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AGENDA NOTICE (2/27/2026)

THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF EAGLE RIVER WILL HOLD A MEETING ON THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026, AT 5:00 P.M. AT CITY HALL, 525 E. MAPLE STREET IN EAGLE RIVER.

Notice is hereby given that a majority of the City Council of the City of Eagle River may be attending scheduled Planning Commission meetings either in person or via zoom:

This constitutes a meeting of the City Council pursuant to State ex rel. Badke v. Greendale Village Bd., 173 Wis. 2d 553, 494 N.W.2d 409 (1993), and must be noticed as such, although the Council will not take any formal action at these meetings.

This meeting will be available by Zoom at the following link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85111695208?pwd=x5pMv8crrbsPuYwefObTYbJG0m83b3.1>

Meeting ID: 851 1169 5208

Passcode: 963936

- 1) Call to Order.
- 2) Roll Call.
- 3) Approval of minutes.
- 4) Public Hearings, discussion and possible action on the following agenda item(s):
 - a) Lions Club request for final approval for municipal bathrooms at Gremban Park.
 - b) Comprehensive Plan Update – Initial meeting with North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- 5) Adjournment.

Robin Ginner, City Administrator

Please note that, upon reasonable notice, at least 24 hours in advance, efforts will be made to accommodate the needs of disabled individuals through appropriate aids and services, or provide a video link for meetings.

For additional information to request this service, please contact the City Clerk's Office at 715-479-8682 ext. 224, 525 E. Maple Street, P.O. Box 1269, Eagle River WI 54521.

February 5, 2026

A meeting of the Plan Commission of the City of Eagle River was called to order at 5:00pm by Mayor Deb Brown.

Roll Call: Alex Forer, Brad Adamovich, Adam Grassl, John Hletko, Kim Schaffer, Deb Brown. Also in attendance Robin Ginner and Becky Bolte Absent: Mary Horant

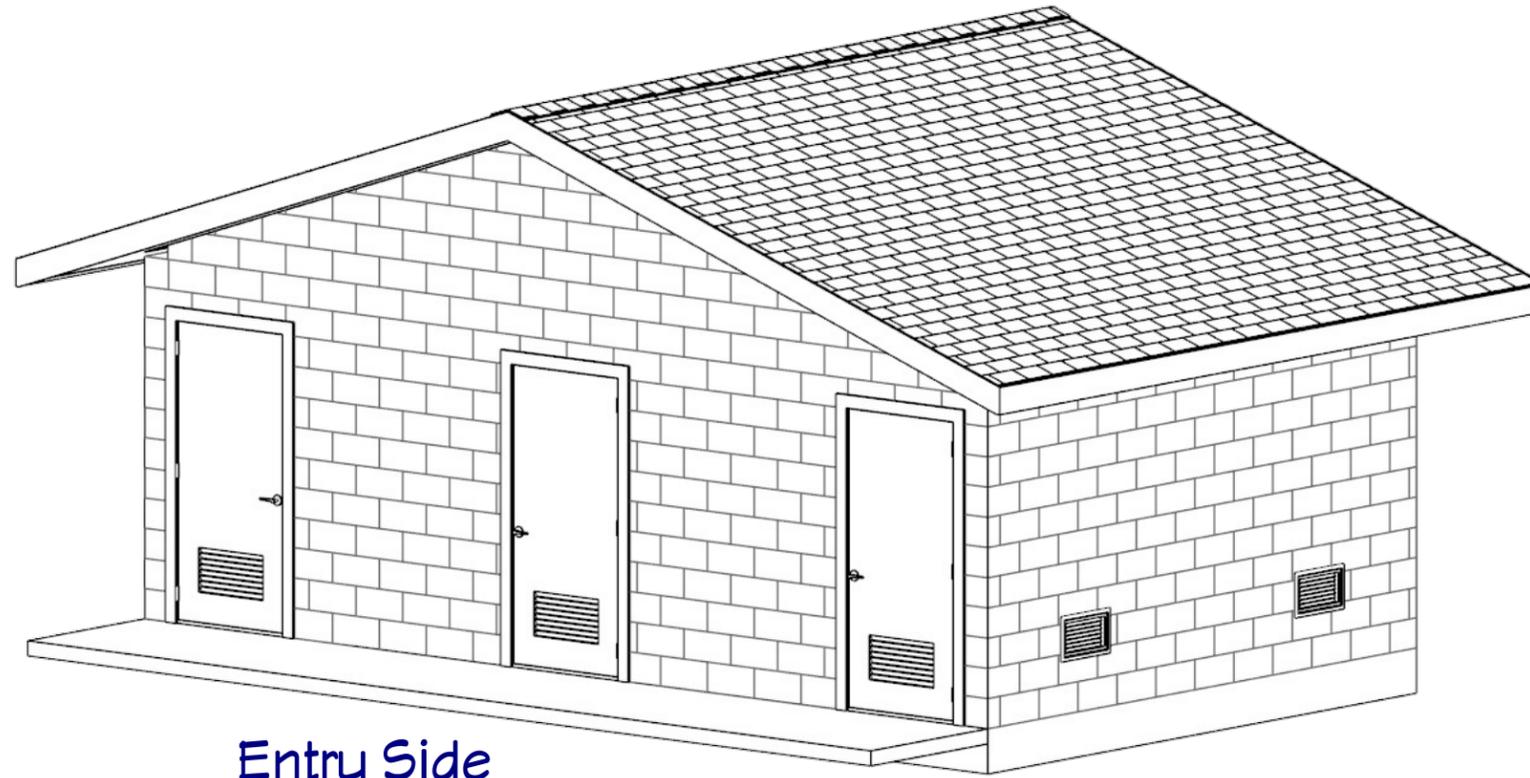
Motion by Forer, 2nd by Hletko to approve the minutes of the 1-8-2026 meeting. Carried, all.

a) Discussion Only: God's Gathering Place request for annexation of Parcel 14-1807, described as PRT NE NW LNG S HWY, into the City of Eagle River as a tax-exempt entity. Bill Lochte was present representing God's Gathering Place. Ginner presented that no formal annexation request had been submitted. Ginner presented that the entity is interested in the purchase of Town of Lincoln parcel 14-1807 and annexing into the City of Eagle River for the purpose of connecting to the city sewer and water system with estimated commercial usage for 200-250 people. Lochte presented the parcel is 5.83 acres and they would like to build a tax exempt improvement with an estimated improvement value of over \$1 million on the southern 3 acres off Pine St with intentions to subdivide and sell the remaining acreage on the Wall Street side. Lochte reported that the DOT has provided Gods Gathering Place written access approval from southern highway side of the parcel, (Pine Street). To move forward with an offer to purchase, Lochte is looking for a feel from the Commission on likelihood of annexation approval. Discussion on the anticipated tax exempt nature of part or all of the parcel and possibility of a PILOT if annexed. Discussion on the logistics of connecting the southern three acres of the parcel to the city sewer and water system and the cost to the owner to do so for a commercial building. Discussion on what the real cost to the city would be as it is currently not city property and landowner would be responsible for all costs associated with sewer and water connection. Commissioners requested city staff try to quantify what the financial burden would be to the City of Eagle River and their taxpayers to annex the parcel with an intended tax exempt status into the city.

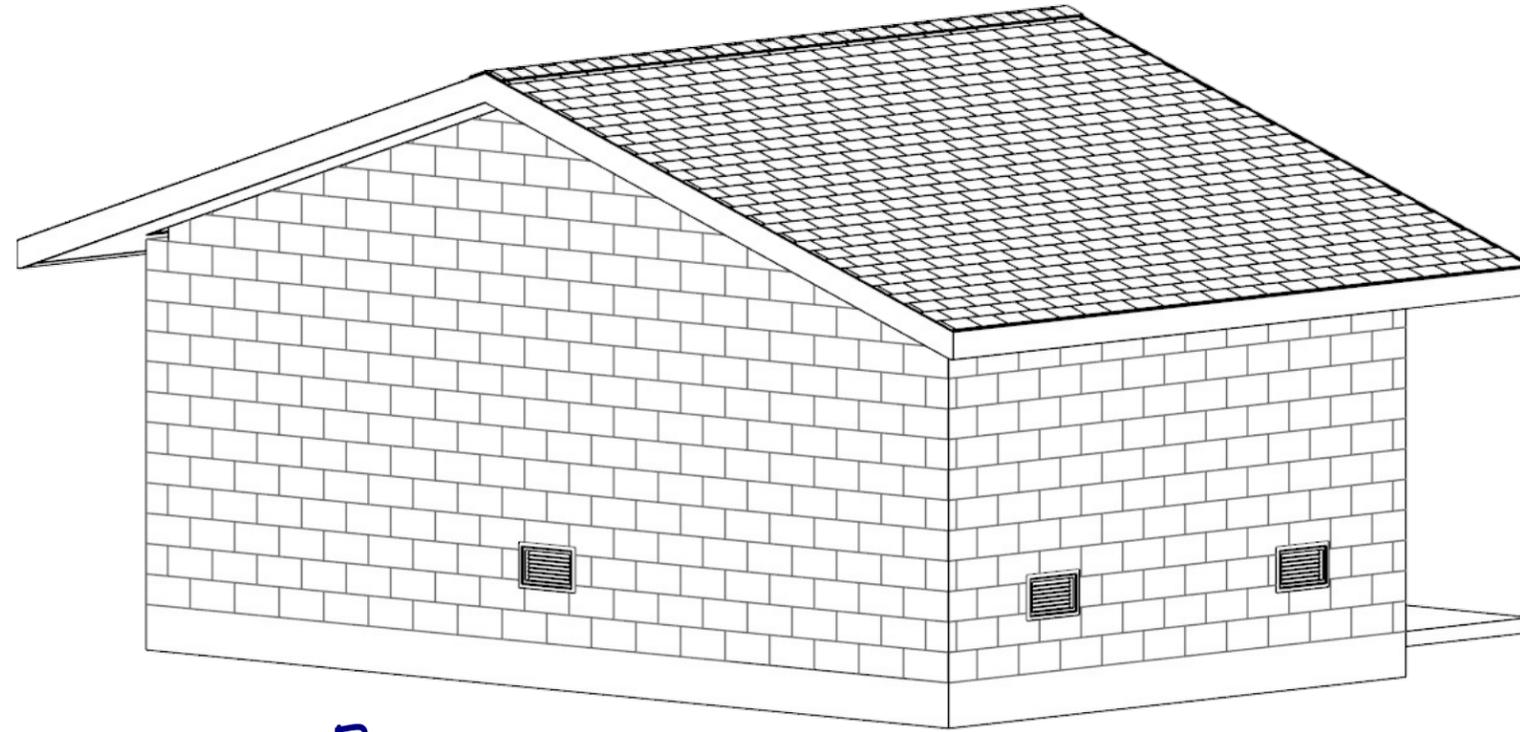
b) Resolution – Adopting a Public Participation Plan (PPP) for the Comprehensive Plan Update: Ginner presented that although our current Comprehensive Plan is dated for 2013-2033, WI State Statutes require that a comprehensive plan be updated every ten years. Ginner stated that as part of the comprehensive plan update, the City of Eagle River recognizes the importance of public participation and that the Public Participation Plan is a required component of the comprehensive plan update. Grassl read aloud the methodology parts of the presented Resolution. Ginner stated North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission has been secured to guide the city through the comprehensive plan update process and the initial meeting with them is scheduled for March 5th at 5pm at the regular Planning Commission meeting. *Motion by Hletko, 2nd by Grassl to recommend City Council adoption of Resolution as presented to adopt a Public Participation Plan as a part of the Comprehensive Plan Update. Carried on a roll call vote, all.*

Motion by Hletko, 2nd by Forer to adjourn at 5:53PM.

Becky J Bolte – Clerk



Entry Side



Rear

PRELIMINARY
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION



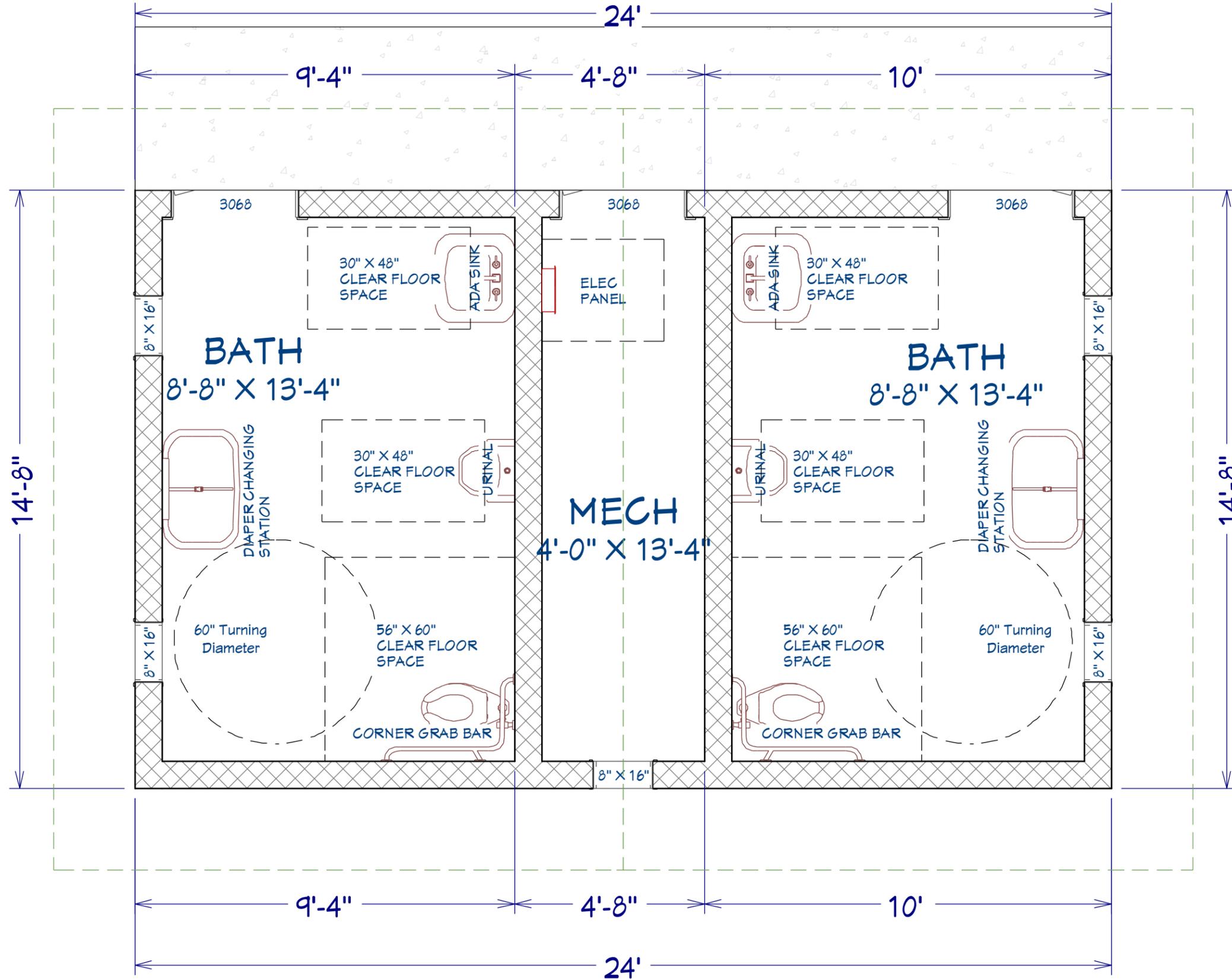
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Park Bath

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3/8"=1'-0"
DATE: 2/2/2026
DRAWN BY:

SHEET NUMBER
A-1
Revision #: 3



PRELIMINARY
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

NORTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Telephone: 715-849-5510, ext. 306 Fax: 715-849-5110
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MEMORANDUM:

To: City of Eagle River Plan Commission
From: Eric Sonnleitner
Re: Eagle River Comprehensive Plan First Meeting
Date: February 25, 2026

Tasks for us at the March 5th, 2026 Comprehensive Plan Meeting:

1. Overview of the plan update process.
2. Review and recommendation of a public participation plan.
3. Review of the existing comprehensive plan.
4. Review of Chapters 1-3 (Demographics, Natural Resources, and Housing) and related maps.
5. Discussion of planning issues.

Please review the attached sample public participation plan. We can discuss any other ideas to involve the public in the process at the meeting.

Also think about the existing comprehensive plan and suggestions on how to make it better and more useful to the City. Was the plan used regularly to prioritize improvements or to evaluate developments? Why or why not? Is there any information that would be useful to the City in planning for the future that is missing?

Please review the draft chapters, the issues identified (these are identified from the City's previous comprehensive plan) and think about the planning issues you think the City is currently facing, will be facing in the near future, and will be facing over the next 20 years. These issues could include additional parks or recreation space, transportation issues, economic development, land use, housing, etc. We will discuss whether the existing issues still apply, and whether there are new issues facing the community.

Review the map for accuracy and think about any additional mapping information that would be useful to the community or the planning effort.

Please contact me if you have any questions prior to the meeting.

CITY OF EAGLE RIVER *Wisconsin*

Snowmobile Capital of the World ★ ATV/UTV Capital of Wisconsin ★ Hockey Capital of Wisconsin

RESOLUTION NO. 1073

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN (PPP) FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

WHEREAS, the City of Eagle River is required under Wisconsin Statutes §66.1001 to maintain a Comprehensive Plan to guide future growth, development and land use decisions; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin Statutes §66.1001(4)(a) requires that a local governmental unit adopt written procedures designed to foster public participation throughout the comprehensive planning process; and

WHEREAS, the City of Eagle River recognizes that meaningful public participation is essential to the development of a Comprehensive Plan that reflects community values, priorities and long-term goals; and

WHEREAS, the City Plan Commission has provided oversight of the Comprehensive Plan update process and has reviewed the proposed Public Participation Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Public Participation Plan outlines the methods by which the City will inform, engage and solicit input from residents, property owners, stakeholders and other interested parties throughout the planning process; and

WHEREAS, the Public Participation Plan includes provisions for public notice of meetings, access to plan materials, online availability of draft documents and maps, a public hearing and distribution of the adopted Comprehensive Plan in accordance with state statute; and

WHEREAS, the Public Participation Plan acknowledges that planning processes may evolve over time and allows for reasonable adjustments as circumstances warrant;

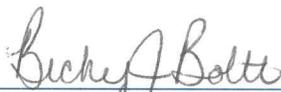
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Eagle River, Vilas County, Wisconsin, that:

1. The Public Participation Plan for the Comprehensive Plan update, as attached hereto and incorporated by reference, is hereby adopted and approved.
2. The Plan Commission and City staff are authorized to implement the Public Participation Plan as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process.
3. The Comprehensive Plan, once adopted, shall serve as a general policy guide for future land use, development and municipal decision-making and shall support the City's existing zoning and regulatory framework.

Adopted this 10th day of February 2026, by the Common Council of the City of Eagle River, Wisconsin.



Debra A Brown, Mayor 2-10-2026



Becky Bolte, Clerk 2-10-2026



Chapter 1

Introduction & Demographics

INTRODUCTION

The City of Eagle River is located in Vilas County, which is situated on the northern border of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Eagle River is the only city in Vilas County and is the county seat. However, it is not the largest municipality in terms of population. Many of the surrounding townships have larger residential populations than the City, which is primarily due to residential subdivisions that are located on many of the County's lakes.

Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law

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

- Demographics
- Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Economic Development
- Land Use
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Implementation

State statutes prescribe a list of topics to address for each of the elements. This chapter reviews demographic data including the total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment, and income levels. Reviewing these trends is critical to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future.

State statutes also indicate that if a local government unit enacts or amends any of the following ordinances, the ordinance must be consistent with that local government unit's comprehensive plan:

- Official mapping established or amended under s. 62.23 (6)
- Local subdivision regulations under s. 236.45 or 236.46
- County zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.69
- City or village zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 62.23 (7)
- Town zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 60.61 or 60.62
- Shorelands or wetlands in shorelands zoning ordinances enacted or amended under s. 59.692, 61.351, 61.353, 62.231 or 62.233

How to Use this Plan

A comprehensive plan is a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive Plans are not meant to serve as land use regulations in themselves, and, instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year horizon for future planning and community decisions. The City's Comprehensive Plan is a dynamic – living document that can be amended at any time. The City's Comprehensive Plan should be used to:

- Guide local officials when making decisions that affect growth and development, especially decisions related to land use
- Guide public and private investment in the City and support grant funding requests
- Examine statistical data and community opinions to provide context for policies in the plan and to form a benchmark for future reference and comparison.

Planning Process

In the beginning of 2026, the City initiated a process to update its plan. The state planning law – 66.1001 – requires that a comprehensive plan be updated every ten years. A variety of Planning Commission meetings were held over the course of 2026 to prepare the plan. A final Planning Commission meeting was held in the [season] of 202X to review the final draft and recommend adoption of the plan by the City Council. The plan was adopted by the City Council in the [season] of 202X.

Public Participation

An important part of any planning process is public involvement. Public involvement provides the citizens of the City an opportunity to express their views, ideas, and opinions on issues that they would like addressed regarding the future development of the City. Local officials use this input to guide policies and decisions with greater awareness of the public's desires and consensus. See the adopted Public Participation Plan in **Appendix A**. The City of Eagle River posted all Planning Commission meetings to invite the public and held a Public Hearing to collect public input.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population and Households

Historical Trends

According to the latest data from the American Community Survey, the City of Eagle River’s population was an estimated 1,528 people in 2024. As shown in **Table 1**, this represents about a six percent increase since 2000. In comparison, the populations of Vilas County and Wisconsin both had faster rates of increase during this time at about 12 and 10 percent respectively.

Table 1: Population					
	2000	2010	2020	2024	% Change 2000-2024
Eagle River	1,443	1,398	1,628	1,528	5.9%
Lincoln	2,579	2,423	2,659	2,738	6.2%
Cloverland	919	1,029	1,068	1,179	28.3%
Washington	1,577	1,451	1,587	1,610	2.1%
Conover	1,137	1,235	1,318	1,294	13.8%
Three Lakes	2,339	2,131	2,413	2,316	-1.0%
Sugar Camp	1,781	1,694	1,819	2,165	21.6%
Vilas County	21,033	21,430	23,047	23,647	12.4%
Wisconsin	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	5,914,872	10.3%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

There were 732 households in the City of Eagle River in 2024, which represents an increase of about 17 percent from the number of households in 2000, as shown in **Table 2**. During the same period, the number of households in Vilas County and Wisconsin both experienced slightly faster household growth. Among surrounding communities, the Town of Cloverland experienced the fastest household growth during this time, increasing by over 40 percent. In 2024, the average household size in the City of Eagle River was 2.09, down from 2.31 in 2000. In comparison, Vilas County’s average household size was 2.12 in 2024, down from 2.32 in 2000.

Table 2: Households

	2000	2010	2020	2024	% Change 2000-2024
Eagle River	626	684	777	732	16.9%
Lincoln	1,111	1,102	1,192	1,234	11.1%
Cloverland	416	470	505	586	40.9%
Washington	683	679	749	823	20.5%
Conover	483	574	640	620	28.4%
Three Lakes	1,031	996	1,153	1,118	8.4%
Sugar Camp	708	729	816	910	28.5%
Vilas County	9,066	9,658	10,804	11,147	23.0%
Wisconsin	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,428,361	2,479,480	18.9%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Projections

Table 3 compares projected population in the City of Eagle River and surrounding communities to Vilas County and Wisconsin, based off population projections conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). The DOA population projections are recognized as Wisconsin’s official population projections and are based on historical population and household growth in the community, with more recent years given a greater weight. According to the DOA projections, the City of Eagle River is projected to significantly decrease in population by 2050.

Table 3: Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	% Change 2020-2050
Eagle River	1,628	1,643	1,589	1,488	-8.6%
Lincoln	2,659	2,683	2,596	2,431	-8.6%
Cloverland	1,068	1,048	987	901	-15.6%
Washington	1,587	1,610	1,565	1,472	-7.2%
Conover	1,318	1,346	1,317	1,246	-5.5%
Three Lakes	2,413	2,488	2,470	2,397	-0.7%
Sugar Camp	1,819	1,822	1,760	1,665	-8.5%
Vilas County	23,047	23,185	22,365	20,885	-9.4%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: WI DOA Official Population Projections

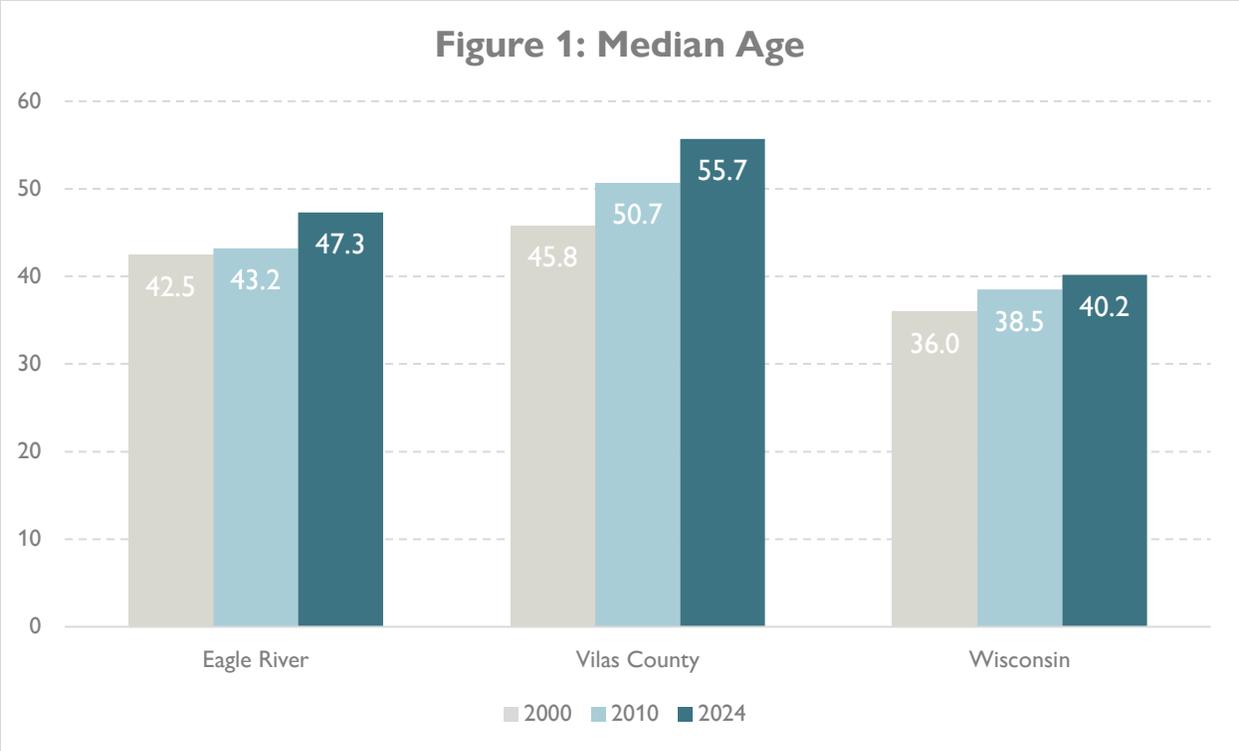
Age Characteristics

As shown in **Figure 1**, the median age in the City of Eagle River was 47.3 in 2024, higher than it was in 2010 (43.2). The City of Eagle River's median age of 47.3 was lower than the median age in Vilas County (55.7) and higher than Wisconsin (40.2) as a whole in 2024. Two age groups are particularly significant, those 65 and over and those under 18. The population under 18 is a dependent population that requires more services including quality childcare, schools, and specialized health care needs. Those 65 and over may require access to healthcare, transportation, and community services.

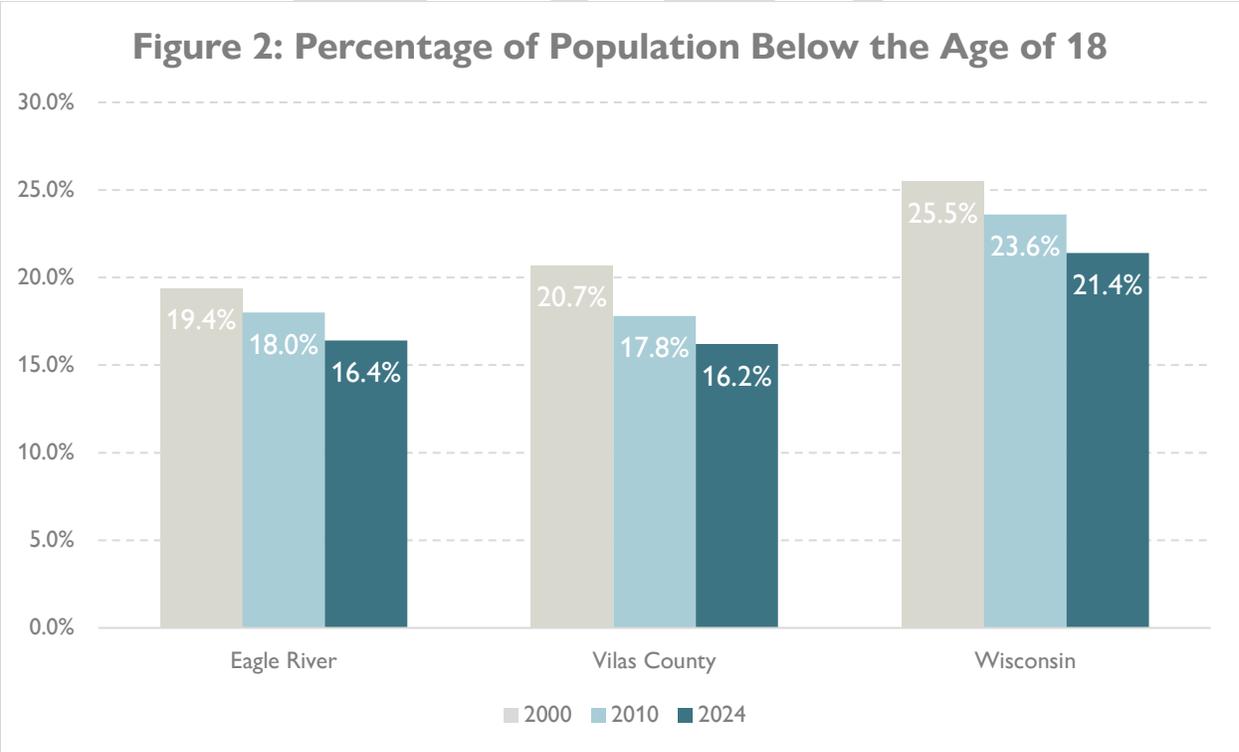
Between 2000 and 2024, the proportion of the population that was age 17 and younger within the City of Eagle River decreased from about 19 percent in 2000 to about 16 percent in 2024, as shown in **Figure 2**. The percentage of the population below the age of 18 also decreased in Vilas County and Wisconsin as well during this time.

Figure 3 compares the proportion of the population ages 65 and older in the City of Eagle River, Vilas County, and Wisconsin. Between 2000 and 2024, the percentage of the population age 65 and older within the City of Eagle River slightly decreased from 26.5 percent in 2000 to 26.0 percent in 2024. In contrast, Vilas County and Wisconsin experienced significant increases in the proportion of the population age 65 and older.

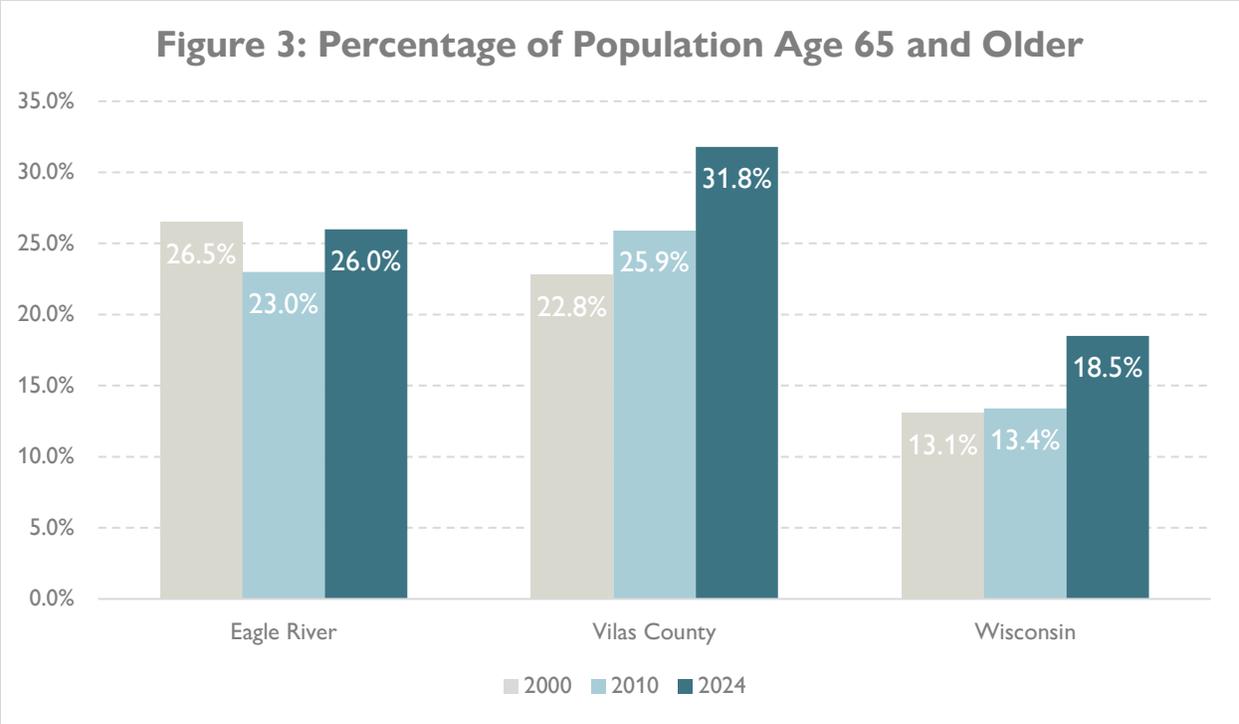
Due to longer life expectancy and the size of the Baby Boomer generation, the 65 and older age group is expected to continue to increase in size. The trend is occurring at the state and national levels and to an even greater degree within the rural Wisconsin counties, especially in the northern one-third of the state. This population trend whereby older age categories increase significantly while younger age categories decline may impact the future labor supply, school system, and health care industry at the national, state, and local levels.



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024



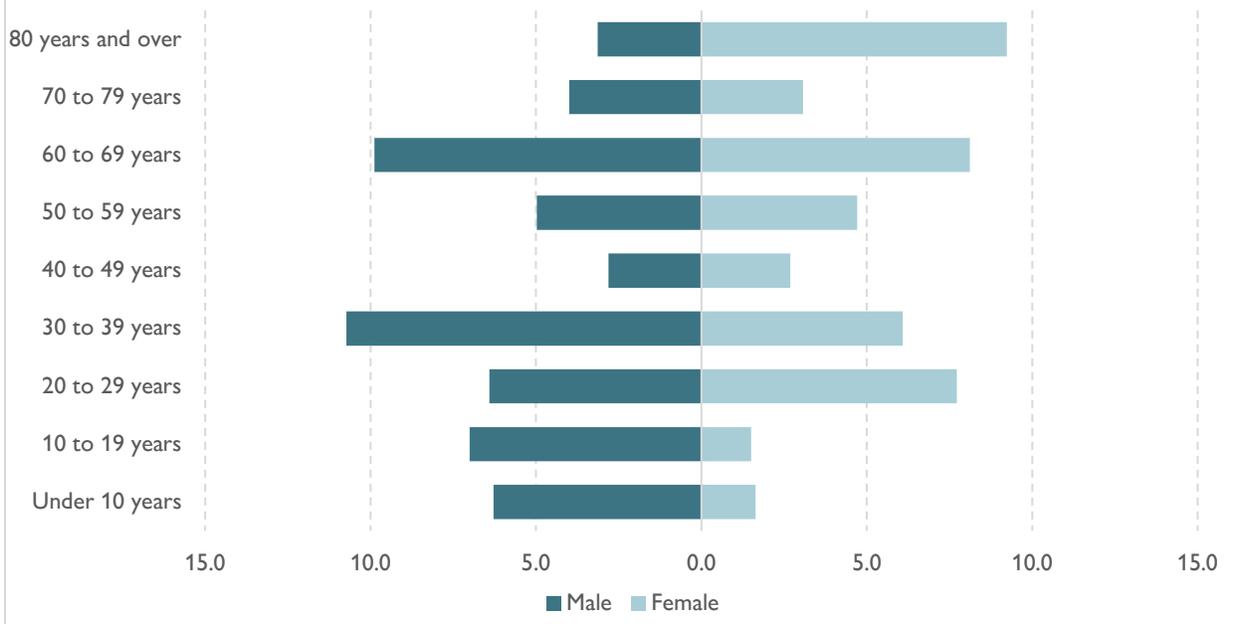
Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

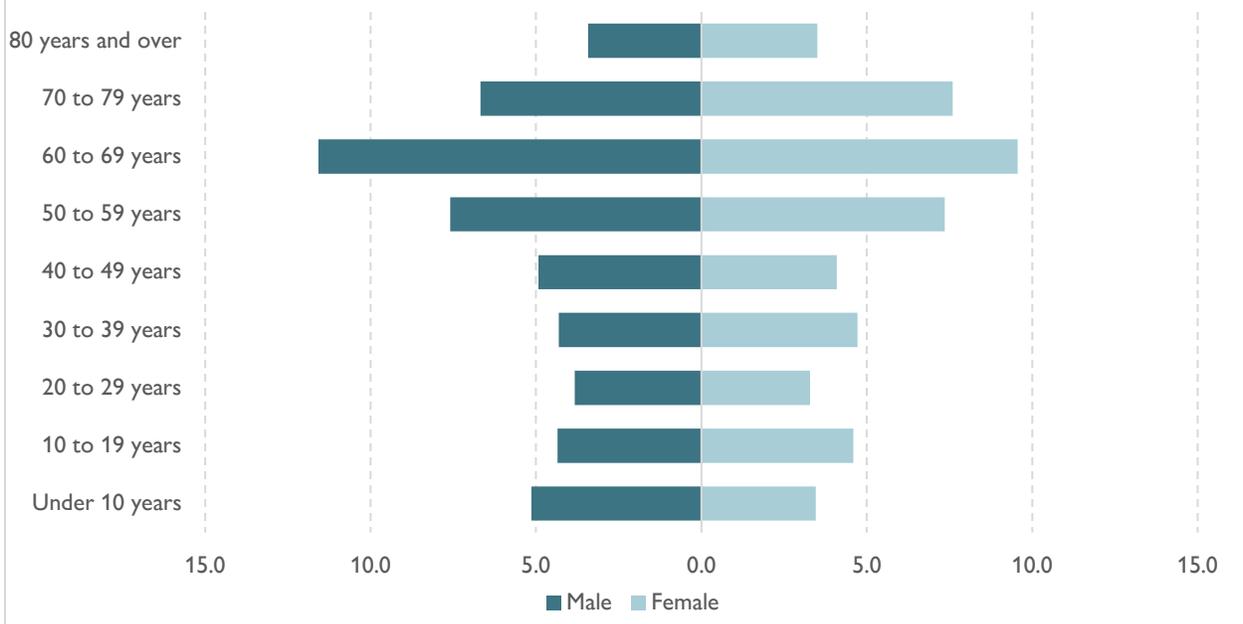
Figures 4 and 5 compare the distribution of age groups for the City of Eagle River and Vilas County. As shown below, both the City and County have a large proportion of residents in the 60-69 age group, indicating that the City and County both have a high concentration of adults either nearing retirement or that are already at retirement age, and both have low concentrations of young adults and children. Eagle River has a significantly higher proportion of residents below the age of 40 than Vilas County, as over 47 percent of the City’s population is below the age of 40, compared to only 33.7 percent of Vilas County’s population.

Figure 4: City of Eagle River Population Pyramid



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Figure 5: Vilas County Population Pyramid

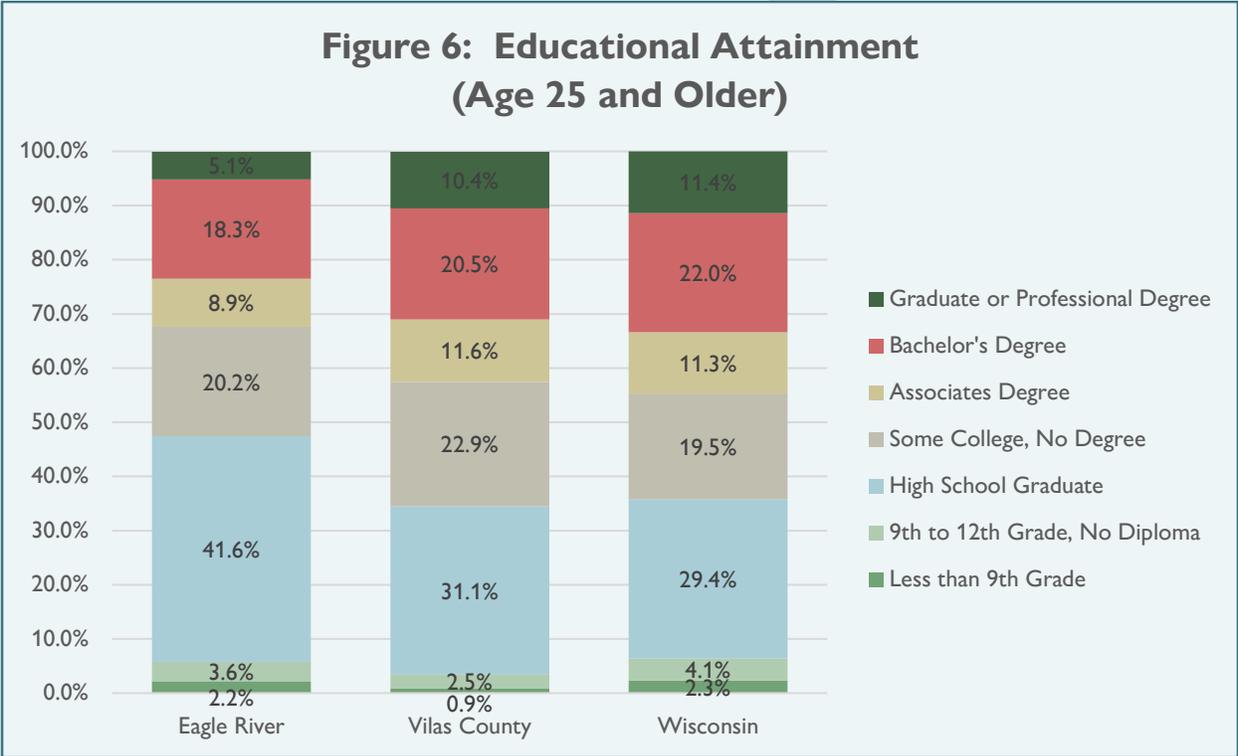


Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Education and Income Levels

Education

Figure 6 compares educational attainment of those in the City of Eagle River to the County and the State by showing the highest level of education completed by residents ages 25 and older. In 2024, over 94 percent of City residents ages 25 and older had a high school education or higher. This was slightly lower than the County and slightly higher than the State. In the City of Eagle River, over 23 percent of the population held bachelor’s or other advanced degrees compared to nearly 31 percent of County residents and over 33 percent of State residents.



Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Income

Median household income and per capita income are two commonly used measures of income. Median household income is the income for the middle point of households, meaning half of all households fall below that income, and half are above. Per capita income is the measure of average total income per person.

Median household income for City of Eagle River residents was \$55,179 in 2024. **Table 4** shows that this was lower than Vilas County and the State of Wisconsin. Median household income within the City of Eagle River was lower than both the County and the State in 2010. When adjusted for inflation, median household income in the City increased by over 54 percent between 2010 and 2024. During this time, median household income increased by 15.5 percent in Vilas County and by 5.5 percent in Wisconsin.

Table 5 illustrates that income per capita in the City of Eagle River was lower than both the County and the State in 2024. The City’s per capita income was also lower than both Vilas County’s and Wisconsin’s in 2010. When adjusted for inflation, per capita income in the City of Eagle River increased by over 30 percent between 2010 and 2024. This was significantly faster than the increases experienced by the County and State during this time.

Table 4: Median Household Income					
Minor Civil Division	2000*	2010*	2024	2000-2024 % Change	2010-2024 % Change
Eagle River	\$43,140	\$35,731	\$55,179	27.9%	54.4%
Vilas County	\$61,682	\$59,255	\$68,431	10.9%	15.5%
Wisconsin	\$80,011	\$73,441	\$77,485	-3.2%	5.5%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)
**: Adjusted for inflation*

Table 5: Per Capita Income					
Minor Civil Division	2000*	2010*	2024	2000-2024 % Change	2010-2024 % Change
Eagle River	\$29,007	\$26,934	\$35,017	20.7%	30.0%
Vilas County	\$33,548	\$38,612	\$43,101	28.5%	11.6%
Wisconsin	\$38,865	\$37,895	\$43,373	11.6%	14.5%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey (2020-2024)
**: Adjusted for inflation*

Employment Characteristics

Tables 6 and 7 illustrate the breakdown of the labor force and employed population living in the City of Eagle River in 2010 and 2024. The “employed population” includes those that are 16 and older. Between 2010 and 2024, the City’s labor force slightly decreased, as there were 10 fewer individuals in the City’s labor force in 2024 than there were in 2010. In contrast, Vilas County and Wisconsin both experienced slight increases in labor force during this time.

Labor force participation indicates the percentage of those 16 years and over that are in the labor force. The labor force participation rate slightly increased within the City of Eagle River from 2010 to 2024, climbing to 53.4 percent in 2024. This is in contrast to the County and the State where labor force participation rates significantly decreased during this time.

Table 6: Labor Force Characteristics

Minor Civil Division	Labor Force			Labor Participation Rate	
	2010	2024	2010-2024 % Change	2010	2024
Eagle River	704	694	-1.4%	52.9%	53.4%
Vilas County	10,718	10,971	2.4%	58.1%	53.9%
Wisconsin	3,078,465	3,136,600	1.9%	69.0%	65.3%

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

In 2024, there were 660 employed residents in Eagle River. This represents a slight decrease in employment among City residents since 2010, as shown in **Table 7**. In contrast, employment increased in Vilas County during the same period, increasing by about 8 percent, while the State experienced a 5.6 percent increase in employment during this time. The U.S. Census classifies individuals as unemployed if they are not working, actively seeking work, and available to accept a job. The unemployment rate in the City was 2.6 percent in 2024, slightly higher than Vilas County’s rate of 2.1 percent and the State’s rate of 2.1 percent.

Table 7: Employment

	2010	2024	2010-2024 % Change	Unemployment Rate
Eagle River	664	660	-0.6%	2.6%
Vilas County	9,764	10,532	7.9%	2.1%
Wisconsin	2,869,310	3,031,042	5.6%	2.1%

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

Table 8: Occupation of Employed Workers

Occupation	Eagle River		Vilas County	
	2000	2024	2000	2024
Management, Professional & Related	126	205	2,338	3,954
Service	109	148	1,901	2,058
Sales & Office	143	157	2,608	2,234
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance	75	66	1,460	1,226
Production, Transportation & Mineral Moving	81	84	961	1,060
Total	534	660	9,268	10,532

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

As shown in **Table 8**, most residents in the City of Eagle River were employed in Management, business, science, and arts occupations. The second sector most represented was the Sales & Office occupation group, followed by Service occupations. From 2000 to 2024, the most significant increase in employment were seen in Management, Professional & Related occupations.

Demographic Snapshot

- The City of Eagle River has experienced an increase in both population and the number of households since 2000. Household growth within the City has outpaced population growth during this time, leading to a decrease in household size.
- The City of Eagle River is projected to experience a significant decrease in population by 2050.
- There is a considerable proportion of the population either entering the retirement phase or already retired. Over a quarter of the City's population in 2024 was age 65 or older.
- The City's median age increased from 43.2 in 2010 to 47.3 in 2024.
- The City of Eagle River has a lower proportion of residents with a high school diploma than the County and a higher proportion than the State, and a lower proportion of residents with a bachelor's degree, or graduate/professional degree than the County and State.
- The City of Eagle River's median household income of \$55,179 in 2024 was lower than the median household incomes of Vilas County and Wisconsin. Additionally, per capita income within the City was also lower than both the County and State in 2024.
- The City's labor participation rate is slightly lower than the County's participation rate and is significantly lower than the State's participation rate, and the City's unemployment rate of 2.6 percent in 2024 is slightly higher than the State and the County.
- Most people in the City of Eagle River work in Management, Professional, and Related occupations.

Chapter 2

Natural, Cultural, & Agricultural Resources

This chapter describes local land and water conditions in detail as well as agricultural resources and cultural heritage. It is important to consider the patterns and interrelations of natural resources on a broader scale because they do not follow geo-political boundaries. In addition, many of the programs for protecting or mitigating impacts to natural resources are administered at the county, state, or federal level. Thus, an overview of recent county-wide natural resource planning efforts is described below. Natural resources covered in this chapter include biology, geology, and geography including terrain, soils, water, forests, wetlands, wildlife, and habitat.

Cultural resources include a community's heritage, archaeological sites and cemeteries, historic buildings and landscapes, historic transportation routes, or traditional cultural properties important to indigenous peoples or other cultural groups. Cultural resources also include arts and the way of life in a community. Cultural resources are those elements around us that signify our heritage and help to evoke the sense of place that makes an area distinct.

Previous Plans and Studies

[Vilas County Land and Water Resource Management Plan, 2025-2035](#)

This Plan provides a framework for local/state/federal conservation program implementation efforts. Implementation of this plan will help protect and improve the valuable water and soil natural resources in Vilas County. Some of the plan's recommendations include protecting shoreland areas, reducing nonpoint source pollution, replace failing septic systems, and reduce wildlife conflicts. A copy is available in the Vilas County Land Conservation Department.

[Vilas County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2023-2027](#)

The primary purpose of this recreation plan is to provide continued direction in meeting the current and future recreation needs of the County. This direction takes the form of an inventory and analysis of outdoor recreational facilities followed by establishing recommendations to meet identified needs. Adoption of this plan and its subsequent acceptance by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) allows for continued eligibility for financial assistance from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON), the Stewardship Fund, and many other federal and state funding programs. A copy is available in the Vilas County Forestry Department.

[Vilas County Farmland Preservation Plan, 2015](#)

The Vilas County Farmland Preservation Plan is required under Chapter 91 of Wisconsin Statutes. The Plan's purpose is to guide and manage farmland preservation and agricultural production capacity from 2015 to 2024. The plan functions as the primary policy document setting forth directions for how the County intends to preserve agricultural production capacity, farmland, soil and water resources, and rural character.

Farmland Preservation Areas – Parcels that meet the Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) mapping criteria. Landowners in this area may apply for farmland preservation income tax credits. No non-agricultural development is planned in the next fifteen years for those areas identified.

Criteria for Farmland Preservation Areas:

- Lands depicted on the Soils Map as farmlands.
- Lands depicted on the Land Use Map as agriculture, cranberry bog, open lands, or woodlands.
- Lands depicted on the Future Land Use Map that allow agriculture or forestry to occur

Lands are excluded if they are any of the following:

- Local, county, state, and federal lands
- “Planned Out” lands on Map 5 of the FPP
- Parcels less than 5 acres
- Tax exempt land

Farmland preservation areas are present throughout the City. However, there are currently no areas of land currently being used for agricultural production purposes within the City.

Vilas County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2006-2020

The mission of the County Forest is to manage, conserve and protect the natural resources within the county forest on a sustainable basis for present and future generations. The Plan contains information about forest resource planning, outdoor recreation planning, silvicultural practices, aesthetic management zones, trails and access control, biological communities, and wildlife species that exist within the county forest. A copy is available in the Vilas County Forestry Department.

USGS Protecting Wisconsin’s Groundwater through Comprehensive Planning

In a joint effort by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the University of Wisconsin System, and the United States Geological Survey, a website was made available with data and information on geology, general hydrology, and groundwater quantity and quality. The website was developed to aid government officials in their comprehensive plans, including this plan. The most recent data available for Vilas County was public in 2007. The Vilas County report can be accessed here: <https://wi.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/index.html>.

Natural Resources

Examining the natural environment is essential to the planning process. For instance, soils, topography and geology can pose limitations to certain types of development, while an inventory of surface water resources, vegetation types, environmentally significant areas, and historical features identify those resources and areas which should be protected from over-development. This section of the plan identifies both the land and water resources of the City.

Water Resources

Surface water resources support the area's economy by drawing tourists and providing a good quality of life for residents. Vilas County contains one of the highest concentrations of natural lakes in the world. Vilas County Shoreland Zoning is in effect. Actual shoreland jurisdiction measurements are coordinated through the County Zoning Department.

Waterbodies within the City include the Wisconsin River (which forms the City's western border), Eagle River, and Silver Lake. Coordination between all levels of government, public and private entities are essential in the operation and continued maintenance of this system. Combined, these waterbodies are significant attractions, which contribute to the entire area's tax base and trades.

The City of Eagle River is part of three watersheds. The majority of the City is located in the Eagle River watershed, a small portion in the northwest corner of the City is located within the Tamarack Pioneer River watershed and the southern portion of City is located within the Sugar Camp Creek watershed. The sub continental surface-water divide determines where surface water will drain. All streams in Eagle River flow into the Mississippi River.

Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters

Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW's) and Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW's) share many of the same environmental and ecological characteristics. The primary difference between the two is that ORW's typically do not have any direct point sources discharging pollutants directly to the water. In addition, any pollutant load discharged to an ORW must meet background water quality at all times. Exceptions are made for certain types of discharge situations to ERW's to allow pollutant loads that are greater than background water quality when human health would otherwise be compromised.

The portion of the Wisconsin River bordering the City is listed as an Outstanding Resource Water, while there are no waterbodies within the City listed as an Exceptional Resource Water.

Impaired Waters

Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires states to develop a list of impaired waters, commonly referred to as the "303(d) list." A waterbody is considered impaired if a) the current water quality does not meet the numeric or narrative criteria in a water quality standard or b) the designated use that is described in Wisconsin Administrative Code is not being achieved. A documented methodology is used to articulate the approach used to list waters in Wisconsin. Every two years, states are required to submit a list of impaired waters to EPA for approval.

Within the City, only Silver Lake is listed as an impaired waterbody in the most current 303(d) list, with an unknown pollutant listed as the impaired water pollutant.

Invasive Aquatic Species

Surface water resources in Vilas County are threatened by the introduction of invasive aquatic species. These species out-compete native species and degrade habitats possibly by decreasing biodiversity from having less plant and animal species. Contact the Unified Lower Eagle River Chain of Lakes Commission for public outreach education strategies. A listing of documented cases of invasive aquatic species is provided below:

- **Silver Lake** – Eurasian Water-Milfoil, Banded Mystery Snail, Chinese Mystery Snail
- **Wisconsin River** – Eurasian Water-Milfoil, Curly-Leaf Pondweed, Chinese Mystery Snail, and Rusty Crayfish
- **Eagle River** – Banded Mystery Snail, Chinese Mystery Snail, Purple Loosestrife
- **Reed Canary Grass** – Located in portions of the City

Wetlands

Wetlands perform many indispensable roles in the proper function of the hydrologic cycle and local ecological systems. In terms of hazard mitigation, they act as water storage devices in times of high water. Like sponges, wetlands are able to absorb excess water and release it back into the watershed slowly, preventing flooding and minimizing flood damage. As more impermeable surfaces are developed, this excess capacity for water runoff storage becomes increasingly important.

Wetland plants and soils have the capacity to store and filter pollutants ranging from pesticides to animal wastes. Calm wetland waters, with their flat surface and flow characteristics, allow particles of toxins and nutrients to settle out of the water column. Plants take up certain nutrients from the water. Other substances can be stored or transformed to a less toxic state within wetlands. As a result, the lakes, rivers and streams are cleaner.

Wetlands that filter or store sediments or nutrients for extended periods may undergo fundamental changes. Sediments will eventually fill in wetlands and nutrients will eventually modify the vegetation. Such changes may result in the loss of this function over time. Eradication of wetlands can occur through the use of fill material. This can destroy the hydrological function of the site and open the area to improper development. The WDNR has promulgated minimum standards for managing wetlands. The wetlands shown for the City of Eagle River were mapped from the WI DNR Wetlands Inventory and are shown in the **Natural Resources Map**.

Floodplains

A floodplain is generally defined as land where there is a one percent chance of flooding in any year. The primary value of floodplains is their role in natural flood control. Flood plains represent areas where excess water can be accommodated whether through drainage by streams or through storage by wetlands and other natural detention/retention areas. Specific areas that will be inundated will depend upon the amount of water, the distance and speed that water travels, and the topography of the area. If uninterrupted by development, the areas shown on a map as floodplains should be able to handle the severest (regional) flood, i.e. those that have a probability of occurring once every one-hundred years. The 100-year floodplain was digitized by the NCWRPC from FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps, for planning purposes only, and are shown in the **Natural Resources Map**.

Groundwater

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

Groundwater is an important resource since it is used for all domestic, agricultural, and commercial purposes in the City. Most groundwater in Vilas County is obtained from sand and gravel aquifers. Groundwater quality in Vilas County and the City of Eagle River is generally good. Local differences in quality are the result of the composition, solubility, and surface of the soil and rock through which the water moves, and the length of time that the water is in contact with these materials. The main constituents in the water are calcium, magnesium, and bicarbonate ions. Mainly in the moraines, the water is hard. A high content of iron is a problem in many wells, but it is not a health hazard.

While groundwater quality might be generally good at present it is important to factor in the potential for contamination. Five physical resource characteristics were identified as important in determining how easily a contaminant can be carried through overlying materials to the groundwater. These characteristics are depth to bedrock, type of bedrock, soil characteristics, depth to water table and characteristics of surficial deposits.

Many land use activities have the potential to impact the quality of groundwater. A landfill may leach contaminants into the ground that end up contaminating groundwater. Gasoline may leak from an underground storage tank into groundwater. Fertilizers and pesticides can seep into the ground from application on farm fields, golf courses, or lawns. Leaking fluids from cars in junkyards, intentional dumping or accidental spills of paint, used motor oil, or other chemicals on the ground can result in contaminated groundwater.

Land Resources

Topography and Geology

Vilas County is in the Northern Highlands physiographic region of Wisconsin where crystalline rock is overlain by thick glacial deposits. The City and County were covered by glacial ice during the most recent glaciation period. Glacial activity formed several distinct types of glacial deposits such as end moraine and glacial ground moraine. End moraine deposits are composed of glacial till which is an unsorted mixture of gravel, sand, silt, clay, and occasional boulders. Adjacent to the end moraine deposits are glacial ground moraine deposits. A glacial ground moraine is also composed of till and gives rise to the rolling undulated type topography.

Forests

Forests play a key role in the protection of environmentally sensitive areas like steep slopes, shorelands, wetlands, and flood plains. Expansive forests provide recreational opportunities, aesthetic benefits, and economic development.

The pre-settlement composition of forestland in the City of Eagle River was a mix of conifer and deciduous tree species that included hemlock, sugar maple, yellow birch, jack pine, scrub (Hill's oak), and beech, with white pine and red pine throughout. All forests are dynamic, always changing from one stage to another, influenced by natural forces and humans. Changes can be subtle and occur over long periods, or can happen in seconds from a timber harvest, windstorm, or fire.

While there are no public tracts of forested land located within the City, there are numerous publicly-owned tracts of land located in the area including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the Northern Highland State Forest, and County Forest lands.

Some private woodlands in the County are enrolled in Managed Forest Law (MFL). This program provides a low annual tax rate per acre and requires a management plan for the property that must include some harvesting along with allowing some public uses based on acreage thresholds. When timber is harvested from MFL properties, a harvest tax is also assessed. This provides an incentive to keep woodlots in active production and allows some community access to the site in exchange for greatly reduced taxes. See the programs section at the end of this chapter for more detail on this program.

Metallic & Non-Metallic Resources

There are no quarries currently located within the City of Eagle River. There are three active non-metallic mines in the surrounding Towns of Lincoln and Washington, however.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Environmentally sensitive areas are typically defined by the local jurisdiction and often include many of the areas referred to in this section such as special groundwater protection areas, threatened or endangered species habitat, floodplains, wetlands and other unique or special resources where encroachment or development could have negative consequences. Some potentially sensitive areas are discussed below.

Redevelopment is the reuse of a parcel of land. Within the City there are 161 sites identified by the WDNR Internet database known as the Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS). Three of these sites have an open status with the DNR indicating that remediation of these sites is necessary. The open sites within the City are listed below. The remaining 158 sites have a closed status indicating they have been remediated to DNR standards. Sites identified by this database were contaminated or potentially contaminated sites with their prior use.

- 112 S 1st Street | Van Haverbeke Property -
- 522 E Wall Street | (former) Citgo Quick Food Mart – Krist Oil

Rare Species & Natural Communities

As of February 2026, there were four occurrences of endangered resources (rare, threatened, or endangered species of plants & animals, and high-quality natural communities) in the City of Eagle River as identified in the Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory, as shown in **Table 9**. Wisconsin's biodiversity goals are to identify, protect and manage native plants, animals, and natural communities from the very common to critically endangered for present and future generations. Knowledge, appreciation, and stewardship of Wisconsin's native species and ecosystems are critical to their survival and greater benefit to society.

Common Name	Status	Group
Bald Eagle	-	Bird
Spruce Grouse	THR	Bird
Swainson's Thrush	SC/M	Bird
Snail-seed Pondweed	SC	Plant

Status Definitions

- **THR** – Threatened
- **SC** – Special Concern
- **SC/M** – Fully Protected under Migratory Bird Act

Source: Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory

Vilas, Oneida, and Iron Counties harbor one of the highest concentrations of lakes in the world. Although most of the privately owned lake shoreline in these counties is developed, a pocketed of mostly undeveloped or lightly developed lakes exists along the border with Michigan's Upper Peninsula. These lakes support an unusually diverse and high-quality assemblage of aquatic natural communities.

The Border Lakes Region is flanked by the Northern Highland American Legion (NH-AL) State Forest, several large County Forest properties, the Nicolet National Forest, and Michigan's Ottawa National Forest. This area harbors a high-quality forest complex with several patches of old-growth forest. Numerous rare bird and plant species are known to exist here.

Protection of this unique mosaic of lakes, wetlands, and upland forests—with its significant water quality, fisheries, wildlife, and forestry resources—is important to maintaining the biological diversity and recreational opportunities of northern Wisconsin.

Soils & Productive Agricultural Resources

Soil is composed of varying proportions of sand, gravel, silt, clay, and organic material. The soils in the City primarily result from glacial till, glacial outwash, or glaciolacustrine deposits, and a few formed from organic material. There is little agricultural activity within the City and its surrounding area.

A detailed study of all the soils in Vilas County was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. As part of that study, soils were identified in terms of both generalized soil associations, or predominant soil patterns, and specific detailed soils.

Within the City itself, there are currently no active farms, while in the surrounding Town of Washington, agricultural uses account for only about 4 percent of the Town's total area.

Historical & Cultural Resources

History of Eagle River

The following is an overview of the history of Eagle River from the **Eagle River Historical Society**:

With settlements starting on the South Bank of the Eagle River, which earned its name given the amount of eagles present in the surrounding forests. The river is a flowage from a larger chain of 28 lakes, taking approx. 50 miles to travel, with the two ends however being only approx. 16 miles apart. Some of the earliest settlers arrived some 30 to 20 years before the Milwaukee Lakeshore and Western (M.L.S.W.) Railway was introduced in 1883.

These first explorers who arrived ranged from Timber Cruisers by the name of Fox & Helms in 1853 near what is now Eagle Waters Resort, but also that of James Hall and his family who arrived in 1863 on northern shores of Eagle Lake, farming aspirations by C.L. Perry in 1865 near Yellow Birch Lake, and at the same time Daniel Gagen who settled the point directly ahead of the T-Docks. As the M.L.S.W. started construction of the Railroad Bridge in June of 1883, new settlers had started to permanently terraform and encamp where the current town resides, the first and notable being John O'Connor and his son George in April of 1883. Soon following came other notable "original" families such as Walsh, Lawler, Croker, Drager, Carter, and McIntyre to name a few.

The first merchants to arrive in Eagle River were Dickinson & Cook to which as Lyman J. Cook recounts "... Dickinson and myself came to Eagle River the first part of May, 1883 ... On arriving here we found a crew getting out timbers for the railway bridge, there was a pole bridge for the teams across the river below where the railway now stands." That same year, a large tract of land was purchased from logger and speculator John Phelps by lumberman John O'Connor and, in 1885, while still a part of Oneida County, the plat of Eagle River was officially filed by O'Connor's wife, Anna.

Timber Basket of the North

Although logging of the area began in the 1850s, the construction of sawmills did not occur until the 1880s and the arrival of the railroad. Until then, harvested logs were driven down the Wisconsin River on rafts to mills further south on the river and then continued south, as there was little need for sawn lumber for personal homes and business, no less any new construction in the largely unpopulated Northwoods itself.

By the winter of 1885-1886 the "Eagle River District" had produced 58,200,000 feet of lumber, clearly demonstrating the output of lumber in the region. As of the winter of 1891 approached, there were reportedly twenty-eight logging camps in the "Eagle River District." While left to be entertained by saloons, the demand by lumbermen demanded more saloons. So much so that in 1891, and with an approximate population of 1,500, a total of fourteen liquor licenses were granted in the town and despite the financial panic of 1893, the number of saloons had increased to twenty-one by 1894. Unsurprisingly, the town earned a rough and tumble reputation. As the Lumber Industry had started to clear many of the surrounding old growth forests leaving behind only stumps, more and more people poured into the town and with it, the infancy of our Tourist Industry.

An Up and Coming Community

In spite of the varied development of the town, Eagle River was progressing at what would be considered an "unusual rate". At least according to a representative of the Rhinelander Herald who visited Eagle River in June 1900 and reported that the community was "showing unusual evidences of prosperity"; The town had established Sewer Systems, Telephone Service, Electric Lighting, and a Public Works water plant all between 1891 and 1900.

As the town grew, more and more services became available, viz. black smith shops, numerous grocery stores, saloons, meat markets, opera houses, a garment district, newspaper companies, harness and shoe store, boarding house, and even a hospital (with a competent physician no less). As time would go on, Eagle River's main and longest running industry would emerge. In October 1920, following what was identified as "the most successful tourist season ever seen in Eagle River."; at that point, long standing resorts such as Crystal Springs, the Hemlock, Tilden, and Morey to name a few had become staples on the Chain of Lakes. The Chicago & Northwestern Railway had even picked up on the trend, eventually offering Pullman car service from down state and northern Illinois, such accommodations would transform into promotions such as "The Fisherman Special" which ran from the 1930s through the 1950s. Rail service would eventually end by 1968.

As Logging in the immediate area had started to subside by 1910 and most of the Lumber Mills had closed or caught fire by the start of the Great Depression, tourism has become the main source of income for the burgeoning town and still serves to be dominant industry. For generations locals and tourists alike have enjoyed the peace and quiet of the Northwoods, and this is where our role is vital in preserving the very essence that has made people come back year after year and decade after decade.

Source: <https://www.eagleriverhistory.org/vilas-co-history>

Historic Properties

The National Register of Historic Places recognizes properties of local, state, and national significance. Properties are listed in the National Register because of 1) their associations with significant persons or events, 2) because they contain important information about our history or prehistory, or 3) because of their architectural or engineering significance. The National Register also lists important groupings of properties as historic districts. In addition, the National Park Service highlights properties that have significance to the nation as a whole by conferring them the status of National Historic Landmark.

The Wisconsin State Register of Historic Places parallels the National Register. It is designed to enable state-level historic preservation protection and benefits. Most of the properties in Wisconsin listed in the National Register are also listed in the State Register. There are three listings on the National & State Registers of Historic Places within Eagle River:

- Region Nine Training School/Trees For Tomorrow – 519 Sheridan Street
- (Former) St. Peter's Catholic School – 115 S Third Street
- Eagle River Downtown Historic District

The Wisconsin Architecture & History Inventory (AHI), provided by the Wisconsin Historical Society, lists historical and architectural information on properties in Wisconsin. The AHI contains data on buildings, structures and objects that illustrate Wisconsin's unique history. The majority of properties listed are privately owned. Listed properties convey no special status, rights or benefits. There are 85 properties listed in the AHI within Eagle River.

Cultural Resources

Eagle River has a long history and a bright future which is enhanced by features that attract visitors and provide residents a quality of life. The City of Eagle River has a wealth of cultural resources such as recreational activities, community events, access to the world's largest chain of lakes, and the five parks located within the City. These cultural resources are important selling points which help to bring new residents to the area. They foster growth and aid the economy. Cultural resources such as the Olson Memorial Library and the City's parks are described in subsequent chapters of this plan. Eagle River should be grateful for, and protective of, these cultural resources which we have inherited from the past to protect for the future.

Events

The City of Eagle River hosts a number of annual events and festivals such as Cranberry Fest, the Performing Arts Concert Series, Paul Bunyan Fest, a 4th of July Parade, and Street Dances among other events. The Vilas County Fairgrounds are located within Eagle River and are home to the annual Vilas County Fair. The Fairgrounds also serve as the headquarters for the National Championship Musky Open held each year.

Sports

Eagle River is recognized as the Snowmobile Capital of the World and is home to the World Snowmobile Headquarters as well as the World Championship Snowmobile Derby. Eagle River is also recognized as the Hockey Capital of Wisconsin and is home to the Wisconsin Hockey Hall of Fame. Additionally, the USA Hockey Long Drink Pond Hockey National Championships are held annually on nearby Dollar Lake.

Other sports which play an important role in past and recent history are fishing and other water sports, cross-country skiing, golfing, biking, hunting and other team sports such as baseball and soccer.

Community Facilities

Community facilities often serve as cultural resources. Community Facilities located within Eagle River include the City Hall, Olson Memorial Library, as well as a large selection of churches which help to meet special needs of the area such as the Vilas Food Pantry and Northwood's Share. Other facilities within the City include the Northwoods Children's Museum, the Eagle River Historical Society, the Vilas County Fairgrounds, the City's parks, and the World Snowmobile Headquarters.

Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources Programs

There are a variety of programs available to the City related to natural, agricultural, and cultural resources. Some of these are identified below. The following list is not all-inclusive. For specific program information, the agency or group that offers the program should be contacted.

Aquatic Habitat Protection Program

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

County Conservation Aids

Funds are available to carry out programs for fish or wildlife management projects as per §23.09 (12), Wis. Stats. and NR 50, Wis. Adm. Code. Projects related to providing improved fish or wildlife habitat or projects related to hunter/angler facilities are eligible. Projects that enhance fish and wildlife habitat or fishing and hunting facilities have priority. Contact the WDNR for further information.

Discovery Farms Program

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

Drinking Water and Groundwater Program

This WDNR program is responsible for assuring safe, high quality drinking water and for protecting groundwater. This is achieved by enforcing minimum well construction and pump installation requirements, conducting surveys and inspections of water systems, the investigation and sampling of drinking water quality problems, and requiring drinking water quality monitoring and reporting. A team of specialists, engineers, hydrogeologists, and a program expert and program assistants staff the program. WDNR staff provide assistance to public and private well owners to help solve water quality complaints and water system problems. They also provide interested citizens with informational or educational materials about drinking water supplies and groundwater.

Endangered Resources Program

The DNR's Endangered Resources staff provides expertise and advice on endangered resources. They manage the Natural Heritage Inventory Program (NHI), which is used to determine the existence and location of native plant and animal communities and Endangered or Threatened Species of Special Concern. The NHI helps identify and prioritize areas suitable for State Natural Area (SNA) designation, provides

information needed for feasibility studies and master plans, and maintains the list of endangered and threatened species. All management activities conducted by Wildlife Management and Forestry staff must be reviewed to determine the impact on NHI-designated species. A permit for the incidental take of an Endangered or Threatened species is required under the State Endangered Species Law. The Endangered Resources Program oversees the permit process, reviews applications and makes permit decisions. Funding for the Endangered Species Program comes from a number of sources, including tax checkoff revenue, license plates, general program revenues (GPR), gaming revenue, Natural Heritage Inventory chargebacks, wild rice permits, general gifts and Pittman Robertson grants.

Family Forest Carbon Program

The Family Forest Carbon Program enables private forest owners across 19 states, including Wisconsin, to access the voluntary carbon market, a growing market that has been traditionally inaccessible to smaller forest owners, providing landowners with income they can use toward forest management costs or to help pay property taxes.

Fisheries Management Program

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

Private Forestry

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

Managed Forest Law (MFL)

The purpose of the MFL is to promote good forest management through property tax incentives. Management practices are required by way of an approved forest management plan. Landowners with a minimum of 20 contiguous acres (80% must be capable of producing merchantable timber) are eligible and may contract for 25 or 50 years. Open lands must allow hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, and sight-seeing; however, up to 320 acres per township may be closed to public access by the landowner. Contact the WDNR for further information.

Nonpoint Source Program (NSP)

Wisconsin's NPS Program, through a comprehensive network of federal, state and local agencies working in partnership with other organizations and citizens, addresses the significant nonpoint sources in the state. This program combines voluntary and regulatory approaches with financial and technical assistance. Abatement activities include agriculture, urban, forestry, wetlands and hydrologic modifications. The core activities of the program — research, monitoring, data assessment and management, regulation and

enforcement, financial and technical assistance, education and outreach and public involvement — work to address current water quality impairments and prevent future threats caused by NPS pollution.

NRCS Conservation Programs

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

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

Parks and Recreation Program

The WDNR gets its authority for administering the Parks and Recreation Program from Chapter 27 Wisconsin Statutes. This program provides assistance in the development of public parks and recreation facilities. Funding sources include: the general fund, the Stewardship Program, Land and Water Conservation fund (LAWCON), and program revenue funds.

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

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

Stewardship Grants for Nonprofit Conservation Organizations

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

Wastewater Program

The Department of Natural Resources provides this program to address point and non-point source pollution control. Operating funds for this program come from the federal government's Clean Water Act funding as well as state general program revenues. The core work of this program involves the issuance of wastewater discharge permits that discharge directly to surface or groundwater and enforcing the requirements of these permits. The program closely monitors the impacts of industry, septic tanks, sludge,

and stormwater on the environment. Pretreatment plants for wastewater are offered economic assistance and provided with plan review services before the facility is established.

Watershed Program

The WDNR seeks to protect wild and domestic animals, recreational activities, natural flora and fauna, agriculture, business, and other land uses through watershed management. Funds to run this program are provided by the federal government through Clean Water Act and through state general program revenues. The program assists with watershed planning, water quality monitoring and modeling, and development of water quality standards and policy.

Wetlands Reserve Program

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

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

Wildlife Management Program

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

Wisconsin Fund

Wisconsin Fund is a program by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, Safety and Buildings Division. Grants are provided to homeowners and small commercial businesses to help offset a portion of the cost for the repair, rehabilitation, or replacement of existing failing Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS). Eligibility is based upon several criteria, including household income and age of the structure.

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

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

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Goals and Objectives

Goal: Maintain and enhance the aesthetic quality of life consistent with the Northwoods Character.

Objectives:

1. Consider structural development in environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, floodplains, lowlands, waterfront and steep slopes.
2. Promote the use of City sewer and water systems wherever possible and practical.
3. Consider assisting lake associations with aquatic invasive species management and other assistance.
4. Assess development impacts on public well water sources to protect wellhead areas from contamination.
5. Examine and encourage new opportunities for cultural development which maintain the character of the City.

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Chapter 3

Housing

Housing characteristics and trends are important components of comprehensive planning. The physical location of housing can determine the need of many public facilities and services. Furthermore, understanding dynamics in the market likely to affect housing development in the future provides a basis for the formulation of policy to coordinate transportation facilities with a sustainable pattern of residential development. Understanding the factors affecting people’s ability to meet their own housing needs provides a basis for reinforcing community ties, fostering economic development and environmental sustainability and improving the quality of life.

Previous Plans and Studies

Wisconsin State Consolidated Housing Plan

The Consolidated Housing Plan is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the application process required of the states in accessing formula program funds of Small Cities Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships, Emergency Shelter Grants and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) “The Consolidated Plan provides the Framework for a planning process used by states and localities to identify housing, homeless, community, and economic development needs and resources and to tailor a strategic plan for meeting those needs.”

North Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2025

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Comprehensive Plan evaluates opportunities for improved and expanded housing throughout the North Central Wisconsin Region. The Regional Comprehensive Plan’s housing chapter includes a listing of programs and strategies for enhancing the housing market and identifies the following issues facing housing in the Region:

- Affordability
- Availability
- Housing Condition
- Senior, Disability-friendly, and Low-Income Housing
- Seasonal Housing

Grow North Region Housing Study, 2021

The Grow North Region Housing Study analyzes the Grow North Region’s (which includes Vilas County) housing stock and housing trends, as well as workforce housing within the Grow North Region. This analysis identifies needs, such as a need for additional housing throughout the Grow North Region, what types of housing are needed throughout the Region, and which steps are needed to solve housing gaps within the Region. This housing study also developed a set of goals and strategies to address the housing issues identified. The identified goals in the Grow North Region Housing Study are as follows:

- Provide an adequate supply of affordable housing for individuals and households of all income levels throughout the Region.
- Increase the number of rental units within the Region.
- Encourage and Support a diverse mix of housing within the Grow North Region.
- Encourage housing that accommodates seniors, those with special needs, and those that are extremely-low income.

Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, 2023

The Vilas County Comprehensive Plan closely examines the state of housing throughout Vilas County, examining housing issues and qualities such as age of housing units, housing value, housing types, seasonal housing, and general housing characteristics. The identified goals in the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan as pertains to housing are as follows:

- Provide opportunities for a broad range of housing choices that will meet the needs of all residents while maintaining the predominantly rural forested and lakeshore residential character of Vilas County.

ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Wisconsin, 2025

This report, developed by the United Way, described the 35 percent of households in Vilas County that are living in poverty or are experiencing financial hardship, making them “ALICE” households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). These households are largely employed but do not earn enough in wages to meet the “household survival budget,” which does not allow for any savings. The report states that many ALICE households provide vital services, such as retail, health care, childcare, and security, but cannot make ends meet on the income provided from these jobs.

- The ALICE report shows that 45 percent of City of Eagle River households are either below the federal poverty level or are considered ALICE households, indicating that the average household in the City of Eagle River is more likely to face financial hardship than the average Vilas County household at-large. This is based on 2023 data, so affordability is likely a larger challenge as housing prices and inflation have increased since then.

Housing Stock Assessment

Housing Trends

In 2024, the City of Eagle River had 935 total housing units, as shown in **Table 10**. This represents a 28 percent growth in housing units within the City since 2000, a significantly faster growth than both Vilas County and Wisconsin.

Table 10: Total Housing Units

	2000	2010	2020	2024	Change 2000-2024
City of Eagle River	728	898	955	935	28.4%
Vilas County	22,397	25,116	26,150	24,876	11.1%
Wisconsin	2,321,144	2,593,073	2,734,511	2,778,572	19.7%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2020-2024

Housing Type and Tenure

Table 11 describes the City’s housing stock by type and tenure. As previously stated, there were 935 total housing units within the City of Eagle River in 2024. Of these housing units, 732 units were occupied, while 203 units were considered vacant. A majority of the vacant housing units in the City are seasonal housing units. The City of Eagle River (about 49 percent) had a significantly lower percentage of owner-occupied homes than both Vilas County (84 percent) and the State of Wisconsin (about 68 percent). The City’s average household size of 2.09 was lower than both the County (2.13) and the State (2.35). Nearly 47 percent of households within the City were occupied by a single householder and over 57 percent of households had at least one individual age 60 and older.

Table 11: Housing Units by Type and Tenure

	City of Eagle River	Vilas County	Wisconsin
Total Housing Units	935	24,876	2,778,572
Total Occupied Housing Units	732	11,147	2,479,480
Vacant Housing Units	203	13,729	299,092
Seasonal Housing Units	134	12,790	172,842
Owner-occupied Housing Units	356	9,367	1,682,214
Renter-occupied Housing Units	376	1,780	797,266
Average Household Size	2.09	2.12	2.39
Percent Owner-occupied	48.6%	84.0%	67.8%
Percent Householder Living Alone	46.4%	33.7%	31.5%
Percent with Individuals 60 or Over	57.4%	59.8%	41.7%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Structural Characteristics

According to the 2020-2024 American Community Survey data, a majority of the housing units in the City of Eagle River are classified as single-family, as shown in **Table 12**. The City of Eagle River has a housing stock with a lower percentage of single-family housing than both the County and the State as a whole. Over 35 percent of housing units within the City of Eagle River are multi-family units, in sharp contrast to Vilas County where multi-family units account for only about 4.6 percent of the County’s housing stock.

Table 12: Housing Units by Structural Type

	Single-Family		Multi-Family		Mobile Home		Total
City of Eagle River	588	62.9%	329	35.2%	18	1.9%	935
Vilas County	22,010	88.5%	1,141	4.6%	1,725	6.9%	24,876
Wisconsin	1,960,248	70.5%	732,391	26.4%	85,933	3.1%	2,778,572

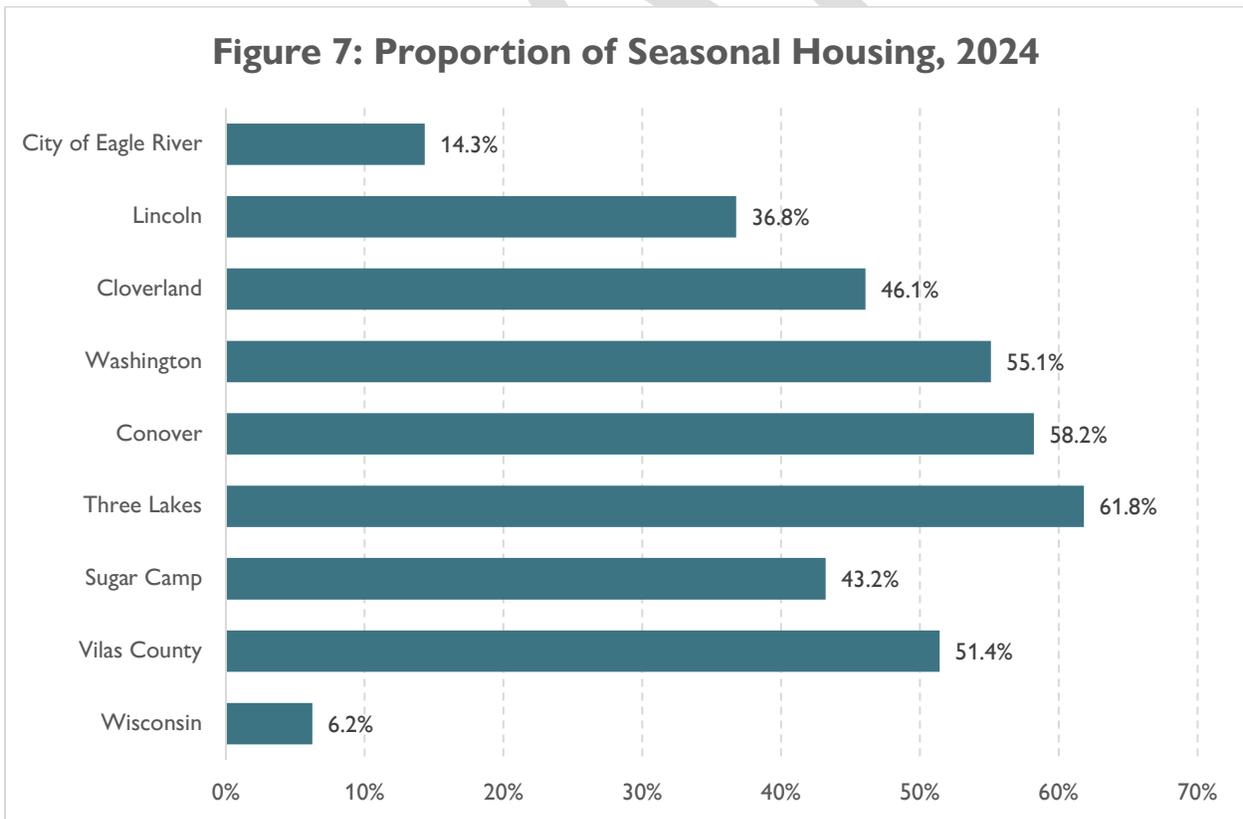
Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Seasonal Housing

Seasonal housing plays an important role in the demographics and economy of both Eagle River and Vilas County. Every year, thousands of absentee landowners visit their properties in the Northwoods for recreation. Most of these landowners permanently reside and are employed across Wisconsin or Illinois. As a result, there is a significant number of homes in the area that are vacant for long periods of time (usually in the winter).

Seasonal housing makes up a significant portion of the housing stock in the surrounding Eagle River area. Within the City of Eagle River itself, over 14 percent of housing units are considered to be seasonal, as shown in **Figure 7**. Seasonal housing comprises over a third of the housing stock in each community surrounding Eagle River, and over half of the housing stock in Vilas County. In comparison, only about 6 percent of the State’s housing stock is considered seasonal.

Figure 7: Proportion of Seasonal Housing, 2024



Source: U.S. Census & ACS 2020-2024

Age Characteristics

The age of a community’s housing stock typically reflects several important factors including size, offered amenities, and overall maintenance costs. Age of the home often also reflects different regional and national trends in housing development. Housing predating the 1940’s for example, was typically smaller and built on smaller lots. In subsequent decades, both average lot and home sizes have increased. For example, average homes constructed in the later part of the previous century and the first decade of the millennium are typically much larger than housing built in previous decades. Additional bedrooms, bathrooms, and attached garage space are among the amenities found in newer housing units.

Table 13 outlines build dates of housing units throughout the City, County, and State based on 2024 American Community Survey data. About 11 percent of the City of Eagle River’s housing units were built before 1940, compared to about 8 percent of housing units in Vilas County and about 18 percent of housing units statewide. About 39 percent of housing units within the City were built between 1970 and 1999, a lower proportion than Vilas County (47 percent) and a slightly higher proportion than Wisconsin (37 percent). Nationwide, there has been a stark decrease in home construction since the Great Recession of 2008, leading to increased competition and higher prices. Over 12 percent of the City’s housing stock has been constructed since 2010, compared to 9 percent in Vilas County and about 8.5 percent statewide. This indicates that the City has not been as impacted by the national downtrend in housing construction since the 2008 Recession as the County and State have.

Table 13: Year Structure Built						
	City of Eagle River		Vilas County		Wisconsin	
Before 1939	103	11.0%	1,862	7.5%	495,155	17.8%
1940-1949	43	4.6%	1,131	4.5%	146,155	5.3%
1950-1959	54	5.8%	2,163	8.7%	285,081	10.3%
1960-1969	87	9.3%	2,187	8.8%	262,558	9.4%
1970-1979	164	17.5%	4,883	19.6%	394,494	14.2%
1980-1989	100	10.7%	3,091	12.4%	262,669	9.5%
1990-1999	97	10.4%	3,535	14.2%	347,567	12.5%
2000-2009	172	18.4%	3,759	15.1%	347,953	12.5%
2010 or Later	115	12.3%	2,265	9.1%	236,940	8.5%
Total	935	100.0%	24,876	100.0%	2,778,572	100.0%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Value Characteristics

Table 14 details housing values in owner-occupied homes throughout the City, County, and State. In 2024, the median housing value was \$213,900 in the City of Eagle River. This was significantly lower than Vilas County’s median housing value of \$300,000 and the State of Wisconsin’s median home value of \$266,500. Over a third of the homes within the City (37.9 percent) are valued between \$100,000 and \$199,999. There is housing across a broad spectrum of valuations in the City.

Table 14: Housing Values of Owner-Occupied Units, 2024

	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 to \$149,999	\$150,000 to \$199,999	\$200,000 to \$299,999	\$300,000 or More	Median Value
City of Eagle River	0.8%	5.1%	13.2%	24.7%	26.7%	29.5%	\$213,900
Vilas County	4.2%	5.9%	6.7%	11.6%	21.6%	50.0%	\$300,000
Wisconsin	4.0%	5.1%	8.9%	14.1%	25.5%	42.4%	\$266,500

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

Housing Affordability

Several factors contribute to the affordability of housing in Vilas County. These factors include rent and mortgage payments, maintenance expenses, lot size, and required or desired amenities for the dwelling. Household size and income are key factors contributing to what housing options are available and accessible to residents.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban (HUD) development recommends that housing costs do not exceed 30 percent of monthly income. If housing costs exceed 30 percent of monthly income, a household is considered cost-burdened. HUD also indicates that lenders are more willing to make loans if the scheduled mortgage payment is no greater than 31 percent of the monthly household income. Low-income households that pay more than 30 percent of their income toward rent may have difficulty affording other household necessities such as food, childcare, and healthcare costs. Severely cost-burdened households are at risk of becoming homeless.

Table 15 shows that the percentage of owner-occupied households in the City of Eagle River that are cost-burdened is lower than the County and higher than the State for those with a mortgage and is lower than both the County and State for those without a mortgage. **Table 16** shows that the percentage of renter-occupied households in the City of Eagle River that are cost-burdened is lower than the County or the State.

Table 15: Housing Affordability (Owner-Occupied Units)

	With Mortgage	Percent Cost-Burdened	No Mortgage	Percent Cost-Burdened
City of Eagle River	\$1,449	24.1%	\$492	4.3%
Vilas County	\$1,477	31.6%	\$495	12.7%
Wisconsin	\$1,689	22.5%	\$659	12.6%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

*Cost-Burdened means a household is paying more than 30% of their income towards housing costs

Table 16: Housing Affordability (Renter-Occupied Units)

	Median Gross Rent	Percent Cost-Burdened
City of Eagle River	\$928	26.1%
Vilas County	\$847	30.0%
Wisconsin	\$1,087	43.7%

Source: American Community Survey 2020-2024

*Cost-Burdened means a household is paying more than 30% of their income towards housing costs

Specialized Housing

In Vilas County, housing for seniors and populations with special needs is primarily provided near Eagle River. The Vilas County Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC), the Northeast Wisconsin Community Action Program (NEWCAP), the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and the Vilas County United Way all maintain a list of these housing options throughout Vilas County. As the number of elderly populations increases in the coming years, there will most likely be a greater need for a wider variety of housing options.

Senior Housing

Housing for seniors typically consists of a range of housing options that provide a spectrum of assistance starting with individual units or homes with little or no assistance, independent living communities for seniors that remain independent, assisted living facilities for those who are no longer able to live on their own, and nursing homes for those that need skilled medical care.

According to research by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the overwhelming majority of seniors prefer to “age in place,” or remain in their home throughout retirement. This can be difficult for seniors as the ability to access medical care and necessary goods and services can become burdensome as they get older.

The Vilas County ADRC provides a variety of housing services and programs to older adults and individuals with disabilities who are looking for supportive services in their place of residence. Some of these services and programs include a senior (low-income) subsidized housing program, assisted living facilities, skilled nursing facilities, supportive home care/(CHORE) services, and adult day centers.

Housing Programs

There are a variety of state and federal housing programs geared at addressing a variety of housing issues. Grants and low interest loans are available for counties, communities, or individual homeowners and renters. The following are some housing resources administered through the state using state or federal funds that are available to participants.

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

- Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)
- Rental Assistance (Section 8) Programs
- Multifamily Loan Fund
- National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling
- WHEDA Advantage
- FHA Advantage
- First-Time Home Buyer Advantage
- WHEDA Tax Advantage
- WHEDA Foundation Grant Program

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

- Single Family Direct Home Loans
- Single Family Home Loan Guarantees
- Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants
- Rural Housing Site Loan
- Housing Preservation & Revitalization Demonstration Loans & Grants
- Housing Preservation Grants
- Multi-Family Housing Direct Loans
- Multi-Family Housing Loan Guarantees
- Multi-Family Housing Rental Assistance

State of Wisconsin Department of Administration Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources (DEHCR)

- Housing Grants and Loans
- Homelessness Assistance and Prevention
- Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)
- HOME Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program
- HOME Rental Housing Development (RHD)
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program
- Housing Cost Reduction Initiative Program (HCRI)
- CDBG – Small Cities Housing and Revolving Loan Program

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

- The HUD Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program
- The HOME Investment Partnership Program
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers
- CDBG – Small Cities Program

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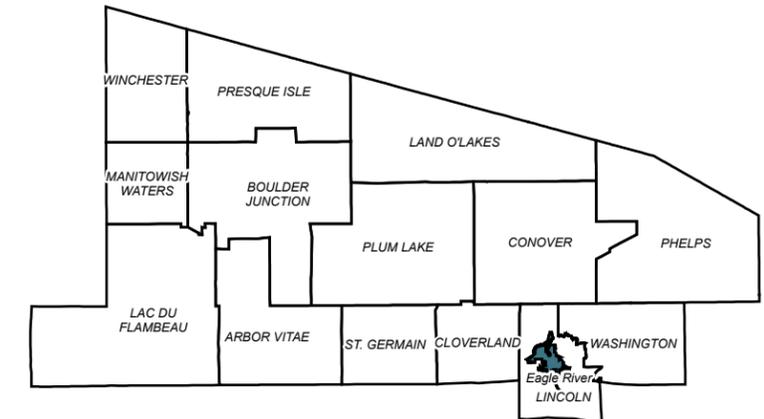
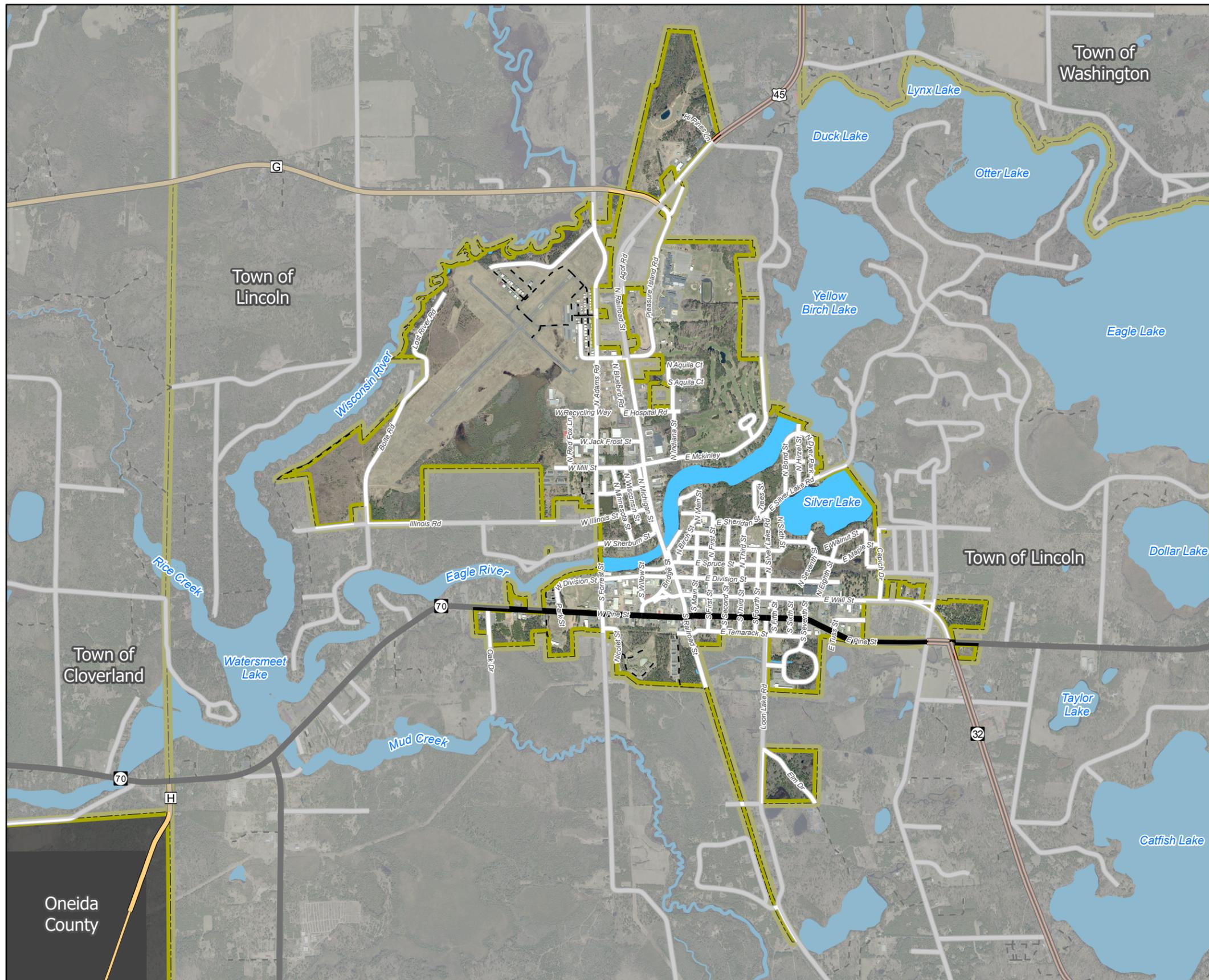
Goals & Objectives

Goal: Develop land use plans that guide the location, use and density of existing and future housing development.

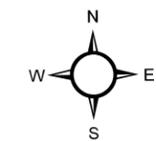
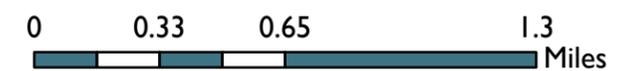
Objectives:

1. Encourage the conservation and improvements in the quality of existing housing and development of available lots
2. Continue to pursue housing block grants or similar programs.

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- Minor Civil Division
- U.S. Highway
- State Highway
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Private Roads
- Water

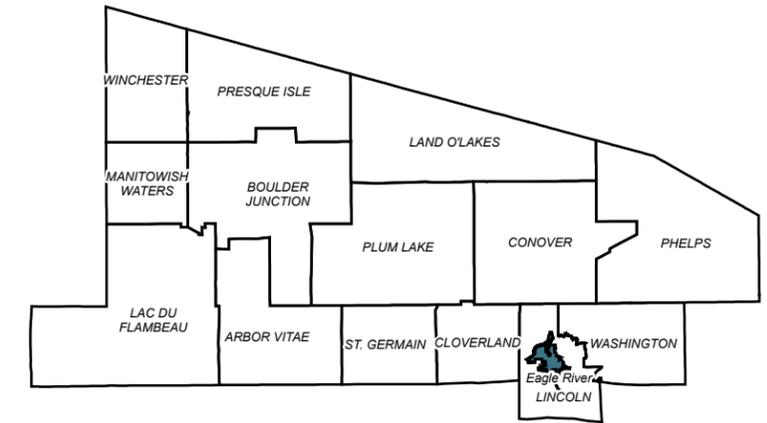
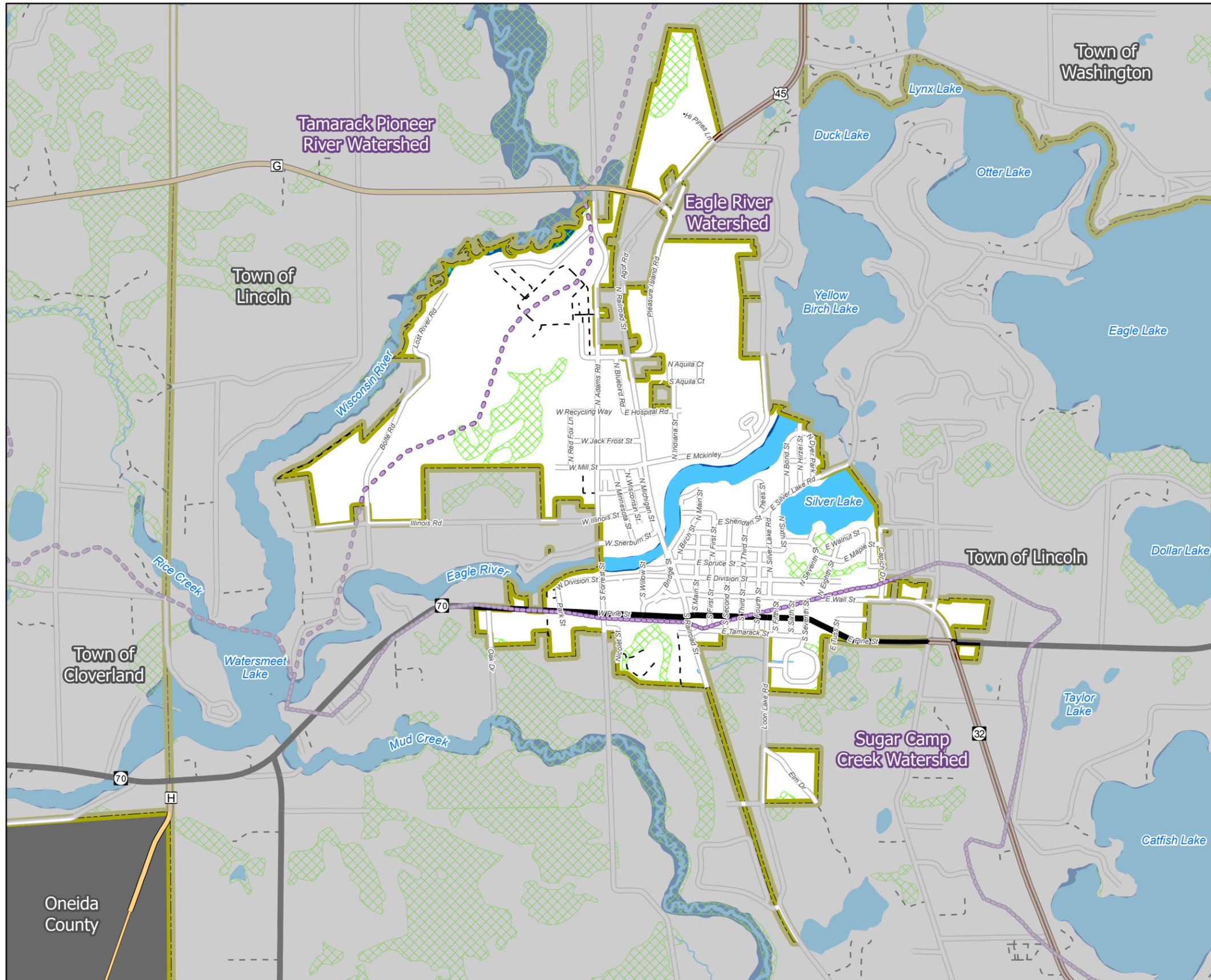


Source: WisDOT, WI DNR, NCWRPC, Vilas Co
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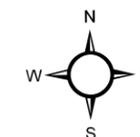
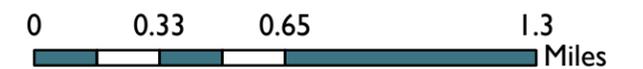


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- Minor Civil Division
- U.S. Highway
- State Highway
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Private Roads
- Watershed Boundary
- Wetlands
- Floodplain
- Water



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