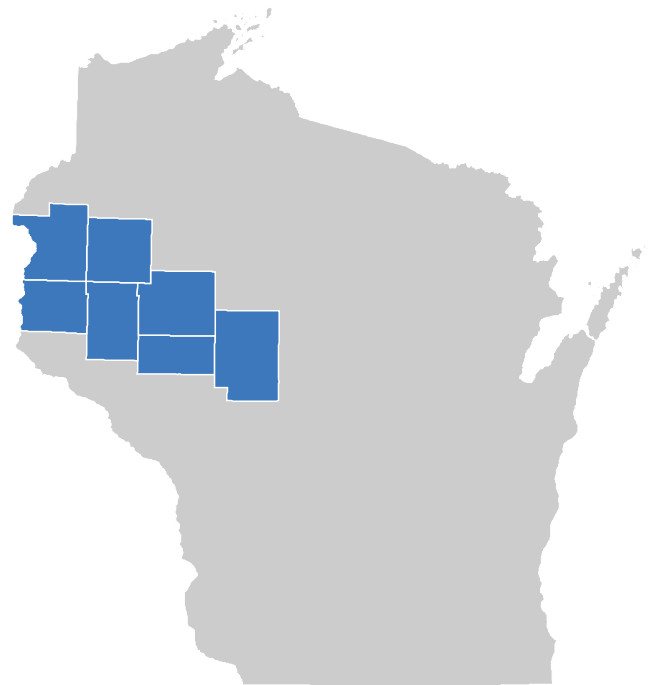




WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REPORT



October 2022

Prepared by:

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

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Abstract:

The West Central Wisconsin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2022 Annual Report is financed, in part, by a planning grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). The Report is being submitted for the time period of November 1, 2021 through October 31, 2022.

Included is a combination of updated regional demographics, activities, and the presentation of continuing and new projects. This document also identifies any changes in the Region which may affect the area's economy or require a program modification. A sample work plan with updates is provided for reference of planned, completed, and ongoing projects.

Strategy Committee

West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC) is a multi-county planning agency serving county and local governments in the Wisconsin counties of Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Polk and St. Croix. The Commission was created in 1971 by the seven aforementioned counties and derives its authority from Wisconsin Statute 66.0309. The Commission's governing body consists of three representatives from each of the seven counties in the Region.

WCWRPC serves as the governing board and planning organization for the seven-county Economic Development District. The Commission members represent the economic interests of the Region ranging from farmers and business owners to not-for-profit entities and public officials.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

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CHIPPEWA COUNTY

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SECTION I: OVERVIEW

Introduction

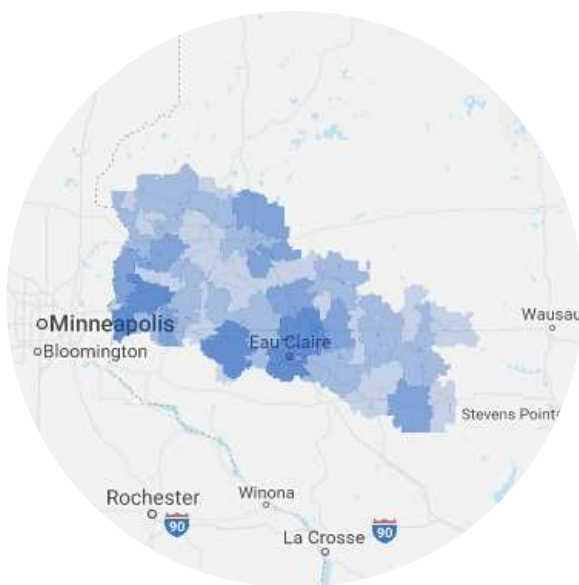
In March 1980, West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission was designated as an Economic Development District by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In order to maintain this economic development district designation, and for entities within the Region to qualify for most EDA assistance programs, the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) must be updated at least once every five years and performance reports must be submitted annually to the EDA. The Region's CEDS was last updated in October 2020 and was accepted by the Economic Development Administration as meeting all the requirements as defined within 13 CFR 303.7.

DETAILS OF THE 2022 CEDS ANNUAL UPDATE

This annual report provides a brief update of economic development activities in the Region and a snapshot of annual changes to the Region benchmarks developed for the 2020 CEDS Update. This includes an update and evaluation of both the Primary Economic Health Indicators and Detailed Performance Measures used to review and assess economic health and performance of the West Central Region. The report also describes progress of the 2020 CEDS Update along with the status and updates of the WCWRPC Work Plan.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW



440,804

Population (2021)

Population grew by 25,845 between the 2010 and 2020 Census and is projected to grow by 13,000 over the next 5 years.

Source: US Census & Lightcast

203,208

Total Regional Employment

\$58,900

Avg. Earnings Per Job (2021)

Regional average earnings per job are \$18.9K below the national average earnings of \$77.8K per job.

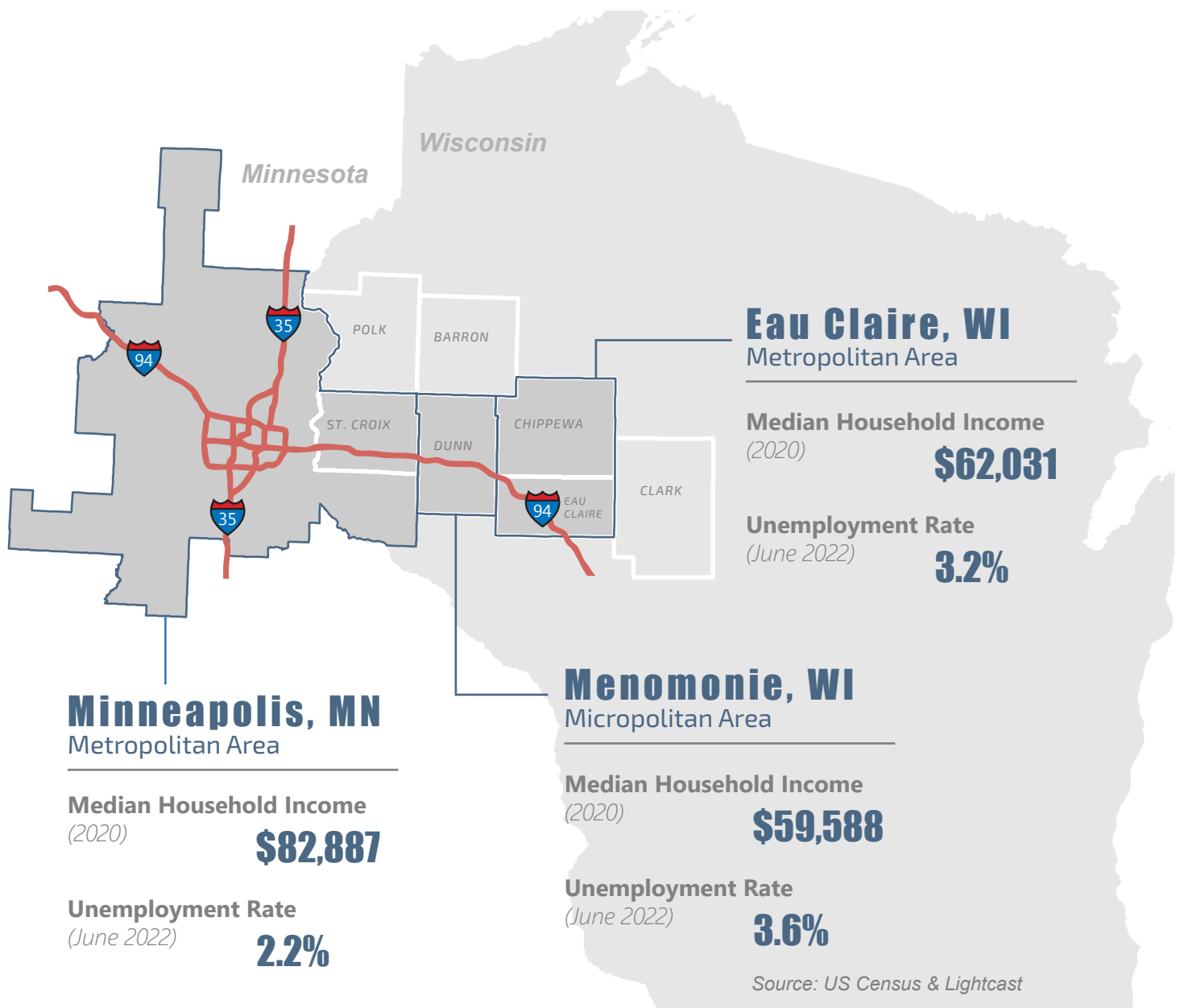
Source: Lightcast

Source: Lightcast

SECTION I: OVERVIEW

Regional Overview

The West Central Region of Wisconsin comprises seven counties with a total landmass of 6,205 square miles. In part from its close proximity to the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metro area, the Region experiences continuous growth with increasing ties to the economic opportunities associated with the Twin Cities. Overall, the Region is mostly rural. However, Eau Claire and St. Croix counties have experienced continued growth over the last twenty years. The Region itself comprises only 7.5% of the State's population while covering around 11.5% of its total landmass.



SECTION II: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report Purpose

This CEDS Annual Report is meant to assess work activities completed regionally by WCWRPC and its partners in improving economic conditions in the Region. It is a requirement to maintain EDA planning partnership grant funding for WCWRPC, but more importantly it provides an opportunity to take a step back annually to assess progress on the initiatives that are being implemented. The five regional goals identified in the 2020 CEDS Update continue to be priorities for the region which include:

- 1. Strengthen Community, County & Regional Infrastructure**
- 2. Promote & Assist In Developing Sense-of-Place as an Economic Development Tool**
- 3. Encourage & Support New or Existing Businesses/Industries**
- 4. Address Regional Workforce Development & Attraction Issues**
- 5. Improve Housing Opportunities for All**

While much work is yet to be done in meeting these goals, progress is being made through completed activities and with close collaboration with partner agencies. This progress is apparent when examining annual metrics and indicators of economic health and performance. Some of the key highlights in the Region include:

- **Increasing population**
- **Growing employment**
- **Decreasing unemployment**
- **Increased wages in most industry sectors**

Economic development strategies and work activities identified in the 2020 CEDS document will continue to be implemented and modified as necessary into 2023 with the goal of continued success in helping to meet the needs of the Region.

SECTION III: COVID-19

COVID-19 IMPACTS

*Excerpts adapted from Wisconsin Department of Revenue
August 2022 Economic Forecast*

Wisconsin continues its recovery from COVID-19, which is taking place alongside wider efforts to develop a healthy national economy in the wake of the pandemic. According to the state Department of Revenue's August 2022 economic forecast, U.S. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has declined for two consecutive quarters in 2022. At the same time, other indicators demonstrate growth in the economy during the first six months of the year, including in the areas of industrial production, employment, hours, and real personal income (excluding transfers). Clearly, this information demonstrates that the economic picture for the country is complicated. The major obstacle moving forward is inflation, which according to some estimates, is expected to be 8.2% in 2022. The Federal Reserve's Open Market Committee has taken, and is expected to continue to take, actions that will attempt to counteract inflation (i.e., interest rate hikes) without pushing the economy into recession.

The state's economic forecast expects personal income to grow in Wisconsin by 3.2% in 2022 and 4.9% in 2023, which is comparable to projected national trends. After adjusting for inflation, however, Wisconsin's real personal income is forecasted to decline by 2.8% in 2022, similar to a 2.9% decline nationally. Real personal income is projected to increase again in Wisconsin in 2023, but only by 1.5%. This trend improves slightly in the years 2024 and 2025, which shows real personal income growth of 2.0% in both years in Wisconsin.

During the COVID-19 recovery, job growth in the state has continued. Looking ahead, the forecast predicts that non-farm employment will expand by 2.4% in 2022 and 1.4% in 2023 in Wisconsin, with some slight back and forth declines and increases in subsequent years. The forecast projects that the state will reach its pre-pandemic level of employment in the first part of 2023. Wisconsin was short of that mark by 58,000 jobs in July 2022, while the U.S. as a whole had surpassed its pre-pandemic level of employment at the same point. The unemployment rate in the first half of 2022 was 2.9% in Wisconsin, while it was 3.7% at the national level during that same time.

Having been the most significantly impacted sector in Wisconsin during the recent recession, the

COVID-19 By The Numbers

COVID-19 data in Wisconsin as of August 1, 2022. For the most up-to-date numbers, visit dhs.wisconsin.gov.

In Wisconsin

- 1,569,411 confirmed cases
- 13,229 confirmed deaths
- 61.5% of Wisconsin residents completing vaccine series
- 35.2% of Wisconsin residents receiving booster

In WCWRPC Region Counties

- 119,758 confirmed cases
- 935 confirmed deaths
- 55.74% of Region residents completing vaccine series
- 31.96% of Region residents receiving booster

Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

SECTION III: COVID-19

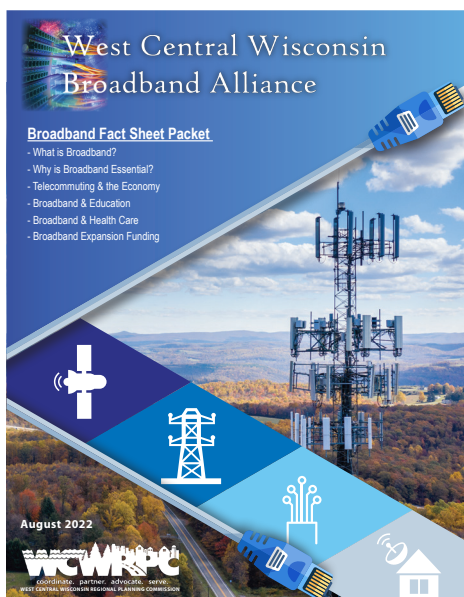
Leisure & Hospitality sector is forecasted to lead the continuing recovery in jobs. Other sectors, specifically Manufacturing, Professional & Business Services, and Trade, Transportation & Utilities, will be important contributors to job growth in 2022. While production sectors performed better during the recession, Manufacturing and Construction are examples of sectors that are being impacted by interest rate increases. Both sectors are projected to peak during 2022. Housing is showing signs of slowing down as a sector, although it is not expected to collapse at this point.

RECOVERY & RESPONSE

The Economic Development District has been proactive in helping the Region recover from the pandemic. Among its activities, it has worked with communities to submit applications and administer grants for projects that will supply the infrastructure needed for businesses to recover and grow. Current projects include an EDA grant for an expansion to the Stout Technology and Business Park in Menomonie and a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for a road and utility project in Augusta. Additionally, the Commission's recovery strategy places importance on reaching out to those in the greatest need. For example, it is providing grant administration services to another project in Menomonie utilizing an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)-funded Neighborhood Investment Fund award from the State of Wisconsin to construct a new facility for the homeless. This project will help ensure that this population is not left behind as recovery continues and that the net of opportunities is cast as widely as possible.



In addition to the projects noted above, the District has supported small businesses through business recovery funds, including a \$500,000 EDA COVID-19 Recovery Business Loan Pool, which has provided \$10,000 loans to 50 businesses. Other assistance has been, and continues to be, provided to businesses across the region through both business loan and grant programs for individual counties and communities, as well as region wide business grant programs.



As part of its recovery efforts, the District has engaged in special projects in the Region, including the promotion of broadband expansion and equity in broadband access. In particular, WCWRPC has continued to provide staffing assistance to the West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance, which is a working group that develops strategies to expand broadband to all parts and populations of the Region. The Alliance's efforts have included the development of a Community Broadband Toolkit and online Broadband Resource Library, and it has worked to connect communities to funding opportunities, as well.

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Economic Health & Performance

Key partners in the Region employ a variety of performance measures to evaluate implementation of the 2020 CEDS Update. Several agencies maintain an extensive resource library of regional resources, up-to-date demographic and economic data, along with planning and regional business support through a variety of plans and programs. This allows various partners or agencies to continually assess the economic health of the Region, and track the progress of CEDS implementation.

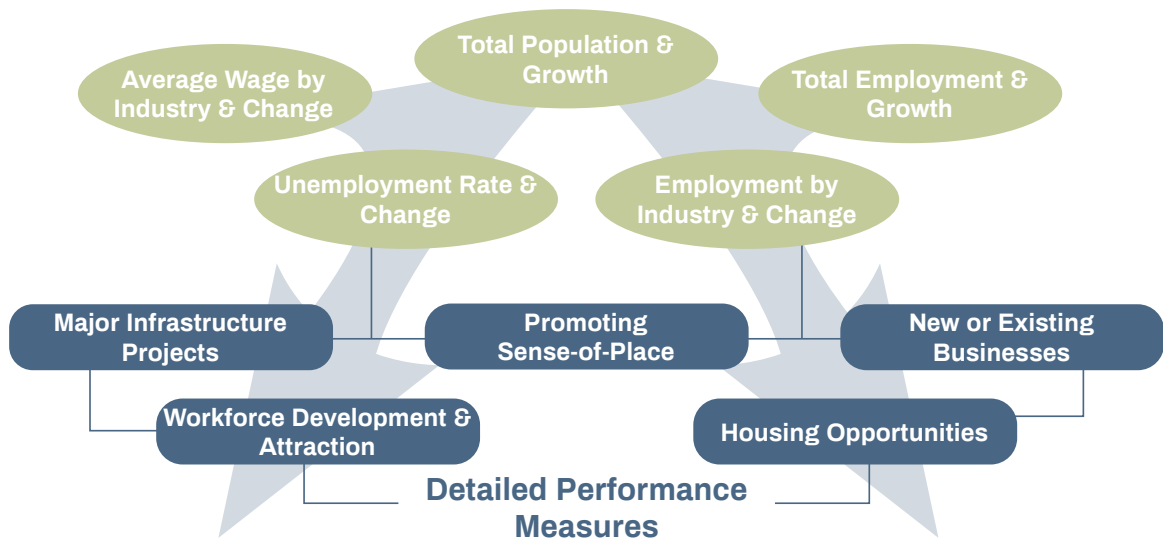
WCWRPC works regularly with partner organizations to implement or provide support for accomplishing goals and objectives of the CEDS. This includes regular meetings and updates of progress related to the five regional goals and how individual partner organizations have contributed to or supported economic development projects in the Region.

PRIMARY ECONOMIC HEALTH INDICATORS

Primary metrics established for the 2020 CEDS Update are shown in the graphic below, followed by any available updates where data is available. These primary metrics, along with input from partnering organizations helps establish a snapshot of the economic health of the Region and provide a benchmark for future comparison.

Benchmark framework developed for the 2020 CEDS Update.

PRIMARY Economic Health Indicators



SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Changes In The WCWRPC Region

TOTAL POPULATION & GROWTH

Source: US Census Bureau

	WCWRPC Region	Wisconsin	United States
2010	414,118	5,686,986	308,745,538
2020	437,330	5,893,718	331,449,281
CHANGE:	23,212 (5.6%)	206,732 (3.6%)	22,703,743 (7.4%)

SUMMARY: Total population in the Region continues to increase with the highest growth rate occurring in St. Croix County (10.9%) and Eau Claire County (7.1%) since the 2010 US Census.

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT & GROWTH

Source: American Community Survey, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

	WCWRPC Region	Wisconsin	United States
2010	225,261	3,424,688	174,593,338
2022	245,496	3,606,574	198,980,183
CHANGE:	20,235 (9%)	181,886 (5%)	24,386,845 (14%)

SUMMARY: Total employment in the Region continues to outpace overall growth statewide. Some of the top growing occupations in Western Wisconsin include: Transportation and Material Moving, Business and Financial Operations, and Management.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE & CHANGE

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor

	WCWRPC Region	Wisconsin	United States
2010	8%	8.4%	9.3%
2022	3.2%	3.5%	3.8%
CHANGE:	-5%	-4.9	-5.5%

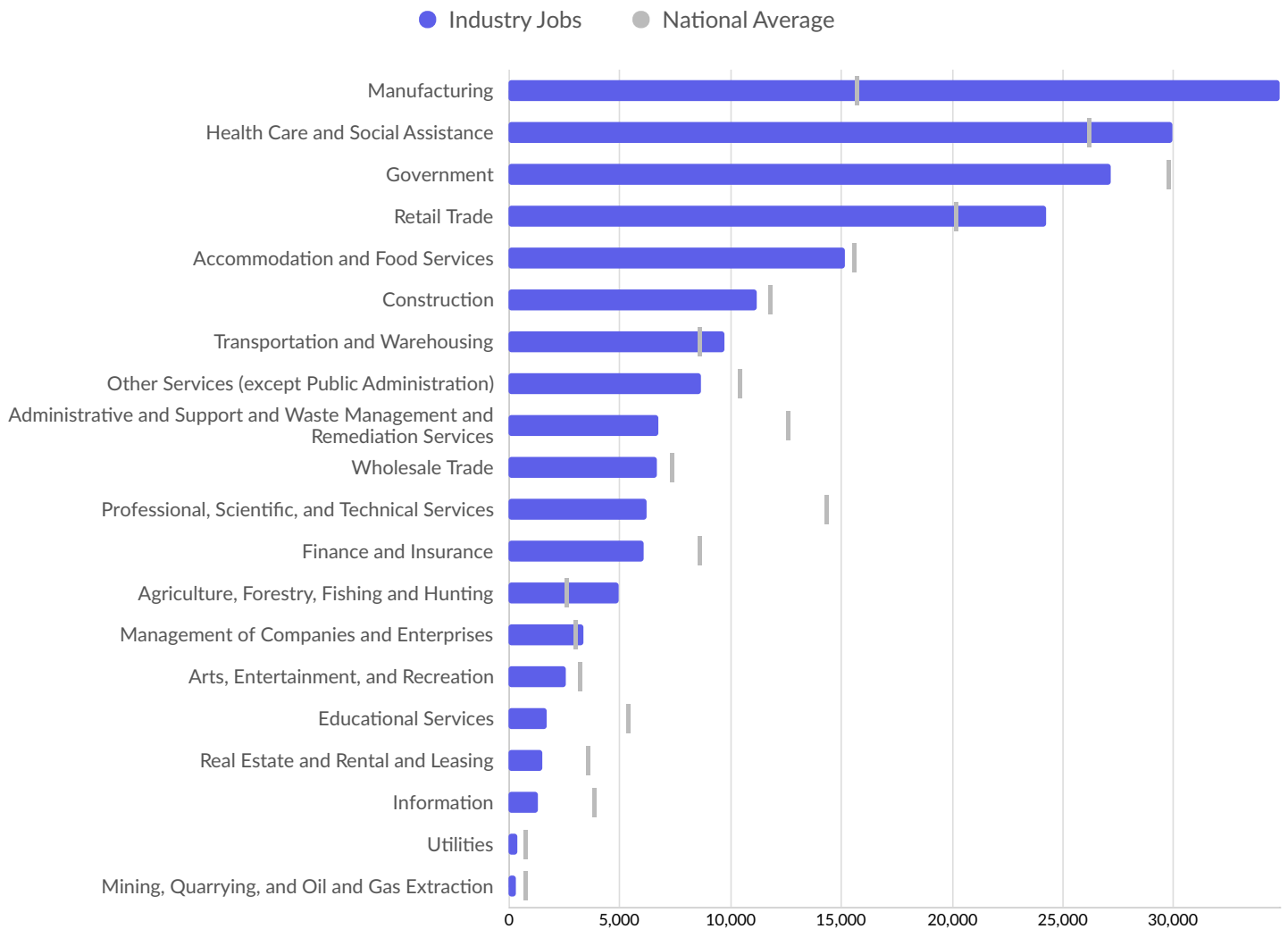
SUMMARY: The WCWRPC Region experienced high unemployment rates during the COVID-19 pandemic (6.2%) but recovered quickly to reach pre-pandemic levels by Spring 2022.

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Jobs by Industry

Manufacturing remains the largest employment industry in the Region, followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, and Government.

West Central Wisconsin Largest Industries (2016-2021)



Source: Lightcast Q3 2022 Data Set

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Employment by Industry & Change

Source: Lightcast

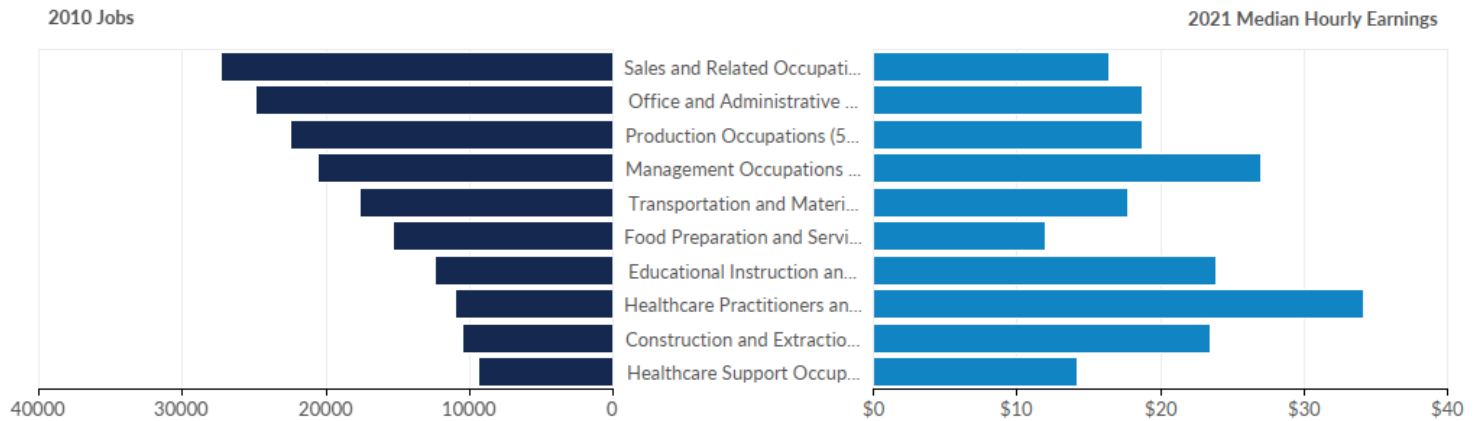
INDUSTRY	2016	2021	CHANGE
Manufacturing	33,072	34,821	5%
Health Care and Social Assistance	30,104	29,995	(0%)
Government	29,212	27,199	(7%)
Retail Trade	23,912	24,280	2%
Accommodation and Food Services	16,136	15,202	(6%)
Construction	10,234	11,195	9%
Transportation and Warehousing	8,470	9,762	15%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	8,742	8,687	(1%)
Admin/Support/Waste & Remediation Services	8,947	6,764	(24%)
Wholesale Trade	6,329	6,723	6%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6,190	6,241	1%
Finance and Insurance	5,615	6,101	9%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4,909	4,994	2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	3,031	3,369	11%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2,713	2,587	(5%)
Educational Services	1,496	1,732	16%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1,439	1,528	6%
Information	1,713	1,310	(24%)
Utilities	426	406	(5%)
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	413	311	(25%)

Manufacturing continues to employ the highest number of workers in Western Wisconsin while Educational Services experienced the highest rate of increase for employment in the Region from 2016 to 2021 (16%) followed by Transportation & Warehousing (15%) during the same time period.

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Largest Occupations

Source: EMSI

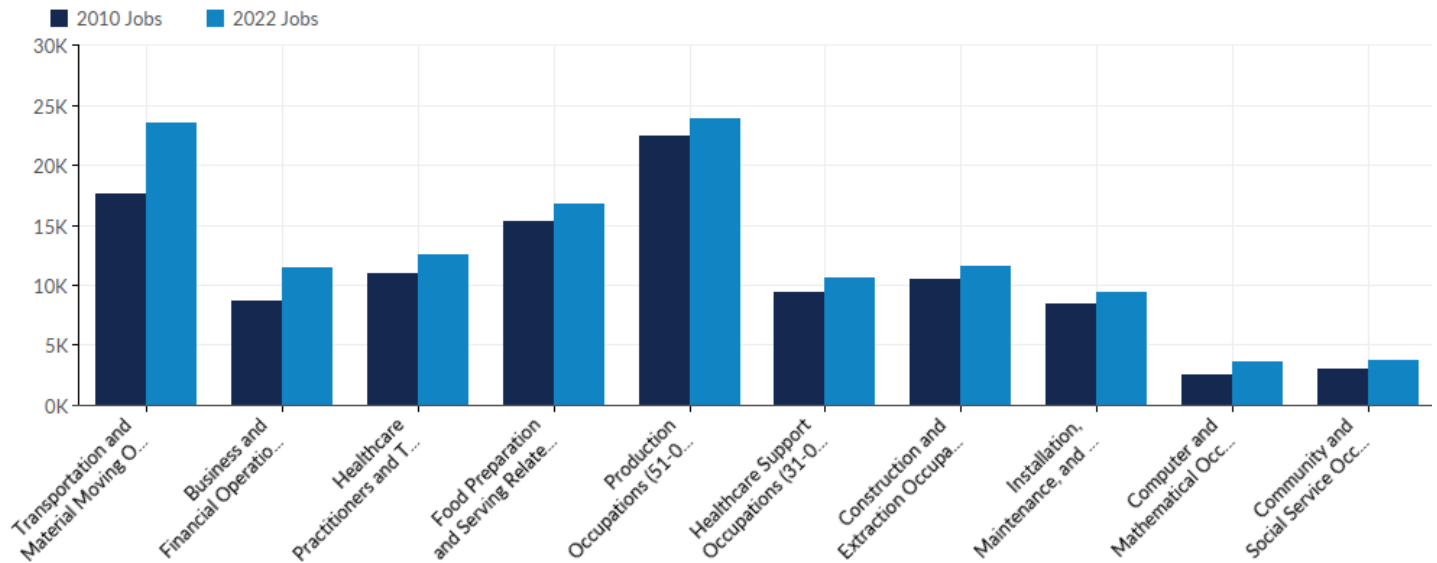


Occupation	2010 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2010-2022)	% Change	2021 Median Hourly Earnings
Sales and Related Occupations	27,305	27,692	387	1%	\$16.38
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	24,839	24,669	-170	-1%	\$18.79
Production Occupations	22,469	23,884	1,415	6%	\$18.69
Management Occupations	20,521	20,617	96	0%	\$27.01
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	17,592	23,434	5,842	33%	\$17.76
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	15,326	16,789	1,463	10%	\$12.04
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	12,403	12,615	212	2%	\$23.88
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	10,998	12,586	1,588	14%	\$34.12
Construction and Extraction Occupations	10,437	11,618	1,181	11%	\$23.44
Healthcare Support Occupations	9,359	10,599	1,240	13%	\$14.25

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Fastest Growing Occupations

Source: EMSI

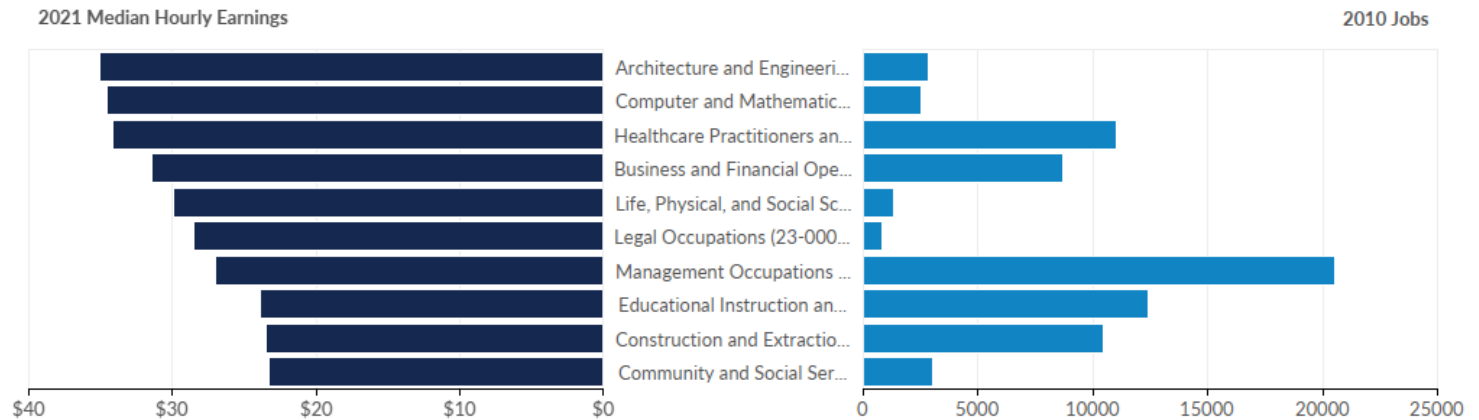


Occupation	2010 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2010-2022)	% Change	2021 Median Hourly Earnings
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	17,592	23,434	5,842	33%	\$17.76
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	8,699	11,481	2,782	32%	\$31.46
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	10,998	12,586	1,588	14%	\$34.12
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	15,326	16,789	1,463	10%	\$12.04
Production Occupations	22,469	23,884	1,415	6%	\$18.69
Healthcare Support Occupations	9,359	10,599	1,240	13%	\$14.25
Construction and Extraction Occupations	10,437	11,618	1,181	11%	\$23.44
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	8,415	9,440	1,025	12%	\$22.76
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	2,547	3,566	1,019	40%	\$34.59

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Highest Paying Occupations

Source: EMSI



Occupation	2010 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2010-2022)	% Change	2021 Median Hourly Earnings
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	2,832	3,445	613	22%	\$35.05
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	2,547	3,566	1,019	40%	\$34.59
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	10,998	12,586	1,588	14%	\$34.12
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	8,699	11,481	2,782	32%	\$31.46
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1,293	1,399	106	8%	\$29.93
Legal Occupations	843	876	33	4%	\$28.51
Management Occupations	20,521	20,617	96	0%	\$27.01
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	12,403	12,615	212	2%	\$23.88
Construction and Extraction Occupations	10,437	11,618	1,181	11%	\$23.44
Community and Social Service Occupations	2,993	3,741	748	25%	\$23.29

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Cluster Identification

According to the Brookings Institution, an industry cluster is a group of firms, and related economic actors and institutions, that are located near one another and that draw productive advantage from their mutual proximity and concentrations. The most important findings for policy makers and practitioners related to cluster analysis finds that:

- 1. Clusters are the key organizational unit for understanding and improving the performance of regional economies.**
- 2. Cluster thinking matters because it orients economic development policy and practice toward groups of firms and away from individual firms.**
- 3. Cluster thinking offers important lessons for economic development policy and practice.**

A report developed for the West Central Region using EMSI software found that Local Education and Training scored the highest among the top 12 ranked clusters in the Region. This cluster is made up of 5 industries that include the following:

- *Elementary & Secondary Schools (Local Government)*
- *Vocational Rehabilitation Services*
- *Fine Arts Schools*
- *Automobile Driving Schools*
- *Other Technical & Trade Schools*

Top 12 Clusters in West Central Wisconsin

Local Education & Training	Local Health Services	State Government Services	Business Services
Upstream Chemical Products	Food Processing & Manufacturing	Production Technology & Heavy Machinery	Lighting & Electrical Equipment
Plastics	Medical Devices	Local Utilities	Agricultural Inputs & Services

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Detailed Performance Measures

The list of performance measures included in this section help to identify a mix of regional actions and tasks to support the 2020 CEDS goals. Key metrics are identified for each of the five regional goals of the 2020 CEDS Update. While it is not always clear who is responsible for accomplishing specific goals or strategies outlined in this document, continued coordination and use of established strategies of the CEDS are meant to help guide professionals in the Region to address specific action items based on their own agency needs, knowledge or expertise.

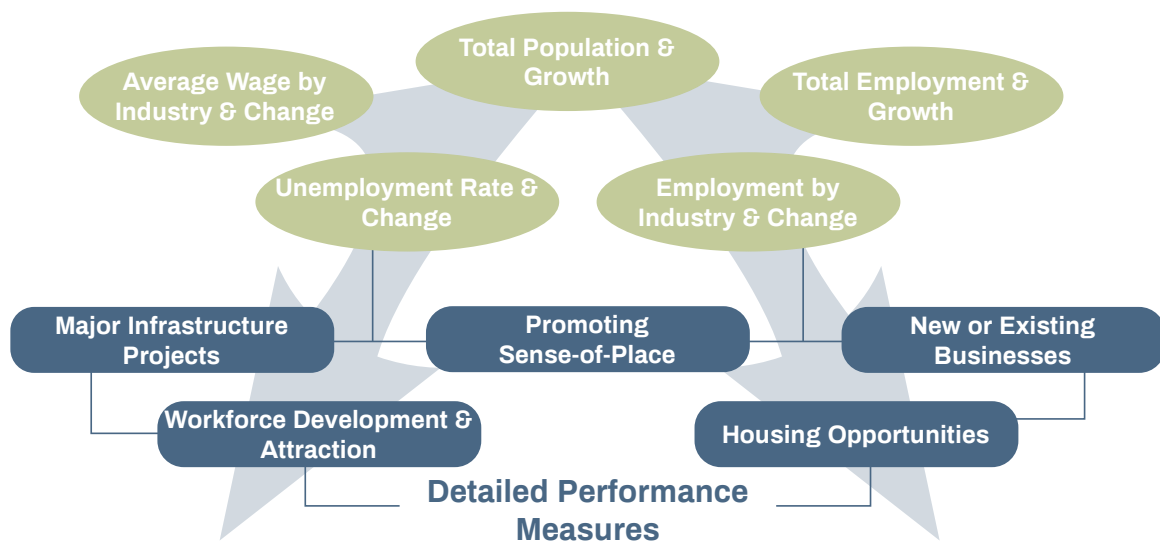
Performance Measure Categories

(based on CEDS regional goals & strategies)

- **Goal 1: Major Infrastructure Projects**
- **Goal 2: Promoting Sense-of-Place**
- **Goal 3: New or Existing Businesses**
- **Goal 4: Workforce Development & Attraction**
- **Goal 5: Housing Opportunities**

*Benchmark framework
from the 2020 CEDS
Update.*

PRIMARY Economic Health Indicators



SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Update of Regional Goals & Performance Measures

Regional Goal 1: Strengthen Community, County & Regional Infrastructure

SWOT FINDING: *Transportation facilities (roads, bridges, etc.), broadband services and water/wastewater utility infrastructure construction and repair is a major concern facing communities in the Region. As communities look to support economic development projects and steady population growth, national and state level programs or funding opportunities will be critical to maintaining a healthy, functioning infrastructure system.*

1. Major Infrastructure Projects

- Increase number of infrastructure projects
- Increase broadband coverage through partnerships or grants
- Increase knowledge and support for passenger rail service to the Region
- Increase public transit availability/use
- Increase rural transportation connectivity through planning or construction
- Increase bike/pedestrian infrastructure
- Increase reuse of brownfields and under-utilized sites for development or redevelopment projects

2022 UPDATE: As the Region continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, communities have had an increasing need to invest in infrastructure projects that will fuel their economies in the coming years. WCWRPC works with communities to help them develop, expand or upgrade their infrastructure and access the federal and state resources that will allow them to do so. This assistance is particularly critical during a time of great economic uncertainty, when services that WCWRPC provides or a grant from a funder may make the difference whether a project is able to happen.

Working with WCWRPC, communities are able to realize projects that will sustain their recovery and lead to long-term economic growth. Examples of activity that WCWRPC has undertaken over the past year to this end include:

- *Administration of EDA-funded project to expand an industrial park in Menomonie, Wisconsin*
- *Administration of a Community Development Block Grant for the City of Augusta to develop new water, sewer and road infrastructure that will support local economic development*
- *Sewer Service Area Reviews for sustainable sewer line development in the Cities of Menomonie, Hudson and the Chippewa Falls/Eau Claire Urban Area*
- *Official mapping of County Highway T in Chippewa & Eau Claire counties*
- *Transit feasibility studies for the City of Hudson and Polk County*
- *Webinar workshop on broadband for stakeholders in Dunn County*
- *Staffing support to the Rail Coalition of Western Wisconsin, the Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and Regional Rural Transportation Program*
- *Shared Ride Taxi Administration for the City of Chippewa Falls*
- *Hosting of a Brown Bag Luncheon webinar on the development of passenger rail service in the region*
- *Worked with Barron County to investigate funding options for a county business broadband project*

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Regional Goal 2: Promote & Assist In Developing Sense-of-Place as an Economic Development Tool

SWOT FINDING: *There are many unique regional assets in the form of diverse natural and cultural resources that make the area an attractive place for new residents and businesses. There needs to be greater capitalization of these assets and a coordinated approach to market the many quality of life benefits of living in West Central Wisconsin.*

2. Promoting Sense-of-Place

- Increase number of placemaking exercises
- Increase marketing of regional assets
- Increase number of outdoor recreation planning efforts
- Increase outreach efforts, methods, and funding sources to enhance and promote quality of life

2022 UPDATE: One of the most important elements of WCWRPC's economic development work is helping communities to establish their own sense-of-place and identity through the development of quality-of-life amenities. This activity allows businesses and workers to experience West Central Wisconsin as an ideal place to live, work and recreate. For example, in recent years the Commission has stepped up its efforts to help communities and counties create or enhance Bicycle & Pedestrian Plans. Currently, WCWRPC is working with several jurisdictions on such plans including the City of Altoona, Barron County and Polk County. In addition, the Commission is conducting an analysis of 21 locations in the City of Eau Claire for improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in that community.

Other projects that demonstrate WCWRPC's efforts to develop sense-of-place as an economic development tool in the Region include:

- *Preparation of Outdoor Recreation Plans for the Village of Fall Creek, Village of New Auburn, Eau Claire County and Clark County*
- *Development of Comprehensive Management Plan for Staples Lake*
- *EPA-funded project to promote regenerative agricultural practices that help to protect the environment and enhance farmers' livelihoods*
- *Chippewa Falls Wayfinding project*
- *Conversations on placemaking activities to be implemented in 2023*

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Regional Goal 3: Encourage & Support New or Existing Businesses

SWOT FINDING: *Business growth in the Region can take on various forms. This may include the encouragement and support of new entrepreneurial ventures, the retention and expansion of existing businesses, or the attraction of new business developments. A variety of programs and resources are in place to facilitate these activities, while others could be added to further strengthen regional efforts to drive the economy forward. Emphasis should be placed on key cluster and driver industries that complement and strengthen the current mix of industries.*

3. New or Existing Businesses

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase number of jobs• Increase number of establishments• Increase business start-ups• Decrease poverty rates• Decrease unemployment rates• Increase wages and earnings | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase number of applications to Regional Business Fund, Inc. or other similar agencies to support business retention or expansion• Increase number of incubators, accelerator programs and/or centers for new or existing businesses• Maintain up-to-date data for businesses interested in locating in the Region |
|--|---|

2022 UPDATE: WCWRPC has continued to provide support to businesses as one of the hallmarks of its regional economic development strategy. Particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, its work to help new and expanding businesses access resources has been crucial to the Region's economic recovery.

The Regional Business Fund, Inc. (RBF) continues to be active in helping the Region recover from the pandemic by administering loans that provide direct support to businesses. Other programs administered by the Commission have assisted as well. Project examples include:

- *Business loan programs through the Regional Business Fund*
- *Administration of a St. Croix County COVID recovery loan program*
- *Regional administration of the Main Street Bounceback Program, funded by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, providing \$10,000 grants to new or expanding businesses that move into vacant commercial space*
- *Administration of an EDA COVID business recovery loan pool*
- *Administration of an Eau Claire County ARPA funded small business and non-profit grant program*
- *Advice and assistance provided to regional incubators*

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Regional Goal 4: Address Regional Workforce Development & Attraction Issues

SWOT FINDING: *While the Region has many higher education opportunities, fewer employment options for these graduates contribute to a "brain drain" and loss of a skilled workforce. The out-migration of many younger people coupled with the aging population will likely result in insufficient workforce numbers in the Region in the near future.*

4. Workforce Development & Attraction

- Increase participation of regional partners with West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board
- Increase participation of regional partners with economic development efforts of Momentum West
- Increase/encourage participation in placemaking and sense-of-place marketing of the Region
- Increase number of workforce trainings/programs to train or recruit workers
- Increase support to educational institutions and their programming needs
- Increase efforts to retain young talent

2022 UPDATE: A major focus of the Commission's work related to workforce issues is to continue engaging with its partners to sustain momentum on existing projects while also working with them to take advantage of new opportunities as they emerge. In this respect, the Commission's representation on the governing boards of Momentum West and the Workforce Development Board of West Central Wisconsin has allowed it to assert a leadership role with these efforts on an ongoing basis.

One of the major strategies to continue developing a highly skilled workforce in West Central Wisconsin is to ensure that quality of life is appealing to current residents in order to encourage them stay, and to potential future residents as a recruitment tool. This work involves helping to ensure communities are safe, healthy, and vibrant while also providing the amenities that allow workers to lead full and productive lives. To that end, WCWRPC is engaged in a number of projects including:

- *Safe Routes to School Plans and programs for communities throughout the Region*
- *Execution of a literature project to promote the use and expansion of broadband*
- *Rain to Rivers Coalition trainings to help keep regional waters healthy*
- *Crash reports for Eau Claire County, St. Croix County and the Region*
- *Participation on the West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board; and the Board of Directors for Momentum West*

SECTION IV: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Regional Goal 5: Improve Housing Opportunities for All

SWOT FINDING: *The current demand for affordable rental and owner-occupied housing options exceeds the supply throughout the Region, which has become a barrier for attracting needed workforce.*

5. Housing Opportunities

- Increase number of housing studies completed
- Establishment of partnership relationships to further housing development
- Increased regional utilization of available housing funding sources
- Increase number of housing projects carried out based on recommendations in housing studies
- Ensure housing projects that are carried out meet diverse needs in the Region's population

2022 UPDATE: A significant factor in the economic development of the West Central Wisconsin region continues to be the availability of housing for its workforce. In recent years, WCWRPC has completed housing studies for several counties in the region to help them develop strategies to meet future housing demand. Currently, the Commission is working on one such study for Dunn County, with complementary studies for the City of Menomonie and the Village of Boyceville occurring simultaneously.

WCWRPC is also working in other ways with partners to help meet the diverse housing needs of the Region, which in turn, helps to shore up the workforce development efforts of communities. In particular, it is administering a Neighborhood Investment Fund (NIF) grant on behalf of the City of Menomonie and Stepping Stones of Dunn County, Inc. in order to construct a new facility for the homeless. The NIF grant has been provided to the City through the State of Wisconsin's Department of Administration via its allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Another of the Commission's projects has included the development of a TIF project plan in the City of Neillsville for the adaptive reuse of a former hospital into needed workforce housing in the community.

The Commission will continue to make progress on this Regional Goal by assisting communities on analysis work, grant administration, funding sources or other appropriate projects that may be identified.

SECTION V: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

Work Plan Status & Updates

The following section presents the WCWRPC Work Plan from the 2020 CEDS with an update of completed and on-going activities and program support. While every effort is made to identify accomplishments for these activities, this in no way encompasses all the efforts and accomplishments of all the dedicated economic development professionals and stakeholders in the Region.

WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Prepare and submit 2020 CEDS Annual Update to EDA	October 2022	Complete
Provide technical and grant preparation assistance to member governments to accomplish identified projects	On-going	Provided assistance to units of government in all 7 counties
Provide assistance to businesses on financing, start-ups, expansions, and relocations	On-going	Approximately 750 businesses assisted in 2022 calendar year
Continue to provide county, community, and economic profiles	On-going	Updated annually and available on WCWRPC website
Assist in strengthening and maintaining an active economic development network	On-going	Participation on Board of Directors of Momentum West, Workforce Development Board, Red Letter Grant, and UW-River Falls Chancellor's Advisory Board
Provide guidance and resources in completing necessary regional studies and solutions	On-going	Completed Staples Lake Management Plan and EPA Environmental Education Project; completion of web-based "story maps" to identify capital improvement projects in Chippewa Falls and Chippewa County
Assist communities and counties in developing economic development strategies	On-going	Consulting support to Dunn County re. preparation of housing studies for county and communities; continuing work on comprehensive and other specialized plans (e.g., outdoor recreation) in the Region
Work with local governments on recreation trail development	On-going	Awarding of WDNR funding to the City of Altoona for recreational trail improvements
Assist local governments in applying for outdoor recreation aids	Yearly	Bicycle & pedestrian plans funded for Barron & Polk counties; Safe Routes to Parks Plan for City of Altoona; Outdoor Recreation Plans completed for Villages of Fall Creek & New Auburn, and Eau Claire & Clark counties

SECTION V: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Provide technical assistance to local governments to manage rural growth through comprehensive planning	On-going	Comprehensive plan update for the Village of New Auburn
Provide data and other technical assistance services to local governments and other partners	On-going	Provide regular assistance as requested by local governments, for example webinar workshop for Dunn County on broadband has been completed
Provide CEDS annual reports which briefly analyze changes in economic conditions and project/program status	Annually	Complete CEDS Annual Performance Reports every October
Prepare hazard mitigation plans for counties and promote community resiliency	On-going	FEMA funding awarded to Barron, St. Croix, and Polk Counties for completion of Hazard Mitigation Plans
Continue to administer Regional Business Fund, Inc. and other local revolving loan funds	On-going	On-going. Continued strong business participation for 2021/2022
Assist on local transportation issues (rural transportation coordination, inter-city passenger rail, transit studies, local financing, etc.)	On-going	Coordination of public participation for County Highway T Official Mapping project; Chippewa Falls Shared Ride Taxi administration; transit feasibility studies for Polk County & Hudson
Assist local governments on comprehensive planning	On-going	Comprehensive Plan Update for the City of Chippewa Falls
Collaborate on regional economic development marketing efforts for West Central Wisconsin	On-going	On-going through coordination with Momentum West
Provide coordinating support to regional broadband implementation efforts	On-going	Provide on-going staff support to West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance, including completion of Broadband Fact Sheets
Conduct placemaking workshops to promote sense-of-place	On-going	Currently evaluating successes and lessons learned from previous placemaking initiatives and planning for follow-up workshops (e.g., Barron County, Village of Boyceville)
Provide grant administration services to communities receiving funding for infrastructure projects	On-going	Grant Administration services provided to Glenwood City for FEMA grant; to City of Menomonie for EDA grant; and to City of Augusta for CDBG grant
Maintain board position on Momentum West	On-going	Continue to serve on Board
Maintain board position on West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board	On-going	Continue to serve on Board

SECTION V: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Assist local governments in accessing the necessary tools and resources to preserve and maintain their downtowns, neighborhood commercial areas, historic properties/areas, culturally significant, and environmentally sensitive areas	On-going	On-going through development of comprehensive plans; EPA Education Project on sustainable farming practices; Rain to Rivers trainings to help protect regional waters; completion of educational videos on Downtown Revitalization, Tax Increment Financing, Volunteerism and Federal/State Grants & Loans
Provide technical assistance to county economic development corporations	On-going	Provide regular consulting assistance upon request
Maintain a prioritized list of infrastructure projects in need of funding	On-going	Projects updated on an ongoing basis
Conduct Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning	On-going	Completion of SRTS Plans for Osceola, Bloomer, Amery & Thorp with Plans underway for Cumberland and the Eau Claire School District; Chippewa Valley SRTS Partnership established; Walk & Roll Challenge completed for Altoona, Chippewa Falls & Eau Claire; development of SRTS website
Process applications for Momentum West's Gold Shovel program	On-going	Applications processed as received
Monitor housing needs in the region and promote programs aimed at increasing housing opportunities for all	On-going	Administration of ARPA-funded Neighborhood Investment Fund grant for the City of Menomonie and Stepping Stones of Dunn County, Inc. related to construction of new facility for the homeless
Prepare housing needs assessments and strategies for units of governments	On-going	Countywide housing study in Dunn County underway, along with studies for the Village of Boyceville and City of Menomonie
Provide information and consultation on potential funding opportunities and their requirements	On-going	Continue to provide support to communities, including most recently the Village of Colfax, City of Cumberland, City of River Falls, City of New Richmond, City of Amery, Village of Boyceville, Village of Osceola, and for UW-River Falls SciTech Building
Support partner efforts in recruiting and retaining workers and residents	On-going	Participation on boards of organizations that directly work on the issue including the Workforce Development Board and Momentum West – provide technical assistance as requested; completed TIF project plan for adaptive reuse of former hospital into workforce housing in the City of Neillsville

SECTION V: WCWRPC WORK PLAN

WCWRPC WORK PLAN - 2020 CEDS UPDATE

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE	STATUS
Provide general support for Disaster Ready Chippewa Valley (DRCV)	On-going	Continue to provide staffing support
Monitor state and federal legislation regarding areas of concern such as comprehensive planning, community and rural development, transportation, solid waste, water quality, and education	On-going	Continue to provide support and adapt to changes in legislation as they occur, e.g. policy changes inform comprehensive plans completed for communities
Act as a coordinating entity between local governments and state and federal agencies	On-going	Continue to provide support, e.g., access to funding sources
Serve on educational institution committees and provide data and input as requested	On-going	Provide continuing assistance to UW- Eau Claire, UW-Stout, UW-River Falls and CVTC
Participate on regional advisory committees relating to special projects and efforts	On-going	Continue to provide support, including the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center Management Committee in River Falls
Provide staffing for regional water quality planning efforts	On-going	Provide staff and administrative support to Rain to Rivers of Western Wisconsin; EPA Environmental Education Project

SECTION VI: ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Economic Resilience & Recovery Update

With natural and other more widespread disasters (e.g., COVID-19) occurring on a more frequent basis, the importance of economic resiliency cannot be emphasized enough. As such, the Commission highlighted resiliency as a part of its mostly recently updated CEDS to include several strategies described below.

WCWRPC continues to coordinate hazard mitigation and disaster resiliency planning throughout its seven-county region. This planning work is critical, as hazard mitigation plans must be updated every 5 years to ensure that all strategies are current and reflective of the hazards most likely to have an impact on communities in the Region. In 2022, for example, Barron, Polk, and St. Croix Counties received FEMA funding via grant applications written by WCWRPC in order to update hazard mitigation plans. Along with these efforts, the Commission provides administrative and programming support to Disaster Ready Chippewa Valley (DRCV), which promotes cooperation between the private and public sectors in preparing for and mitigating the effects of disasters, while also helping businesses be ready to recover from disasters.

The Commission is instituting its CEDS disaster/resiliency strategy by taking an active role in responding to COVID-19. A resource guide has been developed on its website that shares information related to funding opportunities, business resources and research in order to assist in the Region's recovery from the pandemic, and it is updated as necessary. Since the onset of the pandemic, WCWRPC has reached out to numerous communities across the region to vet projects for potential EDA funding through the CARES and ARPA programs. Now that these major COVID-19 related funding programs are closed, the Commission continues to carry out its disaster/resiliency strategy by providing outreach related to EDA's regular funding programs, as well as other sources such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. As potential projects continue to be evaluated, WCWRPC is also currently administering an EDA grant for the City of Menomonie and a CDBG grant for the City of Augusta to assist in their economic recovery efforts. Additionally, WCWRPC assists businesses by carrying out the State of Wisconsin's Bounceback Program in the Region and Eau Claire's County's ARPA-funded business and non-profit support program.

Part of the Commission's disaster/resiliency strategy is to help expand infrastructure in order to mitigate the effects of disasters. Most recently, WCWRPC has been assisting the Northern Wisconsin State Fair Association with an application for funds from FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC) program for a Community Safe Room project to be located at the Northern Wisconsin State Fairgrounds in the City of Chippewa Falls. The application is awaiting funding approval, which is anticipated later in 2022.

