

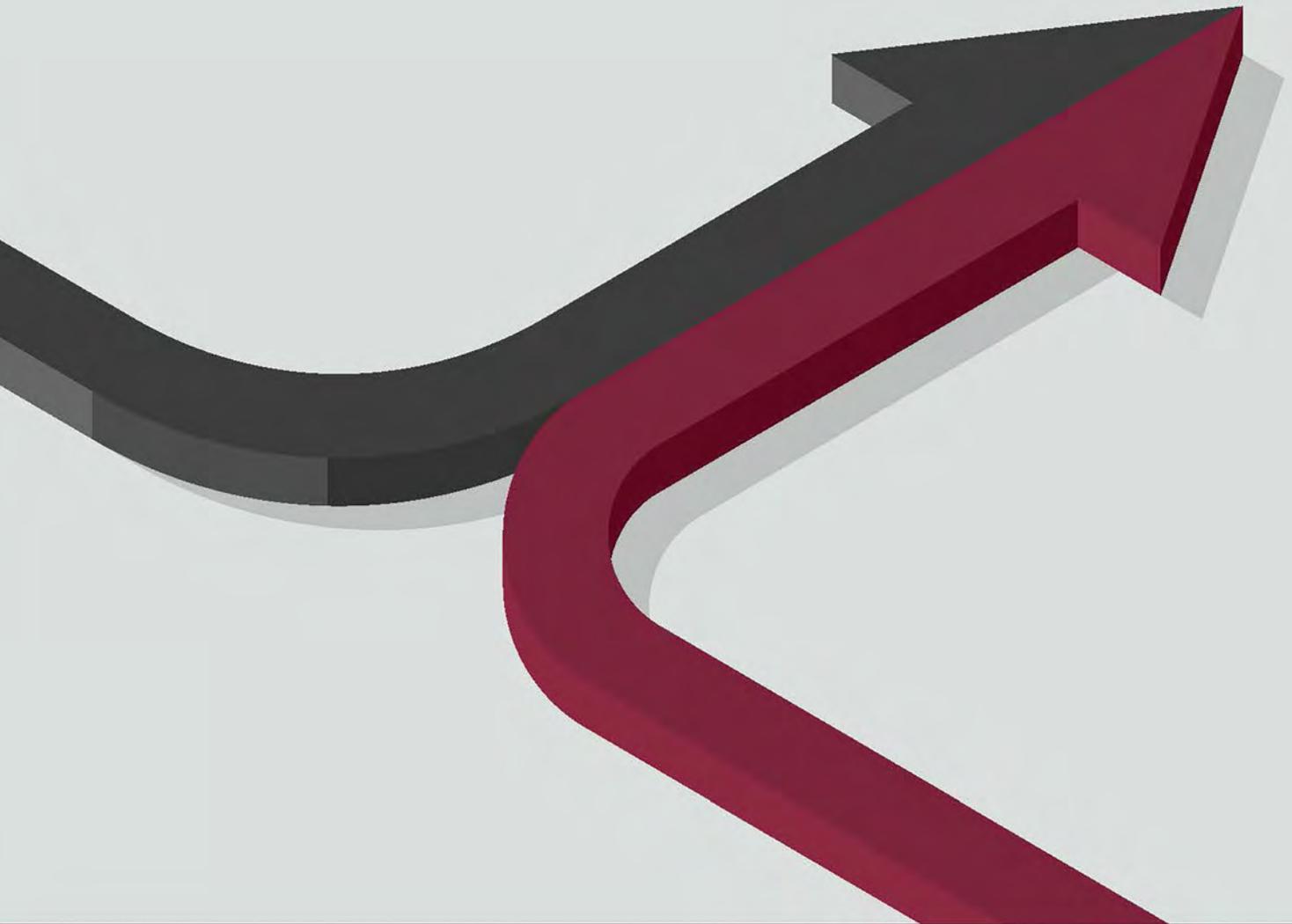
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APRIL 2026

EXPANDING THE Housing Landscape



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APRIL 2026 | Volume 90, Number 4



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From the President

Mark D. O'Connell / President & CEO

Celebrating County Government and the Cycle of Service

April in Wisconsin brings telltale signs of spring after a long winter as the beautiful green of our state reappears. For county officials, April also brings National County Government Month and the spring general elections.

As I write this column, our county election clerks and staff are busy preparing for the April elections. Their steady, professional work is foundational to public trust, and National County Government Month is an appropriate time to specifically thank them for their service.

While appreciation for the work of county government should never be limited to a single page on the calendar, a dedicated month gives us a reason to pause and reflect. It's a chance to recognize the steady and often unnoticed efforts that keep our communities running. From maintaining highways and operating jails to delivering human services, supporting public health, protecting natural resources, and conducting elections, county government is where policy meets pavement. It's practical. It's local. And it matters.

April is also a month of transition. Some familiar faces will be concluding their service in county office and passing the baton to others. That cycle of service is one of the strengths of local government as it brings in new perspectives and fresh energy. At the same time, the departure of experienced leaders is a reminder of the dedication and knowledge that so many have generously shared.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Counties Association, I extend my sincere gratitude to those moving on from county service. Leadership requires thoughtful deliberation, patience, and a willingness to tackle complex issues that rarely yield easy answers. The long meetings,

careful budget reviews, and difficult decisions often go unappreciated by the public, yet they make a real difference in our communities.

Transitions also highlight something equally important: how we welcome and prepare new county board supervisors. Training ensures that boards function effectively, meetings run efficiently, and decisions are made with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

In May, the UW-Madison Division of Extension's Local Government Education program and the WCA will host County Officials Workshops (COWS) across the state, with an online option in June. These workshops will provide an in-depth look at county board roles, running effective meetings, open meetings and public records laws, budgeting, and more.

In June, the WCA will hold its biennial District Meetings in seven locations with a new, updated agenda. The meetings will include a county board refresher on roles and responsibilities from Wisconsin's premier local government law firm, Attolles Law, along with updates from Forward Analytics and the WCA Government Affairs team.

Both trainings are open to all members. The information shared is only part of the value; just as important is county leaders learning from one another and building connections that strengthen our collective voice.

National County Government Month is about pride in the work counties do and appreciation for the people who make it happen. It is also about welcoming new members, honoring those who have served, and recommitting ourselves to effective, informed leadership. Together, that cycle of service keeps Wisconsin counties strong.

As always, thank you for the work you do. My colleagues and I at the WCA are proud to work on your behalf. ■

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The generous contributions of the organizations below helped make the 2026 WCA Legislative Conference a success.



See pages 32-33 for conference highlights

WISCONSIN Counties

ISSN: 0749-6818
USPS — 687-940

Official publication of the
WISCONSIN COUNTIES ASSOCIATION

Established under
Wis. Statute 59.52 (22) for:

1. Furtherance of better county government;
2. Protection of county interests.

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Published monthly by the
Wisconsin Counties Association,
22 E. Mifflin St., Ste. 900,
Madison, WI 53703. Periodical
postage paid in Madison, WI.

Subscription rate: \$20 per annum.
Wisconsin Counties, a monthly
magazine, is distributed to
subscribers in all 72 Wisconsin
counties. Readers include county-
elected and non-elected officials;
state legislators; state agency
personnel; state, city, town and
village officials; and employees of
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The Derby



With the support of a Vacancy to Vitality loan from the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, a former roller rink in Madison was transformed into The Derby, creating 70 affordable housing units.

See page 8 for more information.

4685

14685



Wisconsin's Housing Squeeze

DEMAND RISING, AFFORDABILITY FALLING

By *Forward Analytics*

Housing has long been a major goal and milestone for American families. Owning a home is a core tenet of the American dream, a step towards upward mobility and a way for families to build generational wealth. In Wisconsin and much of the country, that goal is becoming increasingly difficult to attain. Rising home prices, high interest rates and demographic shifts place pressure on local housing markets.

Over the past two decades, housing affordability in Wisconsin has seen dramatic shifts. After the Great Recession, falling home prices and historically low interest rates made homeownership attainable for many. By 2012, the housing affordability index reached a high point, indicating that the median household had more income than needed to afford the median-priced home. But the factors that created this window (low interest rates and falling home prices) did not last. Home prices began to steadily increase, often outpacing gains in household income. In recent years, rising mortgage rates have led to a sharp decline in affordability. By 2024, the median household had nearly 10% less income than needed to afford the median-priced home.



Demographic changes are intensifying the state's housing challenges. As Wisconsin's population ages and the large baby boom generation moves into their retirement years, the growth in population under age 65 has stagnated. Older residents tend to remain in their homes

longer, so even with slower population growth, the demand for housing remains strong.

Our research suggests that Wisconsin may need to build 140,000 additional housing units by 2030 to meet demand. If the state seeks to attract more working-age residents to solve workforce shortages, the need could exceed 200,000 units. Several headwinds make that demand difficult, including declining lot creation, slower housing construction following the Great Recession, rising home prices, and higher interest rates.

Together, these trends highlight a central challenge for local and state policymakers: expanding housing supply and maintaining home values and affordability while navigating the state's demographic changes. Addressing this challenge will require coordination and collaboration from state and local governments, developers, and local communities. ■

For deeper discussions of housing affordability and changing demographics, visit forward-analytics.net. Forward Analytics also calculates a housing affordability index each year for the annual county book of facts, which is available on its website.



The Cherry Lanes Arcade Bar in Door County converted a second-floor ballroom into eight affordable rental units with the help of a Restore Main Street loan from WHEDA.

Photos courtesy of the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

CLOSING THE GAP



Legislative Loans Invest in Housing Aid for Wisconsin's Working Families

By Jodi Amble, Marketing & Communications Director, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

In 2023, Gov. Tony Evers signed into law a bipartisan housing package to expand safe, affordable housing for Wisconsin working families. This \$525 million legislation, part of the 2023-25 biennial state budget, represents one of the state's largest workforce housing investments.

The legislation addresses a housing shortage that threatens Wisconsin's economy and its ability to attract and retain workers. A 2023 Forward Analytics study projected a need for at least 140,000 new housing units by 2030, a figure that could rise if the state's working-age population grows.



The shortage is often attributed to limited inventory due to rising construction labor and material costs and outdated zoning regulations.

Under the Bipartisan Legislative Loans package launched in fall 2023, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority administers three competitive loan programs: Infrastructure Access, Restore Main

Street and Vacancy-to-Vitality. WHEDA awards the loans during two application cycles per year. The programs help close the gap between workforce housing needs and supply across urban and rural Wisconsin.

Since the first award cycle in fall 2023, this funding has supported the development of more than **1,600 homes** for working families by administering \$25 million in loans.

“Each of these loans brings us closer to increasing housing choices for everyone in the state,” said Elmer Moore Jr., CEO and executive director of WHEDA. “We’re already seeing the impact of these programs, and we look forward to even more housing progress as developers find innovative ways to use these loans.”



Gov. Tony Evers attended the ribbon-cutting for The Derby in Madison, which received a WHEDA competitive loan.

These conversions can be expensive due to the structural changes required to redesign the floor plate for housing and meet zoning and regulatory restrictions. However, the projects expand housing without

new land use and often have lower infrastructure demands and shorter development timelines than projects on vacant land.

The Derby in Madison was among the first projects to be completed under the new program, with a \$1 million Vacancy-to-Vitality loan. The development converted a former roller rink into 70 housing units, most leased to people earning 30% to 60% of the area’s median income, with preference given to veterans. Learn about The Derby at bit.ly/WHEDA-Derby.

► **Infrastructure Access:
Building neighborhoods and opportunity**

The Infrastructure Access loan helps developers cover the cost of installing, replacing, upgrading, or improving public infrastructure for workforce or senior housing. When infrastructure is provided by developers, it can add significant costs to a project, putting upward pressure on rents and home sale prices. The Infrastructure Access program reduces housing costs by providing low-cost loans for critical needs such as water systems, roads and utility extensions.

One example is the Sheboygan County Economic Development Corporation, which was awarded a \$3.4 million Infrastructure Access loan for a project that will add 94 affordable homes in Plymouth. SCEDC aims to create an affordable subdivision that will attract working families to a small community in Sheboygan County. The project received funding from the Forward Fund, backed by regional corporate employers who recognized the worker shortage. In exchange for new affordable homes, homeowners agree to affordability and owner-occupancy restrictions for 10 years.

► **Vacancy-to-Vitality:
Transforming empty spaces into homes**

The Vacancy-to-Vitality loan helps convert vacant commercial buildings into workforce or senior housing.

► **Restore Main Street: Reviving downtowns**

The Restore Main Street loan helps renovate units above street-level commercial spaces. Many of these units remain vacant due to high renovation costs and challenges in securing financing for mixed-use properties. However, these projects strengthen main streets by integrating housing with local businesses and supporting thriving, walkable downtowns.

In Door County, Cherry Lanes Arcade Bar received a \$160,000 Restore Main Street loan to convert a second-floor ballroom in a 100-year-old building into eight affordable rental units. The apartments are in a high-amenity downtown area and must remain affordable for 10 years. The loan requires municipalities to help reduce housing development costs, and the city of Sturgeon Bay voluntarily changed its zoning to allow the project to qualify for the loan.

Continued on page 10



- ▶ The Derby offers a variety of amenities, including a fitness room, an outdoor gathering space, a children's playground, and a dog park.

GET CONNECTED

The next funding cycle for the Infrastructure Access, Restore Main Street, and Vacancy-to-Vitality loans is expected to open in mid-April.

Scan the code to learn more. Visit bit.ly/WHEDA-loans to connect with the WHEDA CED team.



Continued from page 9

▶ The role of local governments

Developers typically apply for these loans, but counties can play a key role by providing local financing, aligning infrastructure needs such as roads, utilities, and public works, and supporting zoning and permitting changes to reduce barriers. Counties can highlight priority development sites and demonstrate an openness to workforce housing by adopting housing or economic development plans.

▶ Statewide impact and support

Since the first award cycle in fall 2023, this funding has supported the development of more than 1,600 homes for working families by administering \$25 million in loans. Projects range from large multifamily developments to smaller rural initiatives. The loans are often paired with housing tax credits.

In addition to low-cost loans, the state also benefits from a dedicated Community Economic Development team. WHEDA's CED team is embedded in rural, suburban and urban communities across the state, helping developers access capital and providing technical expertise to increase the housing supply. The CED team helps community leaders connect with the housing ecosystem to achieve their housing and economic development goals. The local presence of the CED team makes them trusted partners who can provide technical assistance and support revitalization plans.

"Although construction material costs have stabilized, labor costs and regulatory barriers can make it difficult for workforce housing developments to pencil out," said Jon Searles, CED Director at WHEDA. "The state's Bipartisan Legislative Loans can make a big difference. I invite partners to connect with CED on how we can support your workforce housing goals." ■

Jodi Amble is the director of marketing and communications for the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority. Created in 1972 by a state charter, WHEDA works closely with lenders, developers, local governments, nonprofits, community groups, and others to implement its low-cost financing programs.

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Residential Housing DEVELOPMENT

Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Counties

By Brad Boycks, Executive Director, Wisconsin Builders Association

Wisconsin continues to face persistent challenges related to housing affordability and availability, and workforce attraction. While these issues are often felt most acutely at the local level, counties play a critical role in shaping the conditions that either support or constrain residential housing development. As the state's housing shortage continues, collaboration has never been more important.

For county officials, the question is not simply how to regulate development, but how to align policies, infrastructure planning, and land-use tools with evolving market realities. For builders and developers, the goal is to work with counties that view housing as essential community infrastructure necessary for economic growth, workforce stability and long-term fiscal health.

► Current trends in residential housing development

Across Wisconsin, residential construction continues to lag behind demand, particularly for workforce housing such as duplexes, townhomes, and modest-lot single-family homes. High interest rates, elevated material costs, and labor shortages have slowed new starts, while regulatory complexity and uncertainty further strain project feasibility.

At the same time, demographic trends, including an aging population, smaller household sizes, and the need to attract and retain workers, are reshaping the types of housing communities need. Counties are increasingly being asked to balance farmland preservation, environmental stewardship, and growth management with the pressing need for more housing.

► What makes a strong county-developer partnership?

Successful partnerships are built on communication, predictability and shared goals. Developers value counties that are clear and consistent about zoning standards, land-use policies and approval processes, particularly in unincorporated areas where county authority is most direct. Unexpected requirements, shifting interpretations, or late-stage infrastructure demands can quickly add costs and delay



Brad Boycks





High interest rates, elevated material costs, and labor shortages have slowed new starts, while regulatory complexity and uncertainty further strain project feasibility.

projects, ultimately affecting housing affordability.

Counties that provide upfront clarity around expectations, timelines and applicable regulations help reduce risk and create an environment where housing investment is more likely to occur.

► Examples of collaborative approaches

Some counties are already taking proactive steps to support housing development. Washington County's Next Generation Housing initiative, for example, aligns public goals with private-sector solutions to expand attainable housing by supporting high-quality homes on lower-cost lots. Elsewhere, counties have partnered with municipalities, employers and developers to coordinate infrastructure planning, land availability and zoning flexibility to unlock stalled or long-dormant housing opportunities.

Counties that thoughtfully use tools such as tax incremental districts (where applicable), coordinate infrastructure extensions, or streamline subdivision and land-division reviews often see stronger outcomes and improved collaboration with builders.

► Common challenges and how counties can help address them

Local government often asks builders and developers what actions they can take to encourage responsible residential development. The homebuilding industry consistently points to several areas where county leadership can make a meaningful difference:

- **Unexpected costs and infrastructure demands:** Developers may face sudden requirements related to roads, utilities, stormwater management, or environmental mitigation. Counties can help by clearly disclosing requirements early, coordinating infrastructure planning, conducting impact fee studies where appropriate, and exploring cost-sharing or phased approaches.
- **Delays and shifting requirements:** Lengthy or evolving review processes increase financing and holding costs. Counties can mitigate this by setting clear review

timelines, coordinating across departments, and ensuring consistent application of ordinances and standards.

- **Regulatory uncertainty:** Frequent changes or inconsistent interpretations of zoning, shoreland, environmental, or land-division regulations create risk. Transparency, advance notice of changes, public engagement, and reasonable phase-in or grandfathering provisions help maintain predictability.
- **Community opposition and growth concerns:** Housing projects may face resistance tied to concerns about traffic, services, or community character. Counties can support constructive dialogue by grounding decisions in adopted comprehensive plans, sharing data on housing needs and economic impacts, and encouraging early public engagement.

Continued on page 14

► County Housing Stories Featured

Want to learn more about local county housing initiatives? Explore the Wisconsin Counties magazine archive for recent stories from Adams, Ashland, Bayfield, Green, Milwaukee, Sheboygan and Washington counties.



- **Building Momentum: Green County Tackles Its Housing Shortage** *December 2025*
- **CheqBUILT Brings Affordable Homeownership to Chequamegon Bay** *July 2025*
- **Investing in Inclusive Housing: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Milwaukee County** *July 2025*
- **New Homestead Credit Incentive Gives Buyers in Adams County "Peace of Mind"** *March 2025*
- **Moving Sheboygan County Forward: A Public/Private Collaboration to Create Affordable Housing Solutions** *June 2024*
- **Washington County: Next Generation Housing Initiative** *September 2022*

To access the archive, visit wicounties.org and click "Wisconsin Counties Magazine" under the News & Media tab.

Continued from page 13

- Financing and market risk: Market conditions can change quickly. Counties can assist by maintaining zoning flexibility, allowing a range of housing types and densities, supporting phased development, and coordinating with state or regional housing programs that reduce upfront costs.

The most effective way to address these challenges is through early and honest communication. Counties that involve builders during planning and ordinance review processes are better positioned to balance community priorities with real-world development constraints.

► Moving forward together

Wisconsin's housing challenges cannot be solved by the public or private sector alone. Counties that take a collaborative, solutions-oriented approach will be better positioned to attract investment, support employers, and meet the housing needs of current and future residents. Regularly reviewing zoning and land-use regulations to ensure they reflect market conditions, demographic trends,

and workforce needs is a practical and impactful step county officials can take.

We are optimistic that recent and proposed changes to WHEDA's workforce housing tools will further strengthen partnerships between counties, municipalities and builders as they work together to address housing shortages.

Finally, counties are encouraged to utilize the More Housing Wisconsin resources, created through a partnership between the Wisconsin Builders Association, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, and the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association. These tools, available at lwm-info.org, offer practical examples, case studies and policy ideas to help local governments spur housing development while respecting community goals.

Ultimately, builders seek partnership, not permission. Counties that lean into collaboration and thoughtful planning will help lead the way in building a stronger housing future for Wisconsin. ■

Brad Boycks is the executive director of the Wisconsin Builders Association, which is a professional trade association comprised of 20 local associations dedicated to helping members build communities around the state.

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Photos courtesy of the Wisconsin Housing Alliance

Homebuilding, Reimagined

By Amy Bliss, Executive Director, Wisconsin Housing Alliance

From Douglas County to Green County, Door County to St. Croix County, a significant issue for all is the lack of affordable, workforce housing. According to Forward Analytics and the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association, Wisconsin needs to build at least 140,000 to 200,000 new housing units by 2030 to meet current demand. A lack of housing is a significant deterrent for employers seeking to attract workers. Solving this issue will require an all-hands-on-deck approach, involving state, county, and local governments, as well as all segments of the developer and building industries. The good news is that it can be accomplished.

One solution is factory-built housing. No, not “trailers.” Rather, everything from modular homes built to the

Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code to manufactured homes built to the federal building code established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (commonly referred to as the “HUD Building Code”). These homes can be identical. The difference lies in the approval process.



Amy Bliss

Each home is inspected by a third-party inspection agency in the factory to ensure strict compliance with building codes. Manufactured homes must have a steel frame, called

Both modular and manufactured homes are frequently built above code and can be constructed with high-end finishes or be budget-friendly.



An example of a manufactured accessory dwelling unit (ADU).

a chassis, that remains with the home. Both modular and manufactured homes are frequently built above code and can be constructed with high-end finishes or be budget-friendly. All homes can be placed on basements, crawlspaces or other foundations. When placed on private land, both can be financed just like site-built homes. Manufactured homes can also be built in a single section, which is typically placed in a land-lease community (i.e., mobile home park).

People often wonder about the quality of a factory-built

home because it is less expensive than site built. The lower costs are due to the efficiency of the factory-building process and economies of scale. There are no weather delays, and the employees are experts in the building craft they do daily. Economies of scale are achieved by the sheer volume of input materials. A site builder may build 10 homes a year. A factory produces thousands of homes per year. When ordering the trainloads of lumber, roofing materials,

Continued on page 18

► **NEW! 2026 Housing Summits on April 15, May 7**

UW-Madison Extension invites county leaders to the 2026 Housing Summits. Join community leaders, housing professionals, local officials, and regional partners for a full-day gathering focused on understanding and addressing your most pressing housing challenges. Each summit is customized to address local issues of concern with presentations, panel discussions, networking opportunities, and resource takeaways.

The summits will bring together planning, economic development, real estate, nonprofit services, philanthropy and local government. Engage directly with experts and peers as you learn, share, and contribute to a stronger regional housing ecosystem.

For more information on these and future housing summits, visit go.wisc.edu/2026-Housing-Summits.



Extension
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■ **Central Wisconsin Housing Summit**

APRIL 15 | Dreyfus University Center, Stevens Point

From Foundation Up: Repair, Revive, Reimagine

Focus on the builder's perspective. Addressing the challenges contractors, developers, and partners face in housing today, discuss best practices, resources, and solutions that move projects forward.

■ **Southeastern Wisconsin Housing Summit**

MAY 7 | Zoofari Conference Center, Milwaukee

The House Blend: Mixing Policy, Partnerships, and Possibilities

Exploring the trends and data shaping the housing landscape, discuss affordability, availability, zoning, and development barriers, regional workforce needs, and community-driven solutions.



Continued from page 17

plumbing fixtures, lighting, flooring, and other materials, the factory will get much more favorable volume pricing.

Planning and zoning departments can play a significant role in encouraging more attainable housing. It is important not to “zone out” what is actually needed. For example, the manufactured homes pictured in this article and on the magazine cover are ones you may want to encourage, but outdated stereotypes sometimes prevent them from being approved simply because they are factory-built. Also, it is critical not to impose unrealistic square-footage requirements, large lot sizes, or aesthetic requirements, such as brick or stone facades, that would significantly increase a home’s cost. Small and affordable does not have to mean unacceptable.

In 2024, factories produced 1,020 manufactured homes and 389 modular homes for placement in Wisconsin. There

is production capacity to increase those numbers to help meet demand for affordable workforce housing in Wisconsin and our neighboring states. The Wisconsin Housing Alliance represents five manufacturing plants in the state: Wisconsin Homes in Marshfield, Skyline Champion in Lancaster, Stratford Homes in Stratford, Cavco in Dorchester, and Wausau Homes in Wausau. In addition, several out-of-state manufacturers produce homes placed in Wisconsin.

The factory-built housing industry can do everything from small accessory dwelling units to modular sections for multifamily buildings. Factory tours are always welcome. Contact the Wisconsin Housing Alliance at 608-255-3131 or email amy@housingalliance.us for more information and resources. ■

Amy Bliss is the executive director of the Wisconsin Housing Alliance, which works to educate, support, and promote the factory-built housing industry.

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Inter-County Commuting



Patterns Reinforce Need for Regional Approach

By Matt Kures, Community Economic Development Specialist, UW-Madison Extension

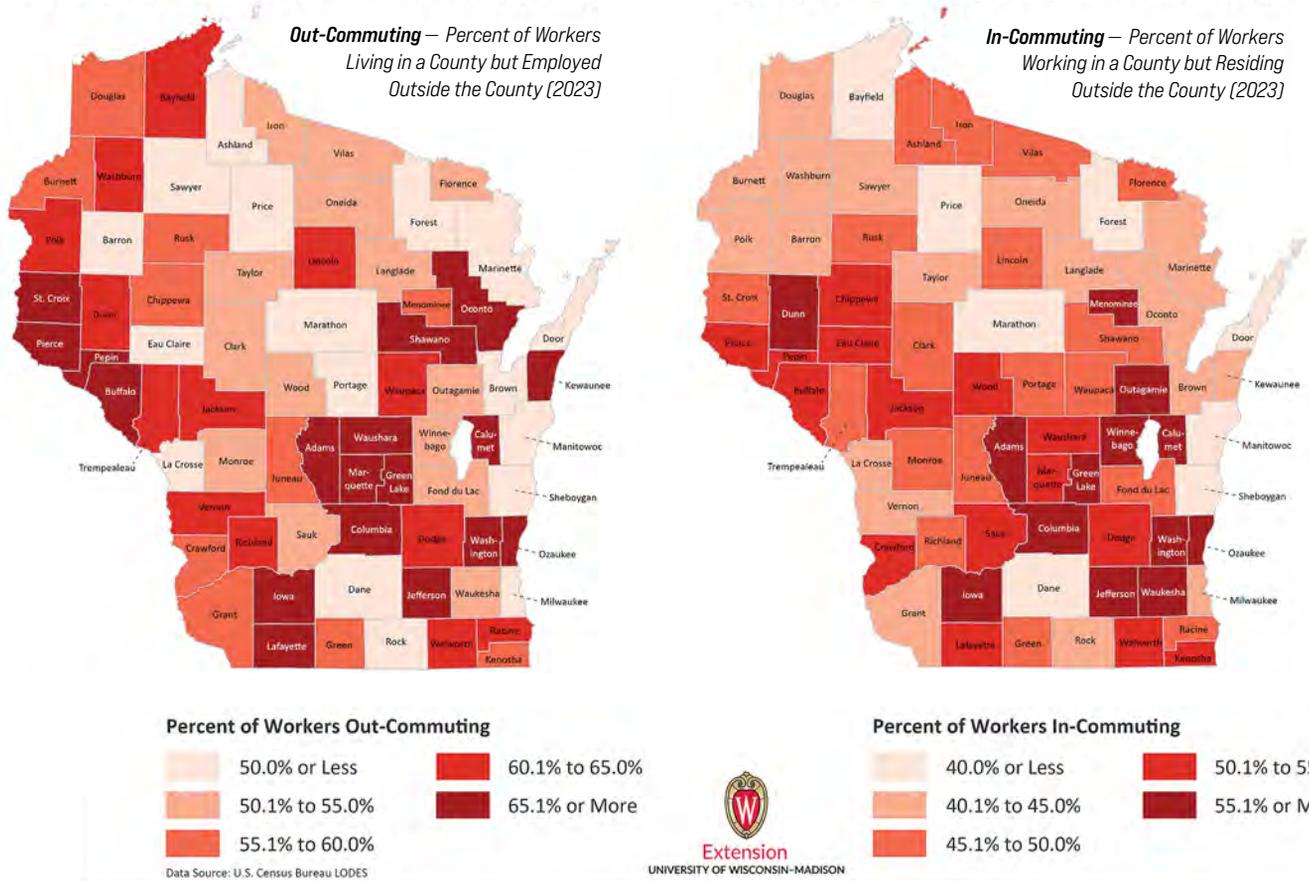
Commuting patterns, or the flows of workers from their residences to their places of employment, have social, economic, and environmental impacts that vary across households and geographic regions. Indeed, the movement of labor is complex across the rural-urban continuum, with some counties seeing a large share of residents traveling to other counties for employment, “out-commuting,” while others rely heavily on workers who live elsewhere, “in-commuting.”

These commuting dynamics create interdependencies among Wisconsin’s counties in terms of geographic labor markets and the flow of personal income. The following

snapshot of inter-county commuting characteristics provides insights into these relationships.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2023, almost 47% of Wisconsin workers lived in one county and traveled to another for their primary job (i.e., the worker’s highest paying job).¹ However, the flow of workers into and away from counties varied significantly across the state (see graphic on next page). Counties with the lowest share of residents out-commuting tend to be geographically isolated, such as Door County, or home to a large regional employment center, such as La Crosse and Sheboygan counties.

Worker Inflow and Outflow by County (Primary Jobs, Q2 2023)



Not surprisingly, those with the highest percentages of out-commuters are often adjacent to counties with large concentrations of jobs. Columbia and Iowa counties, for instance, border Dane County and have a high number of out-commuters. Importantly, high overall numbers of out-commuters in a county may not be evenly disbursed. For example, almost 7,000 Oconto County residents work in Brown County. Most of them reside in the southern portion of Oconto County, resulting in notably different commuting flows in the northern part of the county.

Counties with high numbers of in-commuters may also have large percentages of out-commuters, creating dynamic geographic labor markets. For instance, Dunn County has

ON THE MAP TOOL
 Use the U.S. Census Bureau's OnTheMap tool at onthemap.ces.census.gov to explore commuting patterns in your county.

a significant flow of in- and out-commuters due to the Interstate 94 connection with Eau Claire and St. Croix counties. Employment centers that cross county borders also contribute to high numbers of in- and out-commuters. The

cities of Watertown and Hartford are partially located in Dodge and Jefferson counties, and in Dodge and Washington counties, respectively, resulting in workers flowing across all three counties.

The factors driving commuting decisions vary by household and often involve economic and social

compromises. Households may weigh the influences of job accessibility, wages, cost of living, housing availability, travel times, and other quality-of-life factors when choosing where to live versus where to work.

Continued on page 22

Inter-county commuting relationships suggest that counties depend on one another for labor and income.

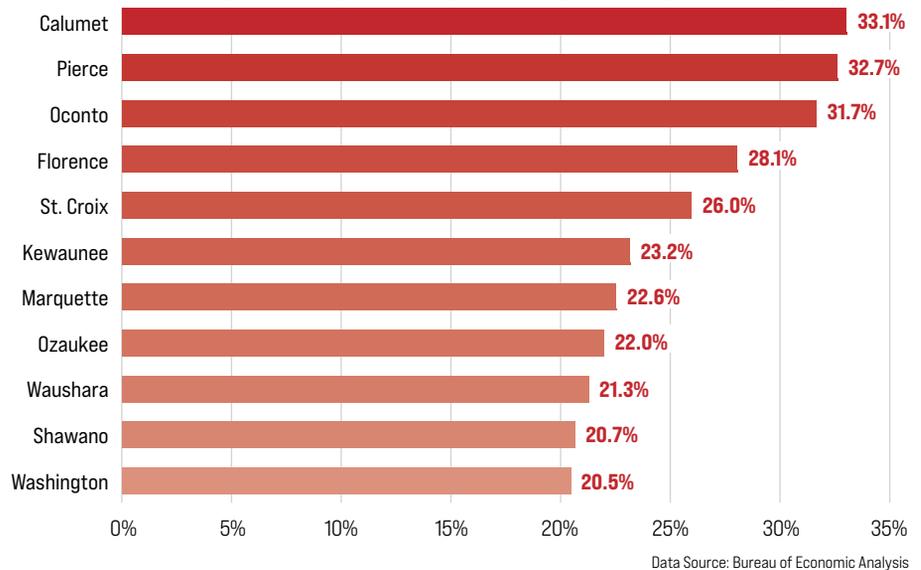
Continued from page 21

In comparing the number of workers who out-commute to the number of jobs per 100 working-age residents (ages 15 to 64) in a county of residence, we see a strong relationship. More specifically, counties with fewer jobs per working-age resident tend to have higher shares of residents who commute elsewhere for employment, suggesting that workers could be flowing to areas with more robust employment opportunities. Charting the average wage per job in a county against the share of workers who are out-commuters shows a somewhat similar, but more moderate relationship. That is, the lower the average wage for jobs located in a county of residence, the higher the percentage of workers who out-commute. Consequently, workers may be trading a commute for access to higher wages.

Inter-county commuting results in flows of earnings among counties. Counties with high shares of out-commuters may see a net inflow of income from workers bringing home wages earned elsewhere. Conversely, counties with a disproportionate share of in-commuters may see a net outflow of income. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis tracks the flow of these dollars, allowing counties to determine the income they gain or lose from inter-county commuting. Eleven Wisconsin counties have at least 20% of their personal income derived from net earnings generated in another county (see graph above). Not surprisingly, many of these counties have among the highest numbers of out-commuters.

Net Commuter Earnings as a Percent of County Personal Income

Counties with 20% or more (2023)



Milwaukee, Dane, and Brown counties experienced the largest net outflows of earnings in 2023, totaling -\$8.9 billion, -\$3.4 billion, and -\$1.7 billion, respectively. While these figures may seem substantial, the large number of jobs in these employment centers requires a net labor

import. That is, these counties have more primary jobs than workers and subsequently rely on workers residing in other counties to meet employer needs. In all, inter-county commuting relationships suggest that counties depend on one

another for labor and income, and that regional approaches to workforce and economic development may be beneficial to partnering counties. ■

Matt Kures is a community economic development specialist for UW-Madison Extension.

1. The share of workers living in one county and working in another are somewhat higher in the U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) data set than those found in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey due to worker definitions, time of data collection, and other factors.



MORE DATA AVAILABLE

Data on the flow of dollars from inter-county commuting is available through the Bureau of Labor Statistics at bit.ly/BLS_commuting (in table CAINC4).

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COUNTY CODE ADMINISTRATORS

On the Front Lines of Compliance

By Kenneth Thiele, President, Wisconsin County Code Administrators, and Senior Zoning and Sanitary Specialist, Columbia County

Organized in 1969, the Wisconsin County Code Administrators is a representative organization for professionals in Wisconsin interested in the administration of

state and county codes governing land use and related fields. The WCCA has over 175 members from 71 Wisconsin counties, and works closely with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Safety and Professional Services.

The WCCA members oversee regulation in areas as diverse as land use, zoning, shoreland and floodplain development, solid waste and recycling disposal, nonmetallic mining reclamation, farmland preservation, and private on-site wastewater treatment systems (commonly referred to as septic systems). Many of these regulatory programs are mandated by the state.

The WCCA tracks legislation and regulatory changes that would affect our communities and county programs in a wide variety of areas, from renewable energy and data centers to local regulation of vegetable gardens and fowl. During this state legislative session, the WCCA has been involved in proposals related to accessory



dwelling units (ADUs) and septic maintenance schedules.

Of particular concern have been Assembly Bill 449 and Senate Bill 473, which would require local communities, including counties,

to allow at least one ADU on each residential property. ADUs are second homes or apartments located on the same property as an existing home, such as an apartment above a garage or a shed converted into living space. ADUs are not required to meet the same safety and quality standards as traditional homes.

The WCCA recognizes the need for innovative solutions to the current housing shortage and the growing desire of property owners to maximize the use of their property. However, implementing a one-size-fits-all approach that could potentially double the density of homes on every property in Wisconsin could directly affect municipal services, particularly in high-tourism areas; water quality and the natural habitat of lakes and rivers if shoreland zoning ordinances are ignored; and participation in the Farmland Preservation Program, which includes density restrictions.

Local officials should retain control of ADUs to ensure they align with the circumstances of their communities.

**During this state legislative session,
the WCCA has been involved in proposals related to
accessory dwelling units and septic maintenance schedules.**

As of this writing, the WCCA has successfully helped the Wisconsin Counties Association stall this legislation.

A second concern is a proposed rule change to Wisconsin Administrative Code SPS 383.54 that would significantly alter the maintenance schedule for septic systems. Currently, septic systems must be pumped or visibly inspected once every three years. If the tank is more than one-third full, it must be pumped. Counties are required to provide a program to track and enforce maintenance.

The rule change would establish a maintenance schedule requiring annual visual inspections until a tank is pumped. Once a tank is pumped, the next service would not be required for three years. In addition to increasing property owners' costs by an estimated 250%, the rule would cause confusion and require counties to substantially change their tracking and enforcement systems, without providing any

increased protection for public health, natural resources, or the general welfare of residents.

As of this writing, the WCCA continues to discuss the rule change with the Department of Safety and Professional Services leadership in the hope of reaching a solution that benefits all stakeholders, including counties.

The WCCA is committed to working with legislators and other stakeholders to ensure thoughtful and common-sense regulations to improve the daily lives of every Wisconsin resident.

As the boots-on-the-ground professionals who enforce state and county codes, county code administrators strive to serve as a resource for state and federal legislators, county boards and committees, and the Wisconsin Counties Association. ■

Kenneth Thiele is the president of the Wisconsin County Code Administrators and is the senior zoning and sanitary specialist for Columbia County.

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WICCI ASSESSMENT REPORT

Solutions to Strengthen Wisconsin's Economy and Resilience

By Dea Larsen Converse, Communications Director, Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts

The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts, a nationally recognized collaboration of scientists and stakeholders working to help Wisconsin policymakers and citizens understand the impacts of climate change, released a new assessment report this year outlining the latest climate science and practical solutions to protect critical infrastructure and public safety.

Led by the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, WICCI generates and shares information to foster solutions to climate change impacts in Wisconsin. This latest report builds on WICCI's 2021 Assessment Report,



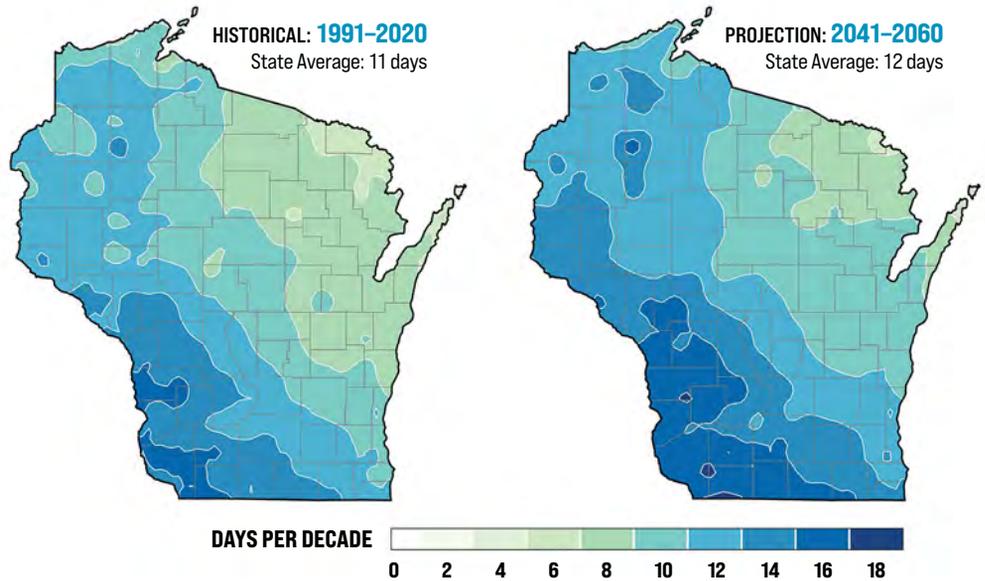
showing how the climate has continued to change over the past five years and how new data and insights are driving adaptation, mitigation and solutions. The report is the product of 14 working groups that include more than 200 scientists, practitioners, and Wisconsin residents, representing more than 50 national, state, and local agencies, tribal nations, nonprofit organizations, universities, and private-sector partners.

“With this report, WICCI provides updated climate science and practical solutions to help Wisconsin residents, communities, businesses, and industries understand and be ready for the impacts of Wisconsin’s changing climate,” said Karen Hyun, secretary of the Department of Natural



Extreme precipitation events, defined as daily rainfall of two inches or more, are projected to occur more frequently in the future across most of Wisconsin. Brown County, for example, is expected to experience 10 extreme precipitation days per decade, up from eight currently.

● Days per decade with more than 2 inches of precipitation



Source: UW-Madison Nelson Institute Center for Climate Research, Medium Emissions Scenario, Probabilistic Downscaled Data v4

Resources. “We are grateful for the ongoing leadership of WICCI working groups through their contributions to this report and their work to achieve a climate-resilient Wisconsin.”

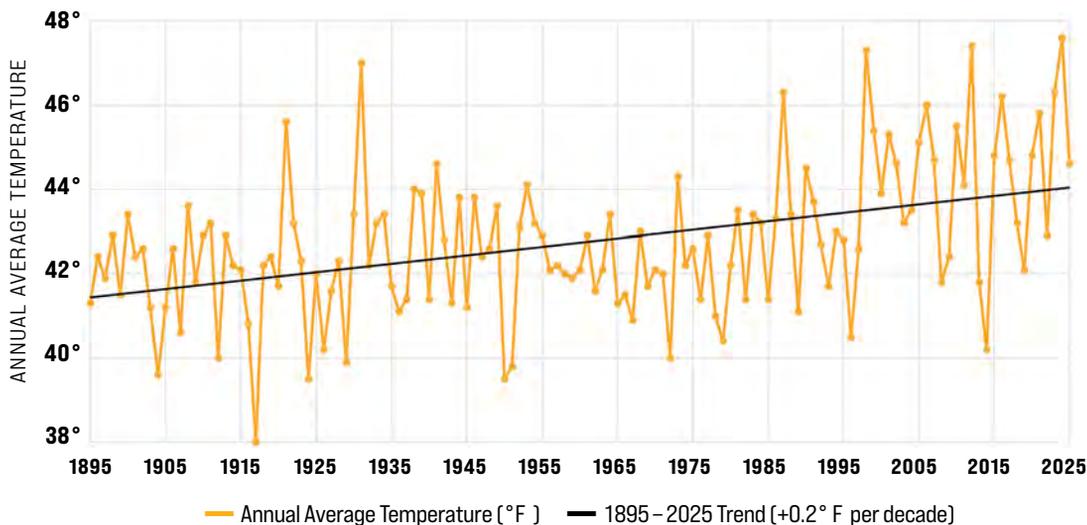
► Expect more extreme weather

Wisconsin’s climatological records, dating back to the 1890s, indicate a sustained transition toward warmer and wetter conditions across the state. Unusually pronounced extreme weather events have also become more common in recent years. Research shows that the 2010s were the state’s most extreme decade since records began in the

1890s, and the 2020s have been Wisconsin’s warmest decade to date. Projections indicate these trends will persist, with greater variability between wet and dry periods, a threefold increase in extremely hot days and warm nights, and more intense storms. These events carry a significant fiscal burden. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Wisconsin experienced 63 weather and climate disasters that caused losses exceeding \$1 billion between 1980 and 2024.

Continued on page 28

● Wisconsin Annual Average Temperature 1895 – 2025



Source: NOAA National Centers of Environmental Information



This graph shows Wisconsin’s annual average temperature since 1895. The 2020s has been the warmest decade to date, and 2024 was the hottest year.

Continued from page 27

▶ **Climate action strengthens the economy**

The report highlights climate-related challenges facing Wisconsin’s businesses and industries. For instance, warming trends are impacting Wisconsin’s \$25.8 billion recreation industry in every region of the state; crop production faces complex challenges and financial risk from new pests and diseases; and warmer winters are shortening the harvest season in Wisconsin forests, straining the timber industry that keeps forests resilient. By adopting climate-focused management, Wisconsin businesses can help minimize the impacts of future warming and strengthen our economy.

▶ **Building community resilience brings benefits**

Over the long term, holistic actions tailored to local needs can make communities more resilient to climate impacts and deliver additional benefits. The report provides many examples. Nature-based approaches can provide durable, cost-effective, and low-maintenance solutions. Infrastructure adaptations to address increasing streamflow can reduce long-term costs and protect aquatic habitat. Investing in a healthy future through clean energy and low-carbon infrastructure can address human health impacts from climate change, including threats to public safety, waterborne diseases caused by flooding, heat-related illnesses, and respiratory issues from wildfire smoke. Watershed-scale restoration and planning can reduce flood risk and improve water quality and aquatic habitats.

“Most importantly, this report provides hope and guidance,” said Steve Vavrus, a WICCI co-director, UW-Madison senior scientist in the Division of Extension and the Nelson Institute, and Wisconsin’s state climatologist. “WICCI plays a unique role by focusing directly on the solutions that keep Wisconsin’s economy strong and our communities safe. That is critical as we see extreme weather becoming more common and expensive.”

▶ **Adjusting to rapidly changing natural spaces protects lives and traditions**

The report also highlights how climate change is accelerating shifts in Wisconsin’s natural systems.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WICCI working group members are available to help local officials interpret this data for long-term planning and infrastructure resilience. Visit wicci.wisc.edu to find contact information and resources. To access the 2026 assessment report, visit wicci.wisc.edu/2026-assessment-report.

Management and protection actions, including assisted migration, stabilizing inland fisheries, restoring and preserving habitat, and addressing challenges to Great Lakes ecosystems and infrastructure, can help protect ecosystems and support our recreation, hunting, and fishing traditions. Focusing on forest regeneration and carbon storage in Wisconsin’s forests can increase resilience to extreme

weather and rising temperatures.

“Although climate change is causing widespread adverse impacts across Wisconsin, opportunities and proven strategies can both improve Wisconsin’s economy and benefit human health and natural resources,” Vavrus said. “This report illustrates how each of us can contribute to solutions.” ■

Dea Larsen Converse is the communications director for the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts, a statewide collaboration of scientists and stakeholders formed as a partnership between UW-Madison’s Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. WICCI’s goals are to evaluate climate change impacts on Wisconsin and foster solutions.

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Wisconsin's Civic Health

A SNAPSHOT OF RECENT YEARS

By Mary Beth Collins, Executive Director, UW-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies

The Civic Health of Wisconsin Initiative is a nonpartisan coalition of Wisconsin-based organizations and higher education professionals and institutes launched in 2020 after the publication of the inaugural Civic Health of Wisconsin Report. The Initiative is administratively hosted by the UW-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies.



Since the publication of the inaugural report, Wisconsinites have lived through, observed, and participated in notable circumstances and events that have affected our daily lives, ability to connect with one another, and civic life.

In addition to a global pandemic, we have faced mounting threats to democracy and civic health worldwide. Our trust in institutions and democratic processes has reached an all-time low, and norms within major institutions have shifted. Extreme polarization, political violence and threats, a rapidly changing information landscape, and a notable increase in social isolation and loneliness have affected us and how we engage.

To provide an update on Wisconsin's overall civic health since 2020, the Initiative has published its second Civic Health of Wisconsin Report. This article summarizes its key findings. The full report, including recommendations for action in Wisconsin communities and organizations, can be found at commnsknowledge.wisc.edu.

▶ Voting and participation in the public sector

Wisconsin remains a high-participation state for elections, with record turnout in 2020 and 2024. Wisconsin voters shifted toward more absentee and early voting, with rates peaking during COVID-19 and remaining well above pre-pandemic levels since.

Wisconsinites are also more likely to contact an elected official than other Americans.

However, rates of public meeting attendance declined in Wisconsin between 2017 and 2023; this was also the trend nationally and in neighboring states, with Wisconsin's drop smaller (5%) than the national average (12%).

▶ Volunteering, giving, joining and social connection

In Wisconsin and most neighboring states, volunteering rates declined substantially from 2017 to 2021, then began to rebound in 2023. Wisconsin experienced more dramatic declines than neighboring states. Though formal volunteering dipped in the initial COVID-19 pandemic and hasn't yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, informal helping remained steady.

Wisconsin residents report talking regularly with friends and family. As in the nation overall, the number who regularly talked to or spent time with friends and family declined



Mary Beth Collins

Recent surveys found that most Wisconsin residents support public participation in government and compromises that make progress possible.

slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic but rebounded in 2023. A more striking trend is that Wisconsin's weekly rate of connecting with neighbors declined significantly during this time, from 35% in 2019 to 28% in 2023. Rural residents report more regular connections with neighbors.

Although Wisconsin ranks high nationally in voluntary association or organization participation, this form of civic engagement is declining.

Rates of charitable giving were consistently higher in Wisconsin than the national average between 2017 and 2023. In 2023, 55% of Wisconsinites gave more than \$25 to a nonpolitical organization in the past year, compared to just under half of Americans overall.

► The information landscape

Less than one-fifth of Wisconsinites report regularly reading the newspaper, and a little more than one-tenth regularly listen to the radio for political information. A significant share watch network TV. Wisconsinites with more ideologically narrow media diets tend to exhibit lower confidence in elections and institutions.

All Americans are experiencing rapid and significant changes in the media landscape, with traditional and local news sources declining; newsrooms consolidating, shrinking and closing; and new forms of digital media being relied upon more heavily. A movement toward nonprofit news and purpose-driven continuation of community- and neighborhood-based reporting and news sources provides hope for the future of local news.

► Polarization, tension and compromise

Mirroring national trends, Wisconsin has seen an increase in threats toward public officials, including librarians, teachers, and clerks, according to the report.

Like Americans overall, the number of Wisconsinites engaged with information about civic and political issues declined steadily from 2017 to 2023. This trend is consistent across measures of news consumption, discussing issues with family, friends, neighbors, and others, and posting views online. However, local issues surfacing in the 2020s,

such as data centers and PFAS, seem to have brought local community members together across differences.

Recent surveys found that most Wisconsin residents support public participation in government and compromises that make progress possible.

► Civics education

Wisconsin mandates that graduating high school students pass a civics test that mirrors the U.S. citizenship test. However, unlike in most other states, there is no statewide civics education mandate; as a result, civics requirements and offerings in Wisconsin vary by district. Many instructors report facing politically motivated restrictions on content related to elections and current events. Civic health efforts in Wisconsin are working on these issues.

► Boycott and protest

Consumer activism — purchasing products or services to signal support for a company's practices, and/or boycotting — has been on the rise nationally in recent years. From 2017 to 2023, over one in five Wisconsin residents consistently engaged in this type of activism, exceeding the national average. Protesting has also seen growing participation rates, with participation peaking in 2020, declining, and then escalating again in 2025, with most protests being peaceful.

► Conclusion

Wisconsinites continue to vote at high levels, give generously, and express support for participation and compromise, even as polarization, declining social connection, a changing information environment, and gaps in civic education present real challenges. The choices and efforts made by individuals, communities, institutions, and leaders in the coming years will help determine whether the state's civic health strengthens or continues to erode. ■

Mary Beth Collins is the executive director of the UW-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies, which conducts community-engaged teaching, research, and outreach focused on the nonprofit sector, civil society, and community efforts. Collins holds a dual Juris Doctor and Master of Arts degree in Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian studies from UW-Madison. She is the co-author of the inaugural and second Civic Health of Wisconsin reports.



LEARN MORE

Find the second Civic Health of Wisconsin Report and information about an April 27 Community Conference on Civic Health at commnsknowledge.wisc.edu.



2026 WCA LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Washington Update *[above photo]*

“Strategic patience” was how Matt Chase (left), executive director of the National Association of Counties, described his association’s approach to the turmoil in Washington, D.C., in his conversation with WCA President & CEO Mark O’Connell. Chase discussed several of NACo’s current priorities, including efforts to balance data center development and control over their construction. The White House views data centers as a national security issue and favors a federal approach, but county officials understand the local land-use issues. NACo is also actively working to keep the Federal Emergency Management Agency at the table on long-term disaster recovery relief efforts.



Transportation Delivers: A Sustainable Funding Discussion

Debby Jackson (right), executive director of the Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin, and Robb Kahl (center), executive director of the Construction Business Group, walked attendees through the rationale for the current Transportation Delivers campaign in a conversation with WCA Government Affairs Associate Collin Driscoll (left). In the campaign, all counties are being asked to adopt resolutions supporting state investment in transportation projects.



Legal Updates

In one of his presentations at the conference, Andy Phillips of Attolles Law walked attendees through important court cases before state and federal courts that could directly impact counties. In his other session, Phillips invited attendees to “ask the attorney.” A wide-ranging discussion ensued, with several questions focused on county authority regarding the siting of energy production facilities and data centers.

Legislative Leadership Roundtable

Legislative leaders from both sides of the aisle joined WCA Vice President of Government Affairs Kyle Christianson (far left) for a lively discussion on several of the hot topics facing the Legislature. The panel featured (left to right) Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester), Senate Minority Leader Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton), Assembly Minority Leader Greta Neubauer (D-Racine), and Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu (R-Oostburg).



Legislative Update

The WCA Government Affairs team, (left to right) Kyle Christianson, Collin Driscoll and Marcie Rainbolt, provided an overview of what the association had accomplished to date in the 2025-26 legislative session, the priorities in the final weeks of session, and what they will be working on in the months leading up to the 2027-28 legislative session.

Forward Analytics

“Affordability” was the focus of the presentation by Forward Analytics’ Kevin Dospoy (center) and Jacob Anderson (right). In a conversation with WCA Vice President of Programs & Services Michael Lamont (left), they explored the growth in costs of essential and non-essential goods and services, which was also the topic of the February 2026 “Spotlight” by Forward Analytics.



The slide decks from the Legislative Update, Forward Analytics and Legal Update presentations are available at wicounties.org.

Click on “Past Event Materials” under the Events tab.

Looking Past Unemployment to Underemployment

By Jacob Anderson, Research Analyst, Forward Analytics

Each month, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes unemployment numbers as part of its “Employment Situation” news release. The most significant number in that report is the total unemployment rate for the United States and individual states. This number provides a quick look at an economy’s status.

A dropping unemployment rate can signal an improving economy, while an increasing rate signals the opposite. This figure also acts as a proxy for the health of the labor market. The unemployment rate can even shed light on purchasing patterns, as a higher rate tends to accompany less income overall, and as a result, less spending. Additionally, this figure can guide policymakers’ decision-making, especially regarding programs such as unemployment insurance.

Most public discourse about unemployment focuses on this high-level figure, largely because the unemployment rate is the single official definition of unemployment used by the United States government. But what if this does not capture the whole picture?

To address this, the Bureau of Labor Statistics created a set of additional figures called “alternative measures of labor utilization,” which includes unemployment, underemployment, and discouraged workers, among others. Each of these measures attempts to better understand labor market dynamics. While each figure is important, this article will focus on the underemployment rate.

▶ The difference between “unemployed” and “underemployed”

To understand the unemployment and underemployment rates, it is important to know what the labor force is. The labor force comprises the employed and unemployed. Employed people are those with jobs, including those performing unpaid family work for at least 15 hours a week, such as helping a family member operate a business or farm.

Unemployed people are those without a job, but who are actively seeking employment. People who are not working and not actively searching for work (such as retirees or those choosing not to work) are not included in the labor force.

Therefore, the unemployment rate is the number of people without a job who are actively seeking employment as a percentage of the labor force. Measuring the unemployment rate this way can potentially be misleading. In any given month, the unemployment rate could drop because a group of people is not actively searching for work. This means that when the unemployment rate drops, it is not only because more people are employed, but a combination of rising employment and the number of people no longer looking for work.

“Underemployed workers” are workers who want to work full-time but are unable to do so because of economic reasons, such as unfavorable business conditions, the inability to find full-time work, and seasonal declines in demand. Underemployed workers are often referred to as involuntary part-time workers or by their official title,





“employed part-time for economic reasons.”

To measure the underemployed, the Bureau of Labor Statistics counts people who worked one to 34 hours during the survey week. Additionally, they must indicate in the survey that they wish to work full-time to be classified as an involuntary part-time worker.

► Changes in underemployment

Between 2000 and 2025, an average of 5.5 million people were employed part-time for economic reasons nationally. This figure ranged from a low of 3.2 million in 2000 to nearly 9 million at the height of the Great Recession in 2009. During and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, there were an average of 4.4 million involuntary part-time workers, peaking in 2021 at 4.9 million, followed by a sharp decrease to 3.9 million in 2022. Since then, there has been a gradual increase back up to 4.8 million in 2025.

However, since the size of the labor force changes over time, it is better to examine involuntary part-time workers as a percentage of the labor force, similar to the unemployment rate. Between 2000 and 2025, involuntary part-time workers comprised an average 3.6% of the labor force. During that same period, the unemployment rate was 5.6%. Post-pandemic, the average percentage of involuntary part-time workers was 2.7%, and the unemployment rate was 3.9%. The percentage of involuntary part-time workers never exceeded the unemployment rate between 2000 and 2025.

Wisconsin-specific data on involuntary part-time workers is available only for 2023 and 2024, providing a brief snapshot of the state’s performance relative to the nation. Wisconsin’s labor market outperformed the national average in both 2023 and 2024. The state’s unemployment rate was 2.8% in 2023 and 3% in 2024, compared to 3.6% and 4% nationally. Wisconsin also had a lower share of involuntary part-time workers. In 2023, 2% of Wisconsin’s labor force was employed part-time due to economic reasons, compared to 2.4%

nationwide. In 2024, the share declined to 1.8% in Wisconsin, while the national rate increased to 2.7%

► Conclusion

Involuntary part-time workers are just one way the Bureau of Labor Statistics goes beyond high-level figures, such as the unemployment rate, to measure the entire labor market. Other measures include discouraged workers, those marginally attached to the labor force, and people who completed temporary jobs. While this article explored underemployment, other measures provide additional insight into the economic state of Wisconsin and the nation and will be topics for future Research Room columns. ■

Forward Analytics is a Wisconsin-based research organization that provides state and local policymakers with nonpartisan analysis of issues affecting the state.



MORE RESOURCES

Visit forward-analytics.net for the most recent Forward Analytics publications:

“Keeping Pace? Wisconsin’s Economic Performance Since 2017” Report, March 2026

“Affordability: More than Wages vs. Prices” Spotlight, February 2026

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BROWN COUNTY

A CENTURY OF SWEETNESS: How Seroogy's Became the Heart of a Community and a Wisconsin Tradition

Michelle Gormican Thompson, WCA Communications

Whether it's the roar from Lambeau Field on a Sunday afternoon or the bells tolling across the St. Norbert College campus on a crisp fall day, history in Brown County is palpable.

For more than a century, Seroogy's Chocolates has been an integral part of that history, of family life.

The legacy of Seroogy's begins far from the Fox River Valley. "My grandparents came to America from Lebanon in the 1890s with almost nothing and started a family restaurant," said Joe Seroogy, third-generation owner alongside his brother Jim. "My grandfather made a batch of fudge one day, and it sold out. Candy became our craft."

That batch of fudge marked a turning point. What began as a restaurant sideline grew into a confectionery business built on copper kettles, handwritten recipes, and an unwavering devotion to quality. The craft passed from one generation to the next, not just as a livelihood, but as a responsibility.

Through world wars, economic shifts, and changing tastes, Seroogy's has endured. Boxes of chocolate remain staples on



Christmas tables, in Easter baskets, and at graduation parties across the region. Courtships are sweetened with chocolate-covered strawberries and condolences are offered in neatly tied gold boxes. In

countless Wisconsin homes, Seroogy's is woven into life's most meaningful moments.

Inside the shop, tradition guides the process. Time-honored recipes are carefully guarded. Favorites remain unchanged even as the world evolves. Employees stay for decades, and customers bring children and grandchildren through the same doors they once entered as kids.

This heritage is about more than confections. It reflects immigration, adaptation, and faith in hard work, themes woven into Wisconsin's broader history as families arrived from distant shores, built businesses with their hands, and rooted themselves deeply in their communities.

Seroogy's isn't just a place to buy sweets. It is a living piece of Wisconsin history. □

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Current counties sharing their Uniquely Wisconsin stories in season four include Brown, Marathon, Outagamie, Pierce and Washington. Counties highlighted in the first three seasons of Uniquely Wisconsin include Adams, Ashland, Calumet, Green Lake, Jefferson, Kenosha, Lincoln, Marathon, Monroe, Oconto, Portage, Price, Racine, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Washington and Wood.



Lincoln County Video Wins 3rd Emmy for Uniquely Wisconsin



Uniquely Wisconsin has won its third Emmy Award for a story featuring Lincoln County’s dog musher Melissa Omernick. The video showcased the beauty of Lincoln County, its abundance of outdoor recreation, and the mutual love between musher and dog that exists in the exciting sport of dog mushing.

Omernick, her husband Keith, her dad, and other family members have been racing for decades. “When you’re standing on the runners, the only sounds you hear are the swishing of the snow under the runners, the breathing of the dogs, and the jingle of the harnesses,” explained Omernick as she described her love of mushing.

The video, produced and directed by Discover Wisconsin’s talented film crew, captured the excitement of the dogs, Omernick’s and her family’s enthusiasm for racing, and the appeal of winter in rural Lincoln County. The video won in the “Human Interest Short Form Content” category at the

67th Annual Chicago/Midwest Emmy Awards in November.

Uniquely Wisconsin’s first two Emmy Awards were for videos featuring Marathon County’s “Farm to Table Pizzas: The Little Red Barn”

in 2023, and Kenosha County’s “Field of Dreams: All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) 80th Reunion” in 2024.

The Uniquely Wisconsin brand, built upon generations of rich storytelling from Discover Wisconsin and created by Discover Mediaworks, highlights the stories of the people, the culture, and the history of our state, sprinkled in with a bit of economic development and tourism.

To date, the Uniquely Wisconsin brand has reached over 15 million, engaging with viewers, listeners and web browsers.

Visit discoverwisconsin.com/dw-uniquely-wisconsin to watch “Wisconsin Musher & the Love for Their Dogs: Beauty Behind Dog Sledding” and all of the Uniquely Wisconsin videos. ■



Find this and all Uniquely Wisconsin content at discoverwisconsin.com/dw-uniquely-wisconsin.

To see season four stories, as well as previous seasons, visit Discover Wisconsin’s YouTube page at youtube.com/DiscoverWI and scroll down to the “Uniquely Wisconsin” section. You can also listen to “The Cabin” podcast on your favorite podcast player, where counties in the program are featured. To learn more and join the Emmy Award-winning Uniquely Wisconsin brand, contact WCA President & CEO Mark O’Connell or WCA Communications Consultant Michelle Gormican Thompson at 866-404-2700.



Save the dates for upcoming webinars:

- May 27
- June 24
- July 22
- August 26
- October 28
- November 18
- December 16

April “In the Board Room” Webinar: ADA and FMLA Laws

Join us for the April 22 session of “In the Board Room” with Andy Phillips and Attolles Law for a discussion on the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and how the two laws intersect. Personnel administration is tricky enough, but add in special considerations for county employers, and it can be downright confounding.

Be sure to pass along this invite for the April 22 noon webinar to the human resources professionals in your

county, as well as corporation counsel and any others who deal with the complicated disability and leave regulations. Also, be sure to bring your questions, as the panel will provide ample opportunity to address the issues your county is confronting.

Visit bit.ly/InTheBoardRoom26 to register for the 2026 webinars. There is no cost to register. Recordings of all webinars are available on the WCA website at wicounties.org. ■

Monday County Leadership Meetings EVERY MONDAY AT 11 A.M.

This weekly virtual meeting features updates from the WCA Government Affairs team and Attolles Law, association announcements, and guest speakers, such as state agency staff and legislators. A link to the virtual meeting is emailed to WCA members each week.



Prime Exclusive Offer for WCA Members

The WCA has partnered with Amazon Business for a new, exclusive program. WCA member counties and their departments are now eligible to sign up for a free Amazon Business Prime membership that includes free and fast shipping, a pre-approved line of credit, and a 25% discount on select office, maintenance, repair, operational and IT products. WCA members can also leverage a competitively awarded contract by OMNIA Partners to purchase on Amazon Business across all categories for additional savings. Contact the WCA for more information.

Adopt a “Transportation Delivers” Resolution by April 30

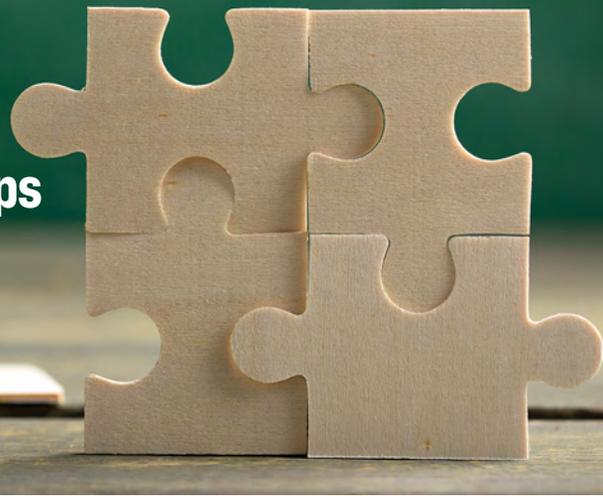
The WCA encourages every county to pass a resolution supporting sustainable transportation funding by April 30.

To assist counties, the WCA created a model resolution. It does not advocate a specific revenue source. Instead, it calls on state leaders to identify and commit to a stable, long-term solution that provides predictability for counties and municipalities.

Visit wicounties.org for more information or contact WCA Government Affairs Associate Collin Driscoll at driscoll@wicounties.org.

2026 County Officials Workshops

Listen. Learn. Lead.



In May, the UW-Madison Division of Extension Local Government Education program and the WCA will co-host their biennial County Officials Workshops across the state, with an online option in June.

Open to all members, these workshops are led by experienced educators from the WCA and UW-Madison Extension who will provide an in-depth look at:

- Roles and responsibilities of county officials
- Running effective meetings
- Wisconsin's Open Meetings and Public Records laws
- Agendas and minutes
- County budgeting
- Ethics and conflicts of interest



All in-person workshops are from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.



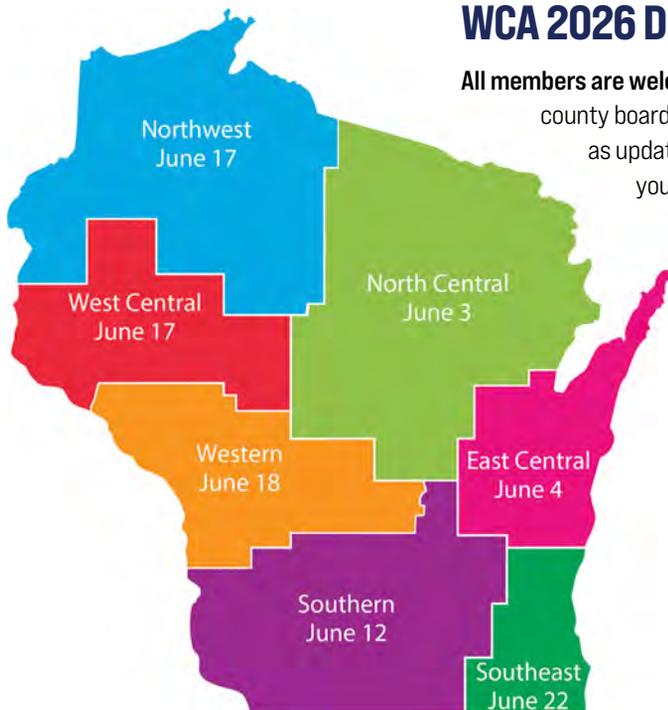
Local Government Education
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Visit wicounties.org for details and to register.

- **Monday, May 11:** Iowa County Board Room, Dodgeville
- **Wednesday, May 13:** Comfort Inn and Suites, Beaver Dam
- **Thursday, May 14:** Mid-State Technical College, Stevens Point
- **Friday, May 15:** Comfort Suites Hotel Rock Garden, Green Bay
- **Wednesday, May 20:** Florian Gardens, Eau Claire
- **Thursday, May 21:** Holiday Inn Express, Hayward
- **Friday, May 22:** Quality Inn, Rhinelander
- **VIRTUAL OPTION** (*attend all three*): June 1, 8 and 15

WCA 2026 DISTRICT MEETINGS

All members are welcome at the WCA 2026 District Meetings in June. They will include a county board supervisor roles and responsibilities refresher from Attolles Law, as well as updates from Forward Analytics and the WCA Government Affairs team. Watch your inbox for an invitation.



North Central Region: Wednesday, June 3, 12–2 p.m.
Hilton Garden Inn Wausau

East Central Region: Thursday, June 4, 8:30–10:30 a.m.
Hilton Appleton Paper Valley

Southern Region: Friday, June 12, 8:30–10:30 a.m.
Glacier Canyon Conference Center, Wisconsin Dells

Northwest Region: Wednesday, June 17, 8:30–10:30 a.m.
Location TBD

West Central Region: Wednesday, June 17, 3–5 p.m.
Florian Gardens, Eau Claire

Western Region: Thursday, June 18, 8:30–10:30 a.m.
Three Bears Resort, Warrens

Southeast Region: Monday, June 22, 8:30–10:30 a.m.
The Ingleside Hotel, Pewaukee

**GHT/COUNTY MUTUAL 2026
SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

Applications are being accepted until May 15 for scholarships to a Wisconsin college or university from the WCA Group Health Trust and the Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation. Visit wcaght.org and wisconsincountymutual.org for details.



**America250: Celebrating 250
Years of History**

This year, the United States is celebrating its semiquincentennial. To commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, events are being held across the nation. For information about Wisconsin events and resources, visit the Wisconsin Historical Society's website at bit.ly/WHS_250th.



**April is National County
Government Month**

Celebrate your county! April is National County Government Month. Visit bit.ly/CtyGovtMonth to explore the National Association of Counties' toolkit for ideas to help your county participate.

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Call for Resolutions

WCA 2026 ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING | DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS 4:30 P.M. ON JUNE 22, 2026

Each year, counties have the opportunity to submit resolutions for consideration at the Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Business Meeting, held in conjunction with the WCA Annual Conference in September. Resolutions adopted at the Annual Business Meeting become part of the WCA Platform.

The WCA Constitution requires all resolutions to be submitted to the WCA president & CEO no later than 90 days prior to the Annual Business Meeting. Therefore, all resolutions must be submitted to the WCA office no later than 4:30 p.m. on Monday, June 22, 2026, to be considered at the 2026 Annual Business Meeting. All resolutions submitted by the deadline will be referred to the appropriate steering committee, as well as the WCA Resolutions Committee, prior to action at the Annual Business Meeting.

Please keep the following in mind when submitting resolutions for the Annual Business Meeting:

1. All resolutions submitted must be adopted by your full county board (please send an official copy for verification purposes).
2. Any resolution submitted must be on a matter of public policy impacting a county's powers or responsibilities in the Wisconsin statutes.
3. Resolutions must be submitted with a cover memo

indicating that the resolutions are submitted for consideration at the Annual Business Meeting.

4. Resolutions may be submitted in any one of the following ways: mailed to the WCA office: 22 E. Mifflin St., Suite 900, Madison, WI 53703; faxed to 608-663-7189; or emailed to diedrick@wicounties.org.
5. If possible, please also email a Microsoft Word or text version of the resolutions to the WCA office. This will allow for quicker processing of the resolution by WCA staff. You will still need to send an official copy of each resolution so staff can verify that action on the resolution was taken by the full county board.
6. Once the WCA office receives your resolution, a confirmation notice will be sent to the county clerk. If you do not receive a confirmation notice by June 23, 2026, please contact the WCA office to ensure your county's resolutions were received.

All resolutions received by the deadline will be considered at the Annual Business Meeting, scheduled to take place on Sunday, Sept. 20, 2026.

If you have any questions regarding the resolutions process, contact WCA Director of Outreach and Member Engagement Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf at 608-663-7188 or diedrick@wicounties.org.

The WCA Annual Conference will be held from Sept. 20-22, 2026, in Sauk County.

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EPA Announces Repeal of 2009 Endangerment Finding for Greenhouse Gases

Adapted from an article by National Association of Counties staff

On Feb. 12, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced it was repealing the 2009 Endangerment Finding, which is the basis for regulating greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act. The repeal removes the EPA's authority to regulate the emissions because they harm human health, casting doubt on other federal regulatory frameworks of greenhouse gases.



and patterns. The finding allowed the EPA to regulate motor vehicles, heavy-duty engines and power plants as sources of greenhouse gas emissions. In its announcement, the EPA argued that the Clean

Air Act does not give the agency the authority to consider public health or welfare effects that are not closely associated with the point source of emissions.

Additionally, the EPA announced that eliminating motor vehicle emission standards for greenhouse gases would occur immediately alongside the repeal of the 2009 Endangerment Finding.

► What is the Endangerment Finding?

The Endangerment Finding is a 2009 EPA determination that the combined emissions of six greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, endanger “the public health and the public welfare of current and future generations” due to their role in changing climate conditions

► What is the impact on counties?

As stewards with the federal government, counties strive to uphold environmental health and quality and must respond to changing and unpredictable weather patterns. Regardless of the cause of environmental changes, counties support federal programs that provide opportunities to build resilience and mitigate their future impacts.

Likewise, as stewards of local public health, counties ask the EPA to carefully consider the impact of regulatory changes to motor vehicle emissions on local air quality. Under the Clean Air Act, states and local governments are generally preempted from imposing stricter emissions standards than the federal government's.

► What happens next?

Several states pledged to challenge the EPA's action in court, and the case will likely be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court before a final determination on the repeal can be made. The repeal also casts doubt on other federal regulations that were predicated on the finding, including emissions regulations on power plants and other engines. ■

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Environmental groups in Wisconsin have joined the coalition that has filed a lawsuit to stop the repeal of the Endangerment Finding. Both Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, who is currently serving as co-chair of the U.S. Climate Alliance, and Attorney General Josh Kaul have issued statements opposing the repeal.

Wisconsin County Officials Visit Capitol Hill to Advocate for Priorities and Thank Federal Delegation

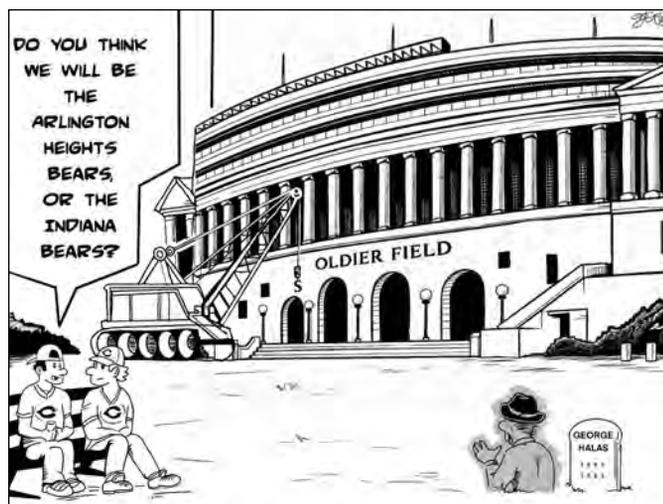
Wisconsin county officials and WCA staff traveled to Washington, D.C., in February to advocate for critical funding during the National Association of Counties 2026 Legislative Conference. Their focus was on urging Wisconsin's congressional delegation to support Medicaid and transportation funding.

The county officials who attended included:

- **Dunn County:** Sara Benedict, Criminal Justice Director
- **Kenosha County:** Rosalind Brown, Board Supervisor; Samantha Kerkman, County Executive; and Sarah Kirby, Board Supervisor
- **Marathon County:** Matt Bootz, Board Supervisor; and Kurt Gibbs, Board Chair
- **Marquette County:** Paul VanTreeck, Building and Grounds Superintendent
- **Milwaukee County:** David Crowley, County Executive; Katie Domina, Director of Government Affairs; and Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Board Chairwoman
- **Sauk County:** Timothy McCumber, Board Chair
- **Sheboygan County:** Keith Ablor, Board Supervisor; Alayne Krause, County Administrator; and Thomas Wegner, Board Supervisor
- **Washington County:** Ashley Reichert, County Clerk
- **Waukesha County:** Allison Bussler, Public Works Director; Sarah Fraley, Legislative Policy Advisor; James Heinrich, Board Supervisor; Larry Nelson, Board Supervisor; and Sarah Spaeth, Board Chief of Staff
- **Winnebago County:** Steven Binder, Board Supervisor
- **Wood County:** Lance Pliml, Board Chair

The participants made a point to thank Sen. Tammy Baldwin, as well as Wisconsin Reps. Scott Fitzgerald, Gwen Moore, Derrick Van Orden, and Tony Wied, for their support for congressionally directed spending projects. Thanks to their efforts, 12 counties are receiving nearly \$32 million for the following projects:

- **Ashland County:** Emergency services radio infrastructure
- **Bayfield County:** Rural first responders lift assist team
- **Brown County:** Green Bay Austin Straubel International Airport taxiway and apron infrastructure rehabilitation
- **Chippewa County:** County mortuary
- **Crawford County Sheriff:** Public safety radios
- **Dodge County Housing Authority:** Childcare center
- **Fond du Lac County:** Sheriff's Office mobile command post
- **Milwaukee County:** Department of Transportation and the Kosciuszko Community Center
- **Monroe County:** Cty Hwy ET multimodal and freight corridor
- **Racine County:** Mental health facility
- **Walworth County:** Community-based residential facility
- **Waukesha County:** Cty Hwy O/Moorland Road project





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LEGAL ISSUES

RELATING TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Short-Term Rental Regulation in Wisconsin Counties

By Rebecca Roeker and Malia Malone, Attorneys, Attolles Law, s.c.

As short-term rental platforms like VRBO and Airbnb continue to grow, counties must balance key legal principles when opting to regulate short-term rentals. This article discusses Wisconsin’s “right to rent” law and updated lodging licensure rules adopted by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, as well as practical guidance for a county to consider when reviewing or adopting a short-term rental ordinance.

▶ Wisconsin’s “right to rent” law and impacts on county regulation of short-term rentals

Wisconsin’s “right to rent” law, set forth in Wis. Stat. § 66.1014, stipulates how counties may regulate short-term rentals in terms of timing.¹ Generally, a county may not prohibit renting a “residential dwelling” for 7 consecutive days or longer.² A county may limit short-term rentals of “more than 6 but fewer than 30 consecutive days” to a consecutive period, and a county may limit the total number of days within a 365-day period in which a residential dwelling may be rented to 180 consecutive days.⁴ However, a county may not specify when that 180-day period will be.⁵ A county’s time limitation must apply to rental periods of more than six but fewer than 30 consecutive days.⁶

The Wisconsin Court of Appeals’ holding in *Wisconsin Realtors Association, Inc. v. City of Neenah*⁷ describes Wis. Stat. § 66.1014’s core rule: political subdivisions may not enact or enforce an ordinance that prohibits renting a residential dwelling for seven consecutive days or longer, and local ordinances that logically conflict with that protection are preempted and void.⁸ This case also illustrates that local restrictions that function as a ban on short-term rentals, such as a requirement that the short-term rental be the owner’s primary residence, are vulnerable to challenges based on the preemption of such regulations by Wis. Stat. § 66.1014. Counties should avoid

“owner-occupancy” conditions until a clear statutory authorization for such regulations is implemented.

▶ DATCP and ATCP 72’s Lodging Rules: Changes in 2026

Operating a short-term rental in Wisconsin often triggers statewide lodging licensure. DATCP is tasked with statewide oversight of lodging establishments, such as hotels/motels and “tourist rooming houses,” which include vacation homes/cabins/cottages rented to tourists or transients as short-term rentals. An owner must obtain a permit to operate a tourist rooming house from DATCP or from a local health department with agent status.⁹

DATCP undertook substantial revisions to Wis. Admin. Code Ch. ATCP 72 in January 2023, with the primary goal of updating safety standards, terminology, and inspection requirements, and updating water supply and testing requirements. The revisions to ATCP 72 became effective Jan. 25, 2026. DATCP has provided helpful information for owners, neighbors and regulating bodies to assist in understanding the revisions to Wis. Admin. Code Ch. ATCP 72, including a “Changes to ATCP 72” fact sheet.¹⁰ The fact sheet is particularly useful for county officials because it notes the material changes affecting county ordinances that use “proof of state licensure,” as well as other points that a county ordinance may model after state standards.

Key updates from the ATCP 72 revisions that may affect county short-term rental programs include:

- License structure and terminology: The revised ATCP 72 groups licensing into three license types: hotel/motel, tourist rooming house, and specialty lodging unit. Each group includes a new fee table and plan review authority for new or altered facilities. For counties, ordinance text should avoid outdated license terms and instead require the appropriate ATCP 72 lodging license applicable to the operation.

- **Water supply and private wells:** ATCP 72.16 includes provisions for shared wells, minimum hot-water temperature, response to water disruptions, and annual private well testing (bacteriological and nitrate), as well as procedures for waterborne disease outbreaks and prevention steps for Legionella.
- **Building safety and sleeping-room standards:** ATCP 72.18 summarizes requirements including handrails/guards, ceiling height, bed egress aisle clearance, bunk bed standards, exiting requirements from sleeping rooms by floor level, and evacuation diagram requirements, along with maintenance expectations for emergency lighting, extinguishers, ventilation, smoke alarms, and carbon monoxide alarms.
- **Guest registration data fields:** ATCP 72.24 adds contact information fields (phone number, mailing address, or email) to the guest register. If a county ordinance similarly requires guest logs, a county may avoid duplicative or more expansive data collection unless there is a clear local need.
- **“Specialty lodging”:** While counties commonly see nature-based lodging, such as small cabins in large wooded areas, yurts, “glamping,” or accessory lodging on farm properties, the ATCP 72 update signals a regulatory category for “specialty lodging” with exemptions tied to the absence of interior potable plumbing or water-carried fixtures and related operational limits.¹¹ Counties should treat these as potential short-term rentals while ensuring that licensing requirements track the correct ATCP 72 category (“tourist rooming house” vs. “specialty lodging” vs. “hotel/motel”), rather than assuming every listing should be classified as a tourist rooming house.

► Practical guidance for county ordinances

A county short-term rental ordinance is easiest to defend — and to administer — when it is written as an integrated system rather than a list of isolated restrictions.

► What does a Non-Zoning Short-Term Rental Ordinance Look Like?

Many Wisconsin counties choose to regulate short-term rentals under the zoning authority in Wis. Stat. § 59.69. However, there may be reasons why a county elects to regulate them under a different regulatory scheme.

For example, to achieve greater efficiency and a streamlined process, Sawyer County adopted a short-term rental ordinance that “piggybacks” on the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection licensure process. The ordinance uses the work the county

A county may start by picking the regulatory “framework,” and then follow the required adoption procedures. If the ordinance regulates land use by zoning district and controls the circumstances under which short-term rentals can occur, it is likely a zoning ordinance and must be adopted through the required zoning procedures.

The Wisconsin Court of Appeals’ recent published decision in *Wildwood Estate, LLC v. Village of Summit*¹² illustrates the importance of following the proper procedures in adopting a short-term rental ordinance. In *Wildwood*, the court held that a short-term rental ordinance, which was adopted as a general licensing ordinance but functioned as a zoning ordinance by regulating where and when short-term rentals may occur, was void when adopted outside the required zoning process. By failing to follow the procedural requirements that accompany a zoning ordinance, the village violated the owner’s procedural due process rights, and the ordinance was deemed void and unenforceable as a zoning ordinance.¹³ The *Wildwood* case illustrates the risk of using the general “police power” to adopt a general licensing ordinance when the ordinance is actually a zoning ordinance and requires procedural due process protections to “avoid unduly infringing on individuals’ property rights.”¹⁴

After selecting the framework, a county may focus on mitigating potential negative impacts of a short-term rental, such as excessive noise, occupancy beyond septic design, parking overflow, and excessive trash. While not having been tested in a Wisconsin published case, the following points are likely acceptable subjects for county regulation:

- Proof of ATCP 72 licensure
- Duration requirements, including prohibiting short-term rentals less than seven days and prohibiting rental for more than 180 days within a consecutive 365-day period

Continued on page 46

completes as DATCP’s agent under Wis. Stat. § 97.615 and Wis. Admin. Code Ch. ATCP 74, while also addressing specific county conditions, but without going as far as a zoning ordinance that requires additional procedural due process requirements and administrative overlap. The result is appropriate county regulation of short-term rentals that reflects the unique characteristics of Sawyer County, efficient use of county staff time and resources, and a seamless process for owners and operators to secure the DATCP and county licenses.



Continued from page 45

- Garbage receptacles and removal
- Compliance with building requirements, such as smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and exit points that are consistent with ATCP 72
- Prohibiting loose dogs or other unattended animals
- “House rules” to be posted indoors on premises
- The designation of an owner or agent, who is located within a reasonable distance, as a contact for renters and neighbors
- Compliance with tax reporting laws
- Application materials showing site plan, floor plan, parking plan, and other general use information
- Property insurance in reasonable amounts
- Inspection protocols, such as those included in the updated ATCP 72 standards

► Conclusion

As the short-term rental market shows no signs of slowing down, Wisconsin counties will continue to face questions regarding regulation. It is imperative to stay informed of the

changes in state law and how those changes may impact your county’s ordinance. Please contact your county corporation counsel with any specific legal questions or reach out to the WCA with additional questions.

Attolles Law, s.c. works on behalf of Wisconsin counties, school districts, and other public entities across the state of Wisconsin. Its president & CEO, Andy Phillips, has served as outside general counsel for the Wisconsin Counties Association for more than 20 years.

1. See Wis. Stat. § 66.1014(1)(a).
2. Wis. Stat. § 66.1014(1)(b) defines “residential dwelling” as “any building, structure, or part of a building or structure, that is used or intended to be used as a home, residence, or sleeping place by one person or two or more persons maintaining a common household, to the exclusion of all others.”
3. Wis. Stat. § 66.1014(2)(a).
4. See Wis. Stat. § 66.1014(2)(d)1.
5. *Id.*
6. *Id.*
7. Wisconsin Realtors Association, Inc. v. City of Neenah, 2025 WI App 49 ¶13.
8. See *id.*
9. See Wis. Stat. § 97.605; Wis. Stat. § 97.615(2).
10. DATCP’s Fact Sheet may be found at: datcp.wi.gov/Documents2/ChangesATCP72FactSheet.pdf.
11. See Wis. Admin. Code Ch. ATCP 72.27–72.29.
12. See Wildwood Estate, LLC v. Village of Summit, 25 WI App 47.
13. *Id.* at ¶ 44; ¶ 38.
14. See Zwiefelhofer v. Town of Cooks Valley, 2012 WI 7, ¶¶6–7.

■ CASE STUDY: Polk County

Polk County’s short-term rental framework is useful as a “real-world” case study, combining shoreland zoning conditions, a permit workflow, and active litigation that is shaping how association challenges proceed.

■ Ordinance structure and key provisions

Polk County’s amended Shoreland Protection Zoning Ordinance treats a “tourist rooming house” as a change in use requiring a land use permit and imposes detailed conditions, including occupancy caps tied to septic/bedroom logic (eight overnight; 12 daytime); accessory structures without sleeping accommodations; impervious-surface parking; a 24-hour public contact number; quiet hours; septic inspection; legal-bedroom verification; and advertisement disclosure of permit and health department license numbers.

The county’s current permit application form adds provisions that matter for consistency and defensibility by explicitly referencing terms from Wis. Stat. § 66.1014. For example, it references the 180-day/consecutive-day concept from Wis. Stat. § 66.1014(2)(d). As counties draft ordinances, it is important to keep the ordinance text, application forms, and enforcement policies synchronized. If one document states “24 weeks/174 days” and another states “180 days,” the county should resolve the discrepancy to avoid arbitrary enforcement claims.

■ Enforcement toolbox

Polk County’s broader Comprehensive Land Use Ordinance includes general permit revocation language, authorizes stop-work orders, and references forfeitures and injunctive/nuisance remedies as enforcement pathways. For counties, this is a reminder that short-term rental enforcement works best when it uses the same graduated tools already familiar to zoning staff: corrective notices, permit conditions, permit revocation/nonrenewal, forfeitures, and even injunctive relief in chronic cases.

■ Litigation and lessons learned

In early 2026, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals issued a decision in Wisconsin Realtors Association, Inc. v. Polk County that focused on whether the association had standing to sue. The court found that the association can proceed on its challenge to the county’s ordinance amendments that address short-term rentals.¹ Even though the decision is procedural, it signals that county short-term rental amendments can be litigated when challengers can show concrete impacts on their members. It emphasizes the importance of making careful legislative records, clear findings, and consistent administration and enforcement.

1. See Wisconsin Realtors Association v. Polk County, Appeal No. 24AP1638, publication decision was still pending at the time this article was drafted.

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