

City of Viroqua

Comprehensive Plan

2026-2046

Draft
9-2-2025

Contents

Chapter 1 – Issues and Opportunities Element	4
Introduction	4
Community Engagement.....	4
Demographic Trends	11
Planning and Development Issues and Opportunities:	13
Goals:.....	14
Chapter 2 – Housing Element	16
Housing Stock Assessment Information.....	16
Housing Unit Projections.....	21
Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations.....	22
Chapter 3 – Transportation Element	24
General Transportation Context:	24
Highways, Streets, and Roads:	24
Programs for Streets and Highways City of Viroqua:	25
Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations.....	26
Chapter 4 – Utilities and Community Facilities Element	27
Water and Sanitary Sewer Service:	28
Storm Water Management:.....	28
Solid Waste Disposal:.....	29
Recycling Facilities:	29
Parks and Recreation:.....	29
Telecommunications Facilities:	29
Power Plants and Transmission Lines:	30
Cemeteries:	30
Health Care Facilities:.....	30
Child Care Facilities:	30
Police:	30
Fire and Rescue:.....	30
Libraries:.....	31
Schools:	31
Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations.....	31
Chapter 5 – Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Element	32

Groundwater:	33
Forests:	33
Productive Agricultural Areas:	33
Environmentally Sensitive Areas:	34
Stream Corridors:	34
Surface Waters:	34
Floodplains:	34
Wetlands:	34
Wildlife Habitat:	34
Threatened or Endangered Species:.....	35
Metallic & Non-Metallic Mineral Resources:.....	35
Other Natural Resources:	35
Historical and Cultural Resources:	35
Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations.....	36
Chapter 6 – Economic Development Element	37
Economic Base.....	37
Vernon County Employment Trends.....	38
Viroqua Employment by Industry Trends	40
Existing Economic Development Tools and Resources	41
Economic Development SWOT:.....	45
Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations.....	45
Section 7 – Intergovernmental Cooperation Element	48
School Districts:.....	48
County Government:.....	48
Adjacent Units of Government:.....	48
State Government:.....	48
Federal Government:.....	49
Existing Cooperative Boundary Plans or Agreements:.....	49
Chapter 8 – Land Use Element.....	51
Land Use Planning Context	51
Existing Land Use	57
Land Use Trends, Needs, and Potentials:	59
Existing and Potential Land Use Conflicts:.....	62

Land Development Limitations:..... 62
Future Land Use Plan63
Consistency Requirement 64
Goals:..... 64

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Chapter 1 – Issues and Opportunities Element

Introduction

The Issues and Opportunities element provides the strategic framework for the City of Viroqua's Comprehensive Plan. It outlines methods and results of community engagement efforts, identifies key demographic, economic, and social trends that shape the city's development, and highlights the challenges and assets that will influence local decision-making over the next two decades.

Located in the heart of the Driftless Region, Viroqua is a vibrant rural city known for its agricultural roots, strong sense of community, and creative economy. As the county seat of Vernon County, Viroqua plays a regional role in education, healthcare, commerce, and tourism. Its location, natural beauty, and cultural amenities make it both a place to call home and a destination.

Through a combination of community surveys, stakeholder interviews, and public meetings, residents and local leaders have helped identify core community values—such as sustainability, equity, economic opportunity, and quality of life—that inform this plan. This element summarizes the major issues facing the city as well as the opportunities residents see to enhance Viroqua's future. It also addresses a range of critical themes: a changing population and workforce; housing affordability and availability; the vitality of the downtown and local businesses; infrastructure and transportation needs; environmental stewardship; and the role of arts, culture, and agriculture in Viroqua's long-term resilience.

By identifying current trends and emerging opportunities, this chapter sets the stage for policies and actions that will guide growth, preservation, and investment in Viroqua through 2045. It encourages proactive, community-driven approaches to shaping the city's future.

Community Engagement

Community Survey

In January 2025, the project team developed a web-based community survey to gather important information on community needs and priorities. The survey was published on February 28, 2025. The original closing date for the survey was March 28; however, the date was extended to April 15 to allow additional input. The survey was promoted on the city's website and social media page and via email to stakeholders. A print copy of the survey was made available at City Hall and McIntosh Memorial Library.

The survey included 33 questions, of which 19 (questions 1–19) were related to the Comprehensive Plan and two (questions 32–33) gathered demographic information. Responses are summarized here. All responses will be provided with the final document. Of the 316 complete responses, 76 percent were from Viroqua residents.

Note: Open-ended responses were summarized using ChatGPT.

Quality of Life Questions

When asked what they liked most about Viroqua, respondents had the following to say:

1. Friendly and Supportive Community
2. Small-Town Feel with Big-City Amenities
3. Arts, Culture, and Events
4. Education and Health Care
5. Local Food and Businesses
6. Natural Beauty and Outdoor Recreation

7. Walkability and Accessibility
8. Diversity and Progressiveness

Occasional Criticisms/Concerns:

- Some concerns were raised about traffic changes on Main Street, rising cost of living, and perceived political or cultural shifts.
- A few expressed nostalgia for how things “used to be,” or dissatisfaction with recent developments.

Overall:

Viroqua is broadly loved for its strong sense of community, vibrant arts and food culture, educational options, natural beauty, and walkable, small-town charm — all wrapped in a progressive, inclusive atmosphere.

Question #3 asked respondents to select up to three priorities most in need of improvement in Viroqua. Housing affordability, availability of housing, and business / job opportunities were the three most selected priorities.

More than 82% rated their quality of life in Viroqua as “Good” or “Excellent”, approximately 14% stated that it was “Fair” or “Needs Improvement”. Those that responded as “Other” (approximately 4%) recognize a high quality of life in Viroqua, especially in comparison to national trends. “Other” responses also revealed significant concerns about infrastructure, city maintenance, inclusivity, and civic engagement—suggesting that the current quality of life feels diminished by overlooked local issues. When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with municipal services, the service most respondents were dissatisfied with was street maintenance. Library services received the most satisfied ratings, followed by emergency services and parks and recreation services.

Approximately 60% of respondents believe that the quality of housing in Viroqua is excellent or adequate, while 30% believe the quality is inadequate. Of those that chose “Other” as a response, they expressed a variety of comments relating to a lack of affordable housing, neglected properties, the impact of short-term rentals, and the need for homeless services.

Housing Questions

Question 11 asked about the different types of housing unit densities and whether the respondent believed more was needed, that there were enough, or whether there was too much already. The top three types of densities identified as needing more were single-family detached, duplexes, and senior housing/assisted living.

General thoughts expressed by 139 respondents are as follows:

1. Concerns regarding housing affordability & cost of living
2. Need to regulate or restrict short-term rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)
3. Availability & diversity of housing options
4. Quality & condition of housing
5. Need for housing policy & long-term planning strategies that are proactive, sustainable, maintain Viroqua’s cultural character and reflect the community’s vision.
6. Concerns about socioeconomic equity & neighborhood gentrification

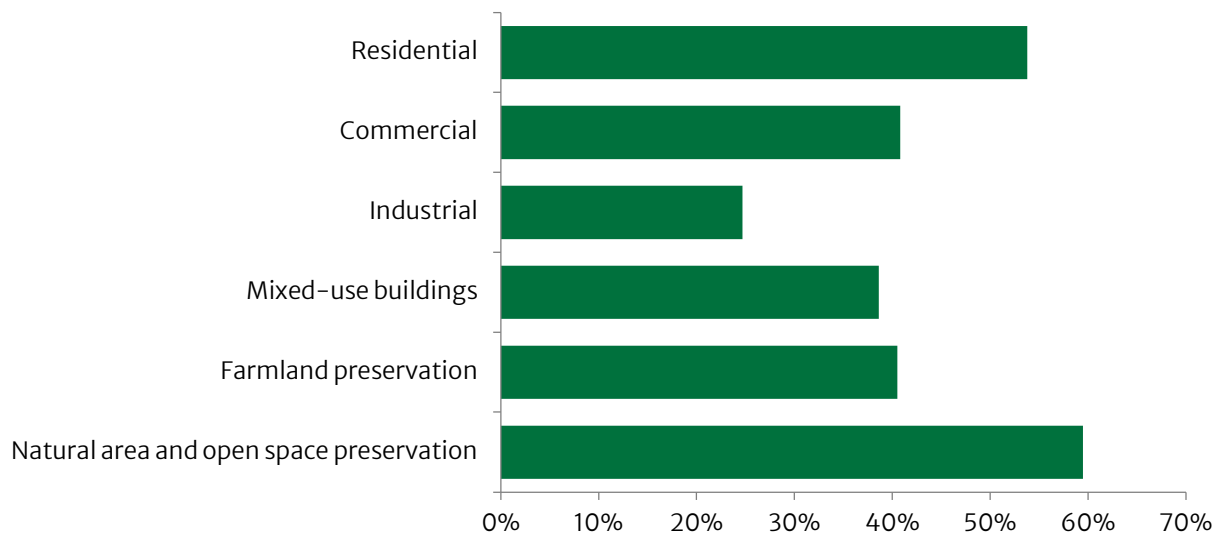
Economic Opportunity Questions

Approximately 40% of respondents stated that job opportunities were adequate to excellent in Viroqua. Another 40% expressed that they felt that opportunities were inadequate. Those that selected “Other” expressed a range of sentiments. Some responses contained both critique and suggestion. In those cases, they were categorized by their primary tone or most emphasized sentiment.

Sentiment Category	Number of Responses	Description
Negative	23	Low wages, lack of good jobs, underemployment, few professional opportunities
Mixed/Neutral	15	Jobs available but not ideal; depend on profession, income, or remote work
Positive	5	Some good opportunities (e.g., Organic Valley, hospital, entrepreneurship)
Suggestions/Ideas	10	Specific improvements: job training, remote work hubs, business development
Retired/Not Applicable	16	Retired, not looking for work, or stated they were uninformed on job market

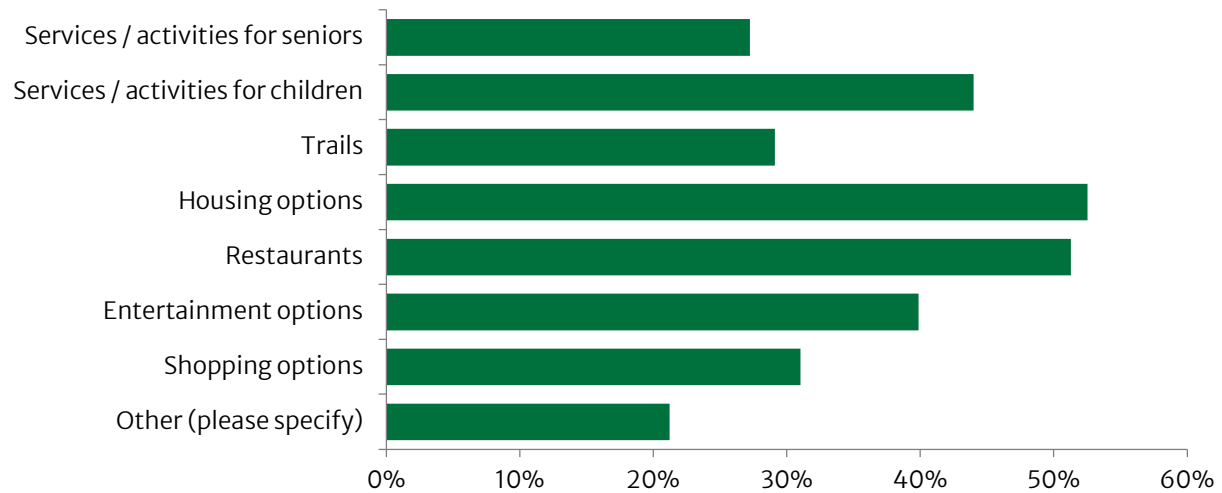
When asked about the types of development Viroqua should encourage, respondents had to make at least one selection, but could also select all options. Respondents emphasized natural area and open space preservation and residential development.

Q14: What type of development should Viroqua encourage?



While “Other” wasn’t provided as an option for Question #14, Question #15 asked what was missing in Viroqua. The top three survey responses were housing options, restaurants, and services/activities for children.

Q15: What is missing or lacking in Viroqua? (Check all that apply)



A summary of “other” responses is as follows:

1. Social/Cultural:
 - a. Public Gathering Spaces available year-round such as a community center that would serve all ages
 - b. Diverse cultural experiences through food, art exhibits, retail and social events.
2. Parks and Recreation:
 - a. Facilities such as a pool, parks with a water feature, and activities for teens.
 - b. Some respondents also suggested ridge parks for viewing sunrise/sunsets.
3. Natural Resources: Environmental management such as storm water, pollinators, and community gardens.
4. Housing: Affordable, family-sized homes.
5. Economic Development:
 - a. Living-wage jobs & activated business park
 - b. Tech/electronics repair services
 - c. More diverse local retail/thrift shops
 - d. Thrift-based tourism idea
 - e. Small-scale farm incubators
 - f. More liquor licenses for restaurants
6. Transportation & Connectivity for all modes of transportation that are accessible for all abilities.
7. Urban Design & Planning
 - a. Public education regarding the process
 - b. Is community-driven
 - c. Provides visuals for public understanding

Vision Question

Themes that emerged from the 256 responses to the visioning question, “In the future, I want Viroqua to be . . .” are as follows:

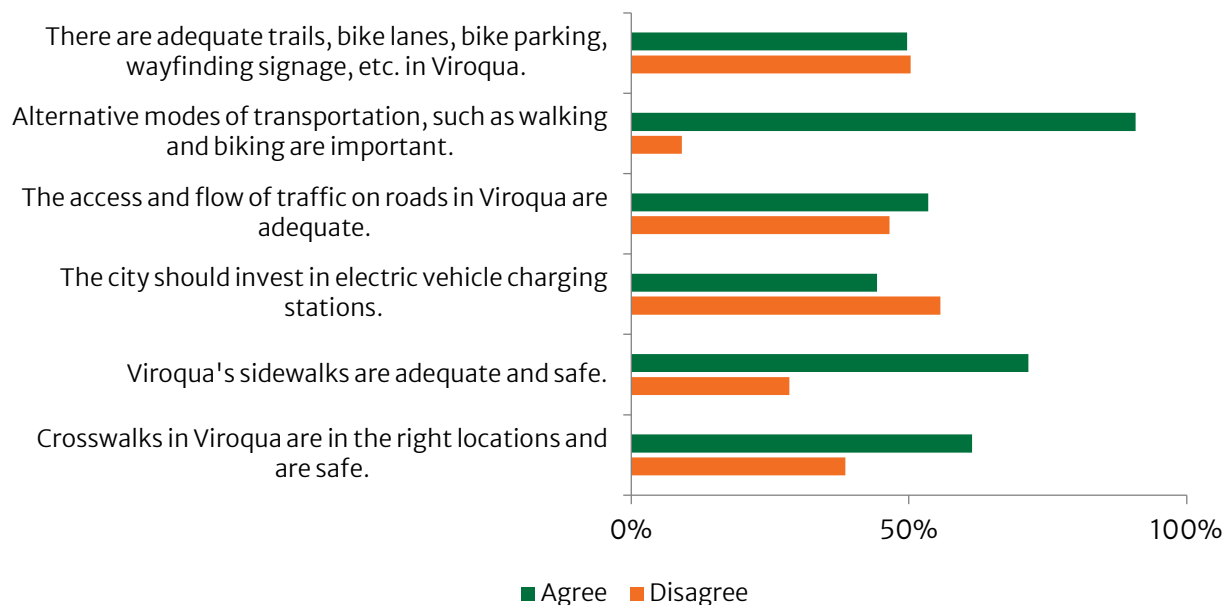
- Small-Town Character & Thoughtful Growth
- Provide Environmental & Climate Leadership
- An Inclusive & Welcoming Community
- Thriving Across Generations
- Affordable & a Local Economic Strength
- A Vibrant Arts, Culture & Food Scene
- Walkable, Bike-Friendly & Provide Infrastructure Amenities

Transportation Questions

A majority of respondents felt that the general condition of Viroqua’s roads is in excellent to good condition (79%). Some complained about snow removal and needing significant repair. Several complained about the very recent changes to Main Street which may take some time for regular drivers to adjust.

An overwhelming majority of respondents believe alternative modes of transportation are important, however, they do not believe that the City should invest in electric vehicle charging stations. Most respondents feel sidewalks and crosswalks are safe and in the correct location.

Q18: Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements about Viroqua's transportation system.



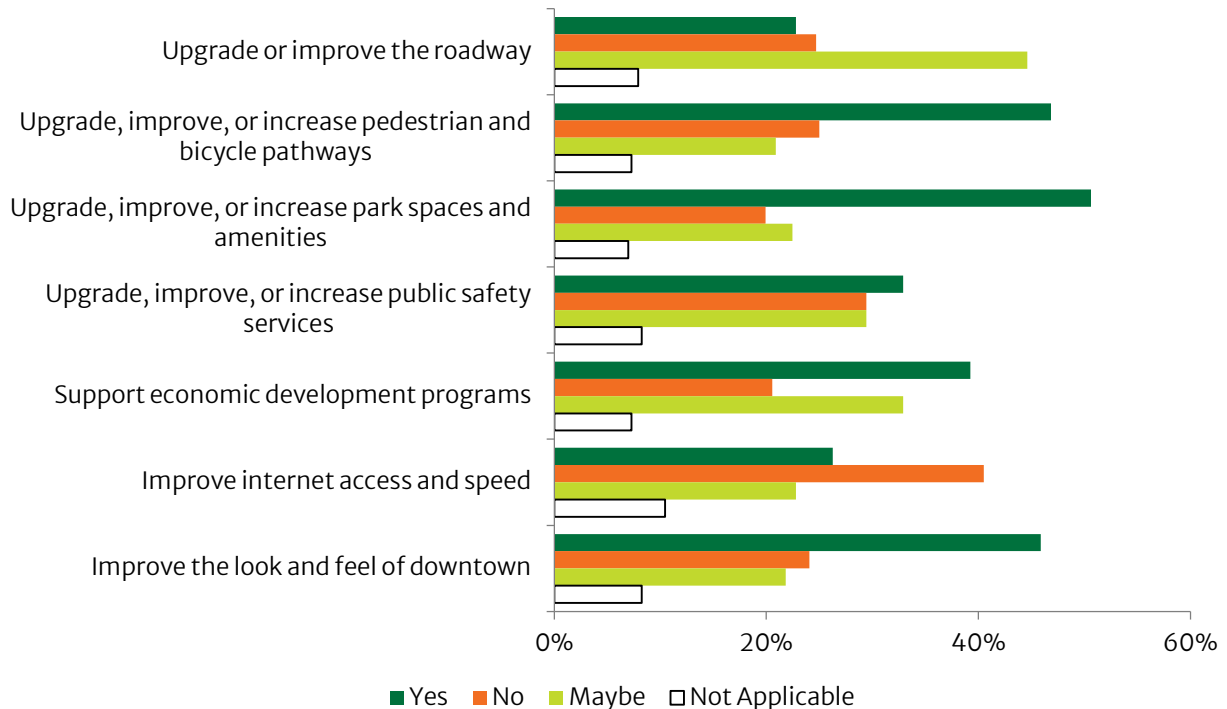
Fiscal Preference Question:

Respondents would be willing to pay increased taxes for the following:

- Upgrades, improvements, or additional pedestrian and bicycle pathways
- Upgrades, improvements, or additional parks and amenities
- To improve the look and feel of downtown

A modest majority of respondents would be willing to pay increased taxes for upgraded, improved or expanded public safety services. Some may be willing to pay increased taxes for upgrading or improving roadways. Based on other stakeholders engagement activities, this would largely depend on which roadways were to be improved. Respondents do not want to pay increased taxes to improve internet speed or access.

Q19: Would you be willing to pay increased taxes or fees to:



Focus Groups

In March 2025, the project team facilitated two focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather input from stakeholders on preservation-related issues and opportunities throughout the City.

Stakeholders were selected from a list generated by the consultant team and refined by City staff. The list was then segmented by an individual’s subject matter expertise and relevance to the Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, or Historic Preservation Plan. Of the 90 individuals included in the stakeholder list; 44 were identified as comprehensive plan-specific stakeholders, 21 were identified as preservation-specific stakeholders, and 25 were identified as recreation-specific stakeholders.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted by the consultant team between mid-February and mid-April 2025. The stakeholders interviewed included bankers, school district staff, representatives of various utilities, small business owners, non-profit organizations, large employers, the hospital, economic development professionals, and realtors. There was an expressed dichotomy between people who see community growth as a path to sustainability, and people who do not want to see the community grow. Highlights of stakeholder interview comments are as follows by topic:

Housing

- Increased interest in Viroqua for recreation, second homes, and residency.
- Demand for “Missing Middle” housing types (twin homes, townhomes, row houses, ADUs, tiny homes).
- Realtors identified a shortage of senior housing and single-family homes under \$300,000.
- Short-term rentals are reducing long-term rental availability.
- Potential for a homeowner improvement loan program.

Education

- Private and public schools are maintaining/enhancing enrollment and infrastructure.
- Private schools aim to own buildings and grow enrollment.
- Investments made in Agricultural & Technical Education.
- Lack of affordable childcare noted.
- Concerns raised about the future use of Western Technical College facilities.

Utilities and Community Facilities

- Current sewer and water systems are adequate but may need upgrades for heavy new users.
- Power lines are buried where feasible.
- Some residents promote exploring sustainable waste and sewage treatment technologies.
- Concerns noted about staffing and service hours for city services, EMTs, and social services.
- Business incubator has supported startup activity.
- Vernon Memorial Hospital has space constraints for expansion.
- No homeless shelter; the public library is a gathering place for unhoused individuals.

Economic Development

- Local banks are willing to partner on commercial gap financing if the revolving loan fund is reactivated.
- Housing availability impacts business growth.
- Potential for growth in agri-tourism and shoulder-season tourism.
- Demand for revolving loan funds.
- Approximately 20 acres are available for commercial/industrial development, with a regional shortage of land and buildings for small businesses.
- Workforce attraction and retention are challenged by housing and childcare shortages.

Transportation

- City-supported taxi service limited to a 1-mile radius; interest in service to/from Madison.
- Desire for more pedestrian and bicycle connections.

Pop-up Engagement

In May 2025, the project team conducted a series of on-site community engagement activities:

- **Intercept Surveys:** Tuesday, May 27, conducted at Nelson Ag Center and the Park Bowl during a baseball game.
- **Pop-up Engagement Booth:** Saturday, May 31st, at Viroqua Farmer’s Market.
- **Community Forum:** Saturday, May 31st at Viroqua Commons.

Each activity was designed to gather community input on each of the plan efforts within the purview of the project team. Engagement activities for the intercept survey and pop-up booth were based on four question prompts—two associated with the Comprehensive Plan, one with the Historic Preservation Plan, and one with the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan—and were adjusted to fit the method of engagement for that given day. A summary of responses are provided below. The complete list of participant responses will be provided in the final document.

Intercept Survey Q1: Which aspects of Viroqua need the most improvement? Select your top 3 priorities

Respondents were provided the following list:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| a. Vacant/Neglected Properties | standards |
| b. Availability of Entertainment | h. Business/job opportunities |
| c. Housing Affordability | i. Amenities of parks and natural areas |
| d. Availability of Housing | j. Access to parks and natural areas |
| e. Transportation Infrastructure | k. Public utilities |
| f. Traffic and Parking | l. Education and youth empowerment |
| g. Community design and architectural | m. Environmental Sustainability |

The top three priorities identified by 26 respondents are:

1. Housing Affordability (12)
2. Business/job opportunities (9)
3. Education and youth empowerment (8); Traffic and Parking (8)

Intercept Survey Q2: What type of jobs would be most desirable in Viroqua?

Respondents were provided the following list based on the North American Industry Classification System:

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. Construction | e. Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate |
| b. Manufacturing | f. Health care and social assistance |
| c. Wholesale trade, Transportation and warehousing | g. Arts, entertainment, and recreation |
| d. Information | h. Retail trade, Accommodation and food services |

Other responses included: ANY and jobs for teens. The most desirable type of job from this group of respondents was Retail trade, Accommodation and food services (15).

Demographic Trends

The following metrics for community growth and development indicate the demand for current and future public services, demand for housing units, spending potential, land use and economic development:

- Population Trends and Projections
- Household Trends and Projections
- Population Age Distribution
- Educational Attainment
- Employment Characteristics and Projections
- Income Levels

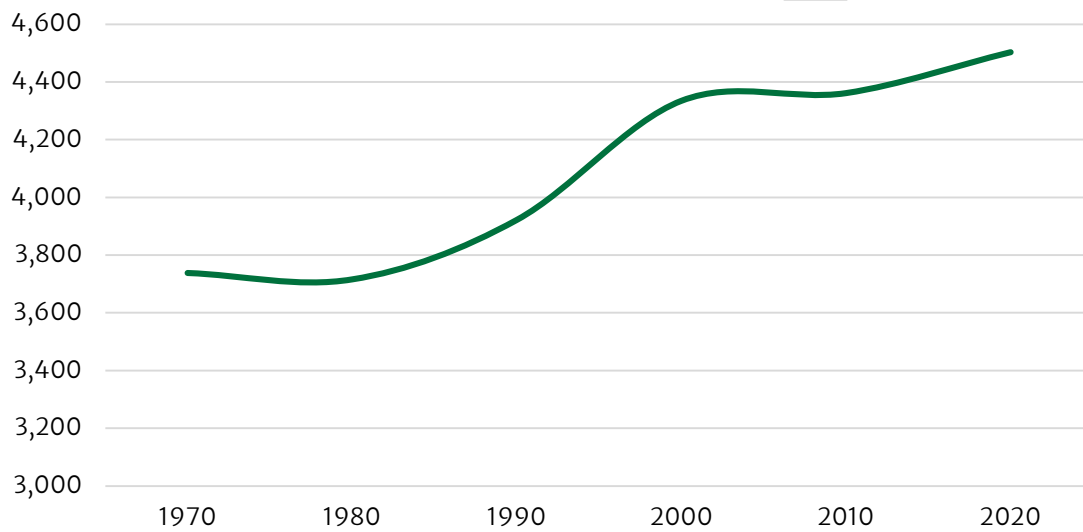
Population Trends and Projections

According to the US Census Bureau and the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), the City of Viroqua grew from approximately 3,700 in 1980 to 4,360 in 2000, or by 660 people over 20 years. Baby Boomers,

those born between 1946 and 1964, were in their childbearing years during this time. Over the next twenty years, the City grew about 140 people. It is outside the scope of this plan to identify exactly why population growth decreased, but likely suspects are aging Baby Boomers, fewer births per woman, and migration out of the community (see figures below).

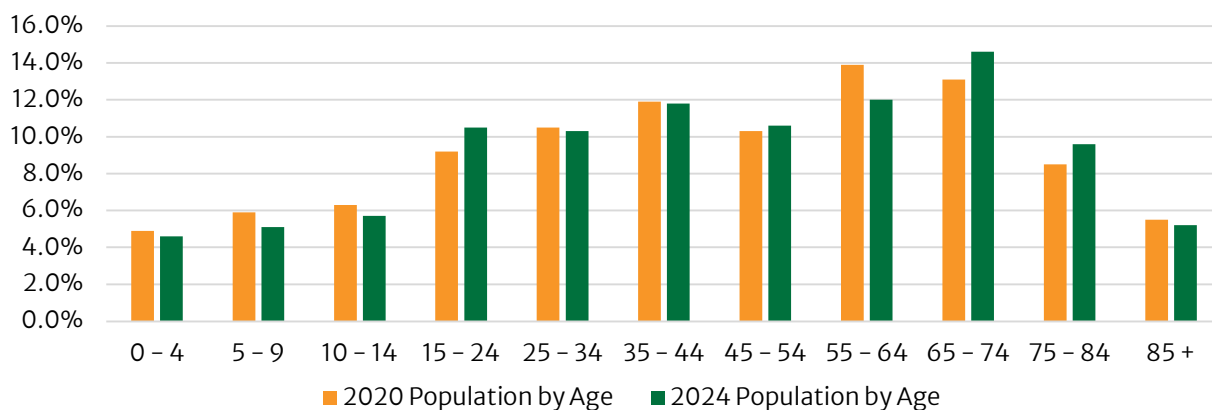
The DOA provides projections in five-year increments to the year 2050. Their projections for minor civil divisions are based on two annualized growth calculations. However, these projections do not account for development capability, competitive advantages, changes in housing preferences, and transportation improvements that characterize the City of Viroqua.

DOA Population for Viroqua



Data Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services.

Viroqua Population by Age (2024)



Data Source: Esri Community Profile.

Household Trends and Projections

The number of households in Viroqua has remained steady, however, likely due to new household formations from children creating their own households, household migration, the dissolution of marriages, etc.

Household Trends and Projections (2010–2029)

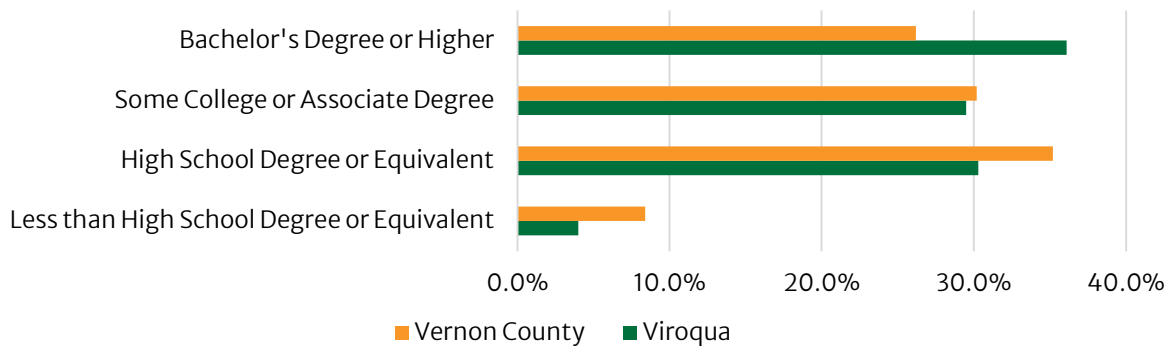


Data Source: Esri Community Profile.

Educational Attainment

A community's educational attainment impacts its future growth and development. Educational attainment is correlated with higher wages, lower poverty rates, and improved health outcomes. Businesses consider local education levels when deciding where to locate or expand, knowing it affects the quality of the labor pool. In turn, businesses that require higher levels of education, offer higher wages which attracts higher income households. According to Esri, residents of Viroqua tend to have achieved higher levels of education than the county.

Viroqua Population by Educational Attainment (2024)



Data Source: Esri Community Profile. Data Note: Education levels are for residents 25 years of age or older.

Planning and Development Issues and Opportunities:

Projections of any future conditions are based on the following set of assumptions:

- The regional economy, and particularly the La Crosse area economy, will remain healthy with continued growth.
- The City of Viroqua will remain receptive to growth.
- Infrastructure financing required to attract and maintain growth will be available.
- The Viroqua area will remain competitive for growth with other rural communities in the La Crosse commuting region.
- The regional economy will react as it has during previous economic shocks.

Therefore, the following issues and opportunities have been identified.

Issues:

- City resources are challenged by levy limits, and the need to balance growth in a resource-constrained environment.
- Retaining residents: As the community ages, it will be important for there to be places to live for aging residents.

- **Affordable Housing:** Ensuring access to affordable housing options is vital to retaining and attracting residents, fostering diversity, and mitigating displacement.
- **Accommodating residential growth:** As the population increases, it will be important for the City to carefully plan for infill as well as new development areas.
- **Business Growth:** There is a need to stimulate commercial activity, attract new industries, and support entrepreneurship to strengthen the local economy.
- **Health and Wellness:** Parks, recreational spaces, and community facilities are crucial for improving quality of life and promoting public health.
- **Development capacity:** the land topography and capacity of the city to accommodate water and sewer needs, as well as manage storm water dictates the type and timing of development.

Opportunities:

- Re-evaluating zoning classifications to better reflect current and future needs can unlock potential for mixed-use, higher-density, and multi-generational developments.
- Brownfield redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing structures can reinvigorate stagnant areas while conserving resources.
- Investments in transport and utility infrastructure can enhance connectivity and resilience to environmental hazards.
- Integrating green spaces, water management features, and habitat corridors into development plans can promote sustainability and improve community health.
- Supporting small businesses and local agriculture can create jobs, enrich community character, and foster resilience.
- Targeted incentives and partnerships can attract investment and stimulate innovation across sectors.
- Leveraging technology and outreach programs to engage residents can ensure diverse perspectives and needs are represented in planning decisions.

Goals:

General planning goals are presented within this chapter to set the stage for specific planning goals, which are included in the individual planning elements contained in subsequent sections of this Plan. The “general” planning goals for the City of Viroqua are:

1. Maintain Viroqua’s “sense of place” as a small city/rural community. This community sense includes a thriving downtown, support for local business, nurturing youth, supporting the elderly, preservation of green/open spaces, and communication of our history.
2. Create the conditions for Viroqua to be an increasingly successful economic, social and cultural hub of activity including the enhancement of health and wellness.
3. Implement a plan that promotes the general health, safety and welfare, and the economic sustainability of the City and the region, in general.
4. Respect for property rights and protection of community rights.
5. Protect and enhance natural resources, scenic landscape, a rural lifestyle and regional agriculture.

Objectives:

1. Confirm future zoning and land use maps, to ensure future developments are appropriate and supported by city policies and programs.

2. Support local businesses and new entrepreneurs to maintain and expand the role of the City as a hub for the region.
3. Cooperate and coordinate with public service providers (health, education, civil government, cultural activities).
4. Safeguard the affordability of living in this area.
5. Create government processes and procedures that ensure fair dealing, and a structure that does not favor or discriminate.
6. Review new developments for impacts on aesthetics, natural and historic uniqueness and beauty.

Recommendations:

1. Approve future zoning map and future land use map, then review and update annually.
2. Maintain an up-to-date Comprehensive Plan which guides development.
3. Seek ways to partner with public service providers in health, education, and cultural service providers to help in their success and serve all residents.
4. Implement open, and transparent standards by the City of Viroqua.
5. Seek outside funding sources to support infrastructure, development, and growth goals, whether through the City or quasi-governmental body such as a community development or redevelopment authority.

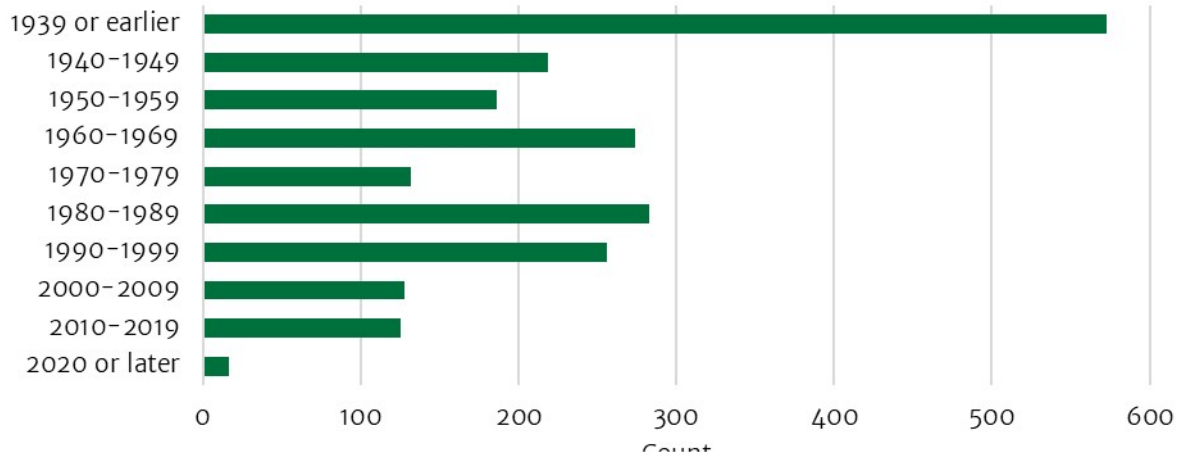
Chapter 2 – Housing Element

Housing Stock Assessment Information

Age Characteristics

Of the approximately 2,200 housing units in the City of Viroqua in 2023, a little more than 16% of them were built in 1939 or earlier. From 1940 to 2009, the average number of units built per decade was 211. Outlier decades include the 1970s, 2000, and 2010s. Consumer confidence, construction costs, and housing starts were all greatly impacted by the ‘oil crisis’ in the 1970s, the Great Recession (and long recovery), and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2010, according to the American Community Survey, only 142 units have been built, however, this data is not current through 2024. Northpointe Development’s addition of the Mainstreet Apartments, along with other minor developments and the pending Hanson Farm development will increase this total.

Figure 1. Housing Units by Year Built



Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Housing Characteristics, 2023.

Structural and Occupancy Characteristics

More than 70% of housing units in Viroqua are single-family detached units and less than 60% of all housing units are owner-occupied. It is inferred, therefore, that some of the single-family units are rental properties, however, the length of these leases is undetermined.

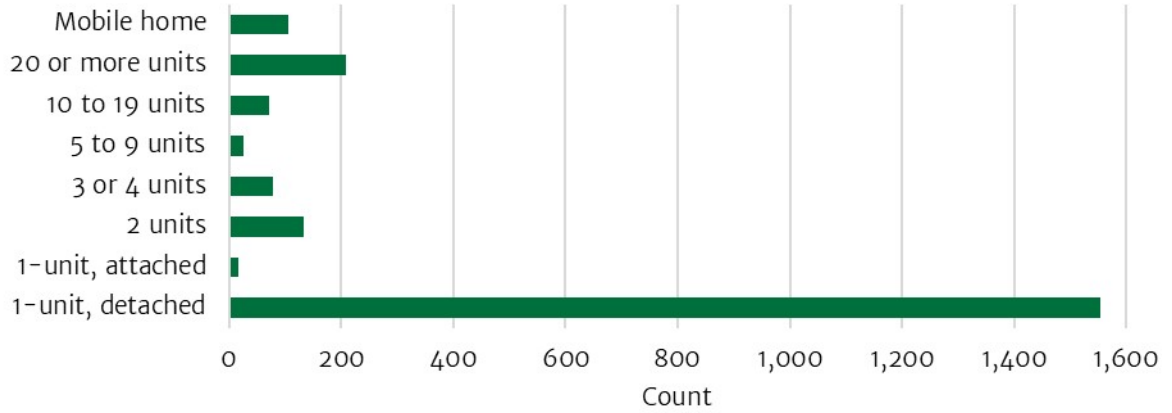
“Some amount of vacant residential units is needed to facilitate the free movement of population and choice of reasonable alternatives.”

~ Arthur Nelson, Planner's Estimating Guide: Projecting Land-Use and Facility Needs

Based on experience, best practices and household growth projections, Redevelopment Resources recommends an owner-occupancy vacancy rate of 1-2% and a rental vacancy rate of 2-3% for a combined vacancy rate of 3-5%, to estimate on the conservative side.

Figure 2. Housing Units by Type

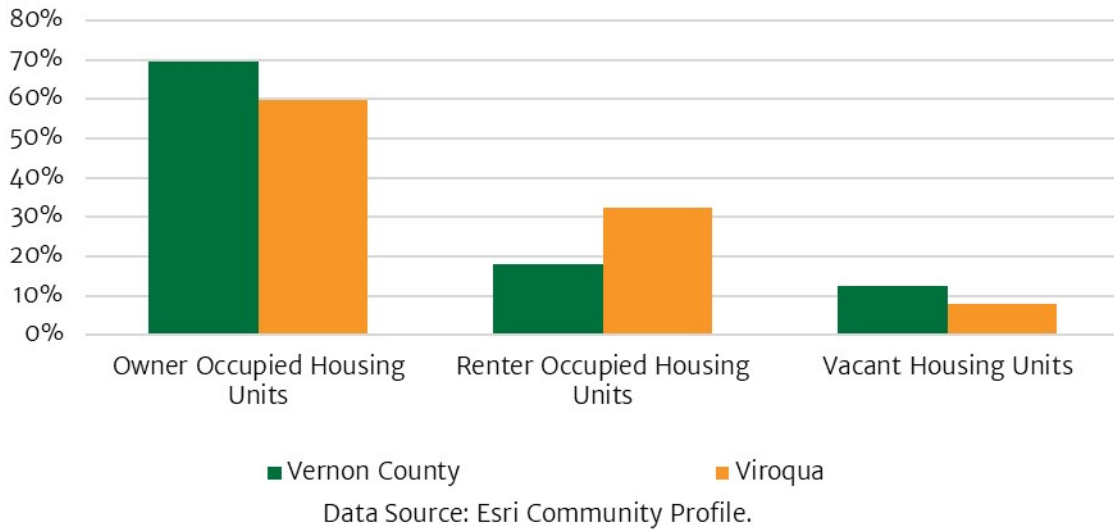
Esri estimates Viroqua's vacancy rate is approximately 7.9%; however, this likely includes short-term rentals which inflate the vacancy rate. Redevelopment Resources believes that Viroqua's real vacancy rate is much lower based on current listings of for-sale units and the lack of available apartments listed online.



Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Housing Characteristics, 2023.

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Figure 3. Housing Unit Tenure Comparison (2024)



Housing Costs

As the housing market tightens demand drives up the cost of housing with increased rents and higher costs of home ownership. Households begin to feel the strain when wage increases are not keeping up with increased housing costs. As of 2023, according to the American Community Survey, approximately 47% are valued at less than \$200,000, 33% of units are valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999, and 20% are valued at greater than \$299,999 (Figure 4).

THE HOUSING LADDER

WHEN THERE AREN'T ENOUGH HOMES, EVERYBODY COMPETES FOR WHAT'S AVAILABLE.

-SIGHTLINE INSTITUTE

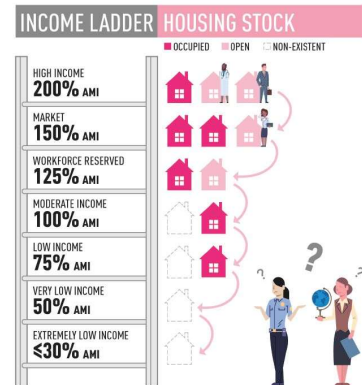
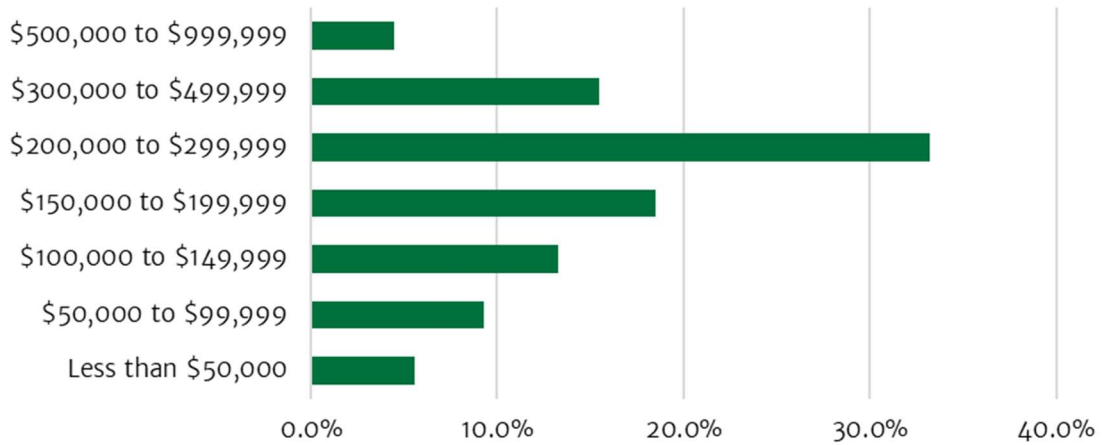


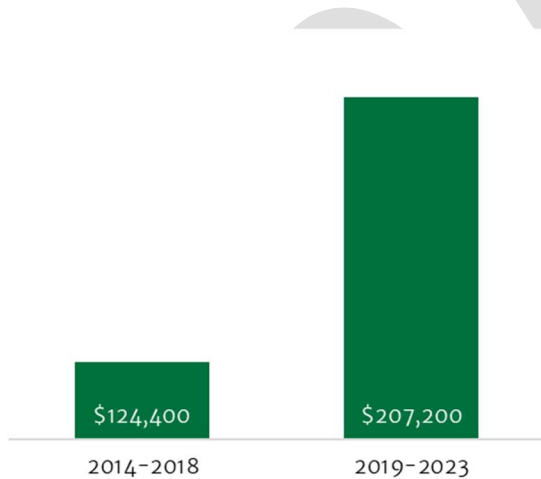
Figure 4. Owner-Occupied Housing Units by Value (2023)



Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Housing Characteristics.

The median home value of owner-occupied units grew 67% from 2014 to 2023. Median rents grew 27% during the same period.

Figure 5. Median Value of Owner-occupied Units (2014-2023)



Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Housing Characteristics.

Figure 6. City of Viroqua Median Rent Trends (2015-2023)

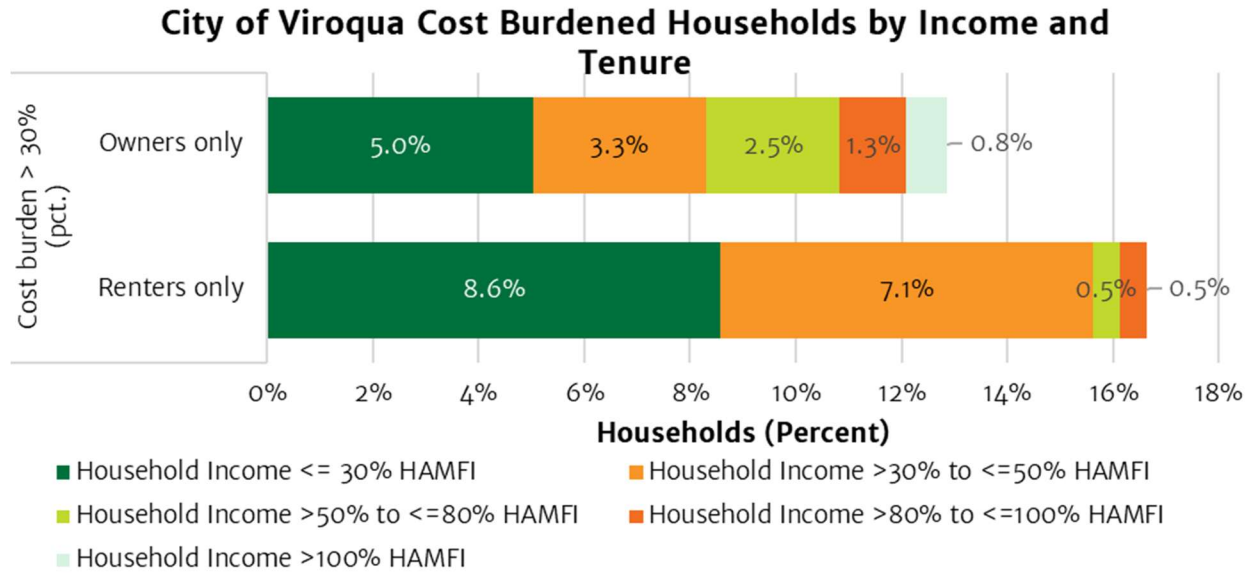


Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014-2023), Housing Characteristics.

Housing Cost Burden

Some growth in value and rent is natural and new housing stock contributes to the increase, but Viroqua residents are concerned about housing affordability and availability of housing units. Households that spend more than 30% of their household income on housing expenses are considered cost-burdened by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In Viroqua, 16.6% of households are cost-burdened renter households and 12.8% are cost-burdened owner households. In other words, nearly 30% of households in Viroqua are cost-burdened (Figure 7).

Figure 7. City of Viroqua Cost Burdened Households by Income and Tenure



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, CHAS (2017–2021 ACS), City of Viroqua.

Income Levels

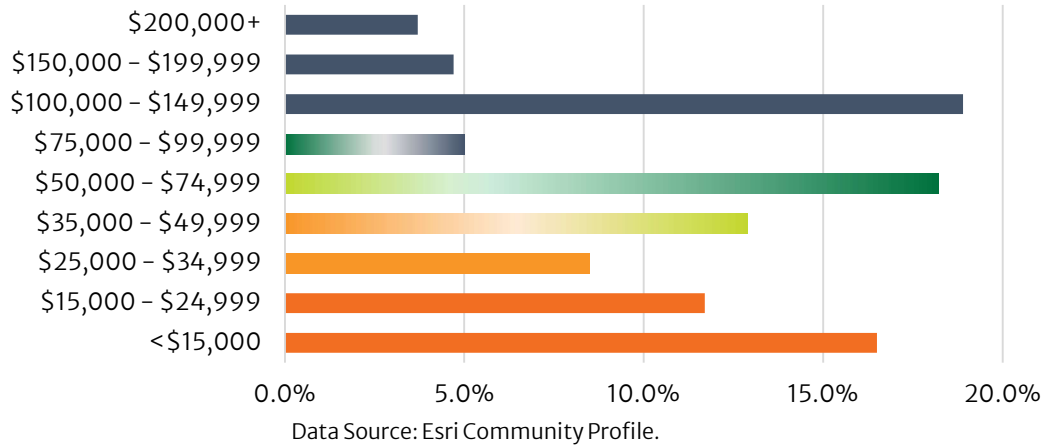
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines the HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI) to determine income eligibility for housing programs. The 2024 HAMFI for Vernon County is \$88,300. Table 1 provides the income limits based on the HAMFI, while Figure 8 illustrates the approximate percentage of households in Viroqua by the percentage of HAMFI. For context, approximately 49.6% of Viroqua households earn less than \$50,000.

Table 1. HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI)

Household Income ≤ 30% HAMFI	Less than \$26,490
Household Income >30% to ≤50% HAMFI	\$26,491 – \$44,150
Household Income >50% to ≤80% HAMFI	\$44,151 – \$70,640
Household Income >80% to ≤100% HAMFI	\$70,641 – \$88,300
Household Income >100% HAMFI	Greater than \$88,301

Data Source: Redevelopment Resources, HUD Income Limits for Vernon County. Note: 2024 HAMFI is \$88,300.

Figure 8. Viroqua Households by Income (2024)



Housing Unit Projections

Redevelopment Resources estimates that there are an additional 230 to 352 housing units needed by 2033. This estimate is based on the following factors:

1. A portion of the employees commuting to the city may choose to move if housing is available.
2. New job creation may capture new residents.
3. Natural household growth trends.
4. Pent-up demand since the Great Recession.
Demand for new housing didn't go away during the Great Recession, but economic forces such as financing, layoffs, etc. constrained the ability to produce the supply needed to keep up with demand.
5. Redevelopment Resources recommends a total vacancy rate of 3-5%.

Table 2. Housing Demand Forecast

	Viroqua	
	Low	High
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside (OTM)	1,976	1,976
New Jobs	20	100
New Households captured	20	52
Natural Household Growth 2024-2033	20	100
Pent-up Demand since 2009	183	183
Recommended Vacancy	3%	5%
Additional Units needed by 2033	230	352

*Jobs were not taken into account in the total demand 1 for 1 but factored into New Households at the percentage shown.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

Goal 1: Ensure Affordable Housing Opportunities

Encourage the development, rehabilitation, and preservation of diverse, high-quality housing types that meet the needs of all income levels, ages, and household sizes, while integrating sustainable practices and long-term planning strategies.

Objectives

- a. Increase the diversity and quality of housing options.
- b. Preserve and rehabilitate existing housing stock.

Recommendations

- a. Create an affordable housing fund through the ability to capture excess increment from allowing a Tax Increment District to stay open for an additional year. By state statute, at least 75% must be used for affordable housing projects. Funds can be used to incentivize the creation of new units, rehabilitate existing units, or support downpayment assistance. The program should be designed to meet the needs of the city, such as development of affordable rental units, assistance with homeownership, or improving infrastructure for low- to moderate-income neighborhoods. This source could also be used to establish a revolving loan program for homeowner or rental rehabilitation.
- b. Encourage mixed-use and mixed-income developments in appropriate areas.
- c. Update zoning to allow a broader range of housing types, including duplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and senior housing.
- d. Offer low-interest loans for home repairs and energy efficiency upgrades
- e. Partner with local organizations to assist landlords and homeowners in maintaining safe, healthy, and sustainable housing.

Goal 2: Protect Community Character through Balanced Housing Policies

Adopt proactive housing policies and regulations that safeguard neighborhood integrity, sustain Viroqua's cultural character, and ensure housing remains available for long-term residents.

Objective:

- a. Regulate short-term rentals (STRs) to ensure housing availability for residents.

Recommendation

- a. Establish a STR licensing process. [Wisconsin Statute 66.1014](#) allows municipalities to regulate STRs if a residential dwelling is rented for longer than 6 but fewer than 30 consecutive days. The municipality may limit the total number of days within any consecutive 365-day period that the dwelling may be

rented to no fewer than 180 days. The municipality may not specify the period of time the STR may be rented, but the municipality may require that the maximum number of allowable rental days within a 365-day period must run consecutively.

If the STR is rented for more than 10 nights each year, the owner or property manager must obtain from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection a license as a tourist rooming house, as defined in s. 97.01 (15k). Second, should the city create an ordinance for licensing STRs, they would also need to obtain a license for conducting such activities.

Resources:

1. [Town of Holland, Sheboygan County, Short-Term Rental License](#)
2. [“Short-Term Rentals” by Remzy Bitar, Attorney, Municipal Law & Litigation Group, S.C.](#)

Chapter 3 – Transportation Element

A safe, reliable, and well-connected transportation system is vital to the City of Viroqua's quality of life and economic vitality. The City's transportation network is shaped by its role as a regional hub in Vernon County, with State Highway 14/61 serving as the primary corridor for commuters, freight, and visitors. Local streets must balance the needs of residents, businesses, and downtown shoppers while ensuring safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Viroqua's transportation challenges are unique, shaped by hilly terrain, limited east-west connections, and the need to manage truck traffic through downtown. At the same time, the community has embraced a multimodal vision. The 2025 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan reflects strong resident support for safer, better-connected walking and biking routes, particularly to schools, parks, and employment centers. Transit services, the Viroqua Municipal Airport, and accommodation for Amish horse-drawn vehicles further highlight the need for a diverse and adaptable system.

General Transportation Context:

The City of Viroqua is served principally by the auto and truck modes of transportation. This mode of travel is served by a system of streets and highways under the jurisdiction of the State of Wisconsin, Vernon County, City of Viroqua, and Town of Viroqua. While these jurisdictional systems are important with respect to their own function, residents and businesses are dependent on the state highways and their regional linkages for their overall welfare and sustainability. State Highway 14/61 is the most important transportation facility in the City of Viroqua planning area because it is the main traffic generator through the City with 8,000-10,000 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), or cars per day.

There is a larger regional transportation context that also affects the planning for the City of Viroqua. Regional transportation facilities affecting this planning area are focused on the La Crosse metropolitan area. Passenger rail and commercial air travel services are available in the City of La Crosse, about an hour away in La Crosse County. Rail service is also available to the north in the City of Tomah. Access to the Interstate Highway System is available in the City of La Crosse to the west and the City of Sparta to the north. Potential growth in service at the Viroqua airport should not be discounted. These facilities are important to this planning area because they have an important role in determining much of the employment and general economic welfare of the Viroqua area.

Highways, Streets, and Roads:

Many of the streets and roads in the City of Viroqua are constructed on hilly terrain because of the area's location at the head of several drainage basins. This terrain causes extra problems for the location and costs of street construction. Issues include limitations on the interconnectivity of streets and the accommodation of drainage. The abrupt topography in the city has produced several dead-end streets. The interconnectivity of streets is important for good traffic flow and safety, and to provide access to property for future development.

A few residents have expressed concern about the traffic volume on Main Street, specifically that there is too much traffic that moves too quickly. Managing traffic through the downtown is important because of the delicate balance between providing access to shopping experiences and pedestrian safety. There must be compatibility between the city's downtown planning and transportation planning. A key concern in traffic movement through a city's downtown is the volume of truck traffic. Traffic volume and congestion problems are limited mostly to arterial streets and key intersections in the City of Viroqua. Facilitating continued urban growth requires the safe and efficient accommodation of traffic flow in existing and planned high-traffic

corridors.

Managing traffic flow in the downtown also involves the provision of adequate parking for shoppers, employees and downtown residents. In addition to managing traffic flow, a good parking pattern is necessary for a successful downtown shopping area.

As noted in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, it is recognized that in the northern half of the city, nearly all through traffic streets, (Chicago Avenue, Main Street, East Street, and Railroad Avenue) flow on a north-south direction, there are virtually no east-west connections for a stretch of nearly a mile between Highway 56 and County Road BB.

Main Street has undergone reconstruction, including electrical work, and businesses and residents are enjoying the improvements. The design added a number of items to increase traffic flow and increase pedestrian safety.

1. Left turn lanes were added in some spots where there were none (Court and Terhune).
2. All three side streets are one-way streets. Court Street was already a one-way, directed away from Main Street, so that was unchanged. Jefferson Street is now a one-way street, directed toward Main Street, and Terhune is a one-way street, directed away from Main Street.
3. Bump-outs were added to corners to shorten the crossing distance.
4. Islands were added in some spots to give pedestrians "refuge" areas when crossing.
5. A Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) was installed at Jefferson Street.

Programs for Streets and Highways City of Viroqua:

Transit:

The City of Viroqua partners with Passenger Transit Inc. to provide ride-share taxi service to the City of Viroqua and the City of Westby, and within one mile of each municipality.

Bicycle, Walking, and Pedestrian Facilities:

In the Spring of 2025, the City approved its Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Residents told the planning team their biggest needs for bicycling and walking are threefold: 1) new facilities, 2) connections to schools and parks, and 3) more separation between motorists and bicyclists/pedestrians. Key findings from community input included:

1. There is an unusually high level of community support and engagement around bicycling and walking.
2. The biggest need for bicycling and walking is new facilities.
3. Connections to schools, parks, and natural areas are the highest priority.
4. People want more separation between motorists and bicyclists/pedestrians.

Three goals and included strategies of the bicycle and pedestrian plan are as follows:

1. Expand and better connect bicycling and walking network
 - a. Build and improve linear facilities
 - b. Decrease conflicts between motorists and people walking and bicycling
 - c. Increase bike parking
2. Maintain the walking and bicycling network
 - a. Improve winter maintenance
 - b. Improve vegetation maintenance
3. Implement the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
 - a. Implement the bicycle and pedestrian plan

Trucking:

There are no commercial trucking terminals in the City of Viroqua.

Municipal Airport:

The Viroqua Municipal Airport, FAA Identifier Y51, is located on the northwest corner of Viroqua at an elevation of 1292 feet. The runways include 11/29, which is paved and 4,000 feet long. This specific runway was recently painted and has a new surface. Runway 11/29 also has pilot-controlled lighting with PAPIs on both ends and a GPS approach. Runway 2/20 is a 1900-foot grass strip and does not have lights.

Other:

There are no navigable waterways, railroad facilities, commercial trucking terminals, or commercial airport facilities within the City of Viroqua. Horse-drawn vehicles travel throughout the Town and City of Viroqua. The Amish community is the most frequent user of the equestrian mode of transportation, which brings with it certain considerations for accommodating this special mode of travel.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

This section outlines goals, objectives, and recommendations to guide transportation planning in Viroqua. It emphasizes safety, connectivity, multimodal access, and regional collaboration, ensuring that transportation investments support community development, economic growth, and the City's long-term resilience.

Goal 1: Ensure a safe, efficient, and well-maintained transportation system for all users.

Objectives:

- a. Improve connectivity and traffic flow while maintaining neighborhood safety.
- b. Reduce congestion and truck traffic impacts in the downtown area.
- c. Enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety at key crossings and corridors.
- d. Maintain and upgrade local streets in a cost-effective manner.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct a traffic and circulation study to identify improvements for east–west connections in the north part of the city.
- b. Work with WisDOT to manage truck routes and improve safety along Highway 14/61 and Main Street.
- c. Expand use of traffic–calming measures (e.g., bump–outs, medians, pedestrian beacons) where pedestrian activity is high.
- d. Regularly update a capital improvement plan for street resurfacing, drainage upgrades, and sidewalk replacement.

Goal 2: Expand and enhance multimodal transportation options.

Objectives:

- a. Implement the 2025 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
- b. Improve connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and employment centers.
- c. Increase accessibility for seniors, youth, and individuals without personal vehicles.
- d. Support safe integration of horse–drawn vehicles into the transportation system.

Recommendations:

- a. Prioritize new trail and sidewalk construction that connects schools, parks, and downtown.
- b. Increase bike parking and improve winter/snow maintenance of pedestrian routes.
- c. Expand partnerships with Passenger Transit Inc. and explore regional transit opportunities.
- d. Design signage and roadway accommodations that improve safety for horse–drawn vehicles.

Goal 3: Strengthen regional connectivity and support economic development through transportation investments.

Objectives:

- a. Leverage Viroqua’s location on key state highways for business growth and tourism.
- b. Improve access to regional airports and interstate highways.
- c. Maintain and enhance the Viroqua Municipal Airport to support business and recreation.
- d. Coordinate with county, state, and federal agencies on transportation planning.

Recommendations:

- a. Advocate for improvements to Highway 14/61 and other regional routes critical to commerce and commuting.
- b. Support marketing and investment in Viroqua Municipal Airport facilities, including lighting, navigational aids, and safety upgrades.
- c. Explore grant funding for airport and multimodal infrastructure.
- d. Work with Vernon County and WisDOT to ensure transportation investments align with local growth and economic development goals.

Chapter 4 – Utilities and Community Facilities Element

According to the City's website, Viroqua Utilities provides water, sewer, and fire protection services to 1,803 Residential, 29 Multi-Family, and 312 Commercial/Industrial/Public Authority customers with a population of over 4,300 in the City of Viroqua. A self-funded entity, Viroqua Utilities, receives no tax dollars to support its system and operates under the rates and tariffs on water use, sewer use, and fire protection. Water and fire protection rates and tariffs are established by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSCW), and the accounting records are maintained in accordance with the Uniform System of Accounts prescribed by the PSCW. The utility is governed by City Ordinances.

Planning for future growth is particularly important when it comes to utilities. Capacity issues are impacted by commercial and residential development. Understanding when and how to expand capacity in water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer, as well as utilities operated by entities outside of the city, is an important part of effectively managing utilities to provide seamless services to residents and local businesses.

An important element of long-range utility planning is the identification of areas where existing utility lines can effectively be extended for future growth. This kind of planning is particularly important for sanitary sewer service because the most efficient wastewater collection system is based on gravity flow to the city's sewer treatment plant. If sewer service needs to be extended to a property that cannot flow by gravity to the sewer treatment plant, a lift station is required to pump sewage from opposite-flowing lands. Lift stations and associated force mains are expensive. Ideally, the city will plan the location of a lift station so that it serves as much of the area as reasonably possible to maximize efficiency and use of such lift stations.

The future growth of Viroqua potentially extends into several different drainage areas or basins. An important responsibility of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a plan that can be relied upon to project the extension of sanitary sewer services. This is necessary to determine the engineering and financing of this complex service. While public water systems also require sound planning for growth, they are not subject to the drainage basin planning and associated costs as described above for sewer systems.

Water and Sanitary Sewer Service:

The City of Viroqua maintains a public water and wastewater system that serves all City residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial customers. The water system includes three wells, two 250,000-gallon storage facilities, and a 34-mile distribution system. The water source is groundwater, with wells ranging in depth from 800 feet to 1,100 feet, tapping into the Ironton-Galesville and Mt. Simon Aquifers. The city's average water use is 320,000 gallons per day, and the firm's (reliable) maximum pumping capacity of 921,600 gallons per day. The system also supplies water for firefighting purposes and has a fire rating of 5.

The sewer system includes 6 lift stations, 34 miles of pipe, and an advanced nutrient removal wastewater treatment system. The treatment system receives an average of 274,900 gallons per day (GPD). The system is currently designed to treat 535,000 GPD max monthly flow.

The City's water and sewer system is regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to ensure protection of public health and the environment. The water quality standards include testing the following potential contaminants: microbiological, inorganic, radioactive, PFAS, disinfection by-products, volatile organic, and synthetic organic: including pesticides and herbicides. The water supply is compliant with all testing limits. The wastewater system is also continually monitored for organics, nutrients, and solid loading, and is also in compliance with all limits.

Storm Water Management:

The City of Viroqua's ridge-top location straddles the drainage basins of the Kickapoo River and the Bad Axe

River. The many valley bottoms throughout this planning area are subject to flash flooding. There are no rivers or stream flood plains within the city. Most of the City is located on ridge-top soils, which tend to be well-drained soils of mixed loams, clay, and rocky residue. There is generally good surface water drainage throughout the City of Viroqua because the general gradient of the land slopes away from the numerous ridge tops, which are prevalent throughout the planning area.

Stormwater management in the City of Viroqua is accommodated by a limited system of storm sewers and surface drainage channels. Most of these storm drainage facilities are provided within street rights-of-way, although there are several open drainage channels on private property or within drainage easements. Urban development generates significant volumes of stormwater runoff. The retention of runoff from commercial and industrial uses within such sites is a standard development technique and is subject to regulatory requirements. Urban housing sites can also be planned and designed to minimize stormwater runoff. It is in the interest of Viroqua to require such storm water management techniques for land development because they will minimize the investment of public funds needed to manage storm water runoff, and ultimately, will minimize or limit storm water damage to private properties and public infrastructure.

Stormwater management standards are typically placed in local subdivision or land division ordinances. Chapter 16 in the Viroqua City Code contains design standards for subdivisions and land development. Stormwater and erosion control standards for land development are also provided in state and federal regulations, such as Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 151 and 216 for construction sites over one acre in size.

Solid Waste Disposal:

Solid waste is collected and disposed of by both the city and private contractors in the City of Viroqua. Solid waste is disposed of at the county sanitary landfill, which is located about two miles northeast of the city. There is no active sanitary landfill within the City of Viroqua. The Vernon County landfill sits on about 253 acres in the Town of Viroqua. The county landfill has full-service recycling. The landfill had received DNR approval for a landfill expansion to accommodate landfilling to the year 2019. Talks are currently underway to consider expansion. The longer-term future of solid waste management indicates that regional collaborations will likely be necessary to control costs and comply with increased environmental requirements.

Recycling Facilities:

The county provides comprehensive recycling services at the Vernon County Landfill.

Parks and Recreation:

See the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation and Parks Plan.

Telecommunications Facilities:

A variety of telecommunication facilities and providers offer internet, television, and phone services. Key providers include Frontier, Viasat, HughesNet, Mediacom, and Vernon Communications Cooperative. These providers offer services like DSL, cable, fiber, and satellite internet, as well as IPTV and traditional phone service.

Internet Providers and Services:

- Frontier: Offers DSL and fiber internet with speeds up to 7 Gbps and 99.9% reliability, according to Frontier.

- Viasat and HughesNet: Provide satellite internet with nearly 100% coverage of Viroqua.
- Mediacom: Provides cable internet, with some areas also having access to fiber internet.
- Vernon Communications Cooperative: Specializes in fiber-optic internet, offering high speeds and reliability.

Availability:

- Cable internet: Widely available, with 97% coverage in Viroqua.
- Fiber internet: Available to 49% of the city.
- Vernon Communications Cooperative: Focuses on fiber-optic service, available to many residents in the area.
- Satellite internet: Offers 100% coverage.

Power Plants and Transmission Lines:

There are no electric power generation facilities in the City of Viroqua. An electric power substation is located on Linton Avenue. Electric power to the City of Viroqua is provided by Xcel Energy and also by Vernon Electric Cooperative. The capacity of power plants and transmission lines serving this area is reported to be adequate for present needs.

Cemeteries:

There is one cemetery in the City of Viroqua owned by the Viroqua Cemetery Board. The city provides some financial support for this cemetery. The cemetery has no known issues regarding use or capacity.

Health Care Facilities:

Healthcare in the City of Viroqua is provided by Vernon Memorial Healthcare, a 25-bed independent hospital. Services include but are not limited to an Emergency Department and H.E.A.R.T. Center (housing Cardiopulmonary Diagnostics and Rehab and the VMH Wellness Center), Physical and Occupational Therapy departments, a Renal Dialysis unit, therapy pool, and racquetball court. Vernon Memorial Hospital has 510 employees serving 25,000–30,000 people within a 25–30-mile radius of Viroqua. Some of the major healthcare services are also provided by the healthcare facilities in the City of La Crosse.

Child Care Facilities:

There are three commercial-scale facilities for childcare, and multiple home-based childcare centers in the City of Viroqua. The Department of Children and Families has a reported capacity of 200 licensed childcare spots in Viroqua. Based on Esri’s population by age estimates, there are approximately 700 children in Viroqua under the age of 14. If 50% of them require childcare due to dual-income earning caretakers, the number of licensed childcare spots would need to increase by 75%.

Police:

The City of Viroqua has a full-time Police Department headquartered in the city at 1130 Nelson Parkway. There are 12 members of the police force, including the Chief, Assistant Chief, Sergeant, Investigator, two K9 Officers, four Patrol Officers, and two dispatchers.

Fire and Rescue:

The City of Viroqua Fire Department apparatus includes three engines, two rescue vehicles, one ladder truck, two tankers, three brush vehicles, a command vehicle, and the Chief’s vehicle.

Libraries:

The McIntosh Memorial Library is the public library that serves the City of Viroqua, which houses a collection of over 40,000 items, 15 public Internet computers, wireless Internet access, and is a member of the Winding Rivers Library System. The library participates in WRLSWEB, the online shared card catalog, which allows patrons to search for and receive materials from libraries in our seven-county region. They offer online programming for patrons of all ages with a special emphasis on children's programming for youth ages 2 to 18.

Schools:

The City of Viroqua's school-aged population is served by two educational institutions. The Viroqua Public School District provides K-12 education at its school campus on the west side of Viroqua. The Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School provides K-8 education in Viroqua. A Youth Initiative High School and the Cornerstone Christian Academy offer high school options in the community.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

Goal 1 – Utilities and Infrastructure: Ensure reliable, efficient, and sustainable water and wastewater services that can accommodate current needs and planned growth.

Objectives:

- a. Plan for long-term capacity in water and sanitary sewer systems to accommodate residential, commercial, and industrial development, taking into account new/planned housing units, population increases.
- b. Extend utility services in a cost-effective, coordinated manner, with priority to areas that can be served by gravity flow for sewer.
- c. Maintain compliance with all state and federal regulations for water quality and wastewater treatment.

Recommendations:

- a. Prepare a Utility Service Area Plan identifying expansion priorities, lift station needs, and cost estimates.
- b. Continue preventative maintenance and upgrade schedules for wells, mains, lift stations, and treatment systems.
- c. Pursue funding (PSCW, DNR, USDA) for system upgrades and capacity expansions.

Goal 2 – Stormwater Management: Manage stormwater to prevent flooding, protect water quality, and minimize public infrastructure costs.

Objectives:

- a. Require stormwater best management practices (BMPs) in all new developments.
- b. Protect natural drainageways and promote site design that reduces runoff.

Recommendations:

- a. Update local ordinances to reflect current state stormwater regulations (NR 151, NR 216).
- b. Encourage green infrastructure such as rain gardens, permeable pavements, and bioswales.
- c. Promote rain gardens, permeable paving, and bioswales on both public and private site.

Goal 3 – Solid Waste & Recycling: Provide efficient and environmentally responsible solid waste and recycling services.

Objectives:

- a. Maintain strong recycling participation and capacity at the Vernon County Landfill.
- b. Plan for long-term landfill capacity and explore new technologies and regional collaboration opportunities.

Recommendations:

- a. Support county landfill expansion and evaluate long-term waste diversion options.
- b. Expand community education on waste reduction, recycling, contamination prevention, and composting.
- c. Explore curbside compost collection or drop-off pilot programs.

Goal 4 – Public Safety: Provide effective, well-equipped police, fire, and emergency services to protect life and property.

Objectives:

- a. Maintain staffing and equipment at levels that meet Viroqua's true population and service needs.
- b. Coordinate with regional partners for mutual aid and training.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct periodic staffing and equipment needs assessments.
- b. Pursue grant funding for equipment upgrades.
- c. Undergo community resilience and disaster preparedness planning

Chapter 5 – Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Element

The City of Viroqua is uniquely situated within Wisconsin's Driftless Area, a landscape characterized by its rugged terrain, steep valleys, and rolling ridges that escaped glaciation. This geography shapes the community's agricultural productivity, natural resources, and cultural identity. The preservation and stewardship of these resources are vital not only to the City's character and quality of life, but also to its economy, which relies heavily on agriculture, tourism, and heritage-based industries.

Although the City itself contains limited farmland, forests, and surface water, the surrounding area supports highly productive agricultural lands, limestone quarries, sensitive wetlands, wildlife habitats, and historic landscapes. Groundwater is the City's sole source of drinking water, making its protection critical to the health, safety, and prosperity of residents and businesses. Similarly, the City's location in a region known for

dark skies, unique prairies, and diverse cultural traditions underscores the importance of thoughtful planning and conservation.

Viroqua's cultural resources are equally significant. From the effigy mounds and Native American travel routes of the Ho-Chunk Nation to Norwegian immigrant heritage, Amish communities, tobacco barns, and its nationally recognized historic downtown, Viroqua's story is deeply rooted in the land and the people who have shaped it. These agricultural, natural, and cultural assets form the foundation of the City's identity and offer opportunities for sustainable growth, education, and tourism.

Groundwater:

The groundwater resource in this planning area occurs in two general forms. In the first form, groundwater is in shallow zones of saturation either on top of sedimentary bedrock on higher lands or at shallow depths in the lower valley floors, usually in stream corridors. The top of the bedrock is typically fractured, allowing some fissures to extend down to deeper aquifers. Contaminants from the ground can find their way to these deeper waters through these cracks and fissures extending from the surface. The second form of groundwater occurs in the deeper crevices and voids of the limestone and sandstone bedrock. This deeper water source is often several hundred feet below the ground surface. Both sources of groundwater constitute the aquifers for the supply of water for human, agricultural, and industrial use. The deep, bedrock aquifers have large supplies of groundwater, but if contaminated, they are difficult, if not impossible to clean up.

The planning implications concerning the groundwater resource center around the protection of these waters for public health and safety purposes, particularly those waters used for human consumption. Protecting the supply of groundwater will ensure adequate quantities for future human and community use. Protecting these waters in Viroqua is particularly important because groundwater is the sole source of water for human use, unlike some other areas, which also have large lakes and reservoirs of surface water that provide drinking water, and water for agricultural and industrial use.

The largest human use of groundwater is by the City of Viroqua municipal water system. This system consists of four wells, which range in depth from 505 to 1,100 feet. Preventing contamination of the groundwater aquifer that serves this system is critically important for public health.

The planning approach for dealing with this groundwater resource centers around the methods of preventing, reducing, and mitigating contamination of groundwater aquifers, methods for conserving water use, and applying water quality measures in the use and development of land. Groundwater planning and protection programs are most effectively done on an area-wide basis, at either the county or river basin level, because of the broad regional nature of groundwater aquifers.

Forests:

The Viroqua planning area has little forested area. There are some woodlands in the Town of Viroqua, mostly on the steep valley hillsides. Planning for the forest as a resource to be harvested is not a paramount issue in the overall context of this plan.

Productive Agricultural Areas:

While there are no productive agricultural areas within the city of Viroqua, a substantial part of this planning area is impacted by productive agricultural lands. This land resource is vital to providing food for new and growing markets. The farm products and farm families on these lands are a very valuable part of the local economy. These agricultural areas are, therefore, an important natural resource, the preservation of which is

important to the quality of life and economy of the City of Viroqua. An important planning issue revolves around the conversion of some of these lands for non-agricultural uses and the secondary impacts from those uses on adjacent farming operations.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas:

There are no uniquely sensitive areas known to exist in this planning area other than those reported here.

Stream Corridors:

This planning area is on the uplands between the West Branch of the Kickapoo River and the Bad Axe River basin. There are no perennial streams in the City of Viroqua. The principal stream-related planning context for this planning area is the quality of the surface waters flowing into the streams, which are downgradient from the planning area.

Surface Waters:

There are no extensive areas of surface water within this planning area. There are no reservoirs, flowages, or lakes. The overall planning context for surface waters would be to ensure the quality of surface waters in its role of feeding into drinking water aquifers, and to minimize surface water runoff problems.

Floodplains:

There is little shoreland in the Viroqua planning area, therefore, floodplain planning is not relevant to this Comprehensive Plan. The Surface Water Data Viewer on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website does not show any open water or floodplains in the city. The Viroqua area does have drainage courses, which are subject to flash flooding. Such flooding increases with urban development on the lands that flow to such drainage courses. There are no 100-year flood plain elevations identified in this planning area; flash flooding is not conducive to 100-year flood plain identification. In the immediate urban area, all drainage courses are potential flood-prone areas, and land development in these areas should be regulated to restrict or prohibit the placement of any use that would restrict flash flood drainage and would be exposed to property damage and jeopardize human safety.

Wetlands:

The planning area consists primarily of uplands with minimal surface water environments. There are a few broad wetland environments present, however, due to the characteristic steep hills and deep valleys of the coulee region, there are numerous small wet soil areas that qualify as biological wetlands. Wetlands are an important bird and wildlife habitat, which is a component of the overall quality of life for residents in Viroqua. Wetland knowledge and planning are also important to property owners and units of government because they are subject to public regulation.

Wildlife Habitat:

Wildlife habitat exists in proportion to the number of woodlands, wetlands, and river environments. As described in the preceding sections, this planning area has small amounts of these types of habitat resources, thereby minimizing the planning issues related to wildlife habitat. Little wildlife habitat exists within the City of Viroqua since most city is developed. Most wildlife habitats are limited to the eastern half of the Town of Viroqua, in wooded hillsides, valleys, and a few stream corridors.

Threatened or Endangered Species:

The federally listed threatened and endangered species in Vernon County include the Higgins Eye Pearly Mussel in the Mississippi River. In addition, there is a prevalence of “goat prairie” plant communities in this general driftless area of Wisconsin. These are southwest-facing dry lime hillsides, which are the habitat for prairie plant materials. Bird habitat is important to the increasing popularity of birding as a recreational pastime. Birding has been reported as the fastest-growing spectator sport in the world, and this activity can have significant economic value for a community.

Metallic & Non-Metallic Mineral Resources:

There are no known metallic mineral resources or mining operations in the planning area. There are non-metallic mineral resources in the form of sedimentary rock and sand and gravel deposits. The sedimentary rock consists mainly of limestone and some sandstone. There are five limestone quarries in the Town of Viroqua. Reclamation measures are required by county ordinance for terminated quarries and pits.

Other Natural Resources:

Driftless Area – Driftless is a geological term describing land that the glaciers likely didn’t pass over, preserving the highly eroded and ancient landscape enjoyed today. This unique landscape is responsible for many of the historic, geological, and archaeological assets of the area and is of statewide and national interest.

This unique landscape is a valuable natural resource, contributing to many of the quality-of-life factors that benefit this area. The diversity of this scenic landscape has economic value to many local businesses and to the tax bases of local and county governments and school districts because it is the base of much of the local economy, namely tourism. The goals, objectives, policies, and programs related to the “driftless” landscape are dealt with in many of the individual sections of this Comprehensive Plan.

Air Quality – Air quality as it relates to rural areas primarily involves odors from farming/livestock operations. As residential development occurs on the borders of farming areas, there may be concerns expressed by residents about air quality related to livestock operations or open burning events.

Light Pollution – Viroqua is in an area known for its dark skies, particularly within the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and surrounding areas. The local group, Kickapoo Valley Dark Sky Initiative (KVDSI), is actively working to mitigate light pollution by focusing on education and advocacy to preserve dark skies in the region.

Historical and Cultural Resources:

The cultural and historical resources of this area fall within two principal time periods: the pre-settlement culture and the culture developed after the onset of white settlement, starting about the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Native American culture present at the time of European settlement was largely that of the Ho-Chunk nation. This nation was thought to be preceded in the area by Native Americans of the Woodland Period, extending back about 3,000 years. It is from this period that ancient mound formations were built in this general area of Wisconsin; these are often called effigy mounds because many of them took the shape of birds and animals. Some of these original upland areas consisted of a savannah landscape composed of prairie and oak openings where buffalo and deer would likely have been hunted. The Native American communities, including the Ho-Chunk, typically resided in valley bottoms near water sources. There are no known

permanent Native American village sites in this planning area. The high ridge divide extending through the Viroqua area likely was the location of historic Native American travel and migration routes. Extensive farming and urban development in the area may have removed such historic sites; however, undisturbed sites may remain awaiting identification.

Most of the historic and cultural resources known to exist in this planning area are those related to the settlement of the area from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The Vernon County Historical Museum in Viroqua is a valuable resource for such information. Properties on the National Register of Historical Places include the following: City of Viroqua downtown historic district, Vernon County Courthouse, Bekkedal tobacco warehouse, and the Masonic Temple building. Other sites of historical and cultural significance include: the round barn and other structures on the Cunningham farmstead on Maple Dale Road, and the Belgium Ridge cemetery on Mahoney Road.

Significant cultural resources and traditions in the area include Norwegian heritage, dairy farming, cheese production, tobacco growing, the Amish communities, and the nearby events of the Black Hawk War of 1832.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

This section outlines goals, objectives, and recommendations for protecting, enhancing, and celebrating Viroqua's agricultural, natural, and cultural resources. The intent is to balance community growth and development with the stewardship of the landscapes, traditions, and resources that make Viroqua unique.

Goal 1: Protect and enhance the City of Viroqua's groundwater and surface water resources.

Objectives:

- a. Ensure safe and sustainable groundwater supplies for residents, businesses, and agriculture
- b. Reduce risks of groundwater contamination from development, agriculture, and industrial uses.
- c. Improve stormwater management to reduce runoff and protect surface water quality.

Recommendations:

- a. Encourage low-impact development (LID) practices, such as rain gardens, permeable pavements, and bioswales.
- b. Collaborate with Vernon County and WDNR on regional watershed protection initiatives.
- c. Promote water conservation education and incentives for residents and businesses.

Goal 2: Support and preserve the agricultural economy and heritage in the Viroqua area.

Objectives:

- a. Protect nearby productive farmland from premature conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- b. Promote local food systems and farm-to-market connections.
- c. Reduce land use conflicts between agricultural operations and non-farm development.

Recommendations:

- a. Encourage the establishment of community gardens and farmers' markets.
- b. Work with county agencies to create agricultural buffers where urban and rural uses meet.
- c. Highlight and market Viroqua's regional reputation for organic and specialty agriculture.

Goal 3: Preserve and celebrate Viroqua's cultural and historic resources.

Objectives:

- a. Protect historic buildings, landmarks, and districts.
- b. Promote awareness of Viroqua's Native American, Norwegian, Amish, and agricultural heritage.
- c. Enhance Viroqua's cultural identity/character throughout the city.

Recommendations:

- a. Continue to support the Vernon County Historical Museum and partnerships with the Historical Society, implement the Historic Preservation Plan.
- b. Promote adaptive reuse of historic downtown buildings through incentives and technical assistance.
- c. Encourage use of Bathhouse sandstone, and include cultural identity in gateways, parks, shelters, signage, streetscapes, and alleyways.
- d. Develop an arts and cultural framework to enhance Viroqua (building murals, art, and history on display beyond downtown)

Goal 4: Balance economic development with stewardship of the Driftless Area's unique landscape.**Objectives:**

- a. Promote tourism and outdoor recreation while ensuring environmental sustainability.
- b. Use the Driftless identity as a core part of Viroqua's community character.

Recommendations:

- a. Encourage land conservation partnerships with land trusts and conservation groups.
- b. Establish design guidelines that respect the natural topography and rural viewsheds.

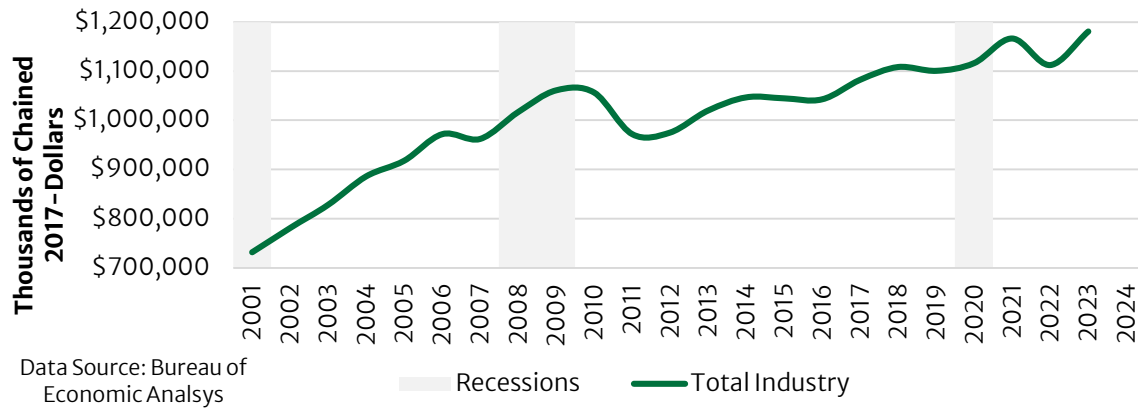
Chapter 6 – Economic Development Element

Economic Base

One of the assumptions highlighted in Chapter 1, "Issues and Opportunities", is that the regional economy will react as it has during previous economic shocks. Specifically, we looked at how Vernon County Gross Domestic Product (GDP), unemployment, and job trends responded to the recessions in 2001, 2008–2009, and 2020.

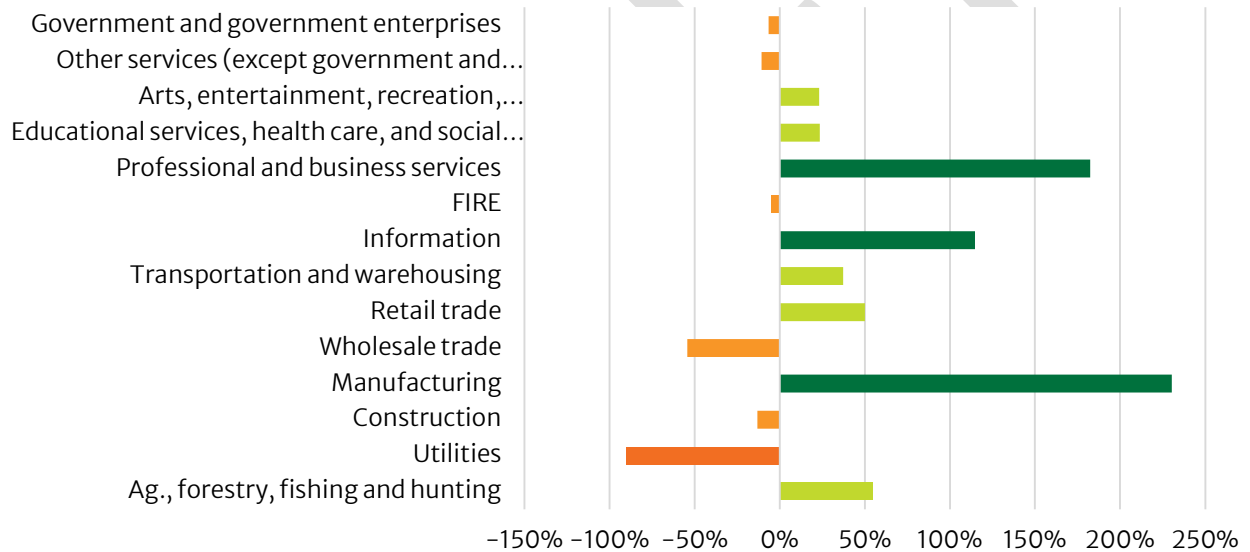
Total GDP for Vernon County reacted in the periods following a recession, apart from the Tech Bubble Burst in 2001. Figure 9 illustrates that while GDP grew during the Great Recession and the global pandemic, GDP fell from 2010–2011 and 2021–2022. However, the construction and Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE) sectors are more sensitive to recessions and react sooner (see **Figure X** in Appendix B).

Figure 9. Vernon County Real GDP Trends



The three industries that have experienced the most growth in Vernon County in terms of Real GDP (GDP adjusted for inflation), are manufacturing; professional and business services; and information (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Percentage Change in Real GDP from 2012 to 2023 in Vernon County by Industry

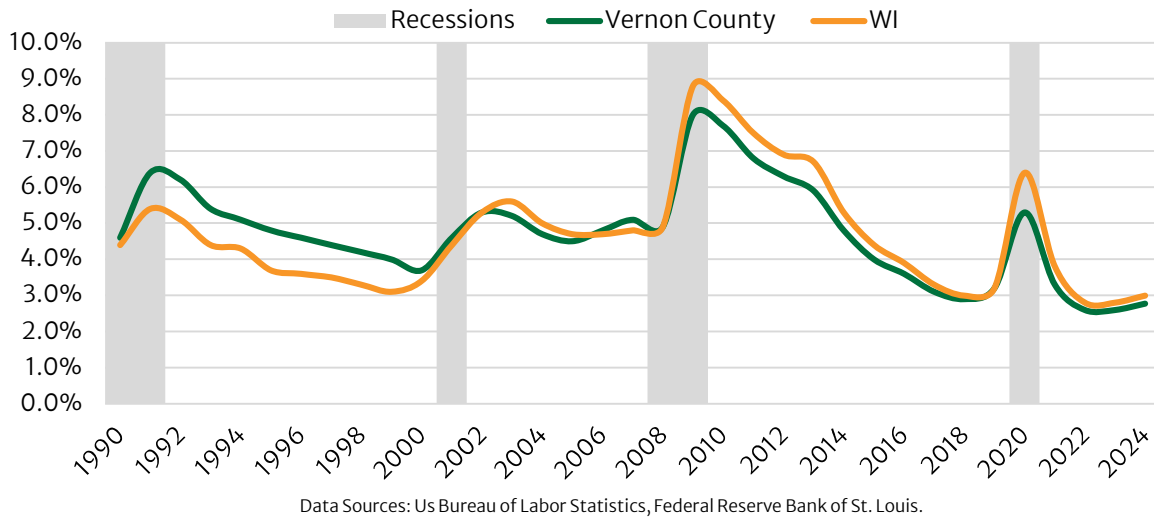


Data Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis CAGDP9, Redevelopment Resources. Data Note: Data for Professional and businesses services industry and Transportation and Warehousing Industry is not available prior to 2011.

Vernon County Employment Trends

Since the Great Recession, Vernon County's unemployment rate has been consistently lower than the unemployment rate of the State of Wisconsin. The unemployment rate reached 7.7% in 2009, the highest it had been since 1990. It reached 5.3% in 2020 and by 2021 reached pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, it was 3.0% (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Vernon County Unemployment Rate Trends (1990–2024)



While the average annual pay for those in the Transportation and Warehousing industry is not the highest (Figure 12) it experienced the most growth in pay (Figure 13). Conversely, while pay in the Utility industry is the highest, it is less than what it was in 2014, and the industry has shrunk in terms of real GDP.

Figure 12. Average Annual Pay in Private for All establishment sizes in Vernon County

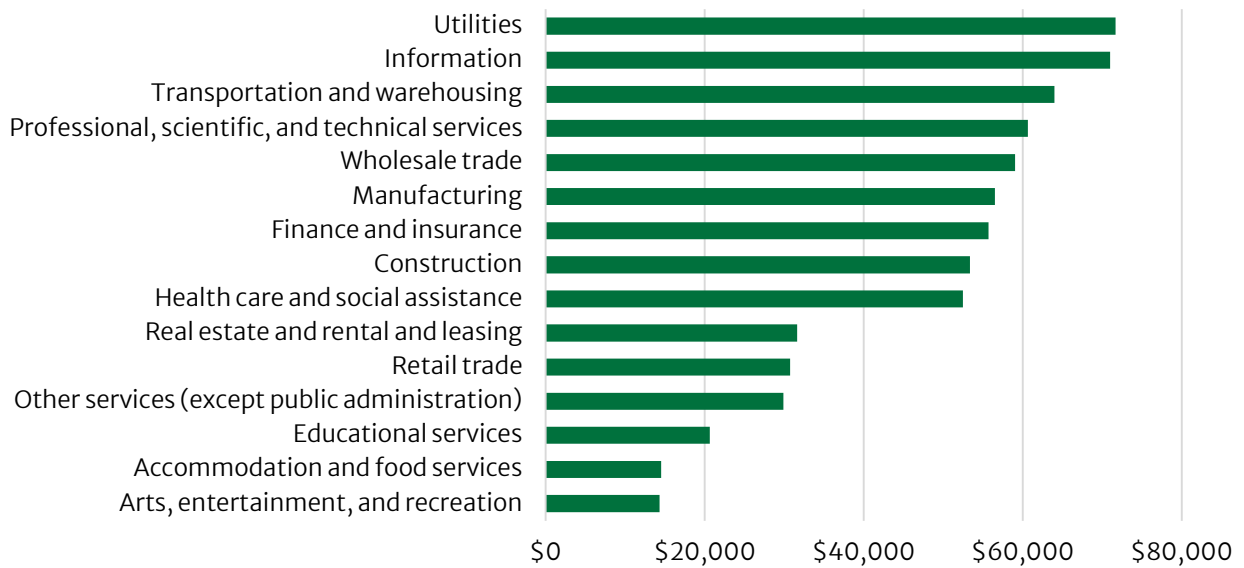
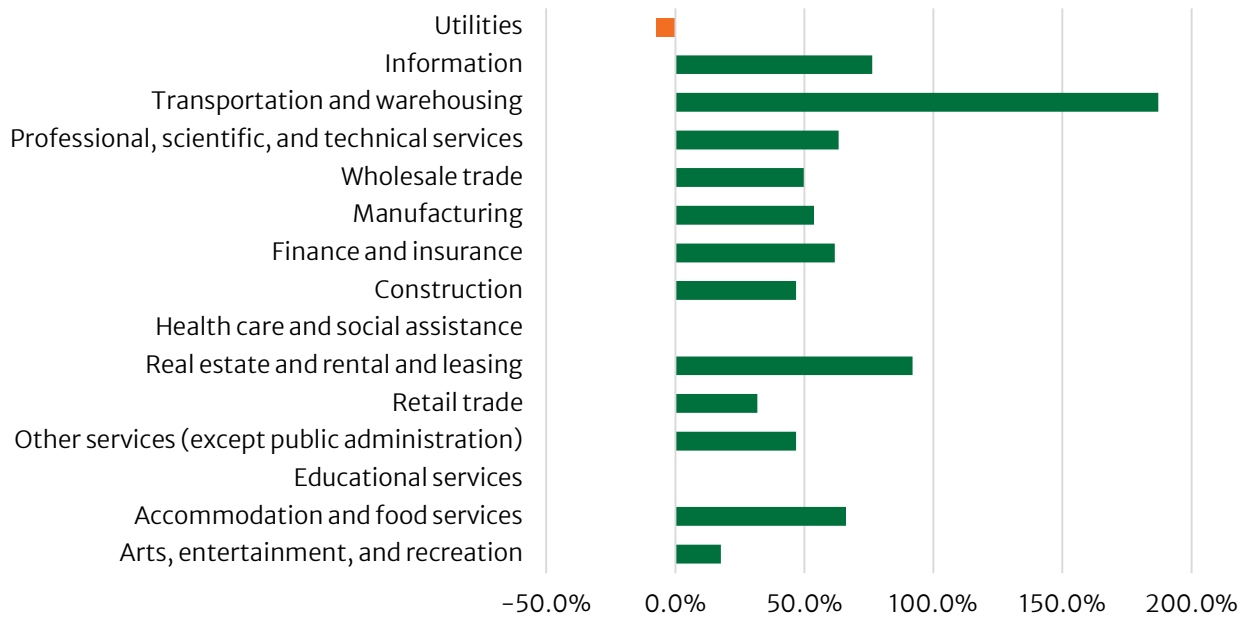


Figure 13. Percentage Change in Annual Pay in Vernon County (2014, 2023)

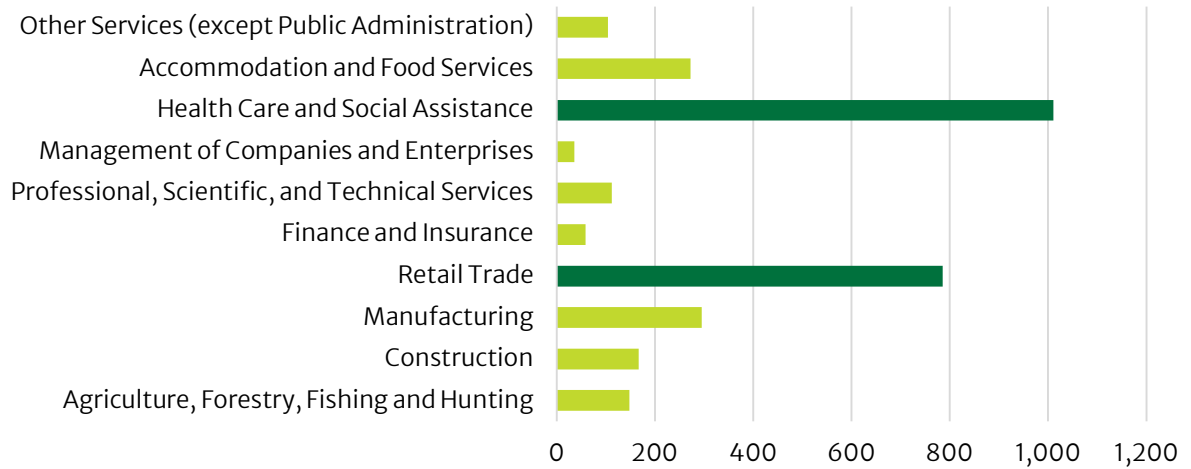


Data Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages in private sector for all establishment sizes. Data Note: Data from 2014 for Health care and social assistance and Educational services industries

Viroqua Employment by Industry Trends

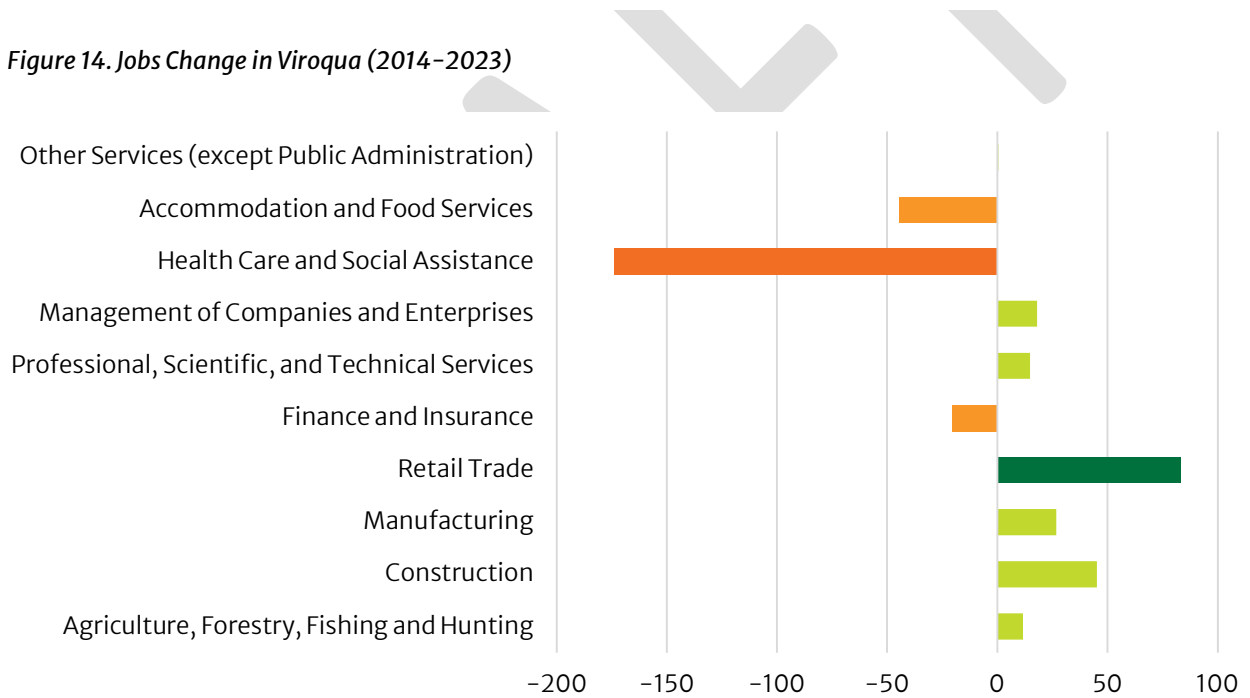
The top two private sector industries in Viroqua by job count are Healthcare and Social Assistance and Retail Trade (Figure 14). From 2014 to 2023, however, the Healthcare and Social Assistance jobs experienced the largest losses (Figure 15). While Retail Trade is a dominant industry in Viroqua and experienced job growth, the annual pay for the industry in the county is on the lower end of the spectrum (see Figure 12 above).

Figure 14. Jobs in Viroqua by Industry (2023)



Data Source: Lightcast retrieved by the Mississippi River Regional Plan Commission. Data Note: The following had insufficient data for the geographical size such as Transportation and Warehousing; Information; Real Estate Rental and Leasing; Administrative and Waste and Support Services; Educational Services; and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation.

Figure 14. Jobs Change in Viroqua (2014–2023)



Data Source: Lightcast retrieved by the Mississippi River Regional Plan Commission. Data Note: The following had insufficient data for the geographical size such as Transportation and Warehousing; Information; Real Estate Rental and Leasing; Administrative and Waste and Support Services; Educational Services; and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation.

Existing Economic Development Tools and Resources

Tax Increment Districts (TIDs)

Municipalities utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as a finance tool for infrastructure and improvement projects located within a specific, contiguous geographic area targeted for development or redevelopment. As

property values within the district increase, the amount of tax increment generated over the base value is used to finance eligible project costs. Any surplus revenues at the time of termination of the district are reallocated to the overlying taxing jurisdictions. More information about TIF is available on the Wisconsin Department of Revenue [website](#) and outlined in Wisconsin State Statute § [66.1105](#).

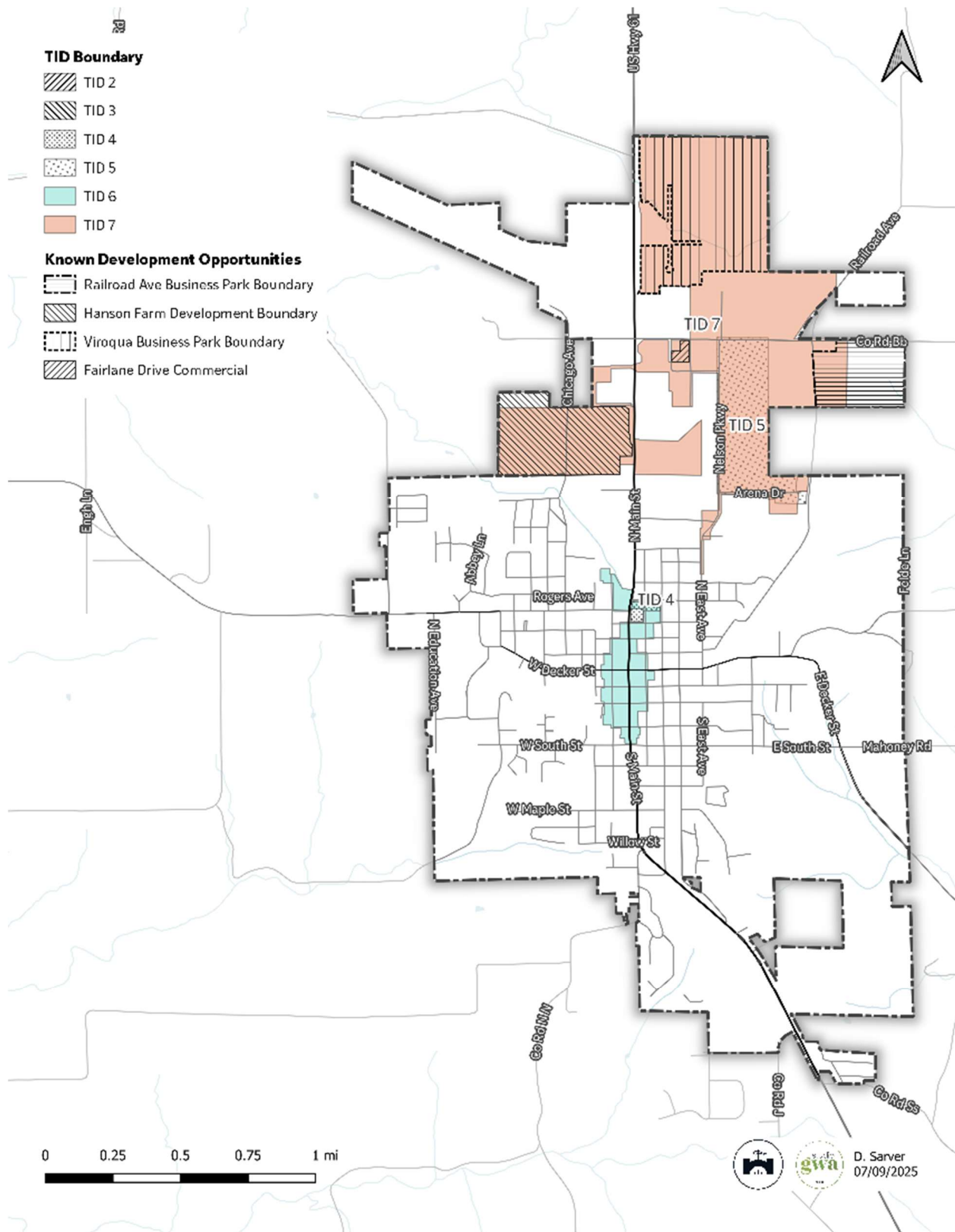
The City of Viroqua has four open TIDs. TID #4 was created in 1999 as a blighted remediation district. The expenditure period has passed, and the increment generated to date is \$3,924,800 according to the Wisconsin Department of Revenue's report on TID changes.

TID #5 was created as an industrial development TID in 2006. It was amended in 2014 to allow additional expenditures, including a half-mile boundary as permitted by state statute, and share revenue with TID #4 for the purpose of completing projects in that district. In 2021, it entered its five-year non-expenditure period. To date, \$2,867,100 in increment has been generated.

In 2015, the city created TID #6 as a rehabilitation/conservation district. A portion of the district overlays TID #4. To date, \$18,228,500 in increment has been generated.

TID #7 is a mixed-use district created in 2019 for the orderly development of commercial, industrial and residential uses. It includes the Viroqua Business Park, a portion of the Railroad Avenue Business Park, Fairlane Drive Commercial Park, and overlays a majority of TID #5. The increment generated to date is \$12,736,000.

Map 1. City of Viroqua Active TIDs



The city markets available properties as development opportunities on its website. Information on available sites includes zoning standards and site brochure.

Viroqua Area Foundation

Through the foundation, philanthropic contributions are made towards the improvement of the quality of life in the Viroqua area. The Viroqua Area Foundation has been involved in the following areas of giving:

- McIntosh Memorial Library
- Eckhart Enchantment Playground
- Viroqua Community Arena
- Restoration of the Temple Theatre
- Royce Jones Memorial Garden
- Viroqua School and Community Sports Facility
- Skate Park
- Multiple scholarship funds.

Vernon County Economic Development Resources

A complete [toolkit](#) is available on the county website. Services to existing Vernon County entrepreneurs and those considering a business relocation include:

- Direction to the appropriate financial resources to address a financial need
- Networking opportunities
- Site selection
- Technical assistance referrals to service providers and partners
- Market research and demographic information.
- Workforce recruitment and retention efforts

Economic Development SWOT:

Strengths

Four open TIDs
Publicly owned, available commercial/industrial land
Residential lots ready for development
Proximity to La Crosse and Minneapolis markets
Educational attainment of labor force
Cost of living
Intergovernmental relationships
SMRT Bus
Municipal airport

Weaknesses

Topography
Distance to interstate
Availability of childcare

Opportunities

Leverage recreation and natural resources for tourism within the region
Agri-tourism
Create and update marketing materials aimed at site selectors
Work with WEDC to post marketing materials of available sites on the WEDC website

Threats

Declining household growth
Destruction of crops by natural disasters or other causes

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

Goal 1: Maintain a growing and diverse economic base that is resilient to economic shocks, attracts new industries, and grows local entrepreneurship.

Objectives:

- a. Strengthen local entrepreneurship.
- b. Market available properties.
- c. Build economic resilience to external shocks.

Recommendations

- a. Create a business resource toolkit for the city website that outlines available resources through partnerships with the Viroqua Chamber, Vernon County, and the Small Business

Development Center at UW–La Crosse.

- b. Present annually to the Viroqua Chamber the resources available through the city to Viroqua businesses including technical assistance, steps in the development process, etc.
- c. Create marketing materials aimed at site selectors with utility information and infrastructure capacity.
- d. Work with WEDC to post to their [website](#) the marketing materials for available properties.
- e. Develop contingency and recovery plans for industries vulnerable to market shifts or disruptions.
- f. Promote Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board programs to adapt to changing economic conditions.

Goal 2: Support small businesses and local agriculture that can create jobs, enrich community character, and foster resilience.

Objectives

- a. Strengthen and sustain small businesses.
- b. Support and expand local agriculture.
- c. Foster community identity through small business and agriculture.

Recommendations

- a. Create a business retention and expansion program. This could be housed within the city, the chamber or a partnership between the two.
- b. Develop partnerships with regional food networks to connect local farmers with schools, restaurants, and institutions.
- c. Enhance farmers markets, artisan fairs, and food co-ops to highlight local products.
- d. Incorporate local foods and goods into tourism and branding initiatives.

Goal 3: Offer targeted incentives and create partnerships that can attract investment and stimulate innovation across sectors.

Objectives:

- a. Use incentives to drive investment in priority areas.
- b. Strengthen public–private partnerships.
- c. Stimulate cross–sector innovation.

Recommendations:

- a. Prioritize incentives for businesses that create quality jobs and contribute to long–term

resilience.

- b. Collaborate with universities, technical colleges, and workforce organizations to foster innovation.
- c. Leverage local, regional and state partnerships to access funding and attract outside investment.
- d. Expand access to financing and micro-loan opportunities through partnerships with area banks.
- e. Promote cluster development in industries such as ag-tech, renewable energy, and creative industries.

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Section 7 – Intergovernmental Cooperation

Element

Intergovernmental cooperation is essential for the City of Viroqua to provide efficient services, manage land use, protect natural resources, and support community development. Because the City is entirely surrounded by the Town of Viroqua, and closely connected with adjacent towns, Vernon County, school districts, and state and federal agencies, collaboration plays a critical role in achieving community goals.

The City works with Vernon County on shared responsibilities such as road maintenance, land and water conservation, public health services, and emergency management. Cooperative agreements with surrounding townships provide fire and emergency medical services. The City also benefits from state and federal programs related to transportation, natural resources, and agriculture. Local schools, private education institutions, and nonprofit organizations contribute additional resources that strengthen community capacity.

School Districts:

The city of Viroqua is served by Viroqua Area Schools, which serves the community with public schools through its elementary school, middle school and high school. Also present in the community is the private school offerings from Pleasant Ridge Waldorf school and the Youth Initiative High School, as well as Cornerstone Christian Academy.

Viroqua Area Schools has been supportive of the City's tax increment financing districts.

County Government:

Vernon County and the City of Viroqua work together on many items, including but not limited to maintenance of county roads that run through the city, enforcement of the floodplain, shoreland and wetland zoning, and conservation programs related to land and water. Vernon County's office of the University of Wisconsin-Extension provides programs related to community development. Vernon County Health Department provides water testing, lead testing, and radon testing services as well as services related to testing for land-based health issues.

Vernon County also provides services to residents of Viroqua related to transportation through the Aging and Disability Resources Center (ADRC), support for economic assistance programs, child support services and veteran's services. Vernon County Domestic Abuse Project provides resources and support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault in the Viroqua area.

Adjacent Units of Government:

The City of Viroqua is presently enclosed entirely within the Town of Viroqua, although parts of the City's west city limit line are on the boundary line of the Town of Jefferson.

The Viroqua Fire Department serves the City of Viroqua and the Townships of Franklin, Jefferson and Viroqua.

State Government:

Relationships between the city and state regarding planning and development are largely in the area of state

standards and licenses for public services such as the Department of Natural Resource's standards for Viroqua's drinking water supply and its wastewater treatment plant. State solid waste standards also apply to the sanitary landfill in the Town of Viroqua, although this is a county landfill. The State Department of Transportation applies various standards for the location and improvements of highway systems that receive state and federal aid.

Federal Government:

Other than the Post Office, the only federal office in the Viroqua area is the U. S. Department of Agriculture office in the City of Viroqua.

Existing Cooperative Boundary Plans or Agreements:

There are no boundary plans or agreements in force between the City and Towns of Viroqua and Franklin as of the date of this plan. Fire and EMS services are provided by a single department based on agreements involving the City of Viroqua, and the townships of Franklin, Jefferson and Viroqua.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations

This section identifies goals, objectives, and recommendations to strengthen partnerships, improve service delivery, and manage growth through coordinated action with neighboring jurisdictions and agencies. Effective intergovernmental cooperation allows Viroqua to reduce costs, avoid duplication, and enhance quality of life for residents while respecting the unique needs of its neighbors.

Goal 1: Strengthen collaboration with surrounding jurisdictions to ensure efficient service delivery.

Objectives:

- a. Explore opportunities for shared public works services to reduce costs.
- b. Promote open communication between the City, Town of Viroqua, and adjacent townships.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct annual joint meetings with surrounding towns to review shared service agreements.
- b. Evaluate opportunities for cost-sharing in road maintenance, equipment purchases, and training programs.
- c. Establish a joint communication protocol for emergency management and disaster response.

Goal 2: Coordinate land use planning and development with Vernon County and adjacent towns.

Objectives:

- a. Ensure that land use decisions near city boundaries are consistent and mutually beneficial.
- b. Protect agricultural and natural resources through coordinated land management.
- c. Minimize conflicts between urban growth and rural land uses.

Recommendations:

- a. Pursue boundary or cooperative planning agreements with the Town of Viroqua.
- b. Participate in Vernon County planning efforts, particularly those related to conservation, groundwater protection, and transportation.

- c. Share mapping, GIS, and development review information across jurisdictions to improve decision-making.

Goal 3: Strengthen partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and state/federal agencies to enhance community services.

Objectives:

- a. Support collaboration with Viroqua Area Schools and private education providers.
- b. Coordinate with state and federal agencies to maximize resources for local needs.
- c. Partner with nonprofits and service organizations to address public health, housing, and community development priorities.

Recommendations:

- a. Maintain open dialogue with school districts about enrollment trends, facility planning, and shared use of recreational spaces.
- b. Work with state agencies to secure grants for infrastructure, housing, and conservation projects.
- c. Support partnerships with local nonprofits, such as domestic abuse prevention programs and cultural organizations, to strengthen community resilience.

Chapter 8 – Land Use Element

Land Use Planning Context

As of 2025, the City of Viroqua occupies approximately four-and-a-half square miles of the planning area, or 2,880.3 acres. Historically, urban development in this planning area has occurred within the city; however, in recent years, some new housing has located in fringe areas just outside the city. The greater ease and affordability of on-site water supplies and waste disposal has facilitated this fringe housing pattern. US Highway 14/61 and State Highway 27 is the principal development corridor that runs north-south and bifurcates the city. A secondary arterial corridor is State Highways 56/82. These arterial highways provide convenient regional and local access to the area, adjacent lands, and intersecting streets, creating opportunities for new land uses.

Zoning

Map 2 is the zoning map the city has been working off of since 2007. Some parcels are overlapped by multiple zoning districts. For the purposes of analyzing land allocations by zoning code, this map was translated on a per parcel basis (Map 3) based on the majority district represented.

Table 3 breaks down the acres, percent of total land by zoning district, and undeveloped acres per zoning district based on Map 4. Table 4 provides the zoning code, description and intent of each district.

Table 3. Acres per Zoning District

Zoning Districts	Acres	Percent	Undeveloped
A-1	493.0	17%	0.25
B-1	27.4	1%	
B-2	258.3	9%	18.40
B-3	392.9	14%	176.99
B-4	183.1	6%	57.61
B-5	45.9	2%	38.32
C-1	196.9	7%	
R-1*	547.6	19%	95.65
R-2	434.9	15%	78.11
R-3	42.5	1%	
ROW ^l	257.7	9%	
Total	2880.3	100%	465.3

Source: Wisconsin State Cartographers Office V10 parcel data for Vernon County. Viroqua parcels were exported and assigned zoning classifications based on the 2007 Zoning map based on the majority district represented.

* Includes 145.1 acres occupied by the Viroqua Country Club and Municipal Golf Course.

!This is an estimate. Some parcels in other districts extended over streets. Therefore, not all ROW is accounted for here and should be interpreted as an approximation.

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Map 3. Translation of Zoning Map on a Per Parcel Basis

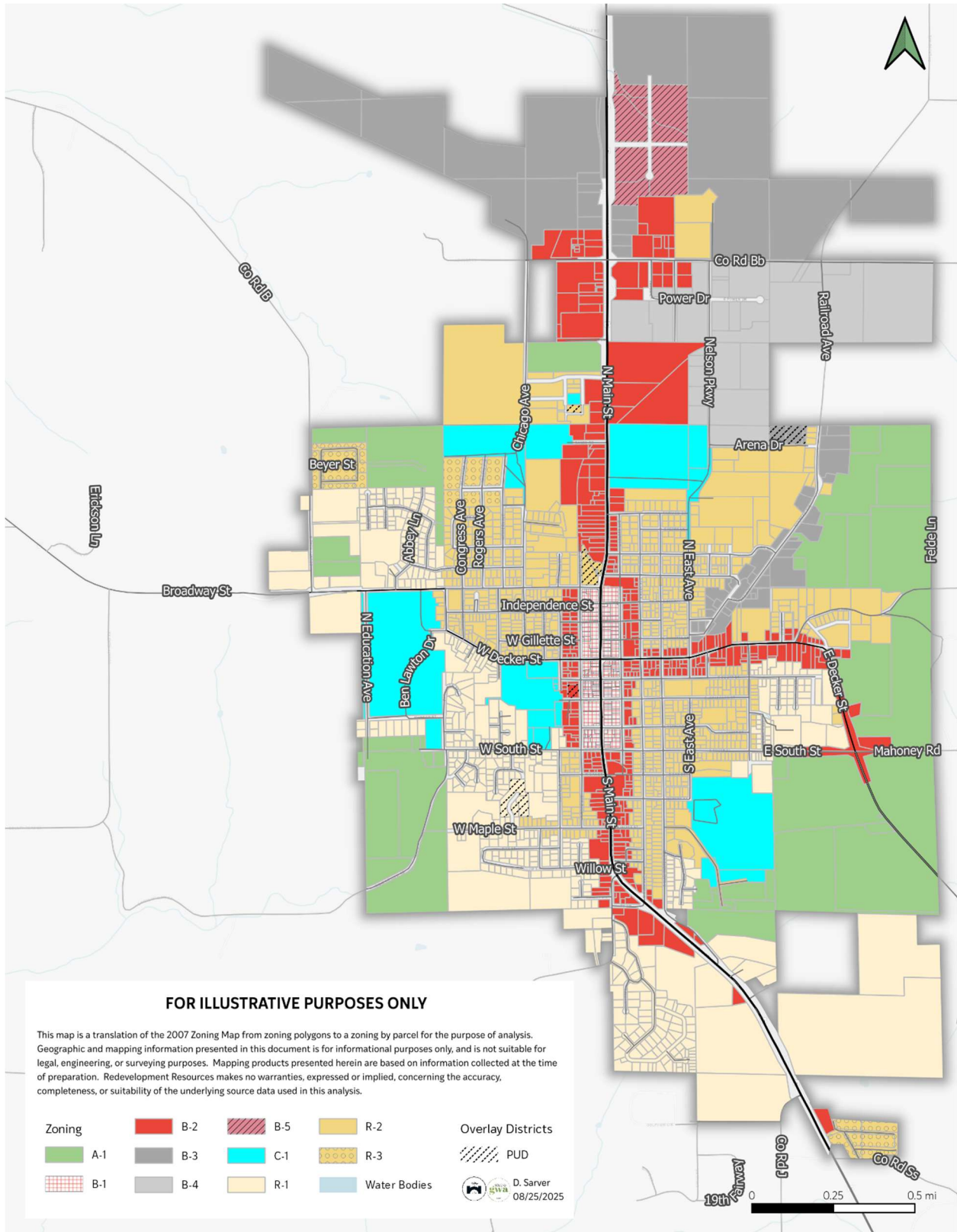


Table 4. Zoning Code Descriptions and Intents

Zoning Code	Zoning Description	Zoning Intent
A-1	Agricultural Transition District	To provide open space particularly in those areas of the City to reduce the need for and cost of public services, or to be applied in those areas of the City where natural environmental conditions present physical development problems. A further purpose is to help preserve the open space and natural scenic and ecological qualities in special areas.
C-1	Conservancy District	To include areas for which the use is outdoor recreation or other public uses; to include lands which are limited for development because of soil, slope, water table or other condition; and for the preservation of scenic, historic or scientific areas.
R-1	Single and Two-Family Residence District	To maintain areas characterized by single and two-family residences.
R-2	Multiple Family Residence District	To provide a medium density, mixed residential district intended to provide a transition between detached housing and more intense non-residential areas.
R-3	Mobile Home Park District.	To provide mobile home parks.
B-1	Central Business District.	To maintain areas characterized by business uses in the center of the City, with heavy pedestrian traffic.
B-2	Commercial District	To maintain areas characterized by a mixture of residential and commercial uses, with light pedestrian traffic and heavy automotive traffic requirements and parking requirements.
B-3	Industrial District	To provide for areas having moderate to intense processing, employment, traffic, and other related activities. It is intended that this district generally be located distant from residential uses and that it be buffered by commercial districts, major roads, or open space.

B-4 Industrial Park District

To insure proper use and appropriate development and improvement of each building site in the Viroqua Industrial Park;
to protect the environment in the industrial park;
to guard against the erection thereon of structures of unsuitable materials;
to require conformance to applicable ordinances and building code;
to insure reasonable development of said property and locations thereon of buildings;
to control the development of said property as an industrial park including, but not limited to, proper setbacks from the street, adequate free space between structures, adequate parking, and in general to provide for a high quality of improvement of said property;
to insure that each building site shall not adversely affect the general plan of physical development of the industrial park nor adversely affect the health or safety of residents or workers in the area nor be detrimental to the use or development of other properties in the Viroqua Industrial Park.

B-5 Gateway Business Park

To ensure quality site planning and building design in Gateway Business Park that:

- a. creates high-quality site improvements that meet applicable ordinances and building code;
- b. creates reasonable development of property and locations thereon of buildings and parking lots;
- c. unifies the natural and built features of the community specifically with regard to natural features;
- d. minimizes environmental impacts including stormwater runoff, light spill, and air/waste discharge;
- e. prevents development that would adversely affect residents, workers and/or the development of other properties in the Gateway Business Park;
- f. is compatible with and promote agribusiness and tourism as key industries within Vernon County;
- g. is compatible with and promote downtown Main Street as an essential component of a vibrant and robust community;
- h. establishes benchmarks for future design; and
- i. encourages sustainability, conservation and energy efficiency.

PUD Planned Unit Development

In return for greater flexibility in site design requirements, planned unit development (PUD) districts are expected to deliver exceptional quality community designs that preserve or enhance critical environmental resources, provide above-average open space amenities, incorporate creative design in the layout of buildings, open space, and circulation; assure compatibility with surrounding land uses and neighborhood character; and provide greater efficiency in the layout and provision of roads, utilities, and other infrastructure.

Existing Land Use

Using aerial imagery and zoning code classification, the following uses were identified for each parcel within the city boundaries:

Agriculture: Under existing crop production.

Commercial: Developed property and structures used for commercial purposes.

Community Asset/Institutional: Properties in the Conservancy District, parks, open space, recreational facilities, publicly owned buildings and sites (e.g., Veterans War Memorial).

Industrial: Developed property and structures used for industrial purposes.

Planned Unit Development: Planned-Unit-Development property and structures are being used for mixed purposes such as residential and commercial. Note: this does not include B-2 properties that conditionally permit a mix of uses.

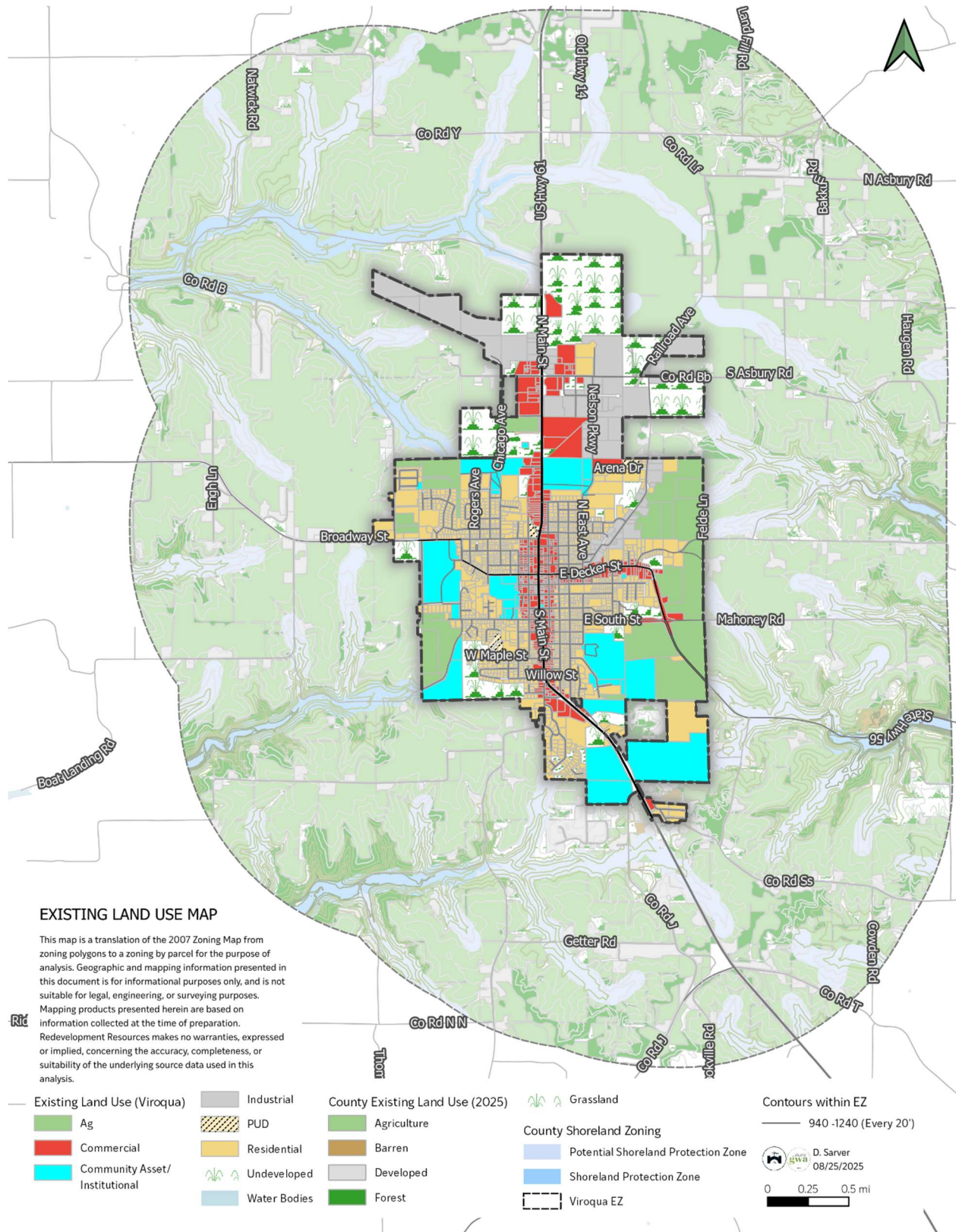
Residential: All developed properties in residential "R" districts.

Undeveloped: Properties zoned for development or crop use but have not yet been developed. One property zoned A-1 was classified as undeveloped, based on aerial imagery, as it is not being used for crop production (0.25 acres). There are a few scattered sites (18.4 acres in total) zoned B-2 that could be developed. Undeveloped land in B-3, B-4, and B-4 is in the Viroqua Industrial Park and Gateway Business Park, totaling approximately 273 acres. There are approximately 174 acres of undeveloped land zoned R-1 and R-2. Total land available for development in the city is 465.3 acres.

Table 5. Existing Land Use

Land Use	Acres
Agriculture	399.1
Commercial	281.0
Community Asset/Institutional	385.0
Industrial	329.2
PUD	12.9
Residential	750.1
Undeveloped	465.3
ROW	257.7
	2,880.3

Map 4. Existing Land Use



Land Use Trends, Needs, and Potentials:

Land Supply

The supply of land for growth within the City of Viroqua is limited since most of the land with ready access to sewers is already developed, leaving only a moderate amount of space for future urban use. The land supply within the city can be increased if land is annexed into the city; however, this method of increasing the city's land supply is based on private landowner decision-making and cannot be predicted or well planned for. Also, annexed land that does not have ready access to city utilities can be overly expensive to service.

Land Demand

The greatest demand would be in the City of Viroqua for developable land with city services, principally sewer and water services. Some demand for developable land is accommodated on land adjacent to the city in the Town of Viroqua. On-site water supplies and septic sewer systems are used to serve development outside the city. The most general land demand is for housing and light industrial.

Housing

Based on the 2023 American Community Survey estimate of 2,193 housing units and the sum of the residentially zoned districts, less the private and public golf course acreage, residential density in the city is approximately 2.9 units per acre.

The housing forecast in Chapter 2 estimates 230–352 units needed by 2033. Table 6 indicates that there is ample opportunity for existing infill development on lots zoned R-1 and R-2. The Hanson Farm Development area is approximately 21.1 acres. Based on preliminary plat plans provided, approximately three acres will become public right-of-way, one acre is zoned B-2, one acre is zoned C-1, and 17.7 is zoned R-2. The current development plan is for 66 residential housing units in the first phase of development, with multifamily and commercial development occurring in future phases. The Main Street Apartment development will bring an additional 65 residential units as well as a 6,065 square foot daycare facility and more than 3,000 square feet of commercial space.

Table 6. Maximum Number of Units Possible with Infill Development

Zoning Code	Description	Minimum Lot Size	Number of Permitted Units by Right	Undeveloped Acres	Max Number of Infill Units Possible
R-1	Single and Two-Family Residence District	6,000	2	95.65	1,389
R-2	Multiple Family Residence District	6,000	4	78.11	2,268
					3,657

Industrial

The city currently has 273 acres of land available in its business and industrial parks on the north side of the city. This land could be consumed by a few large users looking for 100 acres, but these users tend to want to be closer to interstate highways or other multimodal options. When these parks are fully occupied, business and industrial growth will continue to grow north.

Parks & Open Space

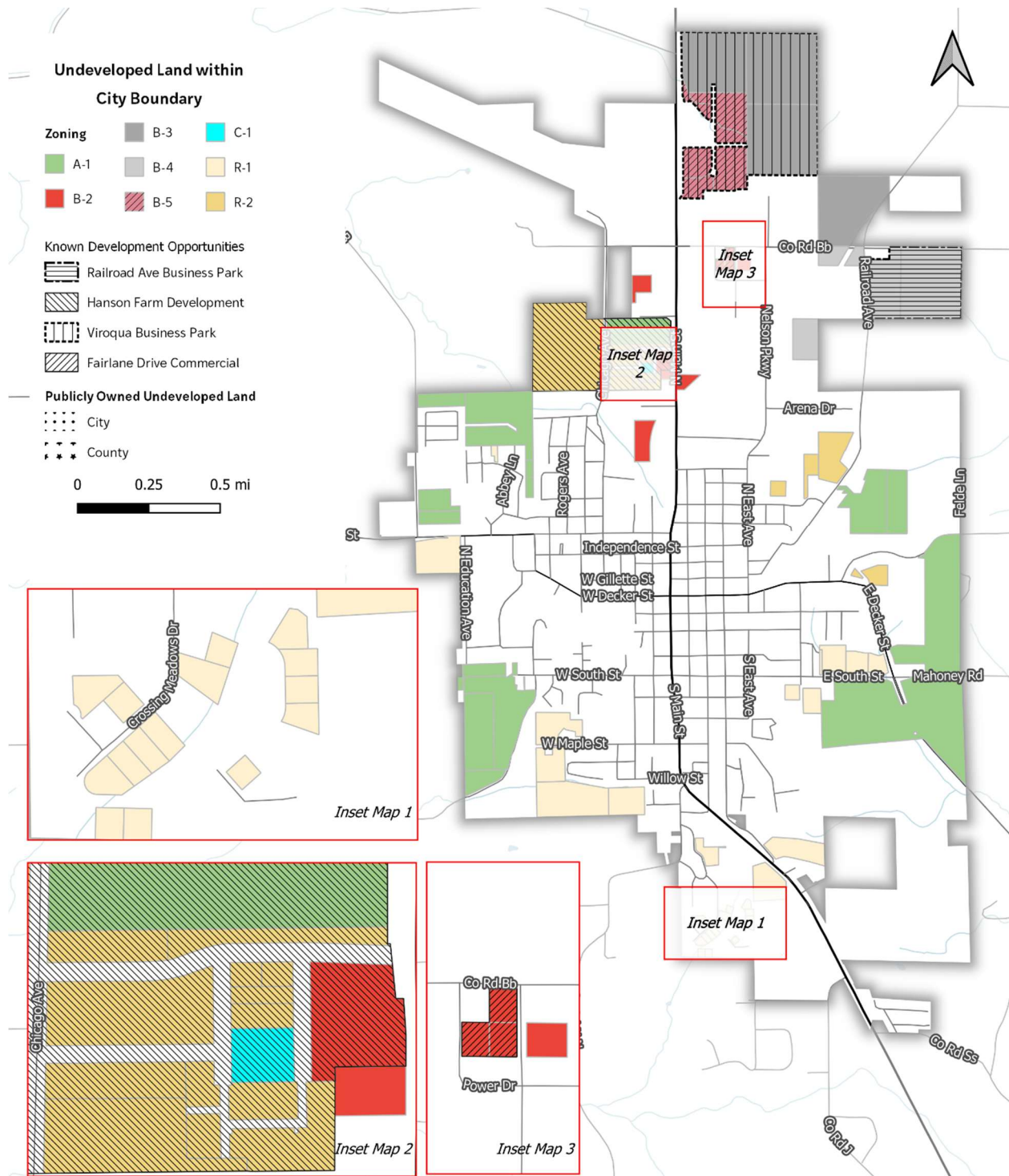
There are a total of 240 acres of parks and open space within the city boundaries. Of those, the city controls 110 acres. The remaining are privately held acres (e.g., Hubbard Hills, Prairie Wind, Viroqua Hills Golf Course), which the public is encouraged to enjoy. (Note: School facilities were not included in these calculations.) Esri estimates that the population in Viroqua was 4,478 in 2024. Therefore, there are more than 53 acres per 1,000 people. Or 24 acres per 1,000 people if only considering the acres the city controls.

The [National Recreation and Park Association](#) (NRPA) provides guidelines and benchmarks that are often referenced by communities in their park and recreation planning. The NRPA suggests a minimum of 6.25 to 10.50 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population. However, it's important to remember that this is a guideline. Municipalities in Wisconsin may adopt different standards based on their specific needs and priorities. Other communities of similar size typically have 8–12 acres per 1,000 in population.

Opportunities for Redevelopment

The opportunities for redevelopment within this planning area would be limited to land and properties within the City of Viroqua. Infill development opportunities are found on vacant or underutilized parcels, whereas greenfield development tends to occur on the fringes. Redevelopment opportunities are located on Map 5.

Map 5. Redevelopment Opportunities



NOTE: Opportunities for development were identified using satellite imagery within the city's boundaries. Any land that appears to be undeveloped or underdeveloped has been identified. However, land owned by the city is the only property within the city's control to develop. Development of parcels not owned by the city must start with a negotiation between the developer and the landowner and proceed through the normal approval process.



D. Sarver
08/25/2025

Existing and Potential Land Use Conflicts:

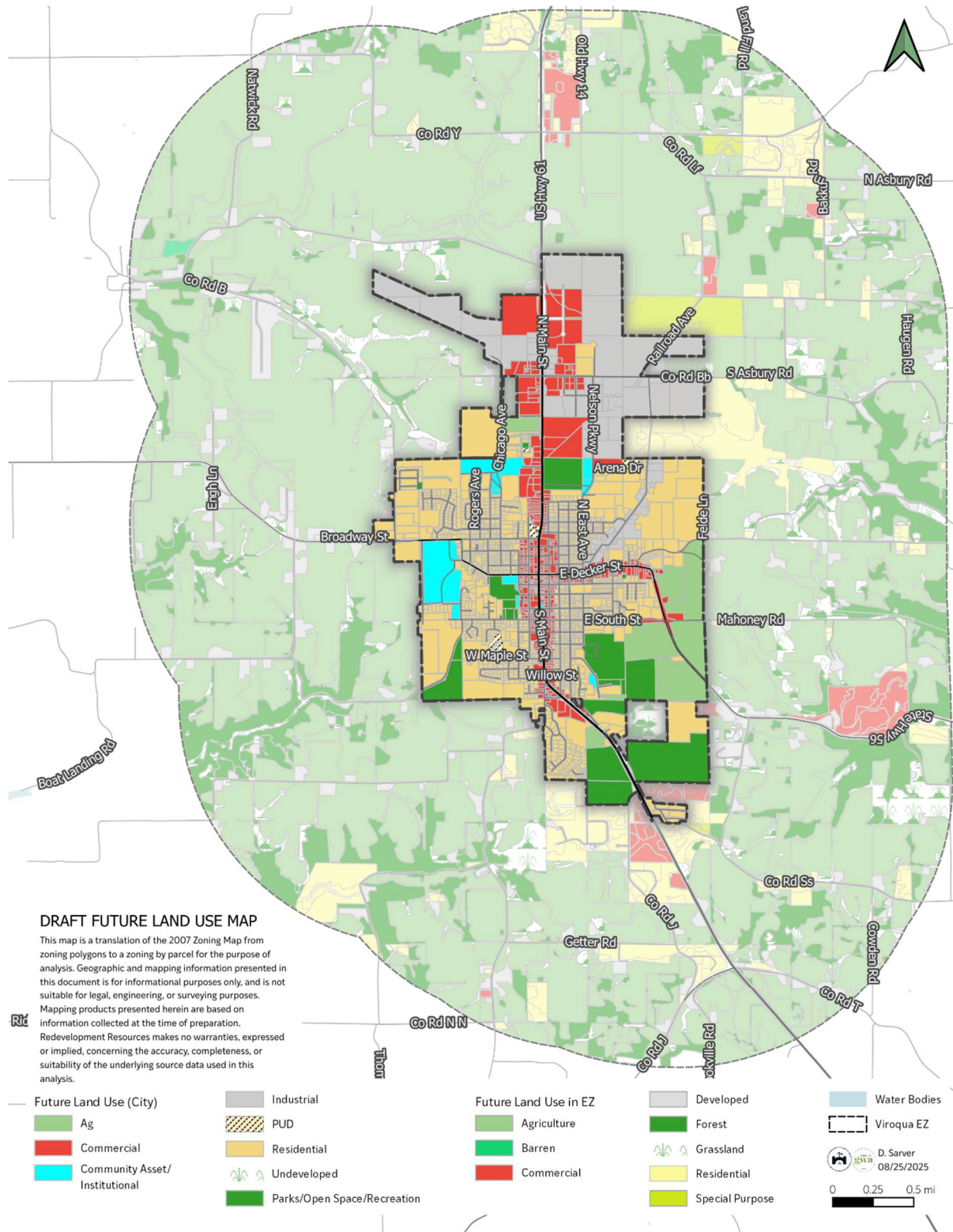
Land use conflicts within the city have been reported to be minimal. Zoning has been helpful in minimizing such conflicts. The greatest potential for land use conflicts in any city is at the interface of residential uses with commercial and industrial uses, and occasionally with large-scale institutional uses. Continued upgrading of a city's Land Use Plan and its zoning standards can serve to avoid land use conflicts as the city continues to grow. These techniques can enable city landowners, businesses, and institutions to see more predictability in the city's desired development patterns and can adjust individual plans accordingly, thus serving to avoid land use conflicts and the interpersonal conflicts, financial loss, and legal problems that can often accompany such conflicts.

Land Development Limitations:

The development of some land uses can be constrained by the physical characteristics of a given location, generally related to characteristics of soil, water, geography, and geology. The City of Viroqua has physical limitations on land development within its boundaries. The primary physical limitations are steep slope, high bedrock, wet soil areas, and some flood-prone lands along the tributary streams of the Kickapoo River in the town and drainage courses subject to flash flooding. Another limitation may include restrictions related to historical sites, such as state or federal regulations regarding development. Map 4 illustrates some of these land use limitations. Specific development proposals should be evaluated for their relationship to these limitations and the various regulations that may be associated with them.

Future Land Use Plan

Map 6. Future Land Use Map



Consistency Requirement

The land use plan maps and the local zoning maps should be consistent with each other in compliance with the state comprehensive planning statute. Decisions made under the local land division and official mapping ordinances should also be consistent with the land use plans.

Due to the inconsistent nature of the current zoning map, where large polygons depict mass zoning classifications irrespective of parcel lines, a set of steps that include rezoning a significant number of parcels city-wide should be undertaken as a separate process following the adoption of the comprehensive plan.

Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations:

Goal 1: Update the existing zoning map to be consistent with the future land use map.

Objectives:

- a. Align zoning classifications with the vision of the Comprehensive Plan.
- b. Ensure the rezoning process is transparent and community-driven.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct a full audit of the current zoning map to identify inconsistencies with the adopted future land use map.
- b. Establish new zoning districts where needed (e.g., Parks/Open Space/Recreation) to match future land use categories.
- c. Hold public workshops and open houses to explain proposed zoning changes to residents and property owners.
- d. Consider zoning code language for the appropriate locations for solar energy installations

Goal 2: Re-evaluate zoning classifications to encourage mixed-use, higher-density, and multi-generational developments.

Objectives: Promote development patterns that align with long-term community goals.

Recommendation: Prioritize zoning that supports walkability and integrated commercial/residential development.

Goal 3: Encourage the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing structures to invigorate corridors and conserve resources.

Objectives:

- a. Encourage redevelopment of underutilized and vacant properties.
- b. Promote adaptive reuse to preserve community character and conserve resources.

Recommendations:

- a. Identify priority sites for redevelopment and market them to potential investors and developers.

- b. Offer financial incentives, such as tax increment financing or grants, to encourage infill development.
- c. Provide technical assistance and design support for property owners seeking to repurpose historic or aging buildings.

Goal 4: Understand and prepare for the impact on City services and departments from the imminent increase in population (forecasting at least 175 new housing units, 10% increase in population) by 2029.

Objectives:

- a. Forecast service demand based on projected growth.
- b. Strengthen city infrastructure to meet future needs.
- c. Prepare City staff and departments for growth.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct a service impact analysis (police, fire/EMS, schools, water, sewer, stormwater, parks) tied to the 175-unit housing forecast.
- b. Use scenario planning to anticipate infrastructure needs under different growth patterns (infill vs. greenfield development).
- c. Integrate population growth projections into the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to guide timely infrastructure investments.
- d. Evaluate staffing levels and training needs across departments most affected by growth, such as planning, public works, and public safety.

Goal 5: Guide future development in alignment with the city's land topography and infrastructure capacity, ensuring that water, sewer, and stormwater systems can support growth in a sustainable and timely manner.

Objectives:

- a. Align growth with infrastructure capacity.
- b. Ensure environmental sustainability in new development.
- c. Plan proactively for long-term infrastructure needs.

Recommendations:

- a. Develop a growth management plan that prioritizes areas with existing infrastructure and service capacity.
- b. Require phased development that matches infrastructure improvements with population and housing growth.
- c. Incorporate green infrastructure and stormwater best management practices into development standards.
- d. Coordinate capital improvement planning with land use priorities to ensure adequate water, sewer, and stormwater capacity.
- e. Pursue state and federal funding to support infrastructure upgrades needed for future growth.

DRAFT