its tax base, workforce, school enrollments, and more in the coming decades.

## Education

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 American Community Survey, 96.7 percent of Town residents have a high school education or higher. This compares to 94.9 percent for the County and 93.7 percent for the State. In the Town, 37 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. This rate is significantly higher than the Marathon County's educational attainment (27.9 percent), and slightly higher than the State's (34.6 percent). Other rates of educational attainment for the entire population can be seen in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Educational Attainment**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024



## Employment

Chapter 6 describes the Town's workforce in detail. Labor force participation describes the share of the population over age 16 that is working or looking for work; those choosing to stay at home with children, for example, are not included even though they are considered despite being part of the working age population. In summary, labor force participation has decreased for the Town (-4.6 percent), County (-5.3 percent), and State (-3.7 percent) between 2010 and 2024, which is partially a result of an increase in retirements nationwide.

Table 6 shows which occupations Town, County, and State residents work. Note that these are measured by where the worker lives, rather than where the job is located. The Town has a much higher share of those in management, business, science, and arts occupations compared to the Town and State, and the share of Town residents employed in these occupations has grown nearly 15 percent between 2010 and 2024. There is also a much smaller share of those working in service occupations in 2024 compared to the County and State, and also compared to the Town's workforce in 2010. For all other occupations, figures are somewhat similar to countywide and statewide trends.

**Table 6: Resident Occupations**

Occupation	T. Weston		Marathon Co.		Wisconsin	
	2010	2024	2010	2024	2010	2024
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	41.4%	56.3%	30.3%	37.7%	33.0%	40.2%
Service occupations	12.2%	4.6%	14.2%	15.0%	16.1%	15.1%
Sales and office occupations	18.8%	10.2%	24.4%	19.6%	24.5%	18.8%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	5.7%	9.2%	10.0%	8.9%	9.2%	8.6%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	22.0%	19.7%	21.2%	18.8%	17.2%	17.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2024

## Income

As shown in Table 7, median household income for Town residents was \$136,563 in 2024, which was a considerable increase from \$87,321 in 2010. Note that \$87,321 in 2010 had the same purchasing power as \$127,183.19 in 2024 due to inflation, so the increase is still present but not as pronounced as the table makes it appear. Median household income also increased at a higher rate than the Village, County, and State.

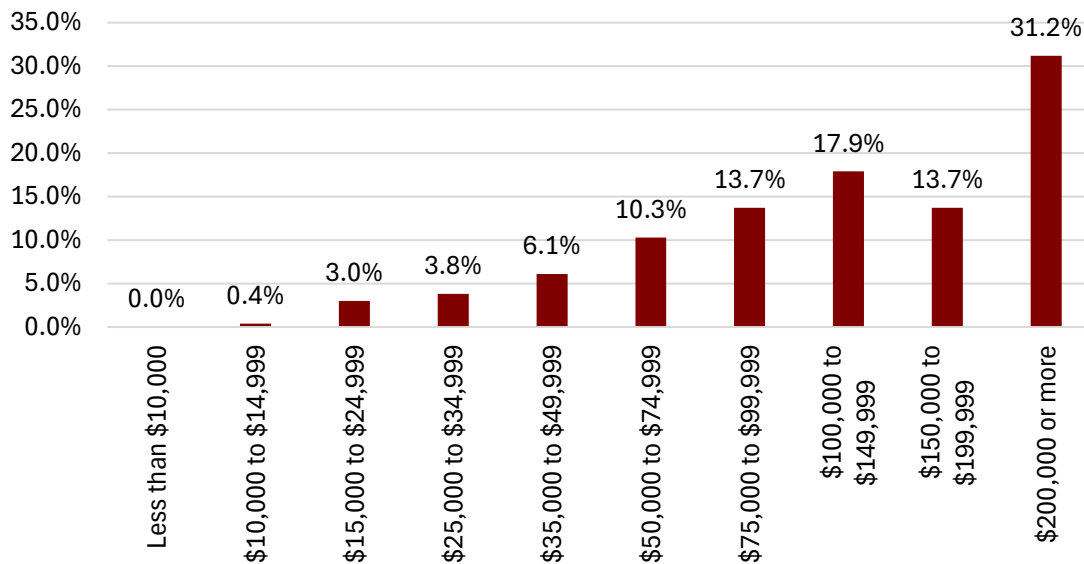
Median household income is also considerably higher than the Village of Weston with a median household income of \$78,207, Marathon County at \$77,884, and the State at \$77,485. In addition to a higher median income, the Town Weston's largest income brackets are between \$100,000 and \$150,000 and above \$200,000, with a significantly smaller proportion of those making less than \$50,000 annually as shown in Figure 4. This suggests a primarily upper middle-class population and reflects the lower median age, meaning a smaller share of the Town's population is retired compared to the Village, County, and State.

**Table 7: Income Characteristics**

	T. Weston	V. Weston	Marathon Co.	Wisconsin
<b>Median Household Income</b>				
2000	\$56,719	\$46,063	\$45,165	\$43,791
2010	\$80,156	\$55,367	\$49,356	\$51,598
2020	\$87,321	\$67,340	\$63,029	\$63,293
2024	\$136,563	\$78,207	\$77,884	\$77,485
% Change 2000-2024	140.8%	69.8%	72.4%	76.9%
<b>Median Family Income</b>				
2000	\$61,375	\$52,398	\$52,632	\$52,911
2010	\$87,083	\$65,873	\$61,386	\$64,869
2020	\$93,000	\$78,294	\$78,239	\$80,844
2024	\$145,938	\$98,018	\$98,320	\$100,141
% Change 2000-2024	137.8%	87.1%	86.8%	89.3%
<b>Per Capita Income</b>				
2000	\$23,941	\$20,148	\$20,703	\$21,271
2010	\$37,124	\$25,500	\$23,757	\$26,264
2020	\$42,377	\$31,897	\$33,608	\$34,450
2024	\$50,316	\$44,362	\$41,413	\$43,373
% Change 2000-2024	110.2%	120.2%	100.0%	103.9%

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

**Figure 4: Town of Weston Income Distribution 2024**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

Median family income, which only measures households with two or more related members, is even higher for Town residents (\$145,938) than the median household income is. This trend is also found in the Village, County, and Marathon, as families are more likely to have more than one working family member than households who are single. Again, median family incomes increased more rapidly in the Town than they did for the Village, County, and State since 2010, but unlike the Village, County, and State, the rate at which it grew was slower than for the median household income.

Per capita income provides a snapshot of how much purchasing power there is for each household member. The Town's per capita income was considerably higher than Village, County, and State per capita incomes, but it grew at a slower rate than the Village's per capita income growth since 2010. This could be due to an increase in average household size for the Town compared to a decrease for the Village.

In summary, incomes in the Town are high, which is common in rural areas near metropolitan areas. Homes in unincorporated areas tend to be larger and on larger properties, and there are fewer multifamily homes or other entry-level housing choices due to the lack of water and sewer that supports higher density development. Being part of the Wausau Metropolitan Area also results in quick access to a variety of high-quality jobs that support the lifestyle that many Town residents have.

## **Summary**

- The Town of Weston has a higher population growth rate between 2000 and 2024 (51.8 percent) compared to the Village (30.4 percent), County (16.2 percent), and State (16.3 percent).
- 2020 Census data may be more accurate than 2024 American Community Survey data. Comparing the growth rate between 2010 and 2020 for the Town (2.8 percent) shows slower growth relative to the Village (5.8 percent), County (2.9 percent), and State (3.6 percent). But either way, it can be assumed that growth is continuing, based on the 15 new housing permits issued between 2020 and 2025.
- The number of Town households rose by 49.7 percent between 2000 and 2020, but 2024 estimates suggested it decreased slightly since 2020. This is reflected in an increase in household size between 2020 and 2024 while the Village, County, and State have consistently decreased in average household size since 2000. The Town's 2024 household size is estimated to be larger than its 2000 household size.
- The Town's 2024 median age (39.6) decreased slightly from 2010, unlike the Village (41.3), County (41.3), and State (40.2), which are all older and have increased. Combined with the information regarding population and households, it appears that the proportion of younger families with children have increased in the Town since 2010.
- Median household income, median family income, and per capita income are consistently much higher than Village, County, and Statewide figures, and with median household and family incomes also rising at a higher rate. Per capita incomes also increased considerably, but at a slightly lower rate due to increasing household size. The Town has a high proportion of high income households and a low proportion of low income households.
- The Town of Weston is projected to see modest growth both in its population and number of households through 2040 with a slight decrease by 2050.
- Economic Development, described in more detail in Chapter 6, impact Town residents' ability to find high quality jobs, and the Town's proximity to the Wausau Area contributes greatly to job availability.

## **Issues and Initiatives**

### **Capitalize on Weston's Assets and Opportunities**

Identifying the Town's current assets and future opportunities is important to establishing a bold yet realistic vision and Comprehensive Plan. The Town of Weston's location relative to neighboring communities is depicted in Map 1. Weston is connected to the region and the Midwest through an extensive, modern freeway network. Its position relative to growing communities in Marathon County presents opportunities for collaboration, as well as challenges including decreasing Town land base due to annexation.

Most of the more developed areas of the Town of Weston were incorporated as the Village of Weston in 1996, dramatically affecting the face of Weston. As a result, the Town's population decreased by over 95 percent between 1990 and 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, though, the Town's population had rebounded by almost 20 percent to reach 639 residents.

The Town of Weston values its rural residential landscape and agricultural character, which is in contrast to the more heavily developed areas of the adjacent Village of Weston and City of Wausau. Weston's community assets include its rural character, moderate taxes, D.C. Everest schools, nearby healthcare, accessible location in Central Wisconsin, open space, and natural and recreational amenities.

In a 2013 community survey, Town of Weston respondents indicated that they lived in the Town of Weston because they enjoyed the rural atmosphere and did not desire to see additional commercial development within the Town. This result affirmed the vision statement contained within the Town's 1998 and 2005 plans, which was: "The purpose of land use planning in the Town of Weston is to guide the growth and development of the township in such a way as to preserve the rural character of the township while balancing the rights of individual property owners with the town's need to protect property values communitywide and keep the cost of government as low as possible." The vision statement on the cover page of this Chapter largely carries forward this older vision statement.

Building on this vision, the Town of Weston will work to maintain the Town's rural character. This will be accomplished by limiting new development in Town's more scenic areas, discouraging higher density rural residential and commercial development, not placing burdening existing agricultural operations through conflicting land uses and road usage, and protecting natural resources that add value for residents. The Town will also continue to provide a quality rural living environment.

### **Advance a Compelling Vision for the Town's Future**

The Town's vision statement may be understood as:

- A presentation of how the Town wishes to look, feel, and be perceived.
- An inspirational view of the Town and its future.
- A platform for the Town to take advantage of its assets and opportunities.
- A broad framework around which to build more detailed initiatives, including those in this Comprehensive Plan. The vision statement is elaborated through a set of goals and it guides the content of the remaining chapters in this Plan.

## **Funding and Responsibility**

These two initiatives will be carried out through the more detailed initiatives described in subsequent chapters of this volume, each with its own particular funding need and source. In conjunction with the Town's Plan Commission, the Town Board will articulate, communicate, and implement the general initiatives laid out in the Implementation chapter.

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

Each of the following chapters of this comprehensive plan includes a set of goals, objectives, and policies, which the Town Board will use to guide the future development of the Town over the coming decades. For the purposes of this plan, goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

- ✓ **Goals:** Broad statements that express general priorities about how the Town 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 are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. 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. Decision-makers use policies on a day-to-day basis.

Several chapters include a listing of possible programs that the Town might implement to advance the goals and objectives of the plan. The listing does not imply that the Town will utilize every program shown, but only that these programs are available to the Town and may be one of many possible ways of achieving the Town's goals.

## Chapter 2: Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources

### Introduction

Because natural resource features do not follow geopolitical boundaries, it is important to consider their patterns and inter-relationships on a broader scale. In addition, many of the programs for protecting or mitigating impacts on natural resources are administered at the County, State or federal level. A description of local natural resource conditions is described below, as well as an overview of recent County-wide natural resource planning efforts. Of particular interest are geographic areas of the landscape encompassing valued natural resource features grouped below by resource type, including water, soils, and biological resources.

### Background

Previous plans and surveys indicated strong support for protecting and enhancing drinking water, the Eau Claire River, and the Town's agricultural economy.

### Previous Planning Efforts

**The Marathon County Forest Ten-Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021-2035.** This plan includes recommendations to guide management of forest land in Marathon County and it provides information on existing forest resources and information related to forest management.

**Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (LWRMP) 2010.** This plan identifies the following long-term program outcomes for the natural resource protection efforts in Marathon County:

1. Land Use activities are well planned to enhance community development, minimize conflicts, maximize infrastructure investments, and protect rural character.
2. Maintain the soil and water resources as productive assets through topsoil and organic matter conservation.
3. Marathon County agriculture and woodlot producers are economically strong.

**Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan 2024.** This plan identifies areas that qualify for farmland preservation zoning where farmers can receive up to \$10 per acre if they enroll in the program. Much of the Town of Weston is designated a Farmland Preservation Area; see this Plan for maps.

**Marathon County Soil Survey.** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency that produces the County's 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. Included are maps identifying the location of soil types.

**NCWRPC Regional Comprehensive Plan 2025.** 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.

**State of the Central Wisconsin River Basin 2002.** This DNR-led plan studies geology, demographics, and land use patterns and provides an assessment of the Wisconsin River's water quality, which the Eau Claire River flows to. This effort provided 1) an assessment of existing conditions, 2) identification of major issues,

priorities, and objectives, and 3) recommendations for action. The plan includes management priorities and recommendations regarding fish, wildlife, and watersheds within the basin.

**The Wisconsin Historic Preservation Plan 2016-2025.** This Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) administers this plan that prioritizes tasks and efforts on five critical issues: 1. Develop and implement targeted educational opportunities, 2. Increase awareness and support of historic preservation, 3. Increase funding sources for historic preservation, 4. Cultivate partnerships to advance historic preservation goals, and 5. Support and expand digital data and access.

## **Natural Resources**

The Town of Weston is relatively flat, except for some areas of undulating terrain in association with rivers, streams, or creeks, that allow for scenic vistas—even as far as across the Wisconsin River Valley. Most of the soils in the community are suitable for agriculture or for various types of development. Three rivers and streams run through the Town of Weston, including the Lower Eau Claire River, Big Sandy Creek and its tributary, Little Sandy Creek. Map 2: Natural Resources depicts the geographic location of these areas, which are described in further detail on the following pages.

## **Natural Resources Inventory and Trends**

### **Geography**

The Town of Weston is located in Central Marathon County in Central Wisconsin along the Eau Claire River, which influenced early development patterns and drains to the nearby Wisconsin River. It borders the City of Schofield, City of Wausau, Village of Weston, and Towns of Easton, Ringle, and Wausau. The Village of Weston, which features more intense development than the Town, was formerly part of the Town of Weston until its incorporation in 1996. County Highway J provides quick access to State Highway 29, linking the Town with the Greater Wausau Area and other metropolitan areas in Wisconsin. County Highway N provides a direct route towards Downtown Wausau, further linking the Town with its surroundings. Despite its proximity to larger municipalities, the Town features a rural lifestyle with its predominately low-density residential and agricultural character.

### **Geology and Topology**

Marathon County's terrain is primarily the result of glaciation. The central area where the Town is located is a mixed terrain of ground moraines and uplands underlain by bedrock at a depth of 2 to 20 feet. Land along the Eau Claire River is composed of nearly level to very steep outwash terraces and nearly level and gently sloping flood plains. In areas along the Eau Claire River and Big Sandy Creek, the bedrock is generally over 50 feet deep. In other areas, it is possible to find shallow depth to bedrock which limits the construction of homes and other buildings since the cost to excavate the bedrock can be cost-prohibitive. High bedrock may also preclude installation of conventional on-site septic systems.

### **Ecology**

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), the Town is within the Forest Transition ecological landscape. The Forest Transition features glacial characteristics like moraines and till plains. Prior to European settlement, mesic forest covered nearly the entire area, which was eventually

cleared for forest products and agriculture. WDNR has a series of reports for each ecological landscape that provide details on plant species, land management practices, and more.

### **Soil**

There are two predominant soil associations in the Town. Fenwood-Rietbrock-Rozellville soils are generally located in the northwest portion of the Town, on either side of CTH X, while Mosinee-Meadland-Dancy dominate the eastern portion of the Town. Several soils in these associations have limitations for septic tank absorption fields, either due to excessive moisture or shallow depth over bedrock. The soils in these associations are commonly used for cropland and woodland, but there are only isolated pockets of Group I and Group II agricultural soils in these associations within the Town of Weston. Also, and not surprising, sandy soils predominate within the corridors surrounding the Big Sandy Creek, and its tributary, Little Sandy Creek.

### **Mineral Resources**

The Reef Deposit, containing an estimated 120,000 ounces of gold, is a geological anomaly located in the Town of Easton. Exploratory drilling has occurred at this site since the 1970s. In 2011, Aquila Resources Inc., purchased options on the mineral and surface rights. They drilled an additional 35 exploratory boreholes in 2011-2012. The Reef Deposit is currently owned by Greenlight Metals who is working to secure additional permits for more exploratory drilling.

Wisconsin's 2017 Nonferrous Metallic Mining Bill (Act 134) opens the Reef Deposit to potential metallic mining. In response, Marathon County is partnered with various stakeholders to create a metallic mining ordinance to provide reasonable local control and protections. Should metallic mining occur at this site, it may impact the Town of Weston's economy and water quality due to its location in a neighboring Town.

### **Non-Metallic Mining**

There are about 400 operating or abandoned sand, gravel, decomposed ("rotten") granite, and stone excavation sites in Marathon County. In 1989, the County adopted a Non-metallic Mining Ordinance that requires reclamation of these sites to a purposeful and acceptable landscape appearance and use. The program is administered by the Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department and includes incentives to reclaim abandoned excavations. In 2025, there was one active non-metallic mine in the Town of Weston.

### **Climate**

Marathon County has a continental climate which experiences four distinct seasons with cold winters and warm summers. Winter temperatures average between 0°F and 23°F and summer temperatures average between 54°F and 80°F. Summers are fairly short which limits the crops which can be grown. Average annual rainfall is 32 inches and average annual snowfall is 60 inches.

### **Watersheds**

Watershed identification is important for water quality management, stormwater management, flood control, sanitary sewer delivery, and habitat planning. The Town of Weston is situated in the Lower Eau Claire River Watershed.



In 2021, Marathon County adopted an update to its Land and Water Resource Management Plan (LWRMP), in accordance with Wisconsin Statutes (Wisconsin Act 27, Chapter 92.10). The primary intent of the LWRMP is to identify a vision for natural resource management in Marathon County and outline strategies to protect the quality and quantity of soil and water resources. Marathon County encompasses portions of 22 watersheds. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has ranked these watersheds according to water pollution impacts and designated five as “priority” watersheds to receive special planning and funding through the voluntary, State-funded Priority Watershed Program. The County’s Department of Conservation, Planning and Zoning works with the WDNR to implement that program. Program funding is used to hire staff to assist in developing management plans for each watershed and to provide cost sharing to landowners for implementation of “best management practices” (BMPs) to achieve the program objectives. There are no priority watersheds in the Town of Weston.

### **Surface Water**

Several rivers and creeks pass through the Town. The Lower Eau Claire River meanders along the Town’s south border. The Lower Eau Claire River hosts recreational activities within it (paddling, fishing) and alongside it (camping, trails). There is an emerging local initiative to forge a more formalized water trail along it, including improved launches like the one near the Ross Avenue bridge.

Big Sandy Creek, and its tributary, Little Sandy Creek, flow diagonally through the center of the Town from the northeast to their confluence with the Lower Eau Claire River just east of CTH X. The Sandy Creek corridor is primarily wooded and natural.

The Town of Weston does not have any significant lakes but there are many small ponds affected by shoreland zoning.

Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) and Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW) designations are derived from an amendment to the U.S. Clean Water Act, which directed states to identify waters that were largely unaffected by pollution and should remain that way. There are no designated ORWs or ERWs in the Town of Weston.

Water resources that have been significantly degraded are identified as “impaired waters.” Four of the 22 watersheds in Marathon County have been identified as “impaired waters” on the “303 (d) list” of the U.S. Clean Water Act. The list identifies waters that do not meet current water quality standards and merit water quality improvement and protection. There are no impaired waters in the Town of Weston.

All areas in the Town of Weston within 1,000 feet of the Ordinary High Water Mark of navigable lakes, ponds or flowages and within 300 feet of streams, or to the landward side of the floodplain, whichever distance is greater, are under the jurisdiction of the Marathon County Shoreland and Shoreland-Wetland Floodplain Code.

### **Groundwater Resources**

Depth to groundwater in the Town is generally less than 20 feet below the soil surface, although in scattered areas, groundwater supply is limited due to high bedrock. In the area north of Big Sandy Creek, wells tend to be deep and the volume of water can be limited.

The 2001 Marathon County Groundwater Protection Guide is an extension of the efforts established with adoption of the Marathon County Groundwater Plan in 1988. It is currently being updated as of 2025. The plan guides local and County officials in setting policy. It also serves as a resource of information about groundwater and other natural resources and recommends strategies to address issues related to groundwater protection.

### **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 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, fishery, water quality, and recreational value of lakes, rivers, and streams. The County has shoreland zoning provisions that are described in detail in Chapter 7: Land Use.

### **Floodplains**

Floodplains consist of land likely to be covered by floodwater during the regional (100-year) flood. Floodplain areas are based on information compiled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM). The floodplain includes the floodway and the flood fringe. In the Town of Weston, areas immediately adjacent to the Lower Eau Claire River and Big and Little Sandy Creeks are located in the 100-year floodplain. (see Map 2). There are approximately 554 acres of floodplain in the Town.

All areas that would be covered by the regional flood or base flood as shown on the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) or other maps approved by DNR in the Town of Weston are under the jurisdiction of the Marathon County Shoreland, Shoreland-Wetland and Floodplain Code. The Code defines “floodway” as the channel of a river or stream and those portions of the floodplain adjoining the channel required to carry the regional flood discharge. “Flood fringe” is defined as the portion between the regional flood limits and the floodway.

### **Wetlands**

In Wisconsin, a “wetland” was defined by the State Legislature in 1978 as: “an area where water is at, near, or above the land surface long enough to be capable of supporting aquatic or hydrophytic (water-loving) vegetation and which has soils indicative of wet conditions.” Programs in three levels of government—local, State, and federal—regulate activities in wetlands. There are dozens of wetland types in Wisconsin, characterized by vegetation, soil type and degree of saturation or water cover. Some of the more prominent wetland types are:

- Aquatic Bed wetlands, which contain plants growing entirely on or in a water body no deeper than 6-feet. Plants may include pond-weed, duckweed, lotus and water-lilies.
- Marshes, which are characterized by standing water and dominated by cattails, bulrushes, pickerel-weed, lake sedges and/or giant bur-reed.

- Sedge or "Wet" Meadow wetlands, which may have saturated soils, rather than standing water, more often than not. Sedges, grasses and reeds are dominant, but may also contain blue flag iris, marsh milkweed, sneeze-weed, mint and several species of goldenrod and aster.
- Scrub/Shrub wetlands, which include bogs and alder thickets and are characterized by woody shrubs and small trees such as tag alder, bog birch, willow and dogwood.
- Forested wetlands, which include bogs and forested floodplain complexes. They are characterized by trees 20 feet or more in height such as tamarack, white cedar, black spruce, elm, black ash, green ash, and silver maple.

In the Town, wetlands are mostly associated with rivers and streams which are labeled on Map 2. The largest wetlands are forested wetlands located adjacent to the Lower Eau Claire River and Big Sandy Creek. There is a large, isolated forest wetland complex in Section 11 that would limit potential development of that area. There are approximately 970 acres of wetlands total throughout the Town.

### **Air Quality**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets National Ambient Air Quality Standards according to the Clean Air Act. These standards set parts per million maximums for six principal pollutants: Carbon Monoxide, Lead, Nitrogen Dioxide, Ozone, Particle Pollution, and Sulfur Dioxide. Hundreds of other air toxics are regulated through permits. Wisconsin DNR monitors air quality to inform the public when air pollution reaches unhealthy levels. Areas with Pollutants that do not meet EPA standards are Nonattainment Areas. Marathon County is designated as an Attainment Area and thus does not have additional regulations on new industries desiring to locate in the County. Northern Wisconsin consistently has some of the nation's highest air quality scores. Despite this, indoor air quality can be a concern, and smoke, carbon monoxide, radon, and mold can be found in homes in Marathon County. The County's Health Department addresses these indoor air quality issues.

### **Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

Environmental corridors are groupings of natural resources, usually situated along a linear waterway or drainage feature. They all contain some type of water feature, such as a river, stream, lake, or wetland, and are often bounded by areas of steep topography, or "rims". They also typically contain a variety of woodlands, grasslands, native plant communities, and wildlife habitat areas.

Primary environmental corridors are the highest quality corridors within the community. They have the largest land areas, the richest diversity of wildlife, and the highest quality water features. Also, primary environmental corridors typically run along the entire length of a water body.

Regional Planning Commission guidelines suggest that primary environmental corridors are a minimum of 400 acres in size, at least two miles long, and a minimum width of 200 feet. Based on these guidelines, the Town of Weston has two areas that meet the criteria for a primary environmental corridor: the Eau Claire River Corridor and the Sandy Creek Lowland Corridor.

These primary environmental corridors provide unique opportunities for recreational development. They provide opportunities for fishing, swimming, hiking, hunting, cross country skiing, and nature interpretation.

Multi-purpose trail development along these corridors often provides users with a variety of year-round, barrier-free recreation opportunities.

The Eau Claire River Corridor has the highest potential for recreational development. Approximately one half of the corridor lies in a wetland protection district. The Eau Claire River, which is accessible by canoe or small boat, is known for bass, pan fish, and northern pike fishing, and increasingly for paddling sports. The Eau Claire River Corridor has a number of scenic woodlands, rapids, and other natural and even historic features within the Town.

### **Vegetation**

About half of the Town of Weston is wooded, with most woodlands located along waterways. Areas of cropland are mostly concentrated in the northeast part of the Town. Vegetation in developed areas consists of private landscaping, although large residential lots are commonly wooded.

### **Forests**

Trees are visually pleasing, environmentally beneficial, and an important link between community residents and the natural environment. They provide habitat and sanctuary for birds and other wildlife, rejuvenate oxygen and control air pollution, and provide shade and microclimate control. As of 2025, there were seven parcels totaling 62.6 open acres in the Town of Weston enrolled in the State of Wisconsin's Managed Forest Program, and another 503.8 acres closed to public use.

The Marathon County Forest Ten-Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021-2035 includes recommendations to guide management of forest land in Marathon County. That plan is in accordance with the County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department's mission to manage and protect County forest lands on a sustainable basis for the ecological, economic, educational, recreational, and research needs of present and future generations. That plan provides substantial information on existing forest resources and information regarding the roles of the various agencies and regulatory framework related to forest management.

### **Steep Slopes**

Steep slopes are often defined as slopes with gradients over 12 percent. Development in areas with steep slopes is restricted due to the increased potential for soil erosion and runoff. Construction is usually significantly more expensive in areas with steep slopes and extending utilities to such areas can be challenging. Steep slopes in and near the Town are generally located adjacent to the Eau Claire River.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

Wildlife resources include a variety of game and non-game species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians that typically live in the area. Common types of wildlife include bear, badger, fox, coyote, deer, wild turkeys, raccoon, squirrels, songbirds, waterfowl and raptors. Wildlife resources are abundant in the many undisturbed sanctuaries, refuges, reserves, and scattered habitats. Numerous other species of migrating birds use habitat in the area for food, shelter, and resting stops during seasonal migration. There are some endangered, threatened, or special concern species located within the Town, particularly within its environmental corridors, described below.

## **Threatened and Endangered Species**

The Town of Weston 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. Wisconsin law prohibits the “taking” of any plant or animal listed as endangered or threatened, which is defined as killing, harming, collecting, capturing, or harassing a member of a protected species. WDNR’s Bureau of Endangered species operates the Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI), which maintains data on the location and status of rare species, natural communities, and natural features in Wisconsin. For an up-to-date list of species, their status, and laws protecting them, view the NHI at [dnr.wisconsin.gov](http://dnr.wisconsin.gov).

As of 2025, endangered species in Marathon County include: Slender Glass Lizard, Blanchard’s Cricket Frog, Ovate Beak Grass, Dwarf Umbrella Sedge, Loggerhead Shrike, Swamp Metalmark, Forster’s Tern, and Black Tern. Threatened species include the Brittle Prickly-pear, Dwarf Milkweed, Red-shouldered Hawk, Spatterdock Darner, Slender Bush Clover, White Lady’s-slipper, Woolly Milkweed, Pale Green Orchid, Long-beaked Bald-rush, Bell’s Vireo, Prairie Parsley, False Asphodel, Yellow Rail, Linear-leaved Sundew, Henslow’s Sparrow, Cerulean Warbler, Little Brown Bat, and Northern Long-eared Bat. There are many additional species of concern as well.

## **Agricultural Resources**

### **Productive Agricultural Soils**

Areas most suitable for agricultural production, with minimal limitations and requiring minimal inputs for successful production have been identified as “prime farmland” by the United States Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Map 3: Prime Farmland illustrates soils in the Town that have been identified by NRCS as “Prime farmland,” “Prime farmland if drained,” and “Farmland of statewide importance.” The majority of the Town of Weston contains soils suitable for agricultural use.

### **Agricultural Activity**

Although agriculture and related occupations employ only a very small percentage of the Town of Weston’s population, as outlined in Chapter 4, farming remains a visible land use in the Town. In 2025, one large dairy farm (300+ animal units) was located in the northeast corner of the Town. In addition, the Town contains crop farms, livestock farms, horse farms, and several hobby farms. In 2024, Marathon County updated the County’s Farmland Preservation Plan in accordance with the State’s Working Lands Legislation. The Farmland Preservation Plan provides a summary of existing agricultural activity in Marathon County, including the Town of Weston. The Town of Weston is located in the so-called “Lumberjack Farmland Preservation Area” in that County Plan. In fact, a great deal of the Town is mapped as a “Farmland Preservation Area” within the County Farmland Preservation Plan.

As stated within that Plan, the purpose of Farmland Preservation Areas are to:

- Preserve productive agricultural lands in the long-term
- Preserve the rural character and aesthetic quality of Marathon County
- Minimize nonagricultural development on prime farmland
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas

The Farmland Preservation Areas were mapped consistently throughout Marathon County using a uniform set of criteria. The purpose of the Farmland Preservation Areas is to identify lands that may be appropriate for farmland preservation zoning or for future designation as “Agricultural Enterprise Areas” through a State of Wisconsin program. In 2016, the Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department indicated to the Town’s consultant that these areas are for reference purposes only, and do not need to correlate to future plans or zoning districts.

### **Cultural Resources**

“Cultural resources” is a broad term that can encompass many aspects of the Town’s heritage. Cultural resources may include archaeological sites and cemeteries, historic buildings and landscapes, historic transportation routes, or traditional cultural properties important to Native Americans or other cultural groups. Cultural resources are those that signify our heritage and help to evoke the sense of place and identity that makes an area distinctive in an increasingly homogenized society.

The Town of Weston dates to the 1840s with the earliest sawmills built along the Eau Claire River. John B. DuBay built the first dam and mill on the river, but left Weston and later relocated in the Knowlton area (where a dam and flowage bear his name today). These mills also included one later owned by Dr. William Schofield as well as a mill farther up the Eau Claire, which was eventually owned by William and N. D. Kelly. The Town was known as Eau Claire until 1859 when the name was changed to Weston, reportedly after an early settler who operated a sawmill at Callon.

Early maps identify the settlements of Callon and Kelly in the east central portion of Weston. The first recorded Town election occurred in 1869. By 1874, the Wisconsin Valley Railroad (later Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul) reached Weston on its way to Wausau. The Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western (Chicago and Northwestern) was constructed through the Town in 1880. The Mountain-Bay Trail is now located in this historic rail corridor.

The original Town of Weston’s location, with railroads, the Eau Claire River, and proximity to the Wisconsin River, led to urbanization and the creation of several separate municipalities. Schofield incorporated as a separate community in 1904, Rothschild followed in 1917, with the Village of Weston finally incorporating in 1996.

### **Cultural Resources Background**

Preserving historic sites and structures recognizes the architectural, engineering, archaeological, cultural, or historic importance of these assets to a community. To help identify historic sites, the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) has an online database called the Architecture and History Inventory (AHI), which provides historical and architectural information for around 120,000 properties that are relevant to the State’s unique

and varied history. Sites in the database are not protected and do not have any special status, rights, or benefits to owners unless listed in the State or National Registers.

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, and each entry in the database varies widely and the information has not been verified in all cases. But overall, using both AHI and ASI tools may help the Town determine which sites are worth preserving.

### **Cultural Resources Inventory and Trends**

Although a brief countywide historic properties survey was carried out in 1975-77 and has not been updated in the intervening 50 years. Many properties identified at that time may be gone, while other properties not previously surveyed may now be evaluated in a new context. More current information about cultural resources would allow the best planning and use of historic properties. Outside the City of Wausau, there is no process to recognize historic buildings or begin to plan for their protection. Once historic properties are identified, towns and villages do not have an established mechanism for recognizing them or integrating them into ongoing planning processes.

### **Burial and Other Archeological Sites**

Archaeological sites are identified only at the township level. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has identified 13 archaeological sites and historic cemeteries listed as being in the township area of Weston, which includes the incorporated communities of Schofield, Weston, and Rothschild.

### **Historical Structures and Sites**

There are no properties in the Town of Weston listed on the NRHP. The Wisconsin Historical Society maintains the Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) that identifies any properties that may have been surveyed in the past; the Inventory does not convey special status and may not be current. The inventory may be reviewed at [www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi/](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi/). There is one historic property in the Town of Weston included in the AHI: the Hawthorne School-Joint School District #1 site, located on the east side of Lester Street, 0.70 miles south of CTH N.

### **Cultural Offerings and Community Character**

The Town's cultural identity and character have, over the years, been affected by incorporation and annexation from neighboring municipalities. Twenty years since the incorporation of the Village of Weston, the Town of Weston is proud to have maintained the land that it has. The Town enjoys a shared sense of community with the Village of Weston and other municipalities within the D.C. Everest School District.

The Town of Weston's landscape, with rural residences interspersed with working agricultural lands, is an often-overlooked cultural resource. As the greater Wausau and Weston areas continue to grow, the Town's landscape will become increasingly unique.

## Summary

- Weston's natural areas feature forested areas, wetlands, and the Eau Claire River and Big Sandy Creek corridors. These corridors are perhaps the Town's most significant natural assets.
- The Town's natural features contribute to wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, health, and aesthetics in the community, and enhance the values of adjacent private property.
- Farming is a minor economic activity in the Town of Weston; still, approximately 44% of the Town is in agricultural or forestry use.
- Loss of land base due to incorporation and annexation has impacted the Town's sense of identity.
- Natural features, such as the Eau Claire River and Big Sandy Creek, contribute to the Town's culture and sense of place.

## Issues and Initiatives

### Increase the Visibility, Quality, and Use of the Eau Claire River

The Eau Claire River is an undervalued resource with great potential. The Town of Weston will work with the Village to encourage greater river appreciation and use, such as through development of the Eau Claire River Water Trail and other efforts to improve the environment and activity around the River. Recommendations include:

#### Establish an Eau Claire River advocacy (or "friends") group for river protection and recreation

The group would increase the number and visibility of River-based activities, advocate for River-based improvements such as new launches, and educate the public about River-related issues. Partners may include other municipalities through which the River flows, the D.C. Everest Area School District, YMCA Camp Sturtevant, the Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Lakes, and the Camp Phillips Boy Scout Camp. The "friends" group would be advised to become a member of the Wisconsin River Alliance, for technical support and networking.

#### Organize River Clean-Up Days

These events reduce the amount of litter and debris while enabling safe passage for paddlers. Local construction companies could help with removing significant blockages and activities could be coordinated by the river advocacy group or D.C. Everest School District on Earth Day or another similar day.

#### Encourage development of the Eau Claire River Water Trail

The Eau Claire River boasts the potential for several different recreational opportunities, such as a more formal and maintained water trail. The Village of Weston is creating/improving a series of kayak and canoe launches that are connected through wayfinding signage, enhancing paddler access to and experience on the water. In 2015, the Village created visioning materials to help the public, regional partners, key stakeholders, foundations, and other potential funders see the potential of the Water Trail.

In 2023, the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway was established along the Wisconsin River, which includes the stretch of the Eau Claire River just downstream of the Town, beginning at Yellow Banks Park in the Village of Weston and ending at the City of Schofield Dam. The Town should continue to monitor opportunities to expand this water trail upstream through the Town.



Outdoor recreation is discussed in this Chapter and expanded upon in Chapter 4: Utilities and Community Facilities.

### **Communicate and Uniformly Implement Environmental Regulations**

Weston's environmental features, such as the Eau Claire River and Big and Little Sandy Creeks contribute to the Town's rural sense of place. The Town will work towards protection of these and other natural resources, while striving for efficient and consistent regulations.

Environmental regulations in the Town of Weston are mainly administered by Marathon County. The regulations protect the environment and private property from flooding and other natural disasters and is mandated under State law to regulate development in floodplains, shoreland areas, and wetlands in shoreland areas in the Town of Weston. They include Erosion Control and Stormwater Management, Floodplain, Shoreland, and Shoreland-Wetland ordinances, which are described in Chapter 7: Land Use. Additionally, portions of the Village of Weston's extraterritorial zoning (ETZ) area fall under the Village's wellhead protection (WHP) zoning ordinance, which are also described in Chapter 7. Other environmental regulations are found in ETZ ordinances.

### **Promote the Continuance of Agriculture in the Town of Weston**

The Town of Weston will work with area farmers to help ensure that agriculture remains a prominent land use in the Town and that the Town supports farmers to the extent practical.

Although the Town of Weston has little control over many external factors that impact the financial viability of farming and the price for agricultural products, interested parties can work locally on a variety of efforts to improve farming potential. These may include:

- Working with University of Wisconsin Extension and Marathon County staff to increase efficiency in farm operations, provide technical assistance, including exploring alternative farming techniques (e.g., grazing), promote agricultural cooperatives, and provide advice on other financial and technical support opportunities.
- Promoting zoning approaches, like the Agricultural Residential zoning district, which seek to minimize conflicts between farming and non-farm uses, while still allowing farmers a limited ability to sell land for housing.
- Continuing to allow flexibility in zoning regulations to allow non-farm home businesses which have little to no impact on surrounding properties.
- Promoting educational partnerships with area groups such as the D.C. Everest High School chapter of FFA and local 4-H Clubs.
- Supporting agricultural diversification through alternative, organic, or niche forms of agriculture suited to the area as well as smaller-scale operations. These may include ginseng, mint, vegetables, dairy, meat, cheese, hops, and other specialty crops in demand locally and nationally.

**Funding and Responsibility**

Funding sources include various foundations, stakeholder groups, riverfront landowners, the County Environmental Impact Fund, Wisconsin Stewardship and Federal LAWCON programs, donations, partnerships with other local governments, the Town's general fund, Marathon County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department, Village of Weston, contracted services, Extension – University of Wisconsin – Madison, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), DNR grants, and more. Efforts may be led by the Town Board, Town Plan Commission, and ETZ committee, with collaboration with Village and County staff.

## Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources Programs

**Aquatic Habitat Protection Program.** WDNR provides aquatic habitat protection services through their Water Management (Regulation) Specialists, Zoning Specialists, Rivers Specialists, Lakes Specialists, Water Management Engineers, and their assistants (LTEs). Programs assist with water regulations, zoning assistance, coordination of rivers, lake management, and engineering.

**Discovery Farms Program,** UW-Extension program, leads agricultural research regarding economic and environmental impacts. It also facilitates communication to help implement effective and profitable management practices.

**Drinking Water and Groundwater Program.** This WDNR program ensures safe, high quality drinking water and groundwater by enforcing minimum well construction and pump installation requirements, conducting surveys and inspections of water systems, investigating and sampling drinking water quality problems, and requiring drinking water quality monitoring and reporting. WDNR staff assists with water quality issues and provides educational materials.

**Endangered Resources Program.** The DNR's Endangered Resources staff provides endangered resources expertise. 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 permitting, applications, and approvals.

**Farm Service Agency.** This USDA agency administers the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

**Farmland Preservation Program.** To preserve farmland, the state enacted the Farmland Preservation Program, which is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Each county must develop a Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP), which becomes part of the county comprehensive plan as well.

**Fisheries Management Program.** This 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.

**Managed Forest Law (MFL).** WDNR's MFL promotes good forest management through property tax incentives. Management practices are required under 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.

**Nonpoint Source Program (NSP).** Wisconsin's NSP Program, through a network of federal, state, and local agencies partnering with other organizations and citizens, addresses nonpoint pollution 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 — address current and future water quality issues caused by NPS pollution.

**North Central Conservancy Trust.** Based in Stevens Point, NCCT works with landowners in Marathon County to develop and maintain conservation easements to enhance wildlife habitat, water quality, aesthetics, and more.

**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 damage caused by floods and other natural disasters. NRCS provides funding opportunities for agricultural producers and other landowners through a variety of programs listed on their website, including but not limited to:

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)
- Water Bank and Watershed Programs
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program
- Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB)
- Wetland Mitigation Banking Program (WMBP)
- Working Lands for Wildlife

**Parks and Recreation Management Program.** This WDNR program helps develop public parks and recreation facilities under Wis. Stat. Chapter 27. 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 that provides assistance as well as educational programs for landowners, schools, and the public.

**Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants (PLWPG).** DATCP provides funding to producer-led groups that focus on nonpoint source water pollution abatement through this program by increasing management practices and farmer participation in these efforts.

**Stewardship Grants for Nonprofit Conservation Organizations.** Nonprofit conservation organizations may obtain funding from WDNR for conservation land or easement acquisition and wildlife habitat restoration. Priorities include 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 the restoration of wetlands and grasslands. Eligible types of projects include fee simple and easement acquisitions and habitat restoration projects.

**Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).** This voluntary program restores wetlands which were altered for agricultural use. The program is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in consultation with the Farm Service Agency and other federal agencies.

**Wildlife Management Program.** WDNR's Bureau of Wildlife Management oversees a variety of programs that incorporate state, federal and local initiatives for wildlife habitat management and enhancement. They 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 state and county forest staff to maintain, enhance, and restore wildlife habitat. WDNR staff conduct wildlife population and habitat surveys, prepare property needs analysis, develop wildlife management plans, and collaborate with other Park, Forestry or Fishery Area Property Master Plans to ensure proper implementation.

**Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS).** This office serves as the principal historic preservation agency in the state. SHPO partners with communities, organizations, and individuals works to identify, interpret, and preserve historic places.

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

### **Goal**

The Town of Weston supports preservation of farmland and farming as an occupation, the Sandy Creek and the Eau Claire River corridors, other natural areas and habitat, and the Town's rural and scenic heritage.

### **Objectives**

1. Preserve environmental corridors given their multiple benefits to scenic beauty, recreation, public health, and wildlife habitat.
2. Manage quality and quantity of water entering waterways, especially Sandy Creek and the Eau Claire River.
3. Respect the agricultural heritage of the Town and support area farmers.

### **Policies**

1. Cooperate on the protection of regional natural resources and systems, particularly the environmental corridors including the Eau Claire River, Big Sandy Creek and Little Sandy Creek.
2. Promote farming as a prominent land use in the Town of Weston and preserve prime agricultural soils.
3. Promote the continuation of agriculture in the Town, including by encouraging agricultural related businesses, value-added agriculture, and other farm family business opportunities to supplement farm income.
4. Protect and celebrate remaining vestiges of the Town's historic character and buildings.
5. Continue stewardship of land and water resources for their multiple benefits to human well-being, community image, and environmental health.
6. Foster a new generation of Town leaders and volunteers.

### 3. Housing

Chapter 3 provides an inventory and analysis of housing conditions in the Town of Weston. The predominant type of housing in the Town is single-family. Also, over 94 percent of housing units are owner-occupied. The Town's housing stock is relatively new, with over half of all housing units constructed since 1980. Median housing values in the Town are higher than values in the Village, County, State, and Nation.

#### Background

##### Residential Siting

The following approach from the Town's former 2017 Comprehensive Plan describes how residential development is best sited in the Town:

- Preserve open space, farmland, woodland, and natural features that define, sustain, and connect rural neighborhoods and enhance rural character.
- Site homes behind trees, hills, ridges and other natural features. Where such features are absent, the use of berms with natural plantings can also be effective. Another method would be to discourage the development of highly visible "frontage lots" along roadways, as these have the greatest visual and traffic impacts. It should be noted, however, that while minimizing the visual impact of development, it is also critical to maintain safe fire access and appropriate road and driveway markings to ensure fast emergency response.
- Minimize the impact of residential development through the clustering of lots in a portion of the development site. Town of Weston and extraterritorial zoning ordinances allow for a density based, rather than minimum lot size, based development in areas zoned Agricultural Residential (i.e., most of the Town). Smaller lots that are "clustered" in buildable portions of a property allow for greater protection of natural features and open space in other portions of the land.

##### Neighborhood Plans

The Town's former 2017 Comprehensive Plan described how Town lands closest to the Village of Weston are considered a "transition" area that will likely continue to receive the most development pressure. The Town respects property owners' preferences in these areas, and in the event they would like to develop into neighborhoods, developing neighborhood plans with the Village of Weston is recommended. These plans include:

- An inventory and analysis, including an investigation of opportunities given the neighborhood's position in Weston and the greater Wausau Area.
- A development plan map and text including residential, commercial, and institutional use areas.
- Locations for single-family housing consistent with the Village of Weston's housing mix policy, and techniques to validate and enhance the market for single-family housing.
- Recommended areas and themes for parks, environmental corridors, other natural areas, and stormwater management.
- A layout for interconnected arterial, collector, and other important future streets.
- Bicycle/pedestrian trails and routes, including connections to adjacent neighborhoods and regional trails and routes.

- Housing and neighborhood design concepts for an attractive, functional place integrated within the larger community.
- Recommendations for public utility system and stormwater management improvements, such as conveyance routes and logical regional basin locations.
- An implementation strategy with zoning and subdivision approaches, capital improvement programming, and grants.

## **Housing Maintenance**

The Town facilitates property maintenance by communicating expectations with landowners directly and through tools like the Town web page, enforcing its building and property maintenance codes, and working with Marathon County and the Village of Weston to enforce zoning and other standards.

## **Previous Planning Efforts**

### **2022 Wausau Metropolitan Housing Assessment**

Though this assessment doesn't include the Town, the Village of Weston, seven other municipalities, and Marathon County participated in this project. The assessment highlighted the challenges of inflation, construction costs, workforce availability, retirements, and more that have led to a shortage of housing units and available contractors to renovate existing homes. It noted that strong immediate need for housing means that housing built in any of the municipalities helps all of them catch up to demand. Included in the study is a series of strategies, programs, and recommendations that expedite the production of housing while reducing development costs.

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

"ALICE" Households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) are above the poverty level, but struggle financially. United Way reported that 23 percent of Marathon County households are ALICE households, and another 9 percent are below the poverty level, for a combined 32 percent of the population below the ALICE threshold.

### **Centergy Regional Housing Study 2025**

While the focus on this housing study is the expansion of workforce housing, it notes the challenge of attracting homebuilders to Central Wisconsin, where population growth and household incomes are lower than in larger cities.

### **Marathon Co Sr Housing Study 2026**

This housing study provides data on the projected dramatic increase in households over age 55 in Marathon County in the coming years as well as the styles of housing that are desired. Included are recommendations on how to retrofit existing homes so residents can stay in them longer as they age.

## Inventory and Trends

### Total Housing Units

As shown on Table 8, the Town of Weston has 263 occupied housing units. Since 2000, total housing in the Town increased by 63 units, per the American Community Survey. According to the Town's building permit data, 28 new home permits were issued between 2017 and 2025. This means that housing starts decreased from an average of 5 per year between 2000 and 2016 to closer to 3 per year between 2017 and 2025. It is important to note that the 88-unit Green Tree Subdivision on land that was recently in the Town between Ross Avenue and Machmueller Park was annexed to the Village prior to construction.

**Table 8: Housing Units Totals and Tenure**

	T. Weston	V. Weston	Marathon Co.	Wisconsin
Total Housing Units	270	7,180	60,910	2,778,572
Total occupied housing units	263	7,058	57,866	2,479,480
Vacant Housing Units	7	122	3,044	299,092
Seasonal Housing Units	0	0	744	172,842
Owner occupied housing units	249	4,474	42,414	1,682,214
Renter occupied housing units	14	2,584	15,452	797,266
Average household size	2.97	2.19	2.36	2.33
% owner occupied	94.7%	63.4%	73.3%	67.8%
% householder living alone	3.0%	20.3%	15.2%	16.5%
% with individuals 65 or over	18.3%	27.6%	32.0%	31.4%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

### Owner-Occupancy Rates

94.7 percent of all housing units are owner-occupied, which is significantly higher than the percentages for the Village, County, and State. This suggests a significantly lower-than-average amount of rental housing in the Town and a significantly higher percentage of single-family residences compared to other areas in the County. The percentage of owner-occupied housing increased slightly from 94.1 percent to 94.7 percent since 2014, the rate reported in the previous comprehensive plan.

### Housing Age

The age of a community's housing stock typically reflects several important factors, including size, offered amenities, and overall maintenance costs. House age often reflects different regional and national trends in housing development. Housing predating the 1940s, for example, was typically smaller and built on smaller lots. In subsequent decades, both average lot and home sizes have increased, though that trend has reversed in recent years. Tables 9 and 10 show the range of housing ages as captured in the 2024 American Community Survey. Over 55% of the Town of Weston's housing stock was built after 1980. Note that ACS estimates only 3 units were built after 2020, when permit data shows that 15 were built between 2020 and 2025.



**Table 9: Year Built (Total)**

Community	T. Weston	V. Weston	Marathon Co.	Wisconsin
2020 or later	3	105	992	38,983
2010 to 2019	16	802	4,179	197,957
2000 to 2009	44	1,577	9,538	347,953
1990 to 1999	39	1,668	7,784	347,567
1980 to 1989	47	811	5,813	262,669
1970 to 1979	49	1,433	8,885	394,494
1960 to 1969	26	471	5,009	262,558
1950 to 1959	16	166	5,755	285,081
1940 to 1949	2	108	2,931	146,155
1939 or earlier	28	39	10,024	495,155

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

**Table 10: Year Built (Percent)**

Community	T. Weston	V. Weston	Marathon Co.	Wisconsin
2020 or later	1.1%	1.5%	1.6%	1.4%
2010 to 2019	5.9%	11.2%	6.9%	7.1%
2000 to 2009	16.3%	22.0%	15.7%	12.5%
1990 to 1999	14.4%	23.2%	12.8%	12.5%
1980 to 1989	17.4%	11.3%	9.5%	9.5%
1970 to 1979	18.1%	20.0%	14.6%	14.2%
1960 to 1969	9.6%	6.6%	8.2%	9.4%
1950 to 1959	5.9%	2.3%	9.4%	10.3%
1940 to 1949	0.7%	1.5%	4.8%	5.3%
1939 or earlier	10.4%	0.5%	16.5%	17.8%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

**Housing Condition**

Table 11 looks at several select measures of physical housing condition and compares them to figures for Marathon County and Wisconsin. The median house size in the Town, as measured by number of rooms, is significantly higher than the Village, County, and State. Almost 99 percent of the Town's housing stock is classified as being a single-family home, which is also significantly higher than Village, County, or State percentages. The Town of Weston also has no homes lacking complete kitchen or plumbing facilities, which reflects the relatively new housing stock.

**Table 11: Structure Characteristics**

	<b>T. Weston 2024</b>	<b>V. Weston 2024</b>	<b>Marathon Co. 2024</b>	<b>Wisconsin 2024</b>
Median number of rooms	7.3	6.0	6.0	5.6
Detached SF residences (%)	98.9%	59.0%	75.4%	66.2%
Lacking complete plumbing	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.4%
Lacking complete kitchen	0.0%	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

### Median Home Value

Table 12 shows median housing value for single family owner-occupied homes for the Town, County, and State. As shown, the Town of Weston had a median housing value of \$361,800, which is 64.7 percent higher than Marathon County's median housing value and 35.7 percent higher than the State's. The Town's higher median housing value may also correspond with the Town's higher median household income. Median housing values in Marathon County were \$46,900 less than the State's median value. Despite the 2008 housing crisis, home values have more than doubled in the County and the State in the past 24 years, while housing values in the Town of Weston increased by 266.2 percent during this period.

**Table 12: Median Home Value**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>Net Increase 2000-2024</b>	<b>% Increase 2000-2024</b>
T. Weston	\$98,800	\$172,900	\$361,800	\$263,000	266.2%
V. Weston	\$111,200	\$143,500	\$229,300	\$118,100	106.2%
Marathon Co.	\$95,800	\$139,500	\$219,600	\$123,800	129.2%
Wisconsin	\$112,200	\$169,000	\$266,500	\$154,300	137.5%
Nation	\$119,600	\$188,400	\$332,700	\$213,100	178.2%

Source: Census 2000; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010 & 2024

### Range of Values

Table 13 shows the range of housing values in the Town. In keeping with the Town's higher median housing value and relatively young housing stock, the Town of Weston has a larger percentage of housing valued \$300,000 and above. The County has a larger share of housing that was valued at less than \$300,000, likely indicative of older homes in more rural areas and the City of Wausau.

**Table 13: Owner Occupied Housing Values**

Community	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$149,999	\$150,000-\$199,999	\$200,000-\$299,999	\$300,000-\$499,999	\$500,000 or more	Median Value
T. Weston	2.0%	3.2%	3.6%	8.8%	22.9%	29.7%	27.7%	2.0%
Marathon Co.	3.6%	7.3%	14.1%	18.6%	28.5%	20.5%	6.5%	0.8%
Wisconsin	4.0%	5.1%	8.9%	14.1%	25.5%	29.4%	11.4%	1.7%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

**Cost Burden**

Several factors impact the varied levels of housing affordability. These factors include rent and mortgage payments, maintenance expenses, lot size, and required or desired amenities for the home. Household size and income are also key factors contributing to what housing options are available and accessible to residents.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends that housing costs or rent not exceed 30% of the monthly household income. 15.8 percent of households with a mortgage in the Town of Weston pay greater than 30% of their income on housing costs, while 42.9 percent of renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. By contrast, only 4.3 percent of homeowners without a mortgage spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs.

Table 14 shows that housing costs for homeowners with or without a mortgage as well as renters pay more than the average Marathon County or Wisconsin resident. Homowners with a mortgage spend on average \$479 more than the average County resident, \$254 more for a home without a mortgage, and \$301 more for rent. The increase in wages discussed in Chapter 1 is reflected here as the Town's housing costs were more similar to County and State figures when the 2017 Comprehensive Plan was written.

**Table 14: Median Housing Costs**

Community	With mortgage	% Cost burdened	No mortgage	% Cost burdened	Median Rent	% Cost Burdened
T. Weston	\$1,942	15.8%	\$843	4.3%	\$1,200	42.9%
Marathon Co.	\$1,463	17.7%	\$589	9.8%	\$999	42.1%
Wisconsin	\$1,689	22.5%	\$659	12.6%	\$1,087	43.7%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2024

**Housing for Older Adults**

In Marathon County, housing for seniors and people with special needs is primarily provided in the urbanized areas in and around Wausau. The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and the Marathon County United Way all maintain a list of these housing options throughout the County. As the elderly population increases in the coming years, there will most likely be an increased need for these types of housing options. This trend will be seen throughout Marathon County, the State of Wisconsin, and the nation. There is no dedicated senior or special need housing in the Town of Weston, though there are options available in neighboring communities.

## **Vacancy Rates**

Nearly all housing in the Town is occupied year-round, with no reported seasonal or vacation homes indicated by the American Community Survey. The ACS also reported that there were no vacant owner-occupied homes, and only 7 vacant renter-occupied homes, for a homeowner vacancy rate of 0 percent and rental vacancy rate of 33.3 percent. Low vacancy rates generally result in higher prices and limited availability for those interested in finding a new home.

## **Household Projections**

Based on the household projections in Chapter 1, there will be demand for three additional housing units by 2030 and another housing unit by 2040, followed by decreasing demand. However, based on the variety of information presented in Chapter 1, actual demand could be higher based on population and housing unit growth since 2020.

## **Summary**

- The median price for a single-family residence in the Town of Weston in 2024 was \$361,800, which is an increase of 266.2 percent since 2000.
- Over 94% of the Town of Weston's housing units are owner-occupied, which is over 20 percentage points higher than the County as a whole.
- 15.8 percent of homeowners with a mortgage, 4.3 percent of homeowners without a mortgage, and 42.9 percent of renters spend greater than 30 percent of their income on housing and related expenses, which is an indicator of when housing is not affordable. These rates are lower than County and Statewide rates, except Marathon County renters who are slightly less cost burdened.

## **Issues and Initiatives**

### **Thoughtfully Site New Residential Development**

The Town will encourage new homes to be placed in a manner that reflects the rural landscape and allows cost effective service delivery, consistent with Town and extraterritorial zoning standards.

### **Work with the Village of Weston to Develop Neighborhood Plans for Growth Areas**

Neighborhood development plans are the recommended bridge between the policies and land use recommendations in this and the Village's plans and subdivision platting. The Town promotes neighborhood development planning in planned "Transition" areas shown in Map 7 (and discussed in Chapter 7: Land Use) to create neighborhoods that are functional and attractive, and that connect residents to each other and the community.

### **Encourage High Quality Property Maintenance**

The Town of Weston will work to ensure high quality property maintenance through relationships with property owners and enforcement of local ordinances.

### **Funding and Responsibility**

Funding is to be provided by a combination of the Town of Weston general fund as well as partnerships with landowners and developers, and the initiatives are to be led by the Town Board, Plan Commission, and ETZ

Committee. Funding and leadership from the Village of Weston's Planning and Development Department, Building Inspector, and Code Enforcement Officer is also utilized when applicable.

## **Housing Programs**

### **Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA)**

- Community Development Block Grant
- Housing Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)
- Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)
- Housing Assistance Program (HAP)
- HOME Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program
- Neighborhood Stabilization Program

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

- Housing Tax Credit (HTC, formerly LIHTC)
- Home Improvement Advantage Loan
- Home Rehab and Repair Loan
- Vacancy-to-Vitality Loan
- Restore Main Street Loan
- Infrastructure Access Loan

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

- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers

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

- Section 502 Homeownership Direct Loan
- Section 502 Mutual Self-Help Housing Loan
- Section 504 Very-Low-Income Housing Repair Program
- Section 515 Multi-Family Housing Loan Program
- Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance
- Section 523 Rural Housing Site Loans
- Section 533 Rural Housing Preservation Grants
- Single-family Home Loan Guarantees

### **Other Programs**

- The Federal Housing Supply Action Plan.
- Emerging CDBG, LIHTC, HOME, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and other Department of Transportation (DOT) and Economic Development Authority (EDA) programs.
- Emerging WEDC and WHEDA housing programs.
- Focus on Energy (rebates on energy efficient upgrades)

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

### **Goal:**

The Town of Weston will accommodate new housing at low densities in a manner that honors the Town's rural character, guiding more intensive housing and neighborhood development to nearby villages and cities.

### **Objectives:**

Promote a housing mix that:

1. Reflects the Town's desire to continue to be a rural community.
2. Emphasizes owner-occupancy and single-family housing, including for moderate income residents.
3. Achieves a lasting and high-quality housing base.
4. Does not overburden the Town and D.C. Everest Area School District to provide services and facilities.

### **Policies:**

1. Encourage the limited, density-based lot development option described within Town and extraterritorial zoning ordinances.
2. Encourage home siting where there is existing roads and other infrastructure, conflicts with and unnecessary conversion of agricultural lands is minimized, where scenic viewsheds and natural areas are maintained, and where property or environmental damage will not result.
3. Direct intensive new housing and neighborhood development to areas near existing development, including the northwest corner of the Town near the Home Sweet Home subdivision and to nearby incorporated areas, particularly the Village of Weston.
4. Emphasize home and property maintenance, supporting efforts to help maintain and rehabilitate the Town's existing housing stock.