

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Final Report, December 2017

Summary

There is concern across Wisconsin and the nation that young people are leaving rural areas and small towns for more urban areas. This research explored whether there may be exceptions to those trends—smaller and more rural places that were gaining and maintaining young adults.

Methods

- From fall of 2015 to summer of 2016 we did demographic research that studied all Wisconsin municipalities (cities, villages, and towns) to identify communities gaining and maintaining young adult populations.
 - We measured *gaining* by looking at the absolute number of people aged 20-39, in five year cohorts, for census years 1990, 2000, and 2010.
 - We measured *maintaining* by looking at the proportional size of the young adult population, on average, across those census years.
- From fall of 2016 to summer of 2017 we conducted interviews in twelve case study communities that were gaining and maintaining young adults, representing all regions of the state, to learn why people thought young adult populations were stronger in those places.
 - We interviewed 210 people.
 - The interviews averaged an hour.

Findings

- The demographic research yielded three important findings:
 - Only about 15% of Wisconsin communities are gaining and maintaining young adults.
 - Communities in Wisconsin's most urban area—Milwaukee county—fare as bad or worse than many rural areas in losing young adults.
 - Communities that are gaining and maintaining young adults are much more likely to be near cities and freeways.

- The case study research yielded five important qualities of communities that are important for attracting young adults:
 - Perceived quality of schools.
 - Perceived appropriate affordability of housing—young adults at different life stages may define affordability differently.
 - Outdoor amenities such as parks and trails, with appreciation for both motorized and silent (skiing, hiking, etc.) outdoor recreation.
 - A small town sense of community and civic engagement.
 - Proximity to cities that offered employment, entertainment, and shopping.

Implications

- Maintaining high quality schools is essential for attracting and maintaining young adult populations.
- Different communities need to provide different mixes of housing for different families at different life cycle stages.
- Public outdoor amenities for a diversity of recreation activities will be valued by young adults.
- Rural and small town development may be tied together with urban development.
- Communities need to address the tensions created by the need for volunteerism to maintain the small town feel, while people spend large amounts of time in cities for jobs, entertainment, and shopping.
- Universities and colleges may influence not just their home city, but also the region as a place for graduates to settle.

Research Team

The research team for this project included a variety of talent. The principal investigator for this project is an expert on community studies, and the co-principal investigator is an expert on demographic studies. We received funding from a United States Department of Agriculture Hatch Grant that supported two graduate student research assistant positions. In the first year it supported one research assistant doing demographic research and another doing qualitative research. That year we also were able to add support from a State of Wisconsin research assistantship that funded one other research assistant to expand the demographic research to urban as well as rural areas. The demographic research assistants received professional and technical support from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Applied Population Laboratory.

The second year of the project we had two qualitative research assistants that focused on conducting twelve community case studies. They were joined by a University of Wisconsin Extension educator for three of the case studies, and by a third graduate student for two case studies. The entire project was overseen by the *Engaging Young People to Sustain Communities, Families, and Farms* team of the University of Wisconsin Extension. All of those directly involved in the research project are listed on the title page.

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Thank You

We are very grateful to the 210 residents across the state who gave of their time to tell us about their communities, and we hope this research honors what they told us. We are also grateful to University of Wisconsin Extension educators who helped guide this research, identify and choose case study communities, form core groups, and recommend research participants. We thank our core group participants in each of our 12 case study communities who helped guide the research, comment on the findings, and recommend research participants. And we extend our appreciation to Caitlin McKown and Casey Kalman for the web design.

This research was supported by United States Department of Agriculture Hatch grant Hatch-WIS01872, and a State of Wisconsin State RAship.

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Background

Many rural communities are concerned about losing young people (Carr and Kefalas, 2010, Brown and Schafft, 2011). As intelligent and motivated youth leave—creating the oft-labeled *brain-drain*—a community has less ability to address its social and economic needs (Artz and Yu 2011), weakened social capital (Wilson 1996, Barnett 2006), and loses agricultural lands as family farmland gets sold to agri-business or non-agricultural uses when the children do not carry on the farming tradition (Carr and Kefalas 2009; 2010; Kuminoff, Sokolow and Sumner, 2001; Program on Agricultural Technology Studies, 2004). Young adult population loss raises the costs for individuals of infrastructure such as schools, public services and recreational opportunities (Artz and Yu 2011), affecting the quality of life for the remaining residents.

Rural communities across Wisconsin are seeing aging populations, school closings, declining downtowns, and other signs that youth out-migration and brain-drain are real issues (Johnson et al., 2005; grow, 2010; Swedien, 2012; Mills, 2014). Those communities that lose too much of their youth population are in danger of becoming unsustainable, threatening the rural backbone for regional family farming and family resort communities.

But there is variation and complexity in rural age demographic transition and the related "brain drain" phenomena. For instance, rural areas furthest from metropolitan centers may fare worse in terms of brain drain (Artz, 2003). Many rural communities may lose young people during their college years, but gain them back as young adults marry and begin raising children (Winchester, 2012). Quality of life amenities such as high-speed Internet service may also attract young people (Artz, 2003). Loss of youth and brain drain are also not necessarily the same thing. Marginalized youth may find themselves stuck in place with relatively limited access to economic and civic community life (Carr and Kefalas, 2009). They contribute to a statistical youth gain but less to brain gain in the sense of a formally educated and credentialed population. Likewise, expensive amenity rich rural areas may attract retirees, producing a statistical brain gain but proportional youth decline.

Challenges in Understanding Brain Drain and Youth Exodus

There are many challenges in attempting to address the question of rural brain drain and youth exodus. First, the existing research starts from documenting the loss of youth, and analyzing the causes of that loss. Consequently, as people start to look for solutions, they are limited to thinking about doing the opposite of what they see as causing the loss, which restricts creative solutions.

Second, most attempts to address the loss of youth, and of general population decline in rural areas, start with putting strategies into place and hoping for the best. Many of these strategies are programs that focus on serving young people as individuals, rather than on the overall community culture and economy (Wood, 2008). The risk of such a strategy is that an individual approach that works in one place may not work in another or may not operate at an economy of scale to make a difference.

A third challenge is that most research attempting to understand youth and rural brain drain/gain analyzes data at the county level. But county level data do not offer enough of a fine-grained analysis to take account of factors in local communities such as the presence of penal institutions, large industrial operations, and higher education institutions, all of which can skew the statistics and about which local government can do little. For example, it is possible for one corner of the county to have a high youth gain college town and another corner to have a youth-losing abandoned mill town. In

addition, county government can often do little to impact quality of life at the municipal level, and most people do not experience life at the county level but at the local municipal level. Consequently, we need research at the municipal level. And at this level we know very little. To address this need, we ask: How do rural towns and villages gain or lose young people and the talent they may represent?

In this project we focused on local municipalities, identifying local communities that stand out as gaining or retaining young people without the presence of an obvious factor such as a major industrial plant or large university, and then analyzing the combination of factors that helped those outliers gain or retain young people. Rather than start with the cause, we started with the effect and then looked for the combinations of causes producing that effect. Our purpose was to identify factors enhancing youth brain gain that municipalities can actually do something about. It is almost impossible, for example, that municipalities can attract a new university. But there are likely other strategies, currently unidentified, that they can do. Our research aimed to identify those strategies.

Our Approach and Biases

We decided to use a different starting point for this project, with three different biases.

A strengths approach

Rather than study the question of why places were losing young adults, we decided to see if we could study places that were actually increasing their share and number of young adults. We reasoned that, if we could find such places, we might be able to understand the strengths of these places that could explain why young adults were appearing in greater numbers and proportions in those places. Making visible those strengths might make it easier for other places to fashion strategies to gain young adults.

An effects-first approach

Rather than study individual programs designed to attract or retain young adults--starting with the program as a cause and then looking for its effects--we decided to start by looking for the effects and then trace back to the causes. By finding and studying places that showed the desired effects—greater size and growth of the young adult population—we could potentially see the combination of causes from a holistic lens.

A community-level approach

Rather than a coarse-grained statistical analysis of populations at a broad scale like a county, we decided to focus in on local communities. In doing so we could see the clustering of young adults in specific places, and thus could customize our questions about what caused young adults to appear in those places.

Our Definitions

We use some terms in this study that are important to define.

Rural and Small Town

We do not use the federal definitions of rural in this study. Those definitions, like so much of the research, are county-based. Since we focus on the municipal level rather than the county, we included low population places in counties that are considered urban but where the community residents feel separated from the city. Most of our interviewees also did not use the word rural to describe where they lived as much as they used the phrase "small town." To a large, but not complete, extent the two terms go together and the definitions of each of them are vague at best.

(Fuguitt, Brown, and Beale, 1989; Bell, 2007). We ultimately decided to rely on the self-definitions of people in the places we studied.

Gaining

We use this term to refer to places that are increasing their absolute numbers, not proportions of young adults. As we will discuss, there are hardly any places in Wisconsin that are increasing their proportions of young adults.

Maintaining

We use term to refer to places that have higher proportions of young adults than the median place in Wisconsin. It is important to understand that this does not necessarily mean that a place is keeping the *same* young adults in a place, but that they are keeping a higher overall proportion of young adults.

Young Adults

We ultimately decided to define young adult as someone between 20 and 39. This was partly because of the structure of our data (we broke that age range into five year cohorts) and because we wanted to limit the influence of college and university populations (we took other steps to limit that influence as well). We went up to 39 based on wide ranging discussions with credentialed and experiential experts, justifying that upper range as still having a strong focus on the parenting of young children.

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Stage 1: Demographic Analysis

The primary goal of this project was to identify the combination of factors that come together in rural communities that successfully gain and maintain young adult populations. To accomplish this required two stages of research.

The first stage focused on identifying Wisconsin municipalities that are outliers in gaining and maintaining young adults. In Wisconsin, a municipality is a city, village, or town, and we gathered data on all 1800 plus municipalities (because of mergers and annexations, the exact total changes over time). To do this, we conducted a series of demographic analyses at the municipality level across the state of Wisconsin using data from the decennial censuses, the American Community Survey, and municipality level data available from Wisconsin state agencies for the years 1990 through 2010. It is not ideal to do research with data gathered seven years ago, but we feared that more recent data would be subject to too much error at the municipal level because it would be based on samples rather than populations. The initial purpose of this analysis was to identify municipalities in rural areas that do better than average with maintaining or gaining young adult populations. We conducted separate analyses of the 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, and 35-39 year-olds.

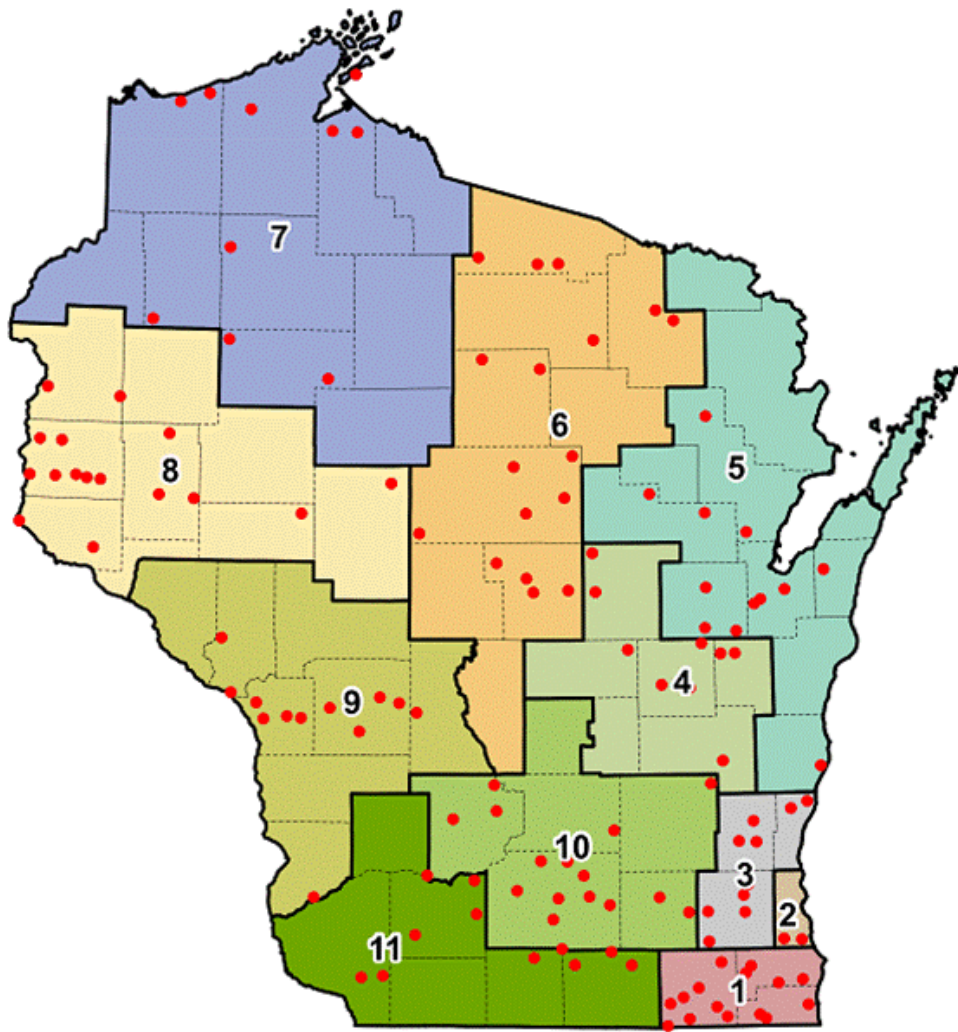
The data presented a number of challenges. One challenge was that our data included both municipality and county boundaries, and a surprising number of municipalities crossed county lines. We took care to identify all of those municipalities and combine them into single cases. We discovered a second challenge when the list of outlier municipalities produced by our initial analyses was heavily populated with prison towns and college towns. Both had large concentrations of young adults, but for very different reasons, and neither were candidates for lessons that other communities could draw upon. So we included a control for *group quarters* housing—basically dormitory rooms and prison cells.

Then, to find the municipalities that were outliers with large and growing young adult populations, we developed distinct measures of **gaining** and **maintaining** in each place.

- **Gaining** refers to the absolute growth of the young adult population—how much the population of young adults grew from decade to decade on average.
- **Maintaining** refers to the proportion of young adults in the total population of a municipality, and we looked for places that had the highest proportions of young adults relative to the rest of the population. We averaged this percentage over the three decades.

We used these two measures to balance their strengths and weaknesses. The gaining measure readily shows whether there are more young adults in a place at time 2 than there were at time 1. But proportional change measures can be easily misconstrued when there are small numbers to begin with. A gain of 20 people from a starting figure of 200 looks a lot bigger than a gain of 20 people with a starting figure of 2,000. Conversely, the maintaining measure easily shows places where young adults are more concentrated. But demographers worry about this measure because it can result from a generational affect—rather than young adults being attracted to a place, they are simply the offspring of a proportionally larger previous generation. And while this critique is valid, we can still interpret it as a positive indicator that, even if the group is larger because the previous generation is larger, they at least are not leaving.

Figure 1



We also attempted to use a third measure—places where the proportion of young adults was increasing over the two decades, but that analysis showed that no place of any size actually had a growing proportion of young adults. There were only a handful of small towns where the proportions were too easily influenced by single housing developments so we dropped that measure. And while some may interpret this as only cause for concern, we should note that places with growing young adult populations had growing populations across the age spectrum. The consequences of that are beyond the scope of this project, but worth further study.

To ensure that our case studies spread across the entire state, we adopted the Wisconsin Workforce Development Board regional map. We had a variety of maps to choose from, but the bulk of recommendations from our UW Extension colleagues across the state pointed us to this map shown in **Figure 1**. The map is not perfect for our purposes. Regions 5 and 6, for example, have long north-south dimensions that do not correspond very well to Wisconsin's distinct up north region. This required us to adjust our method, as we will describe.

In our demographic analysis we created an initial "top 20 list" for gainers, and another for maintainers, in each region. To be considered a gainer, a place had to show an overall positive gain in young adult population from 1990-2010 (the median for communities in the state was a -22% loss). To be considered a maintainer, a place needed to have a proportional young adult population above the median of 24% for communities in the state. Consequently, not every region had 20 communities on each list.

We initially looked for the "overlappers"—places that showed up on both top 20 lists. It then became clear how important *up north* would be in the analysis. Up north does not have one specific agreed upon southern boundary, but regardless of which boundary we used, we needed to go to extra lengths to identify case study communities. In region 7, for example, we could find no overlappers in the top 20 lists so we extended them 10 more spaces to top 30 lists in order to find our overlappers. And in regions 5 and 6 all of our overlappers were in the southern part of the regions, so we extended those lists as well. We then sought out advice from UW Extension educators across the state, asking them to look at the total list of places that were gaining young adults, or whose proportion of young adults was above the state median, and recommend potential case study communities. That produced a final list of 130 places shown by the red dots in **Figure 1**. All of these places were in the top 20 on at least one list and the top 30 on the other or were recommended by Extension educators even if in some cases they dropped below the maintainer median.

There are clear clusterings of communities shown on the map in **Figure 1**. Cities, as our case studies will confirm, become very important to rural areas with strong young adult populations. The Twin Cities metro area, Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, and even smaller cities like Eau Claire, La Crosse, Stevens Point, and Janesville become part of a rural-urban symbiosis. Freeways are also important, and of course provide fast routes between rural places and cities. Many of the places listed are in Combined Statistical Areas (CSAs) and might technically be considered urban rather than rural. However, as we will see from our case studies, the residents of these places define them as quite separate and distinct from urban places. So we did not limit the inclusion of communities based on whether they might be in a CSA.

Based on the clustering we were seeing, we extended this analysis to look at all of the communities that met the strict gainer and maintainer criteria. In total there were 280 overlapped gainers and maintainers, shown in **Figure 2**. In this analysis including all of the communities meeting both criteria, it is clear how important freeways and cities are. The absence of communities up north in Wisconsin is striking and we will have more to say about that later.

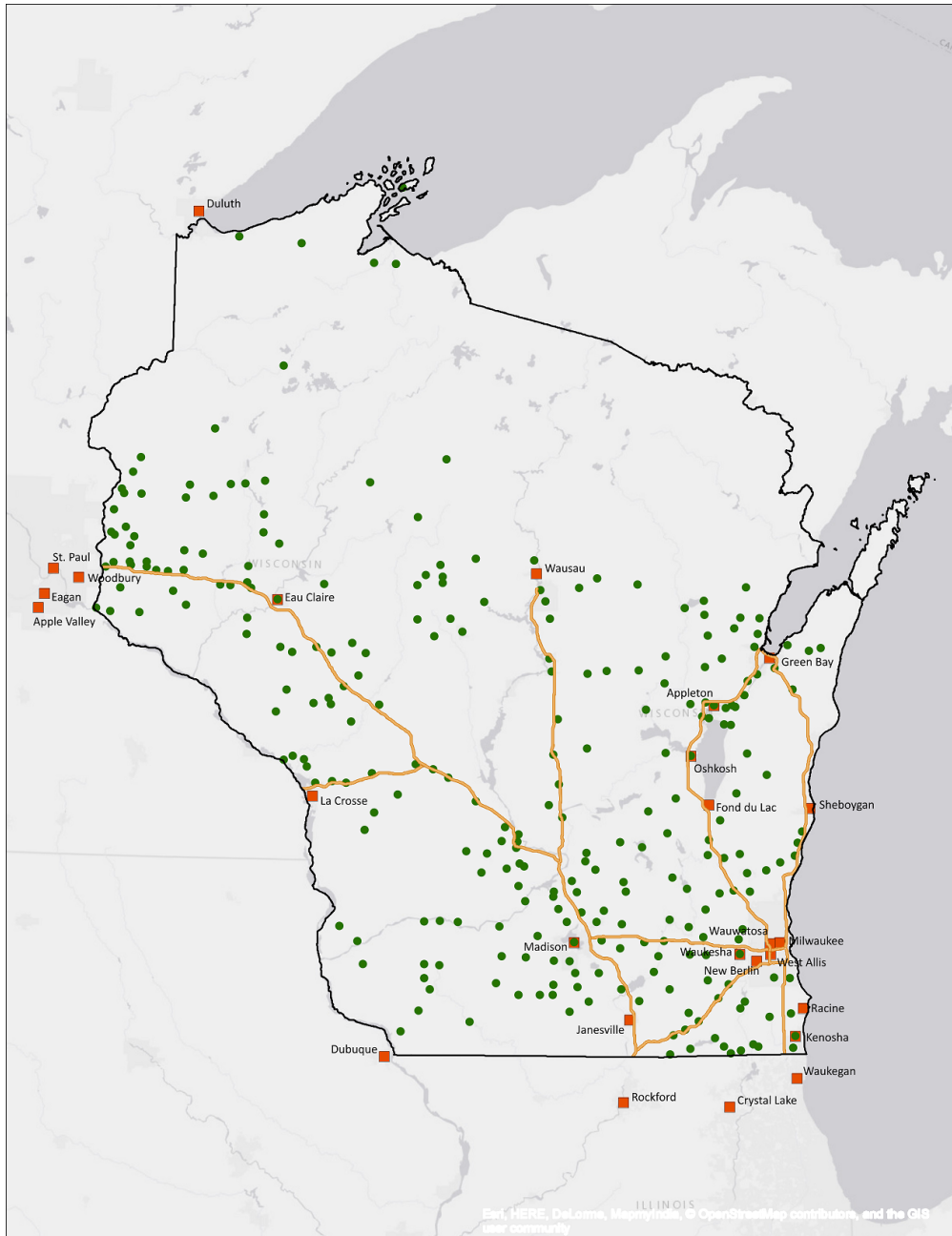
Young Adults in Wisconsin Cities

The focus of this research was on rural and small communities. But we nonetheless learned some things about cities as well. First, as we looked for gainers and maintainers in each region, we were most surprised by region 2, the highly urbanized Milwaukee County, where only two municipalities actually saw an increase in the young adult population. In fact, while we worry about rural brain drain, Milwaukee County did the worst of any region of the state. Fewer than 10% of the municipalities in Milwaukee County showed young adult population growth of 20-39 year olds from 1990-2010. No other region in Wisconsin had such a low percentage of places experiencing young adult population growth. However, we must note that region 2 is made up of only one county and, if we compared county to county, we may find other counties in a similar situation.

Because we also had extra funding the first year of the grant, we were able to do some analysis on other more places. One of the most interesting results of this analysis is that, in medium and larger-sized cities, different five-year cohorts of young adults locate in cities differently. The youngest 20-24 year olds tend to cluster together in the city center. Each older cohort is more likely to be more dispersed away from the city center. You can see the census maps for select cities in Wisconsin in Appendix A.

Figure 2

Green dots represent all gaining/maintaining communities. Squares represent cities of 39,000+ people. Green squares are gaining/maintaining cities, and red squares within Wisconsin are non-gaining/maintaining cities.



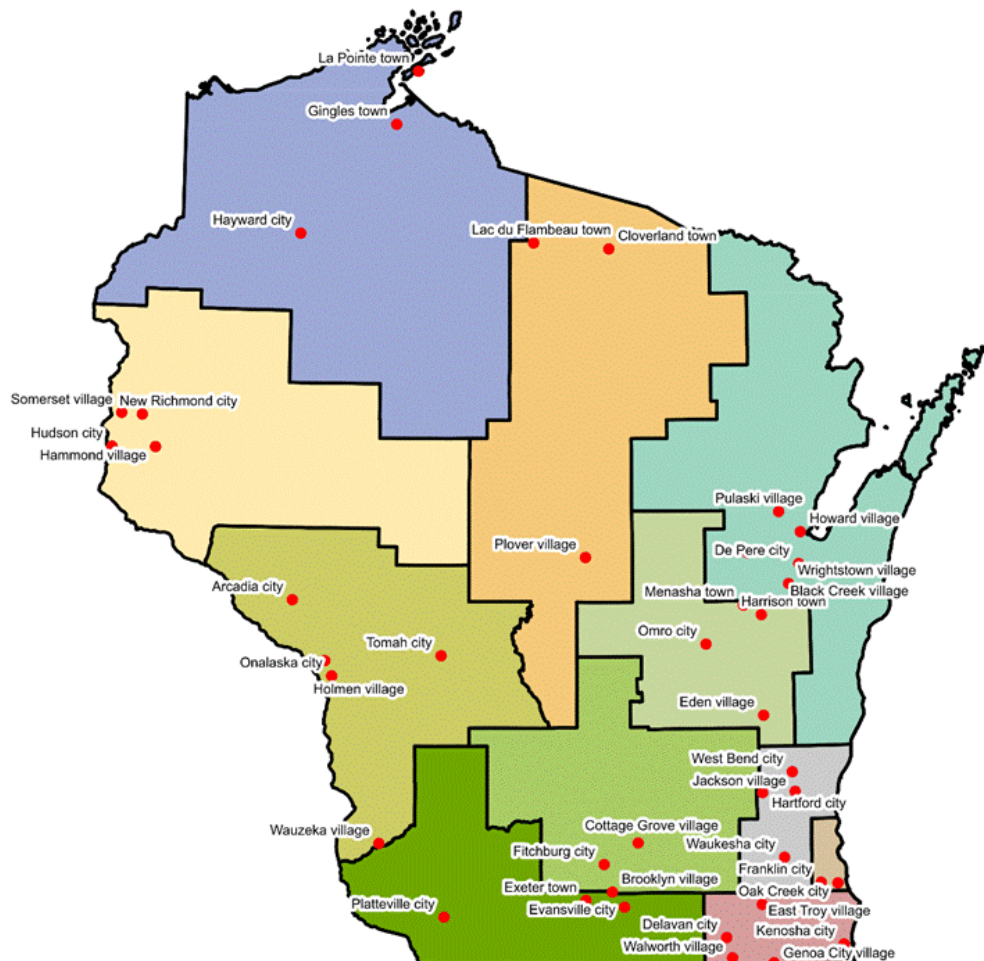
We also conducted a simple statistical analysis comparing these 280 communities to the 1600 places falling below our criteria. Table 1 shows the "as the crow flies" average distance between each group of communities and freeways or cities above 39,000 people. We chose freeways because we could see an obvious clustering in our very initial analyses. And we chose communities above 39,000 people because those were the places mentioned in our case studies, and when we went below that figure the list started including suburbs that would unnecessarily complicate the analysis.

Table 1

	Gainers / Maintainers	Non-Gainers / Maintainers
Count	280	1600
Average distance (miles) to freeway	15.5	29.4
Average distance (miles) to city >39,000	24.2	33.4
Percent of communities within 20 miles of city >39,000	46%	27%

The difference in distances shown in Table 1 are as dramatic statistically as they are visually in Figure 2. The non-gainers/maintainers are nearly twice the distance from freeways as the 280 gainers/maintainers. They are nearly 10 miles further on average from larger cities. The average may be deceptive, since the up-north communities are much further from cities and freeways than communities in the south half of the state. But the measure of the percent of communities in each group within 20 miles of a city with more than 39,000 population also shows dramatic differences that are more likely to extend across the state.

Figure 3



Our next step was to get to a manageable list of case study communities. We simply did not have the resources to do 130 case studies. So our goal was to identify a maximum of 15 places. In doing so, we were careful to treat each of our demographic measures qualitatively as well as quantitatively. For example, we looked at community size. For very small communities, proportions can change a lot with only small changes in numbers. In other cases, mergers or annexations may have artificially affected the numbers. We initially considered towns, but gradually excluded them, expecting that town expansions would be influenced by nearby municipalities. We also consulted Extension educators across the state to offer their appraisals of the municipalities in their county. This process reduced our list to 40 places, shown in **Figure 3**. We then gathered more information on each of these places, including industry mix, income, unemployment, education, racial diversity, and other qualitative information. We then conducted brief site visits in each place, with brief intercept interviews of local librarians, cafe counter workers, or wait staff. We also consulted again with the county Extension educators.

We were not looking for necessarily the "best" places, and such a judgment would have been arbitrary in any event. What we wanted was a diverse set of case studies. Our reasoning was that, if we found the same results across a diverse set of places, we could be even more confident in the validity of those results. We were careful to not concentrate on places that were too unique, however. We excluded places that were too influenced by a single large local industrial operation or military base, for example. At the same time, we were hoping to find some unique results that could be tied to the uniqueness of the place. The final list of case studies, with information showing some of their diversity, is shown in Table 2. Note that Region 2, Milwaukee County, is not included in this analysis as our second year funding did not support doing case studies in such a concentrated urban county.

Table 2

Region	Name	High School Graduates	Bachelors Degree	Mean Household Income	Median Household Income	Unemployed (16+)	In-Migration, 1990-2010, 20-39 year olds
1	Delavan	82.3%	16.2%	\$53,852	\$48,199	8.0%	mixed
3	West Bend	92.5%	26.1%	\$66,916	\$56,829	4.7%	yes
4	Omro	89.0%	18.0%	\$51,211	\$44,375	4.6%	yes
5	De Pere	95.5%	34.5%	\$69,220	\$56,834	4.5%	yes
5	Black Creek	92.8%	14.0%	\$53,866	\$47,188	7.1%	yes
6	Plover	90.0%	31.0%	\$58,409	\$67,765	7.3%	yes
6	Hayward	86.4%	19.7%	\$41,725	\$27,100	5.3%	yes
8	Somerset	92.4%	22.4%	\$61,412	\$62,115	6.5%	yes
8	New Richmond	92.0%	23.8%	\$66,613	\$52,656	7.7%	yes
9	Onalaska	94.8%	35.7%	\$75,789	\$53,813	3.8%	yes
10	Brooklyn	96.1%	25.3%	\$79,982	\$77,250	5.8%	yes
11	Evansville	95.6%	24.2%	\$68,319	\$58,571	3.1%	yes
	Wisconsin	90.8%	27.4%	\$64,523	\$52,738	4.9%	mixed

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Stage 2: Case Study Analysis

To study each municipality we used a case study design. We studied individual municipalities, collecting information about each of them through interviews and documents to understand how characteristics and conditions in each municipality attracted and maintained the young adult population. Yin (2003) calls this an explanatory case study. We followed specific historical and structural definitions for our case studies (Stoecker, 1991). The structural boundaries are the geographical boundaries of the municipality with some allowance for its influence by and on the people who live outside of the formal boundaries but interact with the municipality in regular and important ways (such as shopping, working, learning, worshipping in the municipality). The historical boundaries of each case were 1990 to the present.

We also used a comparative case study approach. Ragin (2014) discusses case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches to research, arguing that the comparative case method allows for both. In a comparative case method, the researcher collects information on variables they believe to be important to a single case, while also being open to other information that may be unique to that case. The process can be systematized in a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory simply means that we let the conceptual categories and themes emerge from the research data we gather, rather than trying to rigidly apply a theory to our data. In our case, the theory of why a place may be attractive to young adults is generated by our analysis of participant responses. In grounded theory, the researcher may start with no or a few variables in the first case, listening and watching for other variables that may become relevant. In approaching the subsequent cases, the researcher includes those new variables in the data collection and adds variables as they appear in the data. Grounded theory researchers say that *saturation* has been reached when they begin to hear the same kinds of responses from participants and, consequently, no new variables are surfacing, which can happen after only a handful of interviews (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). When saturation is reached, it is unlikely that new categories or themes will emerge from more participants.

Similar to grounded theory, we started with an initial set of variables, while being prepared for new variables to appear and be added into the analysis. Various rural observers—some with big data and others with deep experience—propose a list of variables that include good career prospects (especially for starting a business), quality local schools (including those that serve non college-bound youth), high speed Internet, peer networking opportunities, support for diversity (including immigrants), programs designed to recruit young professionals, quality outdoor activities, creative class amenities (following Florida, 2002) and civic engagement (Mills and Hazarika, 2001; Ferry 2006; Mcgranahana and Wojana, 2007; Carr and Kefalas, 2009; Center for Rural Affairs, 2012; Schroeder, 2012; Radke, 2013; Petrin et al., 2014). Data for some of these factors were available in pre-existing form, and we collected others from interviews and the core groups (described below).

This is quite a laundry list, however, and simply using a checklist would not be adequate to predict whether a community would attract young adults. Our suspicion was that there may be various combinations of conditions that attract and retain various combinations of young people. Therefore, it was important to not just study whether a place has the resources on the checklist, but to study how young people in those places perceive and interact with those resources.

We knew that gaining access to data about these municipalities would be easier if we were able to build trusting relationships with local community leaders and honor local knowledge. One of the most effective ways of building such relationships and honoring local knowledge is to invite people who

would normally be only passive subjects of research to also be co-designers of the research, following the best practices of community-based research (Stoecker, 2013). To do this we attempted to organize a core group in each community that would guide our research and check its accuracy. We began by contacting local UW Extension educators in the county of each identified municipality. We asked them to help bring together people in the municipality who could help operationalize variables, inform data gathering procedures, and suggest people to interview. We also engaged the core groups in reviewing rough drafts of the case study reports in each of their communities to identify and correct potential errors in them, adapting a process called *member checking* or *respondent validation* (Mays and Pope, 1995; Buchbinder, 2011). The core groups ranged from 2-6 people in each municipality and often included school officials, local government officials, Chamber of Commerce leaders, and other community members.

Each core group chose from a long list of interview questions approved by our university institutional review board (see Appendix B for the complete list of questions). There was a great deal of overlap in the questions the core groups chose. We then began interviewing individuals and groups in these communities. It is important to understand that we used an open-ended interview method, not a survey method, in collecting data for these case studies. We did this for two reasons. First, with the typical forced-choice survey, the researcher's biases figure heavily in the survey. People will only answer the questions they are asked. If the researcher asks the wrong questions, they will get the wrong answers. In an interview the researcher can ask a question and then have a conversation with the interviewee about what that question means and whether it is the best question to ask (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The second reason we chose an interview method over a survey is that there is too little past research on why young adults choose to locate in certain less urban places. In a survey you need to know all the possible answers to a question beforehand so you can list them on the survey. Even having community members help construct the survey may not solve this problem as the community members may also not know all the possible answers either.

But choosing interviews over a survey involves a trade-off. With interviews we get richer, deeper information, but because of the time it takes we also get information from fewer individuals. We partially compensated for this weakness by a kind of crowd-sourcing method that is gaining popularity in social research. We could have, for example, found only young adults and asked them only

about why they *in particular* chose to live in the community. Instead, we also asked a wide variety of people in the community why they thought young adults *in general* chose to live in that community. This is similar to research that asks people who they think will win an election rather than who they voted for. Such research is often a more accurate predictor of what is really happening (Graefe, 2014), and it can produce accurate results even with a "biased" sample (Rothschild and Wolfers, 2013).

In total, the research assistants spent more than 200 hours interviewing 210 people across the state. The total number of people interviewed in any municipality ranged from 11 to 32. We generally had more interview participants in larger communities. And, in each case, the researchers believed they reached saturation fairly quickly, so even with what may seem to be a small number of interviews, we are confident in our findings.

We ultimately completed 12 case studies, with at least one in each region of the state. We did not complete case studies in three communities. In one community we were unable to generate enough support for the project to form a core group. In another we were unable to recruit enough interviewees. In the third case we simply lacked the time and resources to complete it, and reasoned that it was likely going to be redundant anyway because it was only a short ways up the road from a completed case study community.

Our Method

- Local guidance
- 12 communities
- 210 interviews
- 200+ hours of interviewing

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

About the Case Studies

Here we present the twelve case study communities, moving from region 1 to region 11 around the state. Note that we do not include region 2 as our funding for the case studies emphasized rural and smaller town places.

Following the presentation of the case studies, we will provide some comparative analyses.

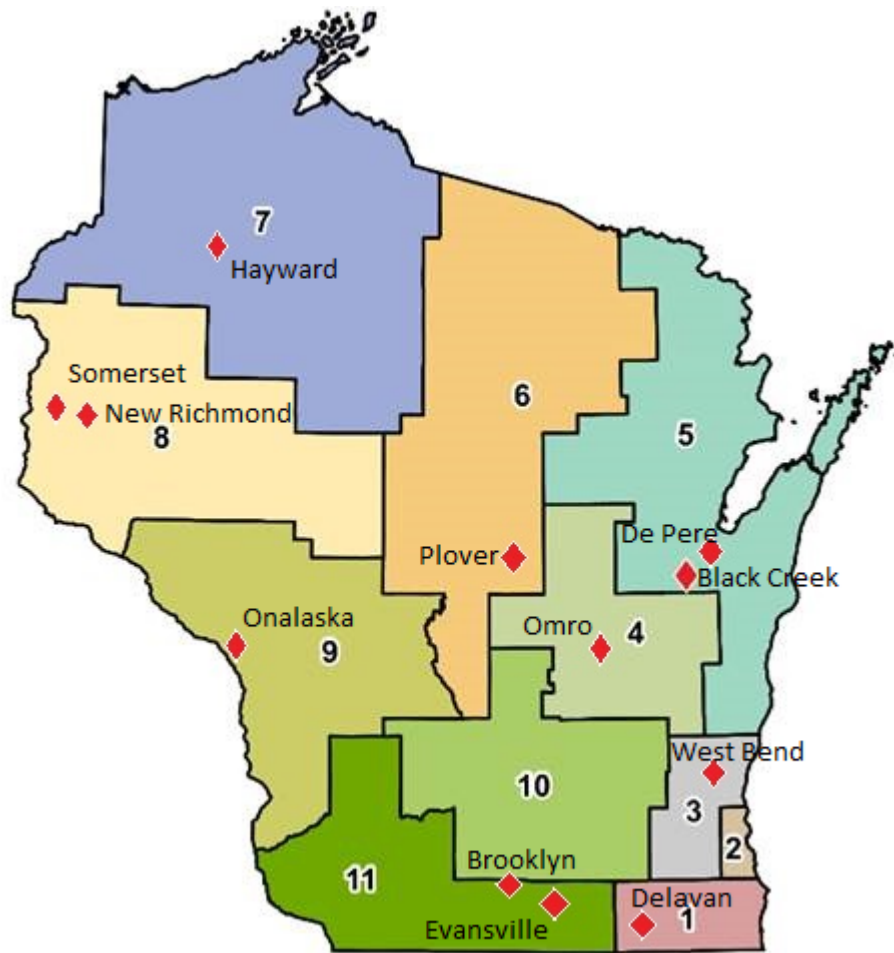
How to Read the Case Studies

Our goal in these case studies is not to provide a complete description and analysis of each community. Instead, our focus is on identifying the variables in each community that seem to influence the presence of young adults. In addition, we wanted short, easily digestible presentations accessible for a wide audience. To learn more about how we did the research and why we chose the approach we did, please see the Stage 2 chapter.

Each case study begins with a table of basic information about the community. Most items will be self explanatory, but two items may need some elaboration. The "young adult gaining measure" is a measure of how much the young adult population aged 20-39 changed relative to itself from 1990-2010. The "young adult maintaining measure" is a measure of the average proportion of the population that was aged 20-39 across the three time periods of 1990, 2000, and 2010. We include the median figures for all 1880 communities in Wisconsin for comparison purposes.

We then provide a brief outline of the research process in the community, and list the interview questions used in each community. Because we wanted the research results to be relevant to each local community, the interview questions are not the same across all the communities, but there is significant overlap.

Then we move into the main body of the report, first providing some basic information on the people we interviewed and then their responses to the interview questions. That is followed by a section comparing the community to other communities that may be similar in important ways, and then a "So What" section discussing some of the implications of the research results for that specific community. We added the "So What" section at the urging of a number of core group participants who wanted us to explore the implications of our research more.



Case Studies

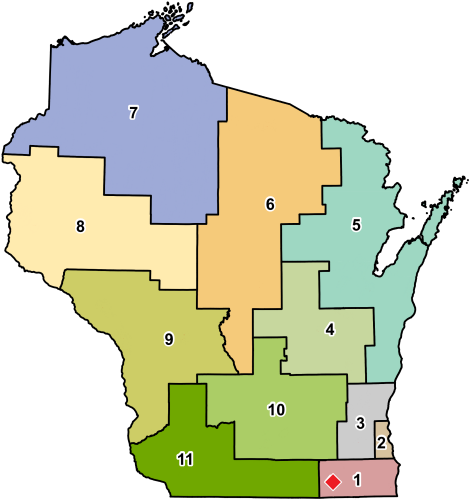
Delavan
West Bend
Omro
De Pere
Black Creek
Plover
Hayward
Somerset
New Richmond
Onalaska
Brooklyn
Evansville

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Delavan

by Sheamus Johnson and Elisa Avila

"It is a great town to live in."

Basic	
	Municipality City of Delavan
	County Walworth
	Year Incorporated 1897
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	8,463 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	1
Young Adult Gaining Measure	23% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	29% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	67.2% White (Non-Hispanic) 14.1% White (Hispanic) 1.7% African American 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native 1% Asian 12.7% Other 2.6% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$51,603 (2015)
Median Income	\$43,527 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2010	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2015) \$2.5 million	
Notes		Delavan is served by the Delavan-Darien School District.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Wileman Elementary School	Pre-K – 5K	Public
	Turtle Creek Elementary School	1-3	Public
	Darien Elementary School	4-5	Public
	Delavan Christian School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Our Redeemer Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	St. Andrew Parish School	K-8	Private
	Wisconsin School for the Deaf	Ages 3 – 21	Public
Middle	Phoenix Middle School	6-8	Public
	Delavan Christian School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Our Redeemer Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	St. Andrew Parish School	K-8	Private
	Wisconsin School for the Deaf	Ages 3 – 21	Public
High	Delavan Darien High School	9-12	Public
	Wisconsin School for the Deaf	Ages 3 – 21	Public

Conducting the Case Study In Delavan

Delavan was the last municipality contacted for the study. For the data collection we relied on connections through Extension and "cold-calling" people in typical leadership roles.

1. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

In early May 2017, we made initial contact with Chelsea Dertz from Extension. She provided an overview of Walworth county. Ms. Dertz described the number of schools, major industries, and provided some demographic information.

2. Connect with Delavan Leaders:

Chelsea Dertz connected us with a community member who suggested the team attend a meeting of the Delavan-Darien Community Alliance. This provided us with more information about the community and helped us recruit a core group member.

3. Connections with Delavan Leaders:

The city administrator assisted us in finding other community leaders, who identified a large number of people to contact. This list of people became the larger contact list and also the pool from which we recruited the core group. In addition to this group of people, we contacted a wide array of people across sectors with publicly available contact information to see if they were interested. Eleven people including our Extension contact formed the core group. During the interviews, we added one interviewee to the group after they asked to learn more about how the report ended up and how it would be further developed.

4. Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:

The core group met on July 21st. Not everyone was able to attend the core group meeting but those that showed interest continued to receive communications. The group reviewed the question bank and showed great interest in many of the questions, choosing the questions listed below. They noted that this type of question about young adults had not been on their radar, and they were surprised that they had a strong young adult population and wanted to learn more. We asked this group to provide further contacts and suggestions for people to be interviewed.

5. Conduct Interviews:

Interviews began the week after the Core Group meeting. We conducted 12 interviews in the month that followed. We asked each interviewee if they could share contact information of other potential participants.

6. Present Results:

We presented the initial draft report on August 30, 2017 to the core group, received their comments, and revised the report.

Delavan Interview Guide

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Do you rent or own your home?
4. Do members of your extended family live in this community or nearby?
5. How does population growth affect you and your community?
6. Tell me about people in your community.
7. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) thinking of moving here?
8. Who do people engage with more – people who have the same, or different job, income, or race?
9. How do people here get around? Drive? Walk? Bike? Carpool? Public Transport?
10. To what extent do young adults engage in local cultural life where you live?

11. What do young people do for entertainment around here?
12. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here?
13. How would you want your town to grow? How would you want it to stay the same?
14. How comfortable do you feel living here?
15. Is your life here different than you thought it would be? Is it better? Worse?
16. Where in your community are some places you have influence or would like to have influence?
Follow up: What do you want from groups in your community?
17. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?
18. What stories does your town have to share?
19. Who contributes to your community?
Follow up: What community groups are influential to people around here? Which ones are helpful?
20. What are the organized recreational opportunities around here? Are outdoor activities important here?
21. What are recreational centers like here?
22. Are gardens important here?
23. What are the libraries like here?
24. What do you think of shopping opportunities around here?
25. How do you feel about your food options here?
26. What do you think of farmers markets around here?
27. What are the schools like here?
28. What kinds of things do you leave the community for?

Results for Delavan

While the identities of interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Three participants were in their twenties, eight were in their thirties, and one was in their forties.
- Two people moved from Chicago. Seven people grew up in Delavan, and all but one of them moved away at some point and later returned. Three people have lived in Delavan three years or fewer, and two others for seventeen years each.
- Nine people were homeowners, two of which were living in an extended family-owned home, and three were renters.

A Comfortable Community and Family

Delavan is a place where people feel comfortable amidst community and family. Ten of our interview participants had extended family in Delavan. When asked how comfortable they feel living in Delavan, nine said "very comfortable" and three others said comfortable. Some of them said things like:

"Very comfortable. I have hundreds and hundreds of friends, and dozens of family."

"I'm very comfortable, never been more comfortable in my life."

"I feel pretty darn comfortable living here, partially because I've lived here my whole life. I think it's pretty easy to get comfortable. It's a very inclusive environment. I think somebody moving here for the very first time. If they can get out there little bit it's pretty easy to find people to hang out with and put those things together."

Even while feeling comfortable in Delavan, the newcomers among our interview participants felt the least connected. For example, one relatively new resident mentioned that his spouse, who was a long-time resident, could easily get support for her business efforts but that he would have to reach out and ask for help if he needed it.

Diversity in Delavan

Participants appreciated that Delavan is relatively diverse compared to surrounding communities. This mainly has to do with the large Hispanic population in the area and the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delavan. Eight of the twelve participants mentioned diversity when asked about people in their community.

"I guess the first word that comes to mind is diverse..."

"I think it is very diverse... A large deaf population and a large Hispanic population, quite a few Hispanic stores downtown and the Cinco de Mayo fest is pretty huge..."

"It is ethnically diverse, the dual language program at the elementary school, it's great for kids to learn so young."

"We are a very diverse community. A large Hispanic population. We also have The Wisconsin school for the Deaf. We see a lot of that in the community. It offers a lot more diversity than some of our close neighbors."

While residents generally noted a high level of diversity, five interview participants also noted that diversity brings with it the challenge of connecting people across differences. They appreciated the differences, and didn't know how to link across those differences.

"I would say on the whole, race and ethnicity are much closer to their own, within the Hispanic community, that's a very tight familial structure, so as a business owner I have a hard time breaking into that if I'm not a part of it."

"I think race is a big [aspect], with the Latin community, there's a lot of family based structure. Like my neighbors, they're a super tight knit family and I love that, and I think that's great, but a very tight knit culture pushes away young families. I think people definitely group by race."

Some other interview participants still believed there were ways for people to connect with each other across cultural differences. We spoke with two people who identified themselves as Hispanic, and felt comfortably connected with white non-Hispanic residents. But of course we recognize they may not be representative. Some participants saw the overall friendly culture of the community, and community events—such as those centered around the Phoenix Band Shell (mentioned by eight interviewees)—as bringing together people across the community.

"There are lots of friendly people and ways to get involved, lots to do for families."

"I think everybody connects with everybody, especially with the band shell. that's a good way to bring the community together."

"I think a good way to mix and mingle is that in the summer time they have Phoenix Park, movies in the park, music in the park, the Band Shell, that's attracting different people All different ages, races. Its free and open to the public so people from all different backgrounds mingle there..."

Proximity to Urban Centers

Delavan interview participants noted that there are many people who work in town, but also a large number of residents commuting to other towns and cities for work. Overall, nine participants directly mentioned that Delavan is located near other urban centers that are convenient for employment opportunities, shopping, and entertainment options not available in Delavan. Overall, the trade-off of commuting to work outside the community may help to contribute to the sense of smaller and closer community ties as well.

Participants offered the following perspectives on Delavan's location:

"There's Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, within an hour. We are pretty perfectly located, easy to get to an airport, cost effectively. I see the benefits of living here in that big picture..."

"It's a great place to get started and raise a family, close enough to bigger cities, an hour-ish to Milwaukee Rockford, Madison, so if you want the involvement with the amenities they have, you're close enough. But you're in a smaller community so you know the people you're living with..."

"We're smack dab in the middle of everything. If you want big city, we're close; you get a little bit of everything but not thrown into just one thing..."

"There's beautiful aspects; distance driving is relatively easy. If you want to buy a house, you can actually do that because it's relatively affordable, or the apartment way, or you can do things like go to Milwaukee and Kenosha, I can get there in 50 minutes and drive back and be done. Even Chicago is only 2.5 hours away. That's the beautiful part. That's why I like living [here]..."

Population Growth

In Delavan, we directly asked participants about how they think population growth affects them. Overall, eight participants indicated that population growth positively affects their lives through growth in businesses, opportunities, newer housing, and new ideas.

"I see it as a positive thing, I can see a lot of business growth over the last, since '98. I guess I wouldn't say on the surface, population growth. Although I have definitely seen, the subdivision I live in wasn't there when I was in high school—growth on the east and west sides of town. I grew up a mile out of the city on a farmette, wasn't exposed to day to day neighborhood life."

"I would say there is more opportunity for things, that's really what my husband and I were looking for in a community, we want to be business owners, we're looking for a town that had those opportunities and Delavan fit the bill with the down town businesses and the movement we saw there, businesses opening and closing, with the lake and the completely separate culture over there, I think it's more opportunity for entrepreneurs."

"Population growth affecting my community is unbelievably positive. Being a small town, having the flow of people come through is important for our economy. The flux of people coming in and out is important for the growth. New ideas coming in and out. Considering [...personal details]. It's very important. I like the idea of having a market for my business."

However, one participant had a markedly different view of population growth in Delavan and where growth in general should come from:

"I don't want my town to grow. I want my town to stay small. I want it stay just the way it is, but maybe have a little bit more resources for the people who are already here. So, the people who have roots here don't get pushed out by people who raise the property taxes. If anything, I want the growth to come from within. To thrive more and more. Don't want outsiders to come in with their money to come in and expand."

Schools

Four Delavan participants have some concerns about the local schools, though they also see them as working hard to innovate and improve. One resident who recently moved to Delavan heard from various sources that the schools had a bad reputation.

"The schools was the one thing that I was warned about and against moving here by some friends... It was the one thing that they said the schools were not that great. It's something I have consistently heard and read about."

Other interview participants see an upswing in the schools, partly spurred on by new leadership.

"They're trying really hard to, they had a bit of a bad rap for a while, test scores were low, some of that is in cycles, you have bad and good times."

"The elementary schools have fantastic leadership. Especially at Wileman... but this new principle she [is] incorporating gym every day, and two recesses, and really support kids' development."

"They'e good, one of the top of the nation, Phoenix School is where I went, they were, except for my class, we were a bad year, they were a good school DDHS is a good school they fixed it up. It's changed dramatically."

"I think they're pretty decent. I thought it was good when I went to school. They're always kind of trying to find the new way, there's a lot of change that tries to happen... I think there's room for improvement... it depends on how long it takes for them to find the right path."

Five participants mentioned the importance of the dual language program that the school system recently initiated. They saw the program as a positive asset, and their perceptions add to the sense of appreciation for diversity in the community.

"And I think it's really great that we offer the dual language program in town, it's an attraction and gem, really."

"The schools are very involved and are constantly trying to improve and offer more things to the kids. My daughter is starting soon, so I haven't had a kid in yet. They started the dual language program, they try to bring in new technology like a 3d printer."

"They started the dual language program, I think it's progressive."

Growth and Change in Delavan

While participants offered examples of what has made Delavan an attractive place for young adults to call home, community members also provided thoughts on changes that could make Delavan an even more attractive place.

Supporting and Growing Delavan Businesses

While participants noted that Delavan is the location with the chain retailers in the county, they often found themselves leaving Delavan for certain kinds of shopping. Participants also noted that they would like to have a coffee shop in town where residents can interact with each other, and perhaps grab a quick bite to eat. Five participants specifically noted a need for access to healthy options. Residents also wanted to see store fronts occupied and more diversified options in general.

Participants listed a few examples of what they think of businesses in Delavan:

"It depends on what you're shopping for. In Delavan, you have Wal-Mart and Kohl's, and Piggly Wiggly, it's pretty slim pickings and if you really have to do some specific shopping you're stuck with online or driving to Janesville, and Kenosha, Milwaukee."

"I would like to see them expanded a bit, some more local places, particularly local places for food, it would be cool if there were more kind of organic groceries, or that vibe, crunchy granola that kind of thing. It would be kind of cool to have that kind of thing. There are a lot of antique and re-sale shops so it would be cool if there was a coop coffee house, or some smaller like local stuff."

"If you want more local fair you have to go elsewhere, similar with local coffee, there are two shops downtown but they don't have pastries or nibbles, and they don't have seating, it's not like a café. So if you want that you can go to Starbucks or Williams Bay, or Elkhorn or Fontana, which I think is a shame, we need someone who delivers coffee too. It would be stuff like that. For local food and stuff like that."

Farmers Markets and Gardens

We asked participants in Delavan what they thought about farmers' markets and whether gardens were important there. They shared with us that Delavan used to have a farmers' market, but that it closed due to low attendance. Seven participants offered that they would like the option of a farmers' market, but that the hours should be more convenient.

"I wish Delavan had one [farmers market]."

"They had one for a while, it's a lot to run. It closed down, couldn't get any traction."

"I think they are severely lacking in our community... Used to be here midafternoon early evening on a Thursday. With a job that's hard to go to."

They also shared that they think gardens are important, both in terms of personal gardens, but also the gardens around town maintained by the city.

"Yes, a lot people take pride in their landscape and their flowers and a lot of vegetable gardens people are growing their own food."

"The city does little gardens throughout town..."

How Delavan Compared to Other Municipalities

We completed interviews in eleven other municipalities across the state. Below are some examples of how Delavan compared to other communities using the common themes that emerged from our interviews.

Schools

Delavan was the only municipality where participants mentioned a dual language program (though there is an Ojibwe language immersion school in Hayward). Delavan was also one of the most diverse municipalities in our study, which helps to explain the mention of such a program. Other municipalities also had several parochial schools in their area as well.

Residents in other communities shared the dual perceptions of schools that we heard from Delavan residents; that they are generally pretty good, and that they experience hardships from time to time. Finding the right balance between the needs of the community and what the schools can offer is a fine line.

Proximity to Urban Centers

Close proximity to another town or city has been a common theme among the case studies we have conducted. In other places, this proximity was often at the forefront of resident's minds. In Delavan, while a significant number of participants mentioned Delavan's proximity to larger cities, it did not seem to dominate the conversation and perception of the place. This may be due to Delavan's long history of being associated with traveling circuses (so a historical connection to other places may be more matter-of-fact here than other places), or that the area in general is connected to other places due to the influx of tourists during the summer season.

So What? Implications for Delavan

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to other urban areas for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in this community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered here.

In analyzing the Delavan interviews, several themes have emerged that may have implications for Delavan in the future. These themes are described in greater detail here.

Diversity

Delavan is a relatively rare community in Wisconsin in having two strong forms of cultural diversity. People are still trying to find out how to connect with the local deaf community and the local Hispanic community, and perhaps other communities. And the most important thing is that they seem interested in doing so. The dual language program seems to be the strongest step in bringing out the benefits of diversity. Could people organize programs with the same spirit across churches, or across schools? Another piece of diversity is the diversity of newcomers and those who grew up here. New residents bring new ideas and new interests, and sometimes have difficulty finding others who share those interests. Finding ways of making it easier for new people to find others with similar interests is another way of maximizing the benefits of diversity.

Community Events and Gatherings

Working from the diversity theme, our interview participants were enthusiastic about community events that bring everyone together and help foster a sense of collective community. The importance of these events cannot be underestimated. Delavan does several of these events well—the concert series at the band shell, other gatherings at the park, and the Cinco de Mayo parade, to name a few. Knowing that residents see these events as opportunities to bring people together across differences may allow organizers to think about ways to plan and structure such events to even better achieve that purpose.

One specific type of gathering that participants in our study asked for was a farmer's market. They noted that there used to be one, but that the hours were not conducive to those working a day job, and that it maybe could have used some better advertising to attract residents and vendors. Considering Delavan's strong track record with community events in general, a farmer's market might help to fill a void in community gathering and diversified food options.

Local Economic Development

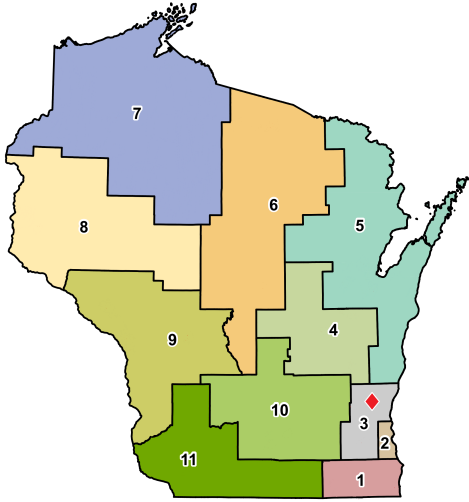
Developing local businesses is always a challenge. In the case of Delavan, the desire for sit-down coffee shops and restaurants is similar to many of the other communities we studied. But we also heard that restaurants can be a challenge in places where too many people are commuting out of the community for jobs. So there is a connection between creating the right kinds of local jobs and the right kinds of local businesses. UW-Extension maintains resources on small town main street development that Delavan could access for ideas. Interview participants also expressed that there seems to be a shortage of local entertainment. Half of the interviewees mentioned that one of the most common entertainment activities was going to the bar, but at least three interviewees didn't identify with the bar scene. Other individuals talked about informal groups that gathered around arts and music interests but expressed that such activities were difficult to learn about. It may be worth further discussion in Delavan to find ways to support such informal activities.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: West Bend

by Amanda Hoffman

"It's easy to feel a part of things if you try. There's something for everyone."

Basic	
	Municipality City of West Bend
	County Washington
	Year Incorporated 1885
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	31,078 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	3
Young Adult Gaining Measure	7% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	27% (WI Median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	94.8% White (Non-Hispanic) 2% White (Hispanic) 1% African American 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.8% Asian 1.4% Other 1.7% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$67,580 (2015)
Median Income	\$57,060 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2004	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2012) \$22.865 million	
Notes		West Bend is served by the West Bend School District.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Decorah Elementary School	K-4	Public
	Fair Park Elementary School	K-4	Public
	Green Tree Elementary School	K-4	Public
	McLane Elementary School	K-4	Public
	Good Shepherd Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Holy Angels School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Montessori Children House West Bend	Pre-K – K	Private
	St. Frances Cabrini School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	St. Mary School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Trinity Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	West Bend Christian School	Pre-K – 2	Private
Middle	Silverbrook Intermediate School	5-6	Public
	Badger Middle School	7-8	Public
	Pathways Charter School	7-12	Public Charter
	Good Shepherd Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Holy Angels School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	St. Frances Cabrini School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	St. Mary School	Pre-K – 8	Private

Schools			
High	Trinity Lutheran School	Pre-K – 8	Private
	East High School	9-12	Public
	West High School	9-12	>Public
	Pathways Charter School	7-12	Public Charter
	Tricenter Alternative School	8-11	Private

Conducting the Case Study in West Bend

West Bend was the first case study we conducted in 2017, after wrapping up our first two in Brooklyn and Evansville in 2016. We began building the core group to guide the West Bend case study in November, and conducted thirty interviews in February and March.

1. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

First, we reached out to Paul Roback at UW-Extension in Washington County. He had previously responded to requests for feedback that our research team sent out when constructing our list of case-study municipalities. We asked him for recommendations of West Bend leaders who could guide the study. He recommended business, government, and nonprofit leaders.

2. Connect to West Bend Leaders:

We held a meeting with these individuals, to review the following questions:

- How is this project relevant to West Bend, and your role in West Bend?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

At the meeting, we reviewed our question bank, and they decided as a group which questions they wanted to include.

The group voiced some surprise at West Bend making our list of municipalities with growing young adult populations. However, they were aware that West Bend hosted a large younger workforce. They were eager to utilize the study's findings to plan for nurturing this population. They could not yet anticipate how the findings could best be put to use.

They decided we should concentrate on interviewing people around the 20-39 year old range. They wanted to interview a diverse group of individuals who live or work in West Bend, to explore as many kinds of lives as possible.

3. Develop Contact List:

Though our meeting was held in November, we did not begin conducting interviews until February. Meanwhile, the group provided contact information for potential interviewees. We also obtained contacts from community service leaders, and the library.

4. Conduct Interviews:

We then conducted the thirty interviews. After they were completed, we arranged to meet with the West Bend core group in the coming summer to review our results.

West Bend Interview Guide

Demographic

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here?

Population Growth

3. How do you feel about population growth in your community?
4. How does population growth of young adults affect you, and how does it affect your community?

Moving to West Bend

5. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) thinking of moving here?
6. Why do people move here?
7. Why do people stay here?

Life in West Bend

8. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here?
9. How do you feel about your quality of life where you live? Economically speaking? Socially speaking? Culturally speaking? Politically speaking?
Follow Up: What are the schools like here?
10. What do people find to be affordable here, or not?
11. What is entertainment like around here? What do you do for fun?
Follow Up: What are the organized recreational opportunities around here?
12. What do you think of shopping opportunities around here?
13. How do you feel about your food options around here? Restaurants?
14. Tell me about the natural environment here.

Beyond West Bend

15. How would you want the city of West Bend to grow?
16. What kinds of things do you leave the community for?
17. Have you ever wanted to live somewhere else?
18. What would influence you to stay or leave?
Follow Up: How is your life here different than you thought it would be?

Making Moves in West Bend

19. Where in your community are some places you have influence or would like to have influence?
20. What stories does your city have to share? What are local projects or impacts that people have had? Which ones were focused on young adults? Tell me about them.

Results for West Bend

While the identities of the 30 interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Participants ranged in age from 22-74. Five people were 20-29, eleven were 30-39, seven were 40-49, four were 50-59, and three were 60 years or more years of age.
- Seven participants had lived in the community for fewer than five years; three had lived there for five to nine years, six for ten to nineteen years, two from 20-29 years, two from 30-39 years, and five people grew up in West Bend. Five people worked in West Bend but lived elsewhere.

The following themes arose repeatedly during our interviews. We took special note of themes that were discussed by one-third to one-half of participants.

Proximity to Milwaukee

Each of our case study municipalities claim a connection to one or more larger cities, whether that city is fifteen minutes away, or two hours away. West Bend sits 35 miles from Milwaukee. Fifteen participants cited proximity to Milwaukee as important for West Bend's growing young adult population. People travel to Milwaukee routinely for work or play, including cultural activities, sports games, and bars.

"I still love getting over to Milwaukee - we're close enough to the metro area."

"20-39 year-olds prefer the city. Downtown Milwaukee has plenty to do for night life."

Four of these participants also emphasized that Milwaukee was close, but not too close. West Bend is distant enough from Milwaukee to maintain it's own economic base, recreational options, and identity.

"Wealthier people want to live in the [West Bend] area because they like the lakes...and want to be near Milwaukee but want beautiful West Bend property."

"It's not really a suburb of Milwaukee."

"Property values are affordable. You can afford a fair amount of land. Those who enjoy the outdoors but maybe work in the city or want culture are in a good position...We feel like we are out in the middle of nowhere but have great access to the area. We could be downtown in thirty minutes."

Not everyone agreed that West Bend was so independent of Milwaukee. Five participants called West Bend a "bedroom community."

"There are not great job opportunities in West Bend. It's a bedroom community."

"It can be a bedroom community for the Milwaukee area, but not for downtown Milwaukee."

Six participants underscored the impact of West Bend's proximity to surrounding communities, for work and play.

"Me and my husband drive around a lot, and there is a lot that is accessible from West Bend."

"You are in the middle of everything, whether from the North, South, or West. You are 1.5 hours to O'Hare, 45 min to Green Bay, 45 min to Brewers, and Milwaukee, and you are near Chicago. You can enjoy the metro and be home that evening. That's good for people in their late 20s. I really like being able to play in the city and then go home."

Jobs In and Around West Bend

For career-oriented young adults, the right kind of job is important. Seventeen participants discussed how the West Bend employment market influenced their location decisions, whether for beginning a career, or growing one.

"I moved here for a job."

"In places like [Kewaskum], you can't live where you work because there aren't enough jobs there. In West Bend, we just added Meijer's - so that's more job opportunities."

"This is a good place to move up in your career but stay in [the same] city."

Six participants pointed out that West Bend also allows for a good work-life balance.

"In West Bend, you can work, play, and recreate. There's a sense of a big city but it has small town values."

"West Bend wasn't number one on my list...I could work more hours to afford living in Madison - but here, I have a good work-life balance."

But people didn't necessarily choose West Bend for a local job. Nine participants discussed how jobs outside of West Bend in communities other than Milwaukee contribute to West Bend's growing young adult population.

"There's a fair number of manufacturers between here and Hartford."

"My husband works in Germantown."

And for those working outside of the community, seven commented on the benefits of a "good" commute with low traffic.

"It's a short commute if you live and work here. There's no traffic on my commute - I'm always on the good side of the road."

"My husband parks and rides to work, and that's five minutes from our house. It's convenient to get to downtown Milwaukee."

Low Cost of Living, Strong Economy

Finances played a strong role in many young adults' location decisions. Fourteen participants discussed how a low cost of living and low taxes contribute to the growth of young adults in West Bend.

"The cost of living is relatively low compared to other towns, and taxes are lower too."

"Career opportunities and housing...are aligned here - the cost of living and wages align in West Bend."

Seven of these participants specifically referenced the role of relatively low-cost housing in young adults choosing West Bend.

"It's cheaper. My husband...got the same house here as in Wauwatosa but for less money."

"If I was living in the city, I would need a roommate desperately. I'm grateful that I have my own place."

According to eleven participants, the job availability and economic base are founded, in part, on a variety of businesses in West Bend.

"Now there's more retail, and more service businesses. There are plenty of great stores."

"There's a variety of commerce - specialty shops, mom and pop shops, big box stores."

"There's a head shop here now! That's unprecedented. Now there are tattoo shops - they've been here for five or ten years."

However, five participants did note either that it was a struggle to afford living and working in West Bend, or that some young adults may stay in West Bend because they are living with parents to conserve on finances.

"Maybe there are people living at home...because there's not a lot of jobs."

"I wish I was better off financially...I'm ready to grow up and get a house...I'm working towards that with my two jobs."

Amenities and Growth

West Bend was the most populous community we studied. It seemed to be large enough that people felt more comfortable with the idea of growth. Thirteen participants attributed growth and retention of young adults to West Bend's growing population and economic base that produced a desired concentration of amenities.

"I'm happy I can meet new people because it's growing. I don't feel like it's the same thing over and over. I like to change my schedule every year. I'm always looking to grow."

"You don't have to drive twenty minutes for amenities"

Fourteen participants (including six of the thirteen mentioned above) pointed to West Bend's strong public school district and parochial schools.

"Kids are getting a good education - there are lots of families and teachers I know there [in the public school system]."

"Because the school district is wide, there's lots of talent for teams and clubs."

"The school offers events too - with lots of opportunities to get involved."

"We decided to raise kids here - it was a religion- and school-based decision."

Eight participants praised West Bend amenities such as bars and restaurants.

"There's a lot of new growth, and new restaurants. It's a good location, a fun place."

"I meet people at the bar, especially Brazen Head. You can talk to people there."

Recreation, Culture, and the Outdoors

Leisure activities are important for every age group, and can influence those who are at an age where they are still choosing the community they want to call home. Twenty-one participants discussed the importance of recreational opportunities for West Bend's growing young adult population. Eleven of this group referenced the YMCA, MOWA (Museum of Wisconsin Art), cultural activities and organized recreation for adults and children.

"The Parks and Rec department offers great programs for young adults - yoga, and dance."

"[West Bend] has great cultural resources, and is a great community for meeting people and socializing. Overall, there's a variety of activities for all ages."

"It's great that MOWA is here - that's great for community or families."

"There's a decent downtown - they have music. There's MOWA."

Fourteen of these twenty-one participants referenced the city's recreational infrastructure, including parks and bike trails.

"West Bend has an awesome parks system, even better than Milwaukee. You can ski, sled, hike, fish, kayak, run - and there are playgrounds."

"There's the Eisenbahn trail [for biking, walking, or running] - there's always people on that trail, whether it's ten degrees or ninety-five degrees."

"It's really fantastic, especially for an outdoorsy type."

However, six participants believed that recreational opportunities in West Bend were generally limited to hanging out with friends, especially for people not raising families.

"There's not much to do here except lay back and chill with your friends."

"It's a great place to raise a family. It's a different story if you are twenty and single."

Four of these six participants, however, were still able to list recreational opportunities available in West Bend.

Family, Home, and Community

Even though West Bend is a larger community, twenty participants still spoke about West Bend as a small, family-oriented community.

"Here's where I insert a commercial for West Bend. When you are ready to start a family...there are parks, schools. It's an opportune place to raise a family, with a caring community."

"I thought the community was somewhat like Mayberry - like a small town, in a school district of forty-thousand. I've been told people come back here to raise families."

"People stay because of family heritage...Businesses are handed down through families, and are dedicated and devoted to carrying on tradition."

For thirteen interviewee participants, a strong feature of West Bend attractiveness to young adults is its welcoming feel, where people greet each other and get to know each other, and where everyone seems to know everyone else.

"When I moved here, the community was exceptionally welcoming."

"There's a lot of nice decent people. People pass you on walking trails and say 'How are you' and 'Enjoy your run.' There's common decency."

For fourteen participants, this sense of community produced a perception of safety and quiet.

"It's a very safe community - I live here by myself and don't perceive issues."

"It's quiet. If you are looking for a real chill city, West Bend is that."

People noted that there are lots of ways to get involved with civic life in West Bend. Five participants pointed to the numerous community service opportunities and organizations.

"West Bend has a dynamic non-profit scene. People can donate time, and put effort into the betterment of the world around us. I used to be on some boards here...They provide lots of services, like mental health assistance, health, homeless shelters..."

Seven participants described the strength of faith communities in West Bend, through which people feel connected and gain a sense of belonging.

"If a twenty-five year old finds it hard [to meet people], there are strong faith-based communities...but no Jewish presence."

Not everyone agreed with the perception of West Bend as a welcoming, caring community. Six participants said they wanted more friends, or that people in West Bend could be mean or cliquey and exclusive.

"People here all grew up together - it's hard to break into the scene."

"Some people here are cruel to each other - they discredit and hurt people."

Some interview participants also saw West Bend as a conservative community. Seven participants discussed how the perceived conservatism was alienating, damaging, or a challenge to negotiate.

"There are bad politics...budget cuts...they shut down the historical society...There was concealed carry at the library for a bit." [The core group noted that, while the county is questioning its financial commitment to the historical society, the society has not been shut down.]

"I would live here if it was more progressive, which means younger. I don't know how to get that to happen."

Opportunities for Growth

The interview participants also had ideas for how West Bend could become even more attractive to young adults. Sixteen participants offered thoughts to improve the city's infrastructure, recreational opportunities, socio-economic diversity, and more inclusive city planning.

"Allow for more diversity in public office. It's all white men. Are others interested? I want more than middle class white people. We could develop a welcome packet for people who come here - about services like voting, for people who buy property here. Give them info on the community."

"We have empty strip malls. I don't understand why they build more strip malls when there are already empty strip malls."

"The river...does not have a lot of money put into it - on the back of the downtown buildings. It gives the feel of an alley, not a gem."

"How many superstores like Wal-Mart do we need? We don't need the replication. Is there city planning behind this? Is this their plan? They seem to just take whatever development they can get."

Comparisons with Other Case Studies

Similar Size Cities: De Pere, Onalaska, and Plover

There were three communities with a similar size to West Bend. De Pere is just a short drive south of Green Bay, and is most similar in population size to West Bend, counting 24,555 people in 2010. Onalaska, at 17,736 in 2010, is just north of La Crosse. And while Plover is smaller, at 12,123 people in 2010, our interviewees saw it as part of a single community with Stevens Point.

People in all three of these communities were appreciative of their more urban amenities, whether the art Museum in West Bend, St. Norbert College in De Pere, or the universities in Plover's and Onalaska's border communities. They also appreciated the density of commerce that a larger population could support. This is in contrast to our smaller communities where most interview participants spoke of having to drive for most shopping beyond the basics and for entertainment.

A contrast of West Bend with these other communities is that people expressing progressive political perspectives seemed less at home in West Bend, and that may be due to the influence of higher education institutions in the other three places. In addition, interview participants in West Bend seemed less concerned about growth than in the other places, though that may be due to unique conditions in each community. People in De Pere were worried about the pressures on the local housing market driving up prices. In Plover, the concern was about protecting farm land and rural space in general.

Concern for Natural Water Amenities

We can also make some other comparisons. People in Omro, which sits along a river, and in Delavan, which borders Delavan Lake, are also concerned about the use and attractiveness of their natural water amenity. Schools were important in every community as well, though no other community had the variety of schools as West Bend. People in West Bend also did not emphasize the schools as community spaces in the same way that people did in the smaller communities we studied.

The Importance of Urban Centers

Perhaps most important to every community we studied is the role played by larger cities within commuting distance. Whether they were in a small town or a small city, having a city near enough to commute to work, or get dinner and see a show, seemed very important to young adults. To a large extent, the health of communities such as West Bend is dependent on the health of larger cities that can provide the amenities that there is just not enough population density for in a smaller place. The young adults in these smaller places don't seem to desire, or can't afford, to live in the large cities, but they want relatively convenient access to them.

So What? Implications for West Bend

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes.

We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

There are also some implications specific to West Bend. West Bend might be characterized as a small city by some, but for many of our interviewees it still has a small town feel. Some residents commute to Milwaukee 40 minutes away for work and play, but many are employed in town or in manufacturing jobs in the surrounding area. Some larger businesses that historically employ West Bend residents and people in the area include West Bend Mutual Insurance, Pick Heaters, and the school district. Delta Defense is building new corporate headquarters in West Bend. For housing, high quality rentals and homes are available at a lower cost than in the city.

West Bend has long had a reputation, confirmed by a number of our interviewees, as a conservative city. That can sometimes imply an unwillingness to fund public goods. And indeed, there are conflicts over support for some public goods such as the Historical Society. But West Bend maintains schools and park systems for residents that are perceived positively by our interviewees. Many households would say that this is a great place to raise kids. But singles and families without kids also enjoy the busy and beautiful area, the varied shops and the many free cultural events hosted by the city and local businesses. And the Museum of Wisconsin Art makes West Bend a host to visitors from across the state. The challenge for West Bend is find ways to continue supporting the amenities that have made it attractive to young adults.

Our interviewees in West Bend and the other communities emphasize the importance of the outdoors for young adults. An opportunity facing West Bend is riverfront development. West Bend's downtown stretches along the Milwaukee River, and residents complain that the riverfront is treated like a back alley by local businesses. Community leaders have listened, and are developing the river front to be beautiful and inviting for folks to walk along. Meanwhile, residents love skiing and hiking nearby, and biking, walking, and running on the Eisenbahn trail. Maintaining such amenities for all-season activities may also enhance West Bend's reputation.

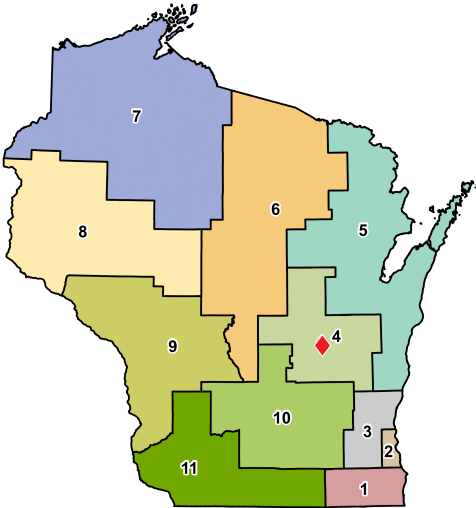
West Bend feels like a small town to some, where organizations and people are always giving and growing together. Others feel anonymous, and seek more connection. As West Bend engages in planning and developing its physical spaces, it could also consider social planning that could engage young adults, building relationships by planning how to build relationships.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Omro

by Allyson Watson

"We just knew that we weren't going to find another community like this."

Basic	
	Municipality City of Omro
	County Winnebago
	Year Incorporated 1928
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	3,517 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	4
Young Adult Gaining Measure	3% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	29% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	94.7% White (non-Hispanic) 1.9% White (Hispanic) 0.7% African American 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.2% Asian 1.5% Other 0.6% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$53,033 (2015)
Median Income	\$44,375 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2005	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2011) \$1 million	
Notes		Omro is served by the School District of Omro	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	H.B. Patch	Pre-K – 1	Public
	Omro Elementary School	2-5	Public
Middle	Omro Middle School	6-8	Public
High	Omro High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Omro

An Omro core group was formed in early 2017 with the assistance of Sheamus Johnson, and University of Wisconsin-Extension Winnebago County educator Allyson Watson took the lead in conducting interviews with community members beginning in April 2017. Collaboration continued to characterize our approach to data collection. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

We reached out to UW-Extension in Winnebago County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. **Connect to Omro Leaders:**

Catherine Neiswender of UW-Extension Winnebago County recommended we reach out to nonprofit, government, and education leaders along with another Extension educator, who all agreed to be on the core group.

3. **Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:**

Sheamus Johnson conducted a meeting with the core group to address the following three points:

- How is this project relevant to Omro, and your role in Omro?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

4. **Conduct Interviews:**

We administered the following questionnaire to thirteen interviewees who we reached through the core group's recommendations, as well as some referrals from those who were interviewed.

5. **Present and Revise Results:**

We analyzed and summarized the results of our interviews, and presented them to our Omro and UW-Extension collaborators, and revised them based on their recommendations.

Omro Interview Guide

1. What year were you born?
2. How long have you lived here?
Follow up: If not from Omro area originally, why did you move here?
3. What is affordable for you here and what is not?
4. How local is your family to where you live?
5. What would you say to someone who is thinking of moving here?
6. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) who is thinking of moving here?
7. Why do people move to Omro?
Follow up: If not from Omro originally, how did you find out about Omro – or if you knew about Omro, what was your perception before moving here?
8. Why do people stay in Omro?
9. What role do young adults play where you live?
10. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?
11. To what extent do young adults engage in governance and politics where you live?
12. To what extent do young adults engage in cultural life where you live?
13. What do young people do for entertainment around here?
14. How many people do you know in Omro? (Classified 'know' as knowing someone by first name)
15. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here (over 40)?
16. How do you want Omro to grow? Conversely, how do you want it to stay the same?
17. What does community mean to you? What does community look like in Omro?
18. What do you think of the shopping opportunities in Omro?
19. What are the schools like in Omro?
20. What do you use that is outside of Omro?

Results for Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Omro

While the identity of survey participants remain confidential, a few key demographic insights maybe prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

Of the thirteen interviewees (all between the ages of 20-39), eight were born between 1979-1984, part of the Generation X cohort. The other five participants were born between 1985-1995, representing the Millennial cohort.

Eight of the interview participants were male, the other five participants were female. All interview participants identified as white.

Eight of the interview participants grew up in the Omro area and either did not leave or returned to the community as an adult. Two participants work in Omro and moved to the area, and one moved there for a significant other who had grown up in Omro.

Interview participants represented a wide variety of occupations and educational backgrounds.

Overall, our thirteen interviewees repeatedly cited a number of factors that were attracting young adults, and keeping them in the community.

Close-Knit Community, Small Town Feel

In describing Omro, twelve of the thirteen participants used words such as:

- "small town" (5 people)
- "nice town/community" (3 people)
- "quiet" (2 people)
- "cute" (1 person)
- "quaint" (1 person)

When participants were asked how they defined community and how they saw it exemplified in Omro, several key themes emerged:

- Community is like family
- Community comes together to fix things and support one another
- Community is taking pride in your amenities - be they parks, memorials, downtown business facades, historic buildings, etc.
- Community is demonstrating care for others and promoting the common good

Seven of the thirteen participants mentioned specifically that Omro's small town identity was important to them. Residents perceived the community as very safe (5 participants mentioned this). There was a high degree of familiarity with neighbors and the community as a whole. Participants used language such as "close-knit/tight" (4 people), "knowing each other" (4 people), and "watching out for each other" (1 person). In their more detailed descriptions, they said things like:

"You don't want to lose that traditional Norman Rockwell America that we have here."

"One of the draws for the community is the close-knit group of people."

"What I think draws people to smaller towns is the fact that people know each other... it's nice to be able to walk down the street and have your neighbors smile and wave at you."

"[There's a] 1950s feeling yet. [You] can let your kids walk home from school."

When asked how many people in the Omro community they knew, only two people mentioned knowing fewer than 100 people. Two other people said they knew at least 100, four said they knew at least 500, and five said they knew at least 1,000.

Residents cited the importance of extended, intergenerational families nearby in Winnebago County or, even closer, in Omro itself.

- Eleven of the thirteen interview participants reported having extended family within Winnebago County.
- Eight of the participants reported having extended family within the City of Omro proper.

This high degree of connectivity can also have a downside, with two participants acknowledging that the close-knit social circles made it difficult to maintain privacy:

People are well-intentioned, but kind of nosy.

Significance of Community Amenities, Community Organizations, and Community Events

The degree of social cohesion in Omro was strongly communicated through community amenities, organizations and events. Interview participants referenced many community organizations by name that they were personally involved in or familiar with and credited them with social cohesion in Omro, including: Scouts (3 people), high school programs like sports teams and band (3 people), volunteer emergency services (2 people), service clubs (2 people), the Main Street organization/Business Improvement District (2 people), church (1 person), and the Historical Society (1 person). Seven participants cited adult bar sports leagues, particularly softball, as a means of connecting socially in Omro. Five of the thirteen participants cited the community pool as an appreciated amenity and opportunity for social engagement.

"Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts are even more active here. They have really phenomenal programs for that compared to others in the area that my [family is] involved in in the Fox Cities."

"We set up for [school] events. We also go to community pep band events, too. My mom doesn't even have a kid in high school anymore but she's still [involved]."

"During [community events], you'll see everyone you know from high school. People come back for those community events... A lot of people who are further away make a point to come back during those events."

"I've heard that the Omro municipal pool is a lot quieter and cleaner than those in Oshkosh or the Fox Valley. I've heard that from people that come here for open swim or lessons in the summer."

Small School Size and Shared Partners in Raising Youth

Omro is served by the School District of Omro. The school district consists of four schools: H.B. Patch Elementary School, Omro Elementary School, Omro Middle School, and Omro High School.

Similar to findings in other municipality case studies, small school size was identified as an important draw for the community. Eight of the thirteen participants mentioned Omro's schools as a draw for the community. Not all interview participants were parents of students in the Omro schools, but they generally held the view that Omro schools offer competitive resources for the size of the community.

"I think the schools are what attract people. It's a nice small town school."

"I absolutely love that my [child] will be one of 400 in the school, versus one of 400 in a class."

Two of the thirteen interview participants appreciated what they saw as a culture of shared responsibility in parenting and looking out for each others' children.

"[Community is] knowing that if your kid does something stupid, that rather than hearing it from the police, [you'll hear it from a neighbor]."

"The old adage of it taking a village to raise a child? There's a lot of truth to that. I think you see that here. If my kid screws up, I want my buddy's parent to say something to [them]."

Three interview participants shared that they home school their children and do not use the public school system. Importantly, however, one of these parents noted that, despite not being a part of the school system, they still get support from it:

"[The Omro Library staff] know our kids and they know what we're into and what we want to read about. They really care about us."

Proximity to Oshkosh as a Workforce Center and Accessing Area Amenities

Omro's close proximity to both Oshkosh and the Fox Cities area was noted by seven of the thirteen interview participants. The shared consensus of ten of those participants was that most people are employed outside of Omro, but that the short commute allows for the quality of life that a small town can provide.

"Most people are commuting to Oshkosh. Some work in the outlying areas. Relatively few people that I know actually work in Omro."

Interview participants expressed the belief, or perhaps hope, that proximity to a larger metropolitan meant that businesses were unlikely to open locations in both Oshkosh and Omro. And while this meant that Omro residents would have to drive to Oshkosh for specific shopping needs, not all interview participants desired that chain stores come into Omro. Three of the thirteen participants actually stated preferring that chains stay out of Omro, a theme that we will return to later in this analysis.

"There are tiers [for shopping]: I've got my basics in Omro. If you want a slightly nicer level, Oshkosh. If you want to go [30-35 minutes away], then Appleton [for the mall]."

"[You can find] just about anything you really need in a pinch without leaving Omro. You also might pay a little more for it."

The top retail destinations that people mentioned driving to other places for were discount/big box retail outlets (Target, Wal-Mart, Costco), big box hardware and building supply stores (Menards, Lowes, Fleet Farm) and specialty natural/organic groceries (Festival Foods).

Four of the thirteen participants, mentioned that they shop using an Amazon Prime account (a shopping option including free two day shipping), which eliminates the need to travel outside of Omro for specialty items. Three of the five Millennial participants shared that they had an Amazon Prime account.

Growth and Change in Omro

In addition to participants' examples of what has made Omro an attractive place for young adults to call home, they also provided thoughts on things that they think are missing in the community.

A Desire for More Dining Options in Omro

Six of the thirteen participants shared that, while they did not object to driving 10-15 minutes to shop, there was a lack of both fast casual (2 people) and sit-down dining (5 people) options in Omro such as coffee shops, supper clubs, and family restaurants. Some specific chain/franchise restaurants they named included: Little Caesars Pizza, Starbucks Coffee, Panera Bread, Hardee's and Jimmy John's.

Entertainment Options for Teenagers

Six of the thirteen participants noted that Omro offered an excellent variety of programming for youth locally, but that teenagers did not have the same volume of opportunities. They desired more activities and programs for that age group. One participant each mentioned a Boys and Girls Club, an arcade, a movie theatre, and a coffee shop/gathering space as options in this vein.

Business Growth and Development

Along with the desire for specific business expansion in Omro, five of the thirteen interview participants also had thoughts about the broader retail and business culture in the community. They said things like:

"[Curb appeal] shapes people's opinion of the City... The whole curb appeal is very negative... It'd be great to send the message that you don't have to go to Oshkosh for everything."

"We don't capture Highway 21 traffic at all... we could probably revitalize a lot of these downtown businesses if we captured 1% of the through traffic."

Three of the thirteen participants were also concerned that continued business development in Omro might sacrifice some of the locally-owned flavor of the community. Participants seemed willing to sacrifice some convenience to have locally-owned businesses in their downtown district.

"You know who the [business] owners are. Keep it a locally-owned community."

"I hope they don't sell out to big corporations. I like that the car place is a locally-owned business."

"I'd rather [Omro] be a small town than a suburb. I don't want you to have to find downtown, I like how downtown is the main drag and you can't miss it."

"I don't want to lose the small town feel. I don't want a... big chain store... I'm okay driving 10-15 minutes into Oshkosh."

Housing Growth and Development

Some interview participants held a similarly guarded attitude toward continued subdivision growth in the larger Omro area. Three of the thirteen participants shared a fear that continued suburban sprawl would blur the boundary of the Town of Algoma and the City of Oshkosh.

"I appreciate the subdivisions popping up that bring more people in, but I'd rather it not become a complete cookie cutter subdivision town. I'd like to see the historic part remain."

What is Omro Doing Right? Where is there Room For Improvement?

Overall, interview participants credited the City (and community at large) of Omro with doing several things right:

- Engaging in intentional historic preservation efforts in the downtown district and in historic home districts (2 people).
- Providing a wide variety of engaging and well-attended community events (7 people).
- Preserving locally-owned businesses in the community, rather than national chains or franchises (3 people).

There were two areas where participants desired to see Omro improve:

- Improving curb appeal and facades of downtown businesses (3 people).

- Take better advantage of the waterfront to appeal to boaters, fishermen (3 people). Some worried that the depth of the Fox River was not suitable for large watercraft, and saw that as a deterrent to business growth.

How Omro Compared to Nearby Municipalities: De Pere and Black Creek

There were two other case study communities in this region of the state: De Pere and Black Creek. While De Pere was a larger community, it and Black Creek were similar to Omro in terms of their proximity to larger urban areas.

De Pere and Omro – Similarities:

- Easy access to larger workforce centers allowed for employment opportunity, but also helped to preserve a distinct community identity in both of these communities.
- High praise was given to the public school districts in both De Pere and Omro, often crediting their respective school districts as some of the best in the region.
- Both De Pere and Omro, who share the Fox River, lamented underutilization of the riverfront. Residents in both communities hoped that future development might incorporate the Fox River.
- De Pere and Omro residents both cited high taxes initially, but acknowledged that the quality of services received was also high.

Black Creek and Omro – Similarities:

- Black Creek and Omro both shared a value of a 'small town identity' which comes with being located on the fringes of a larger metropolitan area.
- Black Creek and Omro residents both placed high value on their local community events.
- Black Creek and Omro residents both shared sentiments regarding shopping opportunities – that basic amenities were readily available locally, but that greater variety and discounted prices were available with a longer drive out of town.
- Easy access to workforce centers was a major highlight of participant responses in both Black Creek (New London, Shawano, Fox Cities workforce centers) and Omro (Oshkosh, Neenah/Menasha, Fox Cities workforce centers).

So What? Implications for Omro

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to other urban areas for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in this community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered here.

In combing through the qualitative data behind this study, several themes emerged that have important implications for Omro in the future. These themes are described in greater detail here.

Small Town Culture is Integral to Omro's Identity

A facet of Omro that proved loud and clear in the participant interviews is that people desire a community that they identify as being a "small town", or quiet and quaint. This appeared to weigh as a higher desire than affordability of a community, a fact that surprised core group members during the report review process. Knowing now that community members select Omro because it is small,

cohesive, safe-feeling, and seemingly timeless – the municipality may want to consider that message in their branding. The City of Omro's current brand "Historically Connected by Nature" may not convey the characteristics people most value.

With a smaller population size, greater social cohesion and connectivity appeared to come hand in hand. The majority of participants shared that having a high degree of familiarity with local business owners, neighbors and educators was important to them. There was some reflection from participants that were not originally from Omro that they were unsure of how to connect with other community members, and some Omro natives reflected that they presume there are those left out of the tight-knit social circles. This prompted discussion in the core group about how the City of Omro might reach out to new residents to make them feel welcome and increase chances of connecting new residents socially.

On the subject of affordability, several participants shared that they feel that Omro's water bills are higher than surrounding communities. Core group members noted that many communities bill for water utilities monthly, whereas Omro bills quarterly. Writing a bigger check at once, rather than paying in smaller increments monthly may give people a perception that costs are higher.

Embrace and Promote Outdoor Recreation

A recurring theme in participant interviews was that the Omro Municipal Pool is a key community amenity for parents. It seemed as though Omro had a leg up on nearby municipalities in this respect, too. Another outdoor recreation amenity that was brought up was the city's kayak rental program. These amenities are perhaps known by some locals, but perhaps not by others, or by visitors. This also ties into the city's current brand of "Connected by Nature".

A Need for Community Spaces

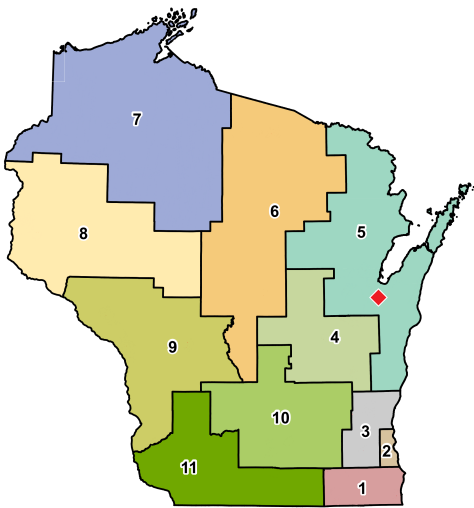
Some participants shared a desire for an all-age inclusive third space, and others specifically indicated a desire for a space for area youth. A coffee shop like space was a similar demand in nearby Black Creek, too. A space like this would provide community meeting space, a place for independent business owners working remotely to gather and share ideas, and would provide a safe space for youth to spend time, as well. Some communities, such as Wisconsin Rapids, have successfully expanded their public libraries to include a small format café. Other small communities have transformed historic downtown storefronts into spaces of this nature, such as Alley Cat Coffeehouse in Hortonville.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: De Pere

by Sheamus Johnson and Allyson Watson

"You feel cared about."

Basic	
	Municipality City of De Pere
	County Brown
	Year Incorporated 1857
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	23,800 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	5
Young Adult Gaining Measure	11% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	32% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	92.8% White (non-Hispanic) 1.2% White (Hispanic) 0.9% African American 1.2% American Indian and Alaska Native 1.5% Asian 0.7% Other 1.8% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$55,345 (2015)
Median Income	\$33,084 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2010	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		Unified School District of De Pere (2015), \$7.1 million; West De Pere School District (2006), \$18.25 million	
Notes		De Pere is served by two public school districts: Unified School District of De Pere and West De Pere School District.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Hemlock Creek Elementary	Pre-K – 5	Public
	Westwood Elementary	Pre-K – 5	Public
	Altmeyer Elementary	Pre-K – 4	Public
	Dickinson Elementary	Pre-K – 4	Public
	Heritage Elementary	Pre-K – 4	Public
	Syble Hopp School	Ages 3 - 23	Public
	Green Bay Montessori Children's World	Pre-K – 1	Private
	Notre Dame School of De Pere	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Our Lady of Lourdes School	Pre-K – 8	Private
Middle	West De Pere Middle School	6-8	Public
	Phantom Knight School of Opportunity (Public Charter)	7-12	Public Charter
	Foxview Intermediate	5-6	Public
	De Pere Middle School	7-8	Public
	Syble Hopp School	Ages 3-23	Public
	Notre Dame School of De Pere	Pre-K – 8	Private
	Our Lady of Lourdes School	Pre-K – 8	Private
High	West De Pere High School	9-12	Public

Schools		
Phantom Knight School of Opportunity (Public Charter)	7-12	Public Charter
De Pere High School	9-12	Public
Syble Hopp School	Ages 3-23	Public

Conducting the Case Study in De Pere

Sheamus Johnson began building a core group in De Pere in January of 2017. Allyson Watson, who was then a University of Wisconsin-Extension educator in Brown County, later became a member of the research team. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

We reached out to Allyson Watson with Brown County UW-Extension, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. **Connect to De Pere Leaders to Form a Core Group:**

Allyson Watson took the lead on reaching out to a number of government, business, and community leaders in De Pere.

3. **Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:**

We met with the core group to address the following three points:

- How is this project relevant to De Pere, and your role in De Pere?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

This meeting solidified our interview guide for De Pere, highlighting those questions that fit best with the community. It was also a major milestone in our holistic and participatory approach. Allyson Watson joined the research team to assist in identifying potential participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing the interview data. The participatory nature of conducting research *with* a member of the community greatly contributed to our holistic understanding of what makes De Pere an attractive community for young adults.

4. **Conduct Interviews:**

We administered the following interview guide to twenty interviewees whom we reached through the core group's recommendations. Sheamus Johnson and Allyson Watson conducted the interviews between February and early May of 2017.

5. **Present and Revise Report:**

We analyzed and summarized the results of our interviews, presented them to our De Pere Core Group, and revised the report based on their comments.

De Pere Interview Guide

1. How long have you lived here?
Follow-up: Where do you live?
2. How local is your family to where you live?

3. What would you say to someone who is thinking of moving here?
4. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) who is thinking of moving here?
5. Why do people move here?
Follow up: How did you find out about De Pere?
6. Why do people stay here?
7. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?
8. What do young people do for entertainment around here?
9. How would you want your town to grow? How would you want it to stay the same?
10. What people would not feel comfortable here?
11. Why did you move here?
12. What would influence you to stay or leave?
Follow up: Where would you go?
13. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?
14. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here?
Follow up: Do you feel like there is opportunity there?
15. What are the schools like here?

Results for De Pere

While the identities of interview participants remain confidential, a few key demographic insights may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- The De Pere Study included participants who live in the Unified School District of De Pere boundaries or in the West De Pere School District boundaries. One participant is employed in De Pere, but lives in Green Bay.
- More than half of the 20 participants live in the City of De Pere (proper), with other participants living in the Town of Ledgeview, Village of Hobart, Town of Lawrence, Village of Ashwaubenon and City of Green Bay.
- There was a relatively even gender distribution in participation. All interview participants were Caucasian and one was of Hispanic/Latino descent.
- While the City of De Pere does have higher educational attainment levels than some other municipalities in Brown County, interview participants had educational backgrounds above community averages. Thirteen participants mentioned that they had obtained a four year (bachelors) degree, and seven participants had either obtained or were in the process of obtaining post graduate education.
- Another indicator that was outside the community average was the number of homeowners included in the participant group. Thirteen of the participants mentioned that they own a home and no participants mentioned outright that they are renters.

Overall, our twenty interviewees repeatedly cited a number of factors that were attracting young adults and keeping them in the community.

Close-knit Community, Small Town Feeling in a City

All De Pere participants felt connected to their community. They noted that there is a lot to do, but that it maintains a small-town atmosphere. Sometimes this was fostered through a sense of community, and sometimes supported by adequate amenities.

"What I love about De Pere is there's a lot to do like a big city, but it has small town values."

"It provides close access to everything you need in life. It has a growing big city amenities. It is still very much the feel of a small town with very close community ties."

"I would say it's a great, supportive community. Always something to do, and it's small enough that you know people, and you run into people you know. Familiarity. You feel cared about."

"De Pere offers the charm of a small community with the resources of a bigger city."

The connections to community are a significant factor in what keeps young adults in De Pere. Ten interview participants shared that people stay because of deep roots to the community, which may take some time to cultivate.

"Once you're established here - it takes a little while to get in - it's a very generous mentality. People who are connected often want to help one another out."

"I think people identify very closely with the community when they live here. It makes it more difficult to leave...when you have roots in a community."

"I think people stay for the community. It's hard to describe, there's a sense of community in De Pere where people are very proud of the community, give back to the community and are involved in the community. People get used to that and they like that."

"People stay because it's that whole community sense, [you] feel like you are a part of something, kids get involved, park system is great."

Deep roots may refer not only to the strength of relationships in the community, but also a proximity to extended family or to a personal connection and history in the community.

- Seven of the interview participants shared that they were born in Brown County, two of whom were born in De Pere specifically. Five of the interview participants shared that their spouse was born in Brown County, and three spouses were born in De Pere specifically.
- Eight of the interview participants said that they had at least one member of their extended family living in Brown County, and five of them had at least one extended family member living in De Pere specifically.
- Four of the interview participants had either received their K-12 education in De Pere. Nine had either completed or were receiving their collegiate education in De Pere and had opted to stay in the community or return to the community afterward. This high retention rate of De Pere K-12 and college students may explain some of the comments relating to 'deep roots' in the community.

Young adults' connection to De Pere is further evidenced by the fact that an outstanding career opportunity is about the only thing that would influence them to leave the community. Eight participants mentioned that a better career opportunity would influence them to leave.

"My husband owns his own company, so to leave it would have to be a really, really amazing career opportunity."

"It would have to be two things for me to leave: career - if I was given an amazing opportunity and I knew my career would flourish because of it. The second would be my kids. They're only in elementary school, but if they go to college somewhere else - we might follow our kids."

Close Proximity to Green Bay, Fox Valley Cities

One of the frequently mentioned reasons why De Pere is an attractive place for young adults is its proximity to other urban areas. Fourteen participants mentioned De Pere's proximity to other areas. De Pere is large enough to have sufficient amenities of its own, but the proximity to Green Bay and the Fox Valley allows for a greater diversity in employment opportunities, entertainment, and a place to live that is conveniently located close to all of these and family.

"It provides close access to everything you need in life. It has a growing [set of] big city amenities. It is still very much the feel of a small town with very close community ties."

"Proximity to everything in De Pere is close to Green Bay. It's a 10-15 minute drive anywhere."

"Well, I would say if you travel for work, or work in Green Bay, it's nice enough to be outside the city limits, if you work in Appleton, you're there in 20 minutes. It's a nice spot to get around to different things, It's a geographically smart place to live and outside the busy city."

"The reason people live in De Pere specifically is, I believe, the excellent schools and the smaller town feel that is closer to Green Bay and has everything you need."

Proximity to other urban areas is a theme throughout many of our other case studies. De Pere's thematic connection to other municipalities in our study will be examined later in this report.

Excellent Schools, Family-Oriented and Perceived as Safe

Twelve participants felt that De Pere was not only a safe community, but an excellent one to raise children in. This was largely due to positive perceptions of the school, plenty of activities for families, and a community that embraces families.

"It's a great place to settle down for sure; there's a lot of activities for kids and adults. It's a very family-centric area, but it also has a focus on staying current."

"The school district in De Pere is very popular right now. Not open enrolled any more, driving up house sales in De Pere. Housing prices have grown a lot because of that, particularly the West De Pere school district. The only way to get in is to move in to the community since they don't have open enrollment. The school is highly ranked at the state level, which is attractive to young adults."

"Then I would probably go on to say it is one of the best neighborhoods for your kids. The school district is rated high."

"It's a safe city to raise a family in."

"I'd say De Pere has probably one of the best school systems in the area."

"It's a really good area to buy a home because the values are high and stay high because of the really good school district."

Perspectives on St. Norbert College

Due to the composition of the De Pere Core Group (including some educational leaders from St. Norbert College) and the referrals shared for potential interview participants, it is important to note that St. Norbert College was highly represented in this study. St. Norbert College has a student body of just over 2,000 undergraduate students. Five of the interview participants had attended St. Norbert College for their undergraduate education and four had attended or were attending St. Norbert College for their post-graduate work.

We asked participants who first came to De Pere as St. Norbert College students about their perspectives of the community as students. They said things like:

"[It's] a pinnacle of the community."

"One of the big things that struck me was that the campus was walkable... Being close to the [Fox] River, but still having the amenities of town was important... I really loved the architecture, too, of both the campus and the community."

"I really love how St. Norbert College has 'communio' as a part of their values... I really believe that a community should... care for their own like an extended family."

Change and Growth in De Pere

Concerns Related to Rapid Growth and Housing Demand

If there was any one subject that drew criticism from residents, it was the rapid growth of the school district in recent years resulting in larger class sizes (4 participants), and the development of new subdivisions along with increased pressure on the housing market (3 participants).

"My biggest concern about De Pere is that it is growing past its capacity and it will eventually bust... our schools are past capacity right now. We're going to have to build another school."

"The property is very expensive and It's very hard to find a starter house, or any house really. Starters especially."

"Taxes would influence me to leave. If property taxes get too high."

"You still see large open plots of farmland in West De Pere... that's another how many hundred new homes? How is the school district preparing for this? Are they prepared to handle the growth? ... You want the community to grow, but how much can it handle from the infrastructure side? ... I don't want to lose the highly rated schools that aren't overcrowded."

"I was talking to someone last week who put their house on the market. It sold within an hour over the asking price. It's a hot market right now... [De Pere is] the new popular thing."

Commercial Development in De Pere

Seven participants shared that they felt De Pere was on the right track with recent development, particularly in the downtown area – mentioning specifically the 102 on Broadway (luxury apartment development) and an increase in modern restaurants. Nine participants spoke to specific development ideas for Downtown De Pere and emphasized restaurants and entertainment venues (such as breweries, third spaces, ethnic dining and concert venues). Six participants shared that they felt these specific types of amenities were attractive to young professionals:

"I'd like the population to grow, more young professionals in the area. I'd like to see more contemporary restaurants, bars, housing."

"A greater focus on culture... coffee shops... breweries... entertainment... I think those are a lot of things that Chicago, Minneapolis and Portland used to attract young people. We're [De Pere] doing a better job of adding those things."

Entertainment in De Pere

Participants mentioned a general drinking culture in De Pere as a form of entertainment. But they also discussed how there is much more to do for fun in De Pere.

"Heavy culture of drinking involved, so there's that. There's the farmers' markets, the bike trails, waterways, restaurants, bars, concert series (outdoor ones - Fridays on the Fox and the St. Norbert Knights on the Fox concert series..."

"I think that's a conversation for a 20 year old. I've got children. Where I'm at, De Pere does offer a lot like Knights on the Fox on Tuesdays in the summer, Yoga in the Park on Thursdays. We choose to be a part of those as a family."

"During the summer all the farmers' markets and music festivals (which are smaller), the art walks, there's really so much."

"I think they do a lot outdoors. They enjoy the bars and entertainment, the social aspect. There's a lot of sports - volleyball leagues, softball leagues, curling."

Participants also saw the warmer months as offering more opportunities than the winter.

"I believe there's a lot more to do when we're not covered in snow."

"There is a gap in entertainment options in winter. However, we do have charity events like Wine and Cheese, Boys and Girls Club, Soup and Suds, but yeah it is pretty limited in winter."

One participant noted a positive change in winter outdoor entertainment requested by the community and facilitated by the city and county:

"Trails are open in the winter time too. De Pere really listens to feedback, Fox River and the other trail, they listened to the feedback that people wanted it to be plowed and snow cleared. That got passed. [They] can be used during the winter now."

Factors Important for Young Adult Retention

When asked what participants would like to see remain the same in De Pere, interview participants generally expressed contentment with the way things are presently, and wanted the city to maintain a high level of quality in community services, such as education, pools, parks/trails, recreation programs. Specific responses to this question included:

"The community pools, parks, trails... we need to be sure that we're mindful of maintaining them as we move forward."

"I want the City to be able to offer the same amenities that it does... When you call the City, you're talking to a person, not a machine. I like how the City is structured and what they have to offer."

"There is great access to parks along the Fox River, I wouldn't want to see that go away."

Maintaining the city's strengths seemed to be tied to the current population size/density, too. There was, as mentioned earlier, concern about rapid growth in the community expressed by seven interviewees along the following themes:

"Eventually we're going to become like Ashwaubenon and be landlocked... Their school is the largest for open-enrollment because they don't have a lot of kids living there. How do we still maintain the small town charm [despite growth]? That's what makes De Pere great – our small town charm."

"I don't want De Pere to get too big, because I don't want the bad to come in with the good. There's something special about De Pere where we don't have a lot of crime."

"You don't want to get too big. You don't want to be Green Bay, Appleton, Madison."

Historic Downtown Preservation

Many participants shared that they would like to preserve the historic feel of buildings in downtown De Pere and that it was important that a preservation-focused development mindset continue. They also noted that there seemed to be some vacant buildings, and that they would like them to be used rather than razed for new construction.

"What I don't want to see is the old architecture being torn down, I want to see it being repurposed... The moment the old architecture comes down is the moment it loses its charm."

"I like keeping the historic look of the buildings - I wish that we'd try to not tear down old buildings and put up new ones. Keep the historic look as much as possible."

"Character is important to be maintained - it's quaintness. Physical infrastructure is what defines quaintness, I like to see the old school look, but interiors of buildings revamped. Historic exterior but modern and contemporary interior."

"I love the historic charm of the area. One of the commercial developers [in De Pere] has a heart for... historic properties. I love that because [they] maintain the integrity of the old world look but enhance [it] to make it attractive to new businesses... young professionals."

How De Pere Compared to Other Municipalities

Proximity to other Urban Centers

Proximity to other urban areas was frequently mentioned by participants not only in De Pere, but several other municipalities in our study as well. In other locations, the importance of proximity to other urban areas was particularly visible in where people worked. In New Richmond and Somerset (in Western Wisconsin near the Minnesota border) people estimated that roughly half of the population worked in town, and the other half in the Twin Cities (MN) or other nearby towns. In De Pere, one of the larger communities we studied, being close to another city certainly affords a diversity of employment options, but it may not be as strong of pull in De Pere as in other locations. This is evidenced by multiple participants mentioning employers more local to De Pere as capturing the workforce.

School, Feelings of Safety

Most of the communities we studied cite the schools as a primary factor for attracting and retaining young adults. When asked what they would say to a young adult (20-39) who is thinking of moving to their community, participants frequently mentioned that it is a great place to start a family and raise kids. Similarly, De Pere residents, along with those in other municipalities, feel a general sense of safety in their community.

Entertainment and the Outdoors

The Fox River and Fox River Trail were frequently mentioned by De Pere residents. Some viewed the trail as a convenient way to commute to work. Others liked accessing it for exercise or to simply enjoy the outdoors. Other municipalities were similarly tied to outdoor resources. Residents in Hayward, Onalaska, West Bend, Somerset, New Richmond, and Plover consider access to outdoor recreation/amenities as an important part of why they enjoy living there.

Outdoor and community event programming (facilitated by the municipality or a community organization) were recurring themes in De Pere and other communities studied. De Pere residents mentioned things like Yoga in the Park, the Knights on the Fox outdoor concert series at St. Norbert College, as well as the city-operated recreation leagues for youth. This was a common thread in nearby communities of Omro and Black Creek, where interview participants had high praise for community events and credited them for helping to cultivate a culture of social cohesion.

So What? Implications for De Pere

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

In combing through the qualitative data for this study, several themes have also emerged that have important implications for De Pere in the future. These themes are described in greater detail here.

Amenities are Important

In many ways, De Pere seems to be on the right track in terms of commercial development, but this is not void of community members' concerns for other types of growth. Many participants in our study mentioned that downtown De Pere has undergone many positive changes in the recent years. The increase in downtown amenities are attractive to young adults. Additional dining options and the luxury apartment development were among the attractive additions to De Pere's downtown. While the uptick in these amenities has been positively received, community members are hungry for more modern dining and entertainment options. They are also eager to preserve the historic feel of downtown. Future commercial developments in downtown would likely be positively received if they hit these two points; historic preservation of the store front and either entertainment or dining.

Growth is Double-Edged

While the interview participants see downtown development as positive, they have concerns about increasing population and overburdening the school system. This, coupled with the fact that many residents appreciate and depend on the high quality of community services, poses a challenge for future development in De Pere. Additionally, special attention should be paid to the current housing demand in De Pere. Some interview participants expressed concern about not being able to find a reasonably priced starter home, and about how the school district is planning for increased population from new developments. It will be particularly important to balance growth with those factors that attract young adults to the area in first place; good schools, attractive and modern amenities, and a general sense of safety in a small-feeling family-oriented community.

Outdoor Amenities

Community residents embrace and utilize the Fox River trail for both recreation and transportation. Recently, the city began plowing the trail during the winter months, a step that was praised by at least

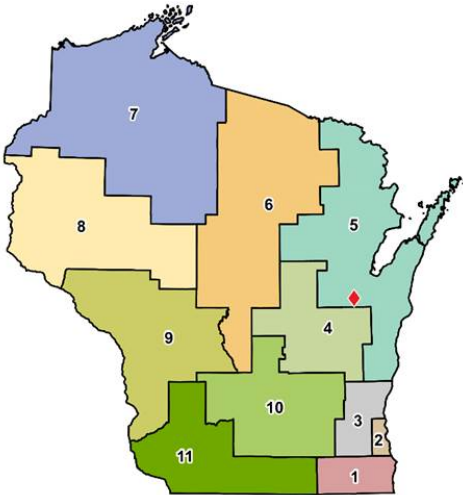
one participant in our study. Given that interviewees also discussed a decline in community activities during the winter months, support for winter events may be important. De Pere already has a good track record of listening to community members' wants and concerns. Continuing to be open and receptive to community member's wants and concerns will set De Pere up to be an attractive place for young adults and residents in general.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Black Creek

by Allyson Watson and Amanda Hoffman

"A group of people nearby. Friends, people you trust, people to interact with... That's what it's like here - we all care about Black Creek and each other."

Basic	
	Municipality Village of Black Creek
	County Outagamie
	Year Incorporated 1904
Population and Growth	
Population	1,316 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	5
Young Adult Gaining Measure	17% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	32% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	93.9% White (non-Hispanic) 2.1% White (Hispanic) 0.2% Asian 1.4% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.8% Other 1.6% Identified 2 or more
Mean Income	\$56,972 (2015)
Median Income	\$52,708 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2016	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		\$1.86 million, 2017	
Notes		Black Creek is served by the Seymour Community School District	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Black Creek Elementary/Middle School	K-8	Public
Middle	Black Creek Elementary/Middle School	K-8	Public
High	Seymour Community High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Black Creek

In Amanda Hoffman's first visit to Black Creek, some core group members suggested that it would be difficult to find folks that would agree to participate in an hour-long interview. Amanda had just completed dozens of interviews in three other municipalities, and was confident that she would have little trouble. Yet interviews and recommendations were hard to come by. We completed eleven interviews, and determined that this data represented diverse enough experiences, while repeatedly pointing to shared themes.

In future case studies, Amanda began to spend more time researching local businesses and groups to generate a larger list of potential interviewees, early in the process. If we employed this approach in Black Creek, we could have scheduled interviews more quickly. We also could have brainstormed more contact recommendations with the core group, initially.

We were grateful for the time and care that the core group members took in connecting Amanda with community members. They worked hard to present this study to individuals, groups, and potential partners. Here is how we proceeded.

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

In late 2016, we reached out to UW-Extension Outagamie County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who would be interested in our project. Department Head and Family Living Educator Karen Dickrell responded promptly with interest.

2. **Connect to Somerset Leaders to Build "Core Group":**

Ms. Dickrell suggested local leaders to contact for the core group that had important civic and business roles in the community.

3. **Develop Interview Guide:**

Amanda invited each of these folks to meet in Black Creek, and provide feedback on how to shape this study. At the meeting, we discussed the relevance of this project to Black Creek, and what questions to ask the interviewees. We went through the question bank and the group decided together which questions to include. After the meeting, Amanda drafted the interview guide, and emailed the group for them to approve the order of questions.

4. Contact Potential Interviewees:

Core group members emailed Amanda contact recommendations, and directed potential Black Creek interviewees to contact Amanda. One core group member invited Amanda to present this study to the parents at a Community Family Resource Center playgroup. Other core group members discussed the project with Black Creek's business association. Amanda connected with a local business, and with a local school leader.

5. Conduct Interviews:

Amanda conducted eleven interviews between the end of February and the end of April.

6. Growing the Research Team:

In the beginning of May, Allyson Watson from UW-Extension in Outagamie and Winnebago Counties joined the team, and connected to the school, core group, and village, to recruit interviewees, though this did not result in any further interviews.

7. Present and Revise Report:

We analyzed and summarized the results of the interview, presented them to the core group, and revised the report based on their recommendations.

Black Creek Interview Guide

Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Do you rent or own your home?
4. Do members of your extended family live in this community or in a nearby community?

What's in Black Creek

5. What do young adults do for recreation/entertainment around here?
6. What do you think of shopping opportunities around here?
7. How do you feel about your food options around here?
8. What kinds of things do you leave the community for?
9. Are gardens important here?
10. What are schools and childcare like around here?

Growth in Black Creek

11. How do you feel about population growth in your community?
Follow-up: What trends have you seen in the number of young adults where you live?
12. What would you say to someone who is thinking of moving here?
13. Why do people move here?
14. Why do people stay here?
15. What people would not feel comfortable here?

Community in Black Creek

16. What role do you think young adults should play where you live?
17. How would you want your town to grow?

18. How would you want it to stay the same?
19. What would influence you to stay or leave?
20. Is your life here different than you thought it would be? Is it better? Worse?
21. How many people do you know in your town?
Follow-up: How much do you know your neighbors?
22. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?
23. What do you need from your community? In terms of individuals? Groups?

Results for Black Creek

While the identities of interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- The eleven interviewees were all between the ages of 24-45. Seven of the participants were born between 1965-1984, part of the Generation X cohort. The other four participants were born between 1985-2000, representing the Millennial cohort.
- Ten of the interview participants were female, and one participant was male.
- All eleven participants indicated that they were homeowners.
- Nine of the participants indicated that they lived in Black Creek (Village or Township was not specifically indicated). One participant lived in Seymour and one described themselves as living "five miles North of Black Creek".

Proximity to Other Places:

Nine participants described Black Creek as close to Appleton and the Fox Cities metro area, while seven participants described Black Creek as close to Green Bay. Nine participants emphasized the importance of proximity of other nearby communities such as Seymour, Shawano, the Appleton-Fox Cities metro area, and Green Bay to Black Creek residents because they offer things not as available in Black Creek:

- Three people mentioned employment opportunities
- Seven people mentioned retail shopping
- Seven people mentioned dining
- Seven people mentioned recreation
- Four people mentioned entertainment
- Two people mentioned worship communities

Considering the impact of these other communities is important for understanding life in Black Creek. Interviewees said things like:

"Most people work in Appleton or Green Bay."

"I tend to include Seymour. We're one."

"Within fifteen minutes you're back in Appleton. They have groceries with pretty good selection of what they need. Food options are pretty good."

Seven participants perceived that locally-owned establishments cannot always offer the same price competitiveness of larger chains. In addition, six participants shared that they felt the drive time to amenities was manageable while three participants felt the drive time was too much. Two participants expressed a desire to have more amenities available locally within walking distance, and one

participant worried that the amount of driving required to live in Black Creek might deter potential residents.

But residents didn't feel that they needed to leave Black Creek for everything they needed. Seven participants emphasized that Black Creek has conveniences readily available, reducing the need to leave the community for everything. Four participants shared that they find additional conveniences available in nearby Seymour. Interviewees said things like:

"Some people stay in Black Creek because it has everything they need and that's their comfort zone. If you don't want to leave you don't have to. But there's so much to do around the area, there's so many different cultures. It's a short drive. We like to go and explore stuff."

"Black Creek is a small town but has basic things."

Among the local conveniences mentioned, three participants cited the convenience of having a Shopko Hometown store (small format department store and pharmacy) in Seymour. Four people noted the seasonal farmers' market in Black Creek as a convenient and appreciated source for fresh produce.

Two participants shared that they make a conscious effort to patronize local businesses in Black Creek. Two participants offered that they believe local businesses in Black Creek support the community, and five participants emphasized that the presence of local businesses is important to them. Interview participants said things like:

"I make a point of shopping at [local establishments]."

"It's convenient to have a little grocery store, and farmers' market...I'll send my kids to the store."

"If you have to get something quick, there's a store here, but it's... expensive"

People also seemed to value the quality of life that Black Creek offers more than proximity to work, shopping, dining or specific recreational opportunities.

"It's ideal for being out of town, on Highway 47. People are generally very nice."

"It's a 20-minute scenic route. You're not fighting traffic. You can unplug and decompress. Even to Green Bay is a nice drive."

"It pulls you out of the hustle of Appleton and Green Bay...You can live in the country and be near the city. That was a big attraction for me...It's a close drive for resources."

"I like to be in the country, and close to Green Bay and Appleton."

"We did it [moved here] because we wanted the country... you get more land for your money."

In addition, four participants cited that a lack of traffic made living in Black Creek enjoyable, though three participants mentioned that traffic does pick up in the summer as State Highway 47 is a corridor to vacation spots in the north woods.

Housing

All eleven participants indicated that they were homeowners. Six of them said that they have recently sensed growth in Black Creek in the housing market, and five participants have noticed a shift in the demographics of the community toward more younger people and families. And while residents

appreciated Black Creek being a reasonable driving distance from large places, there was also a recurring theme of Black Creek being "far away enough" from more urbanized areas. This was key to the identity of Black Creek, a topic which we will touch on further in a later section. In thinking about the distance of Black Creek from nearby urban areas, four people mentioned that housing is comparatively affordable, three noted that the cost of living is affordable, two said that taxes are affordable, and two said that large lots are more readily available.

"We liked the amount of space that lot had"

The house they have here is less expensive than it would be near Appleton - "you get more land for your money"

"Everything [houses] was hideous in Seymour. They look good in pictures but bad in person"

"I'd prefer Greenville or De Pere, but it made sense because we found a house here. There was a lot of turnover in the housing market in my neighborhood – I don't see that as much anymore. It was a perfect storm for us, and for the people next door. It wasn't my first choice."

Attitudes About Growth

Housing became one of the indicators that people used to discuss the community's identity and support for growth. People had a variety of perceptions of housing growth and availability. One participant held the perception that the housing inventory is not as robust as desired by residents. The Village does have land availability within its boundaries, but this person believed that developer incentives are often a requirement to successfully add new subdivisions. Others said things like:

"There's not a lot of housing or neighborhood choices. The Village is full. There's not much to develop."

"I don't want it to get too big. I don't want it to become a suburb of something...It won't become a suburb in 10 years, but in 40 years, it may change. Appleton is creeping in. There are lots of commuters here already."

"Houses are not on the market for long... It's a positive change. More people means more amenities."

The risk of Black Creek growing too much and becoming a suburb was an important sticking point for some participants. Two interview participants expressly indicated a desire that Black Creek not become a Fox Cities suburb, but retain its own distinct identity. One person expressed strongly a desire to curb further residential subdivision development. But overall sentiments were mixed on whether or not population growth in the community was a good thing. Three of the participants shared that they felt it was a good change, and two others were not proponents of population growth. Four participants supported adaptive re-use of existing homes and commercial buildings for residents and commercial tenants. And four participants explicitly stated that Black Creek is "not the city" in answering both questions about future growth of the community and the types of residents who would not feel welcomed.

Recreation

We asked participants what young adults do for recreation in general and what they do personally for recreation. There was a notable divide in responses and how participants viewed themselves compared to the general population of young adults. From the interviewer's notes:

I introduced the question "What do people do for fun?", but before I finished it she started laughing. I told her everyone laughs at this question, and she said "I understand why everyone laughs". But as far as I know, most people go to Appleton and Green Bay so it's a central, small, hub community with bigger communities outside.

Others said things like:

"Main Street, it's sad, there's so much potential."

"Much traffic in the summer, and there are some cute shops. Cars would stop but [most would] drive through."

"There are good spaces, and great restaurants, but they've never lasted."

"[A well-frequented community] bar just got shut down...We're not sure what to do. We're trying to figure out where we want to go. They had really good food. We would go more than once a week."

Despite these sentiments and a belief that young adults leave the community for recreation, individuals shared wide ranging recreational activities that they partake in within Black Creek. These include connecting with community in the outdoors, at home, and at family-friendly events. One interview participant was excited to move out of the big city for opportunities like having a fire pit in her backyard, and commented that regulations are less restrictive in Black Creek. Others made statements like:

"We participate in Family Daze parade, and community events in the library."

"The park a minute from us has a lake with a little beach that we can go to for free in the summer. It's quite quaint."

In addition:

- Four participants cited that they take advantage of family and community events held in Black Creek.
- Three participants cited that they engage in recreation at home, such as entertaining friends and family or having a bonfire.
- Five participants cited that local taverns play an important role as social gathering spaces in the community.
- Four participants cited that Black Creek offers access to hunting, fishing and shooting sports.
- Eight participants cited outdoor recreation as something they take advantage of in Black Creek.
- Six participants mentioned nearby walking or biking trails in the Black Creek area that they frequent.

Sense of Community

When asked to define community and share what their sense of community was in Black creek, several themes emerged from participants:

- Seven people described Black Creek as safe
- Seven people described the community as cohesive with neighbors and community members
- Six people described it as family-friendly
- Six people described Black Creek as a small town
- Four people described the community as rural or country

- Four people mentioned looking out for and supporting one another
- Three people emphasized uniting around a common theme of community betterment
- Two people mentioned they felt a sense of family

Sentiments were mixed on whether the size of the community hindered privacy. One participant shared that they appreciated the privacy available by living in the country. Two participants felt privacy and anonymity were harder to come by in a smaller community. Two participants believed that "small town drama" and gossip were unavoidable, but tolerable as a trade-off for the high quality of life that they experienced in Black Creek. Interviewees said things like:

"It's too hard to get to know people in a big city."

"It's a lot different. I grew up in the city. Growing up in the city is where you lock your doors behind you. I still do it, I'm over-vigilant about it, my husband would say. But there's not that fear of something bad happening, or someone breaking into your house."

Many people had strong local roots in Black Creek already. People move to Black Creek, or return to Black Creek, for starting a family, and connecting to a safe, supported, family-like community. Six participants indicated that they were born or grew up in Outagamie County, and two of those were born or grew up in Black Creek proper. Four participants shared that their spouse or significant other had grown up in Outagamie County, one of whom was from Black Creek proper. Three participants indicated that they had returned to Black Creek after attending college. Just one participant had no family ties to Outagamie County or Black Creek. Seven participants indicated that they had at least one extended family member living in Outagamie County, and four of them had extended family living in Black Creek proper.

"They grow up here, go to college, and come back to raise kids."

"It's home, it's comfortable, it's family."

"It takes a community to raise a child."

"The businesses in town do a great job of supporting community and people that live in it. I'd like to see them continue that support."

"You stay when you feel you've become a part of it. It's hard to leave."

"I think people stay because once they settle it's easier to stay than to leave."

"People here are non-judgmental but informative"

When asked what role young adults do or should play in Black Creek, there was strong encouragement for them to get involved in supporting the local community, but also recognition that getting involved was not easy.

"If you want to see that sense of community, get involved to keep it that way. Otherwise it'll just be like any other place."

"if there are businesses that you utilize, you should support them. You usually are going to pay more for them."

"The younger generation brings in ideas...open minds...they would take more risk in how to revive the town."

"The people who help, they drag them down, because there's not that many people willing to give them that extra time. They burn people out and then they have nobody."

Schools and Childcare

The school was cited by seven of the eleven interview participants as a reason for moving to or remaining in Black Creek. The school is seen as a personable and nurturing institution, and one that also connects families.

"People probably move here to find housing in the Seymour School District."

"People are supportive of referendums. The school asks for money when they need it, and use it well and wisely."

"[The school] is one reason I agreed to move here. Super-nice, small sizes, great teachers."

Four participants noted that they had attended Black Creek schools in their childhood, and one indicated that they attended Seymour High School (the shared high school for Seymour and Black Creek within the Seymour School District). Five participants remarked about the small school size being a positive factor. Six participants shared that they had close relationships with their teachers in the Seymour School District or have those close relationships with their children's teachers. Participants praise the school's size, and the familiarity between teachers and students that characterizes it.

"I love the school - I love the accessibility. My son's teacher, I got to meet her, she was also his T-ball coach...you see teachers in the community - it's neat. My experience is that the community has been very friendly. It's nice to know who your teacher is, and they know you."

"Teachers are very friendly; they all know all the students. Anybody has a problem, they can talk about it."

"There's not that openness in another town because chances are you don't go to the same school."

In regard to childcare, sentiments were mixed. Four participants said that they have not used childcare in Black Creek. Three participants believed that their childcare needs are being met adequately in Black Creek. Two participants desired other childcare options in Black Creek than what is presently offered.

How Black Creek Compared to Nearby Municipalities: De Pere and Omro

Along with our Black Creek interviews, our research team conducted case studies in De Pere and Omro, which also have growing young adult populations. Below is a summary of these case studies. Each factor describing population growth and retention in De Pere and Omro matches our study of Black Creek, despite De Pere's population of over 23,000 as of 2010.

De Pere (Brown County)

- Proximity to workforce centers is very important (In the case of De Pere – Appleton and Green Bay)
- Described as more of a bedroom community – basic amenities are available, but residents are more than willing to drive one or two communities over for more specific amenities that can't be found locally.
- Bar culture and drinking recreationally are an important part of building cohesive community networks.
- More so in De Pere than in Black Creek, the school district was a primary reason for locating in the community.
- A desire for affordable housing was less of a driver than for residency in the school district in De Pere, but home values were perceived as strong because of the quality of the schools.

Omro (Winnebago County)

- Proximity to workforce centers is very important (In the case of Omro - Oshkosh and Appleton)
- A well-recognized bedroom community for those who work in Oshkosh and the Fox Cities
- The small school district is very important to residents and a factor for those staying in or relocating to the community.
- The desire to be in a safe, small community was strong among residents in Omro and Black Creek.
- Bar culture and sports leagues affiliated with bars are an important part of building cohesive community networks.
- Nightlife perspectives: there are some options locally, but many others require driving to a larger community. Nightlife in the local community is more family-inclusive, such as having a bonfire or attending a community event.
- Familiarity of neighbors is important, and lends to a sense of safety.

So What? Implications for Black Creek

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to other urban areas for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in this community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered here.

In combing through the qualitative data behind this study, several themes emerged that may have important implications for Black Creek in the future. These themes are described in greater detail here.

Quality of Life is More Important than Convenience

Black Creek residents who participated in this study indicated almost universally that irregular trips out of town for things like medical visits, bulk shopping, specialty products, etc., are not a problem for them. There also seems to be consensus that the retail offerings in Black Creek are convenient and appreciated for spur-of-the moment purchases, or basic amenities. There seems to be more of a desire from residents for proximate regular events and activities, like youth recreation (karate, girls' sports) or personal fitness classes. It seemed that the regularity of these events was what made driving more burdensome.

"Trade-offs" was a word used by multiple people in this study. These participants value the quality of life in Black Creek so much so that they are willing to sacrifice amenities that a larger community might offer, like more dining options or recreational opportunities. Black Creek may look to what other

small, outlying communities have done to provide these amenities to their residents in a creative fashion. In some communities where people desired personal fitness amenities, the local schools were able to offer use of facilities to residents seasonally. Flexible fitness spaces that can be shared by multiple tenants offer a lower cost and require less commitment from business owners who may seek to offer their classes locally, but question demand.

Valuing Local Businesses, But Having Many Choices

This theme was not unique to Black Creek, and was shown in Omro as well. Participants in the Black Creek case study express that they value locally-owned businesses in their community and feel that they are a defining part of Black Creek's identity. Despite this fact, participants were readily honest about the fact that they often choose to shop elsewhere. The reasoning behind this varied from participant to participant, with some choosing to shop elsewhere for lower prices, and others choosing to do so for more selection or specialty items. This is by no means unique to Black Creek—the desire to support the local community and the business owners who live in these communities does not always translate into local purchases.

Two of the reasons that locally-owned businesses were so valued by participants was that they are perceived as honest business people, and that they are perceived as being very supportive of local non-profit organizations and community programs like charities and sports programs. Knowing this, it might well suit local businesses to incorporate this message even more into their brands. Seeing local businesses support local programs and families seemed to resonate strongly with participants.

Sensitivity to Growth

Participants in the Black Creek study almost all perceive a local growth trend, either in changing demographics or in housing market trends. There are mixed sentiments surrounding this trend, including some sensitivity about the idea. Black Creek's identity is rooted in it being a "small" town, which some go as far as to describe as rural, or country, and firmly deny being "city" or suburban. This firm small town identity is being challenged by continued suburbanization and the development of new housing, in both Black Creek and in communities throughout the Fox Valley. As the lines blur between rural and suburban, suburban and urban, some accept the change and others resist it.

Some of the reactions to community growth are positive: an opportunity to meet new people, attract new businesses. Others are negative: taking away from rural character, bringing in lower income populations, decreasing the sense of safety in the community. There is some concern that a population influx will change the cost of things like housing or increase the much-loved small class sizes that schools presently offer. Participants were in support of adaptive reuse of existing buildings, both residential and commercial. Black Creek might garner more resident support if development efforts married new development and investment in rehabilitating commercial properties, particularly in the downtown area.

Valuing Local Events and Programs

Black Creek participants place a high intrinsic value on community programs and events, both those occurring with frequent regularity like farmers' markets, book clubs and library programs, as well as community events like Family Daze. Many residents enjoy and appreciate these opportunities for social engagement and cohesion. Such events are possibly even more important for those who work outside of Black Creek and are less connected within their community.

Employment and commuter trends do pose a problem for the volunteer-supported organizations that coordinate some of these events. A need for volunteers, and the inevitable burnout of volunteers who take on too much, was mentioned in participant interviews. This leaves Black Creek facing the challenge of how to continue to source volunteers, when more potential volunteers are commuting out of the community for work and may have conflicting commitments like programming for their families.

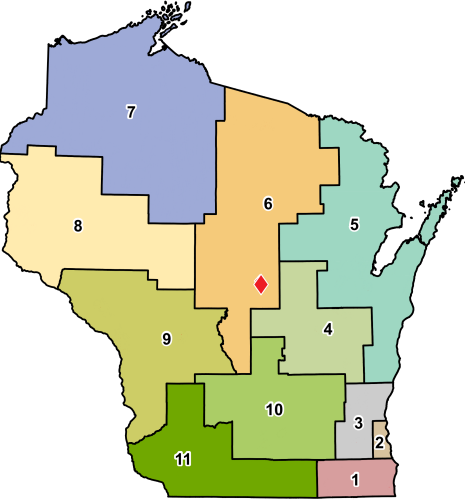
A desire for gathering spaces that are not bars was expressed by some participants. Bars and taverns play an important role for social networking and cohesion in communities that lack a density of third spaces. This fact, as well as the discomfort that some have with alcohol, support the idea that a third space or gathering space, like a café or coffee shop, would be utilized by residents and community groups alike in Black Creek.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Plover

by Sheamus Johnson

"It's a great community, it's got the small-town atmosphere, yet accessible to everything."

Basic	
	Municipality Village of Plover
	County Portage
	Year Incorporated 1971
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	12,123 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	6
Young Adult Gaining Measure	9% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	32% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	91.1% White (Non-Hispanic) 1.7% White (Hispanic) 0.5% African American 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native 3.8% Asian 1% Other 1.5% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$66,945 (2015)
Median Income	\$57,838 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2005	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2006) \$26.4 million	
Notes		Plover is served by the Stevens Point Area School District.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Plover-Whiting Elementary School	Pre-K – 6	Public
	Roosevelt Elementary School	K-6	Public
	St. Bronislava Elementary School	Pre-K – 4	Private
Middle	Ben Franklin Junior High School	7-9	Public
	Point of Discovery School	6-8	Public
High	Stevens Point Area Senior High School	10-12	Public
	Charles F. Fernandez Center for Alternative Learning	10-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Plover

Collaboration characterized our approach to data collection. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

We reached out to UW-Extension in Portage County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. **Connect to Plover Leaders:**

Nathan Sandwick and Peter Manley of UW-Extension suggested several community members to join the core group, including local university faculty, government officials, nonprofit leaders, and business leaders.

3. **Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:**

We met with the core group to address the following three points:

- How is this project relevant to Plover, and your role in Plover?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

4. **Conduct Interviews:**

We administered the following interview guide to fifteen interviewees who we reached through the core group's recommendations.

5. **Present Results:**

We analyzed and summarized the results of our interviews, and sent them to our Plover and Extension collaborators, and revised the report based on their feedback.

Plover Interview Guide

1. How long have you lived here?
2. What is affordable here for you, what is not?
3. How local is your family to where you live?
4. What would you say to someone who is thinking of moving here?
5. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) who is thinking of moving here?
6. Why do people move here?
Follow up: Did you choose Plover?
7. Why do people stay here?
8. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?
9. To what extent do young adults engage in governance and politics where you live?
10. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here?
11. Where do young adults live around here?
12. How do you feel about your quality of life where you live? Culturally speaking?
13. How would you want your town to grow? How would you want it to stay the same?
14. What people would not feel comfortable here?
15. Why did you move here?
16. Did you stay for the reasons you thought you would?
17. What would influence you to stay or leave?
18. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?
19. What stories does your town have to share?
20. What community groups are influential to people around here? Which ones are helpful?
21. What is entertainment like around here? What do you do for fun?
22. What do you think of the shopping opportunities around here?
23. How do you feel about your food options here?
24. What are the schools like here?
25. Tell me about surrounding communities?
26. What do you use that is outside of the community?

Results for Plover

Plover was different from all of the other case studies in that, for most people, it was indistinguishable from Stevens Point, the larger community to its north with whom it shares a short stretch of border. The two communities are otherwise separated by Whiting. In this particular area, people seem to move their residence freely around the area and can identify with any one of the three communities even when they live in the other. Consequently, in this case study we had the fewest pure target community residents, though all of the interview respondents claimed deep knowledge of the community because of their employment or life experience. In much of the analysis we will separate

the responses of Plover residents from others, but we did not note any differences in overall perceptions between the two groups. We interviewed 15 people total.

- Six interview participants were Plover residents and one other grew up there. Two people work in Plover but do not live there. Four people live in Stevens Point with the remainder in nearby towns.
- The interview participants ages ranged from the late 20s to late 30s.
- Eight interview participants have extended family in Plover or Stevens Point. Interestingly, four interviewees had extended family move to the area, in three cases parents.
- Eight interview participants have moved around the area, and in and out of the area. Most have been in their current address fewer than ten years.
- Three interview participants noted that they stayed in the area after attending the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and four are alumni of the University.

Housing

Overall, 13 of our 15 participants noted that they consider housing in the Stevens Point/Plover area to be affordable in almost every aspect.

Plover residents noted the following:

"You know, pretty much everything, it's a nice area to live in those terms. I think you get a lot for your money around here."

"Housing, is very affordable. I mean just comparing this central WI to other places I've lived, you can't get the same type of property for the same amount. Housing is super affordable. It's a pretty affordable place to live."

"I think something that would be affordable would be either a rental or a mortgage between \$800 and \$1000 which is on the steep end. We rented first when we were in the city, paid \$600 to almost \$1000 for rent. And now we are paying about \$1000 for the mortgage on our house."

Stevens Point or surrounding area residents had this to say about affordability in the area:

"The housing, buying a home is more affordable than renting."

"I would say most things are pretty affordable here, especially housing, and everything else like utilities and groceries are affordable compared to other places I've lived."

However, some participants expressed concern for renters, and worried that perhaps the housing prices have inflated beyond affordability for some in recent years:

- "[compared to] when we bought our house, housing has grown out of affordability for a lot of people. I'm a builder, so it's great for me. For people who move to the area, we have seen house prices explode. Affordability is not there."
- "Maybe those that rent have a problem."

Jobs

Another aspect of the Plover area that participants mentioned was the availability and diversity of jobs in the area. They listed several large companies with many employees, as well as retailers in the area that employ residents. Additionally, entrepreneurship was a common theme in responses. Plover participants had this to say about jobs:

"There's a good portion that work at Skyward, Sentry Insurance, the hospital and local clinic. Those are some of the biggest. There's Lands' End, the Travel Guard insurance AIG."

"I think a lot work at Sentry, AIG. I think a lot work at the hospital, the university. A lot of professionals live in Plover that work all over. I just sold a house in Plover to a guy who works at the University. They work at restaurants, all over."

"I think you see a lot of young adults working at the big five employers, Sentry, AIG, Skyward, Delta Dental, a couple other larger companies. Diversi-Tea is a large employer, a lot of young adults are attracted to those jobs. They may be good right out of college, but they're still low paying, 12-14 [dollars] an hour. You see a lot of turnover in those jobs. They get the experience, they move elsewhere, or go for another job in the area. I also think we are in an age where a lot of young people are curious about entrepreneurship and want that ability to work at their own schedule. A lot of employers are flexible."

Residents in other parts of the area and Stevens Point offered the following responses about jobs in the area:

"I know a lot of entrepreneurs who are self-employed: farmers, service industry, store front, etc. I also know a lot at the University or at the bigger businesses, the hospital, Skyward, Delta Dental, and Sentry."

"There's a lot of folks, less often discussed but pretty substantial, a lot of the food manufacturing in and near Plover: Monogram foods, Del Monte, Okray Farms. With so many vegetable farms, there's a lot of vegetable processing that happens; that's pretty significant in Plover."

"I would say most probably work in some kind of specialty store, or work for a larger company, a lot of young professionals maybe go to Sentry insurance, [or] are their own entrepreneurs. A lot of young people are starting their own business or are doing some kind of trade who are buying their own shop."

Blurred Lines – Stevens Point and Plover

Plover is conveniently located in the greater Stevens Point area. Participants often noted that they consider Plover and Stevens Point to be one contiguous area. Part of this seems to be due to the fact that there is little opportunity for expansion in Stevens Point and, by happenstance of geography, Plover has the space for new homes and development.

Participants from Plover offered the following:

"We are in Stevens Point and Plover, I think of them as the same. So we are in and out of Stevens Point on a daily basis... I think Stevens Point and Plover mesh together."

"It's so hard to separate Plover and Stevens Point. I think that is a break among young adults and transplants to the area. When I came here, I don't see a distinction, we share school districts, amenities, but the older generation who remember when it was farm fields, they are two distinct communities to them. I don't see it that way though. I think people who come here don't see that level of distinction."

While many indicated that they think of Plover and Stevens Point as one, two participants distinguish Plover and Stevens Point in distinct ways:

"Plover and Stevens Point are very different even though they are connected. It's [Plover] not as walkable as other communities, walkability and bikability is important. While we can walk to a couple places from home—school, gas station, and bar—I can't walk to the grocery store or downtown. I could, but it's three or four miles. Most people are just going to hop in the car and drive. There are benefits, but also if someone wants to walk everywhere Plover may not be the place."

"You can find expensive and inexpensive restaurants in Plover. They have more above average pricier homes, mid to upper range homes. Point has more affordable housing there. Plover just built that new Torrey Pines subdivision. Politically Plover tends to work better and are more aggressive with getting or retaining businesses. They seem to really, when someone says they want to come, Plover will go to the ends of the world with some of the stuff they will do. The city [Stevens Point] has more red tape. Pretty much anything you do in Stevens Point that is commercial, no matter what you want to do you need to get a commercial use permit. I can't just go and get a building permit. They need to approve it through a conditional use permit, which is another red tape step. They do that with anything. They [Plover] work well with big business, they give away the world to 'em. In Plover, they seem to really work with the developers and the owners so I had zero hesitation to locate in Plover. They're really easy to work with."

Community Events and Entertainment/Recreation

One aspect of the Plover/Stevens Point area that participants valued was the entertainment and community event offerings in the area. Frequently mentioned was the Green Circle Trail and a concert series in a park. Residents also value the proximity to outdoor recreation in terms of hunting/fishing, organized sports and accessing hiking trails, the river, or convenient bike routes.

"I like to go down to the Schmeeckle Reserve and go for hikes."

"Outdoor recreation biking, kayaking, people spend a lot time doing that. Volleyball, ultimate league, kickball league."

"We go to the river. My parents bought a place on the river. We do hiking, both the Green Circle trail and state parks out in Waupaca."

"We do the music series—this summer has been great."

"The Green Circle, hunting, it's all appealing for those who like to be outside."

Schools

It is hard to ignore the attraction of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Undoubtedly Plover's proximity to the University and greater Stevens Point area has contributed to its emboldened young adult population. Participants often mentioned the University as an employer, location for cultural and entertainment events, and as an attracter of young adults to the area. In fact, four of our participants are UW-Stevens Point alumni.

"I went to school, college in Stevens Point. I've lived there since 18 and 31 now, and off and on since."

"A university brings in a lot of opportunities. [You are] being exposed to a lot of ideas you wouldn't find..."

"I think honestly, people start with the university. People come here for that and find job opportunities in the area and that keeps them here."

"The university, the hospital system, Skyward and things like that, as that brings in employment, people move here."

"...the university attracts a lot of younger folks too."

This also seems to influence the local culture. Nine participants spoke of their desires for more racial/cultural diversity in the area, which is somewhat unique among our case study communities.

Plover residents also brought up the local school district in our interviews. They were pleased with the selection of elementary schools. These included a Waldorf-style elementary school and a Catholic elementary school. There was a general concern for the size of the high school however. Participants have noticed that the high school is not able to offer the diversity of classes that it had in the past. Residents spoke positively about the schools in general.

"People have a lot of good things to say about the education their kids get. There are a couple charter schools that are, even evolving, some of them are very new. They have a different focus. It's nice to have those options. Where my wife works, it's a Waldorf idea sort of thing. Part of that is that they don't put screens in front of young kids."

"There are two public charter schools, I would love to get my kid in one. One is out in Portage County a ways. It's a Waldorf-style elementary... they do a lot outside, more project-based, less sit in the classroom. There's one in the Stevens Point district, it's a middle school. It's project-based too."

I think, well, there's two elementary schools. Ours is half Stevens Point, half Plover. And then a Catholic elementary. They're all great schools. I think that the teacher retention is good. But there's still diversity in the schools, I think they are really good and that's why people are open enrolling to bring their kids here."

"There's a pretty good selection for schools. Public schools are pretty good, a lot of kids in the one school district... Catholic school system has grade schools, middle, and high school. There is a Lutheran grade school, too."

Growth in Plover

When asked about how they would like Plover to grow, interview participants again blurred the lines between Plover and Stevens Point, and between small town and urban. Plover residents and the others had both urban development interests (8 interviewees) and also wanted to keep a small town feel (4 interviewees). On the small town side, people said things like

"I guess I don't want to see it get too big though. I'm from a small town, so I like that I feel comfortable walking around at night, but not too big that I don't."

"I guess, not too hard but a nice growth is a good thing. Keeping the taxes and water bills reasonable. Fire department can stay the same, they don't need a full time [department]. Keep the small town touch."

"Small enough where I feel that it's safe for the kids to ride their bikes around town. Stays safe and friendly to people that want to go out for a walk or bike."

Then there were the interviewees who offered a variety of creative perspectives on growth that also expressed an urban-style appreciation for greater density:

"I feel like the area has a ton of room to grow and be a leader in sustainable living..."

"I would like more growth in the existing urban area, and I'm not excited about building out east of Plover and Stevens Point."

"I would like to see more businesses and residential development downtown. And infill the spaces that we have."

"[I] want to develop a Plover downtown. Some higher density feel to that area. Some more urban feel to it."

"I guess I'd prefer it to grow taller than wider."

Support for Young Professionals

Plover was the only community where participants mentioned the importance of a young professionals group in any number. Seven participants noted the importance of the Ignite Leadership Network of Portage County where Plover is located. We must note, however, that our interviewee list was influenced by one of the organizers of that group.

How Plover Compared to Other Municipalities

We completed case studies in eleven other municipalities. Below are some points of comparison for Plover and other areas we studied.

Schools

In many of our other case studies, participants highly regarded the local school district. Some had similar concerns to those in Plover in terms of size of enrollment and availability of course offerings. One large difference between Plover and our other case studies is the close proximity of the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. In fact, several participants noted that they had either stayed after attending school there, or indicated that the University was a large attractor to young adults. This is similar to what interviewees said in Onalaska, close to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and in De Pere, which is the home of St. Norbert College which is small but still influential in terms of its ability to help maintain a young adult population.

Proximity to Urban Centers

Nearly every case study had the element of close proximity to another urban area or city/town. It seems that places attractive to young adults are connected with other towns for sources of employment, entertainment, or amenities.

Plover was unique both in how close it is to Stevens Point and in terms of how much interview participants identified the two communities together. Nowhere else did participants have such a sense of connectedness and blurred municipal lines as in Plover. The only close comparison would be De Pere, where there are several smaller towns that are in the De Pere school district but not in De Pere proper. The transition from municipality to municipality was not as seamless in De Pere as it was for Plover residents.

Outdoor Recreation

Interviewees in many of the municipalities that we studied cited access to outdoor recreation as one of the reasons they enjoyed living where they do. Hayward, New Richmond, Somerset, De Pere, and others noted this.

Many indicated fishing and water access as important to them. This was particularly pronounced in areas near lakes and rivers, like the St. Croix River near Somerset and New Richmond, the Fox River in De Pere, the Mississippi River in Onalaska, and several lakes in the Hayward area.

State and other parks were frequently mentioned by residents in our case studies. Those in Delavan and Evansville greatly value access to local parks similar to those in Plover who use municipal and state parks connected by the Green Circle Trail.

So What?

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Some of the findings also have specific implications for Plover.

Community Connections

Plover is unlike any other municipality we studied given both its immediate proximity to Stevens Point and residents' identification of the area as a single community. Because of this, Plover may need to pay more attention to how it fits into the larger whole. Many core group members and participants mentioned Plover and Stevens Point being part of a larger area. The term "employment shed" was used by some core group members and "labor shed" was used by one interviewee. Many interviewees also either directly called for, or implied, a regional development strategy. For these reasons, it is important to understand how residents think about and value each separate place and the region as a whole.

Often, participants mentioned that when they were looking for a home with a certain number of bedrooms, size lot, and price, they found what they were looking for in Plover. Similarly, our interviewees see much of the new retail development as happening in Plover and surrounding communities rather than in the city of Stevens Point. At the same time, there is a risk if economic development is as unregulated as some residents perceive. In most of our case study communities our interviewees expressed concern that uncontrolled growth could ruin the small-town feel that they valued in their community. On the other hand, only six interviewees used the phrase "small town" in relation to Plover—a smaller proportion than for many of our similar-sized case study communities. So the concerns about growth may be different than for these other places.

Creative Growth Opportunities

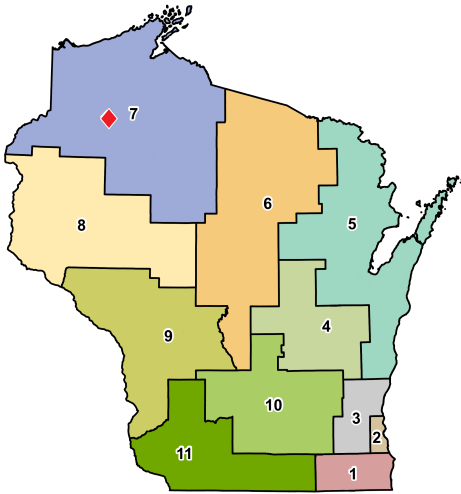
Many of our interviewees are not afraid of bringing some sustainable urbanism perspectives into thinking about growth in Plover and Stevens Point. A number of our interview participants see urban forms of growth—growing up rather than out—as consistent with sustainability principles that protect farmland and promote walkability and bike-ability. They also see this as bringing more urban-style amenities into both Plover and the broader area. Of course, not everyone feels this way, and the path that these interview participants perceive Plover to be on—building larger houses on larger lots with creeping expansion across the freeway to the east—collides with those principles. Plover community leaders may want to engage further discussion about these issues with community members, including with the young adult population in their midst.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Hayward

by Elisa Avila and Amanda Hoffman

"It's a nice place to call home."

Basic	
	Municipality City of Hayward
	County Sawyer
	Year Incorporated 1883 (not 100%?)
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	2,318 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	7
Young Adult Gaining Measure	7% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	25% (WI Median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	83.3% White (Non-Hispanic and Hispanic) 2.5% White (Hispanic) 0.4% African American 11.8% American Indian and Alaska Native 0.9% Asian 0.3% Other 3.2% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$42,855 (2015)
Median Income	\$30,074 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2010	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(1998) \$16.5 million	
Notes		Hayward is served by the Hayward Community School District.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary-High	Hayward Center for Individualized Learning Virtual Charter	K-12	Public Charter
	Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School	PreK-7	Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Public Charter
	Hayward Elementary School	K-5	Public
Middle	Hayward Center for Individualized Learning Virtual Charter	K-12	Public Charter
	Northern Waters Environmental School	6-12	Public
	Hayward Middle School	6-8	Public
High	Hayward Center for Individualized Learning Virtual Charter	K-12	Public Charter
	Northern Waters Environmental School	6-12	Public
	Hayward High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Hayward

Hayward was the fifth case study that our team initiated. We had not yet studied a municipality so far from Madison. We wanted to conduct most of the case study interviews in person. To accommodate this distance, one researcher spent several days visiting Hayward and conducting interviews, in March of 2017. Within a week, she conducted twenty interviews with folks who worked, lived, or spent significant time in Hayward.

1. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

We reached out to UW-Extension in Sawyer County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project. One team member established

this relationship, and a month later, in February 2017, another researcher took over running the Hayward study.

2. Connect to Hayward Leaders:

Ariga Grigoryan of UW-Extension recommended we reach out to local education, business, and community leaders along with another Extension official.

Ms. Grigorian suggested that we simply call folks before beginning the project, as to save a trip up to Hayward. So instead Amanda held an individual phone conversation with each person, and asked them the following questions.

- How is this project relevant to Hayward, and to your role in Hayward?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

Part of the core group's interest in the study was that they were eager to learn how to build upon a leadership training they led earlier that winter.

3. Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:

Amanda reviewed our bank of approved questions with each core member. They each shared which questions and topics they would want to see on the interview guide. Amanda incorporated their feedback into a final draft, which they each approved.

Each core member provided a set of names, numbers, and businesses, which Amanda used to recruit interviewees. Core group members ensured the success of the study by sharing a list of nearly fifty contacts, and passing along information about the study to Chamber of Commerce members. In the space of a week, Amanda scheduled over twenty interviews.

4. Conduct Interviews:

Amanda interviewed twenty people who she reached through the suggestions of each core group member.

5. Present and Revise Report:

Amanda and Elisa analyzed and summarized the results of the interviews. Amanda presented the results to the core group, and revised the report based on their recommendations.

Hayward Interview Guide

Demographic

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Why did you move here?
4. Do you rent or own your home?
5. Do members of your extended family live in this community or in a nearby community?

Young Adults on the Move

6. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) thinking of moving here?
7. Why do people move here?
8. Why do people stay here?
9. How does population growth of young adults affect you, and how does it affect your community?

Community Resources

10. How do you feel about your shopping opportunities around here?

11. How do you feel about your food options around here? What do you think of farmers' markets around here?
12. What are the schools like here? What about libraries?
13. What do young people do for entertainment/recreation around here? What are recreation centers like? To what extent do young adults engage in local cultural life where you live?
14. How are outdoor activities important here?

What Young Adults Do

15. What role do young adults play where you live? What role do you think young adults should play where you live?
16. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here? Where do young adults live around here?
17. To what extent do young adults engage in governance and politics where you live?

Satisfaction and Needs

18. How do you feel about your quality of life where you live? Economically speaking? Socially speaking? Culturally speaking? Politically speaking?
19. Who would not feel comfortable here?
20. How would you want your town to grow? How would you want it to stay the same?
21. What community groups are influential to people around here? Which ones are helpful? What are local projects or impacts that people have had? Which ones were focused on young adults?
22. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here? What do you need from your community?

Results for Hayward

While the identities of the 20 interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Our interview participants ranged in age from 19-48 years old. One person was 19, six were between 20 and 29 years of age, ten were between 30 and 39 years of age, and three were between 40 and 49 years of age.
- In terms of residence in Hayward, six participants had lived there from 0-4 years; three from 10-14 years; and three grew up here, left for a few years, and returned. One person had moved in and out of Hayward a few times; one had lived around the area their whole life, and six others lived in one of the nearby towns or in one case the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation.
- Looking at occupation, twelve people worked in Hayward, two worked elsewhere, four owned businesses in Hayward and one elsewhere, and one identified as a student.

A Beautiful Landscape

Hayward was the only "up north" community case study. Up North is generally considered by many to be the most attractive part of the state for people seeking a rural experience. Sparsely populated by people, and densely populated by lakes, the landscape is widely appreciated. A unique thread among the interview participants was their sense of appreciation for the beauty of the landscape and the lifestyle it supports. When we asked why people move here and stay here, they said things like:

"The lifestyle. It's hard to want to leave a place where people want to go on vacation."

"A big portion of people that move here are very aware of what it has to offer in terms of scenery."

"It is a vacation town...weekends and summers...we do live that life all the time"

"It's unique even here - we really do have a special thing going on here."

"I don't know...because it's beautiful! They love it."

The Importance of the Outdoors

Of course, with such a landscape, outdoor activities become important. We asked specifically about the outdoors opportunities the area provided and people consistently responded positively. Eleven people emphasized that the outdoors are important, and responses varied enough to show the variety of outdoor activities that fit different peoples' needs. For example, two people noted the abundant opportunities for "silent" sports. Others hailed the area's motorized sports as not only widely available, but also being popular and welcoming social scenes such as the women's four-wheeling group, which has grown "from eight to 130 members." Then of course there is the famous American Birkebeiner ski race—which has generated a wide variety of other activities—and the Lumberjack World Championships.

"We have the Lumberjack - it's just guys chopping wood but we make it a sport"

"You have the Fat [bike] Birkie... [and] it's hard to find a summer where there isn't something big happening"

Many of these interview participants cited both summer and winter sports as valued assets and opportunities in the area: Fishing, snowmobiling, skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, biking.

"There's strong support for those things here."

"It's kinda the basis for the whole town...it would just be another...you go to Spooner - there isn't much there."

"Oh my goodness. We are very outdoorsy. It's very rare that you don't have some hobby outdoors."

Uniformly, people suggested that winter was serious but fun business. Whether people complained about disliking the cold or rattled off a list of their favorite events, most people mentioned that they were active in the winter with outdoors activities and events. Everyone goes out in the winter time:

"Everyone bitches about the cold...but everyone does it [goes out]."

Part of the experience of the landscape, outdoors, and recreation activities, winter is an important aspect of life in Hayward, too. It's not only the weather that is important, but also the community atmosphere that organizes around it:

"The Birkebeiner got canceled...they had a 5k in Cable...people still came and they drank and they had a good time - I think that means something."

With a place of such beauty, supporting an active outdoor lifestyle with a wide variety of recreational activities, the community also attracts people conscious about practicing a healthy lifestyle. Six people mentioned the growing demand for food and services supporting a healthy lifestyle, and some hidden resources.

"If you get into the co-op world, there's a lot of food producers around the area—if you want to be health oriented."

"I have a feeling that health is a big deal in this community."

But not everyone felt like they were in the midst of a health-conscious community. One person said:

"I don't think there's a strong drive for healthy food around here."

Tight Knit Community

Hayward is a tightknit community, which yields feelings of comfort, belonging, and identity. Along with general comments about community, seven people mentioned religious organizations as playing a role in their lives or the lives of others. Overall people emphasized Hayward was the kind of community that produces mutual support and requires mutual knowledge of each other:

"A very tight knit community. Someone's got your back."

"Everybody knows everybody - and that's for better or for worse."

Of course, the tight-knit community also has a flip side. Six people spoke about how it can be difficult to become accepted into the community, and that there is an adjustment period to belonging in Hayward:

"Breaking into the Hayward area is a little tough...once you get over that hump...it's fun to be in Hayward"

"People aren't reaching out to you - you're reaching out to them."

"It's a very welcoming community but hard at first."

"You always need to be invited in here...it might be a bit lonely at first... your group will grow from that."

"It's kind of a tight knit community - if you're brand new to it, it might be tough...to break in relationships"

That tight community can also be interpreted by some as a community of older people. Not everyone agreed fully with what the statistics said about Hayward being a place that was gaining and maintaining young adults:

"There's a perception that it's an old folks community."

"I'm not sure if enough new people move to town in my age group."

Connected to this perception that it's an "older" community, a couple of people described the tight-knit community as a result of families that have been in the area for a long time. Those families produce a local power structure that some people don't feel wholly comfortable with:

"There's a lot of that good old boy system - the families that have been here forever - you can name them all on one hand - it's their kingdom - who has the most relatives in the area, they get voted in...it gets very territorial...I think it has to do with that these are old logging towns, they are logging barons..."

But two other interview participants noted that young adults served on many of the boards for community activities and then started to get elected to city council when they reached their late 30s. Others spoke of the importance of young families in the community, with most agreeing that Hayward is a community that better fits families with children than single people.

Drinking Culture and Community Life

Many of our interview participants saw alcohol consumption and the bar scene as an important part of community life in Hayward. Some people also think there is a problem with alcohol abuse, but most of the people we spoke to mentioned the bar scene as being an important cultural aspect of Hayward. Twelve people mentioned drinking as part of social life, while three specifically mentioned concerns about alcohol (and other substance) abuse. One person, when asked what young people do for recreation, noted that he didn't get to see that many people regularly, saying "I think they're at the bars." Another person mentioned that she believed many more people were moving into Hayward proper because of "DUIs." Others said things like:

"Being in Northern Wisconsin involves drinking."

"There's a lot of alcohol friendships in this town."

Volunteering as Part of Community Life

Though most of the people we interviewed didn't mention their own volunteering, six people noted that volunteers were important people in the community. People described volunteering as helping organize events and festivals, Little League, children's programming, the Park Theater, service organizations, church, and outdoors groups. Many of the major activities and events wouldn't succeed without volunteers.

"It's a very volunteer-driven community."

"A lot of us are volunteering more, getting involved with the Chamber of Commerce."

At the same time, two people mentioned that these organizations and activities often had difficulty attracting enough volunteers.

People Work Hard in Hayward

One of the reasons that it may be difficult to recruit volunteers in Hayward is that people work hard to pay the bills. Whether talking about newcomers needing to have ambition or an entrepreneurial spirit, or noting that they worked beyond the 40-hour work week with multiple jobs, people in Hayward work hard and value hard work. This is related to the seasonal nature of many tourism-related jobs that provide only a service worker wage. With a tourism-driven service industry, there are jobs in bars, resorts, and other service sector jobs. People work multiple jobs across sector, too, doing white-collar jobs and service-sector jobs to make ends meet. Six people mentioned working multiple jobs or knowing others that work multiple jobs. When asked where people in Hayward work, one person said:

"Anywhere they can, I'm not the only one I know who works 70-90 hour weeks."

Others said things like:

"There's not much opportunity for living wage jobs - there are some, for unskilled labor."

"There is one joke...to live where we love we have to have at least two jobs...and that's true. They'll waitress at night."

But one interview participant mentioned that there is some local industry that provides a core of better paying jobs. There are also small business owners working equally long hours and earning a modest income. And while probably no one would object to having a more comfortable income, at least one person was philosophical about the situation:

"Money doesn't buy happiness - this area does!"

Housing is a Challenge

One of the additional financial challenges facing people in Hayward is housing. Importantly, six people mentioned not only the cost of housing, but the lack of rental housing for young adults. This was a challenge noted by renters and homeowners alike when considering where young people live. Somewhat unusual for our case studies, half of our interviewees were renters.

"Housing is terrible for young adults here."

"There's not much of a rental market available."

"Housing is difficult around here. It's hard to rent places. Part of that is people can't afford to buy homes around here."

One person who lived outside of Hayward mentioned she was looking for housing in the city but couldn't find any she could afford. Two other people mentioned knowing a number of people who receive government assistance to pay for housing.

Schools

Schools have been important in each of our case study communities. We asked interview participants specifically about the school system that serves children in Hayward and the surrounding area. Some people were ambivalent about the school system. A few noted some grumblings about decision making, including the limiting of language opportunities in Haywood's public school. People also noted that there is an environmental charter high school, the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School, and a virtual charter school in the area. Five people discussed how they thought the academics of the public schools were not great, but at least two of them also mentioned that they seemed to prepare students adequately for college:

"I thought I was getting a horrible education, but then went to college and realized it was better than I thought."

"Kids don't have the same breadth of variety or opportunity that they would at a larger school, but I don't have any problems with it. I was able to make a transition to college and not be left out in the cold"

Seven other people spoke glowingly of the schools:

"Hayward is big enough and small enough to maintain the shape of its school system. It's a 'sweet spot.'"

"Hayward is forward thinking in its schools."

"[my children] love and I love it."

"They seem to be pretty strong - they seem to have a vibrant student population that's pretty engaged in the community."

"Everyone says they're really good compared to other places in the state."

Four people specifically mentioned that the schools were strong in sports, and two people mentioned that Hayward schools readily fill their open enrollment slots.

Local Amenities

While outdoor recreation opportunities were highly regarded in Hayward, our interviewees were not so positive about the availability of other amenities. Four people indicated that they either didn't know about the local farmers' market or couldn't access it because they were working during the market's open hours:

"The farmers' market is for tourists on vacation."

One local amenity that stood out for three people was the local library, which has a nature walk around it and a pier that extends into a pond and wetland area. When it comes to programming and services targeted at children, the library appears to have good options for people with programs geared specifically towards them.

"We have a wonderful library, it's big and clean and beautiful."

"They do a real nice job - aesthetically it looks nice in there - with the exchange you can get anything."

"It's gorgeous..."

Shopping is another challenge in Hayward. While there are grocery options available that people find acceptable, they described some of the other adjustments they have to make if they live in Hayward, and this included shopping online and planning trips to Duluth for shopping. Nine people mentioned not finding the shopping options very good in Hayward and eight people told about going to Duluth for shopping. Specifically, people mentioned work clothes and "heels" as being hard to find in town. One person suggested, for shopping in Hayward, "bigger city options" [where it's] "competitively priced with things an hour away..." Other people spoke of planning out regular trips to Duluth:

"You have to make a day of it."

"We'll make specific trips to Duluth for what we want."

People also appreciated area festivals, and the venues in town that had regular live music. But they also noted that there wasn't as much entertainment as they would like:

"People do love live music...if you could get more live music in this town...even the adults want it. If it's an outdoor concert we're just like wooo! I think it's a big draw. Big activities draw young people out from the woodwork."

"...going to a play... We don't have that kind of stuff."

"A lot of it is people really relish the opportunities when there's an event going on....because there aren't as many opportunities [compared to the city]."

Growth and Change in Hayward

How do people want Hayward to change? It was somewhat difficult to pin down a major theme in regards to how people want Hayward to change. Considering the facets of life that people mentioned above, it makes sense that people value the quietness of their town:

"I wouldn't want it to lose its small town feeling where you really get a chance to know people when you want to"

"I'm selfish. I don't want it to change. This is what I wanted; this is what I came here for."

"People don't want to turn Hayward into the Dells. Some business owners want that. A lot of residents don't."

"I don't know how I'd like to see it change, because I like it the way it is."

But at least one person felt favorable toward some kind of growth:

"I want it to grow so people can experience this great community. Things move slowly in a small town. People keep things the same because that's how they've always been done."

Other interview participants did not talk so much about growth as about different entertainment options, or shopping options, that they might want which might require growth.

Comparing Hayward to Other Communities

Hayward is Unique

Hayward is unique from all our other case study communities in a number of important ways. First, and most importantly, it is the only community in our study where people did not bring up commuting to work. Interviewees in all of our other case study communities discussed how either they, or people they knew, were commuting into the city for their jobs. In Hayward, the only person who mentioned commuting was commuting to Hayward. When we looked at the statistical data for Hayward on commuting to work there are a fair number of young people commuting for work. But it did not turn up in our interviews. And the reality is that there is no city to commute to. Duluth is nearly 90 minutes away by the speed limit. Importantly, however, people did discuss traveling to Duluth for shopping, which is similar to many of our other case study communities.

Hayward is also unique in having the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation nearby. People made brief mentions of the reservation, but didn't broach any extended discussions. The one Tribal member we spoke with described having had a positive experience in Hayward. Only one person mentioned wanting a better relationship with Tribal members. One person mentioned attending Pow Wows. A couple people spoke positively of the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School. We realize that discussions of these relationships with strangers can be difficult, so we are not surprised we did not hear more. One interview participant in Black Creek also indirectly mentioned the nearby Oneida Reservation as an asset

A final unique quality of Hayward is that it seems to lack some of the advantages that interviews commonly cited in our other case study communities. First is the perceived lack of affordable housing. Appropriately affordable housing was very important to interview participants in the other case study communities. Second is the distance from any other city. Not only our other case study communities, but nearly all the other communities in the state that had growing young adult populations were much closer to a more urban area.

Social Connections, Schools, and Trade-offs

Similar to many of our other case study communities, people seem to have some connection to Hayward before they move there, whether that is a relative, a spouse's job, or a previous vacation experience. Across the board a relevant link was important to bringing new people to Hayward. The lifestyle offered an eventual acceptance into the community is what has kept many people here.

Schools were also important in all of our case study communities. And while the perceptions of the Hayward schools is mixed, one common element of the schools that is valued in Hayward and the other communities are the perceptions that the schools are small enough for people to know each other and connected enough to the broader community so that parents feel like they have a relationship with the school.

Also similar to other case study communities are the trade-offs people are willing to make for a rural community experience where there are fewer local entertainment, employment, and shopping options. In Hayward, because of its distance from any larger urban place, those trade-offs were the most intense. But people seemed happy to make those compromises, whether that meant making a day of going to Duluth for shopping or becoming comfortable with the options for social-life—in fact loving the options to live the Hayward lifestyle. In our other case study communities young adults were more likely to mention housing affordability, good schools, and distance from the city as the main reasons they chose the community.

Tourism

Two other case study communities where tourism was important were Somerset and Delavan. Somerset is just across the border from the Twin Cities and Delavan is in southeast Wisconsin. All three communities found their relationships with tourists to be mixed. But Somerset and Delavan's tourist experiences were more about weekend visitors than seasonal ones. So their local economies were less organized around tourists than in Hayward. The young adults in Somerset and Delavan were more likely to be focused on commuting jobs than jobs in the local service industry, and experienced less apparent financial stress related to housing. There was also less emphasis on a lifestyle focused around the natural amenities of the region.

So What?

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Our research findings also hold some implications for Hayward.

Overall, it seems that Hayward residents know things to keep an eye on such as drug and alcohol abuse, are aware of what they value about life in Hayward, and understand what might bring new

people in to town. They also see the splits in the community—between the silent and motorized sports, between the health culture and the drinking culture, between the progressives and the conservatives, between the young and the old, between the poor and the working and middle classes. And there has been at least some integration with Tribal culture in the community. But Hayward also does not see itself as a place gaining and maintaining young adults (which the statistics say it is), and there are mixed perceptions of the school.

Unique Lessons

We cannot stress enough how unique Hayward is. There are only a handful of other places "up north" that meet our criteria of places that are gaining and maintaining young adult populations. And those other places are also tiny spots where a new subdivision of a dozen lots can make a large difference in percentages, not developed towns like Hayward. Hayward, consequently, is the exception that makes the rule. Our other case study communities lead to the finding that four important factors—relatively affordable housing, great schools, commuting distance from a city, and specific amenities geared toward young families—are the main attracters for young adults. There is some of that in Hayward—many people think positively of the schools, the statistics say a number of people drive out of town to their jobs, and there are certainly those outdoor amenities. But people talk about Hayward more as a hub than a spoke; they have mixed feelings about the school, and the outdoor and entertainment activities seem to be as accessible for young singles as young families. Clearly, the development of an outdoor culture is a huge draw for young adults. It may be worth people reflecting on how that culture has been built, and whether the past holds lessons for building it even further.

Risk Factors

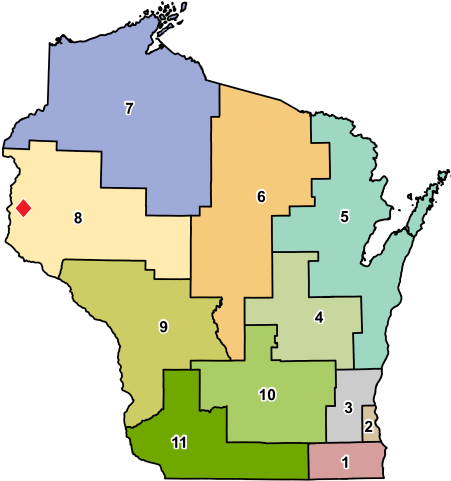
We cannot say exactly what makes Hayward the Up North exception. That would take further study. But it may be worth the trouble for people in Hayward to spend more time talking to each other about what attracts young adults to their community and maintains a healthy proportion of young adults there. They may also look closer at some of the risk factors that could reverse that trend, such as low service wages, relatively high housing costs and a lack of rental housing, a lack of specific shopping amenities, and mixed feelings about the local schools. There may also be ways to further expand appreciation for the cultural diversity that exists in the region, as we are learning that young adults in our other case study communities desire more diversity in their communities. There may be ways of engaging young adults in discussions and planning around these issues. But young adults, working multiple jobs to make ends meet, and caring for children, will find it difficult to participate without supports to do so. The community will need to find ways to make young adult participation convenient, cost-free, and meaningful.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Somerset

by Amanda Hoffman

"Somerset has the foundation for everything you want."

Basic	
	Municipality Village of Somerset
	County St. Croix
	Year Incorporated 1915
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	2,635 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	8
Young Adult Gaining Measure	123% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	29% (WI Median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	93.1% White (Non-Hispanic) 2.2% White (Hispanic) 1% African American 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.8% Asian 2% Other 2.5% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$64,123 (2015)
Median Income	\$63,224 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2012	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2014) \$7.95 million	
Notes		Somerset is served by the School District of Somerset	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Somerset Elementary School	Pre-K – 4	Public
	St. Anne's School	Pre-K – 8	Private
Middle	Somerset Middle School	5-8	Public
High	Somerset High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Somerset

Somerset was the second municipality where a researcher spent a full week visiting and collecting interviews. Amanda Hoffman began building our core group in the beginning of 2017, and conducted interviews from May 5th to May 11th.

1. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

In early 2017, Amanda reached out to UW-Extension educator Eric Biltonen in St. Croix County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who would be interested in our project.

2. Connect to Somerset Leaders to Build a "Core Group":

Eric Biltonen, who also aided our New Richmond case study, connected Amanda to local government and business leaders to form the core group.

3. Develop Interview Guide:

Amanda contacted each of the three core group members separately, and sent them our approved bank of questions. She requested their input on building the interview guide for the Somerset interviews. Before interviews started, each core group member sent back their question preferences. Amanda constructed an interview guide that addressed their points of interest, and sent it around. Each approved the final interview guide.

4. Contact Potential Interviewees:

Amanda requested suggestions of people to invite to interviews. She communicated that we were interested in interviewing people in the 20-39 year old age range (or were very familiar with people in that age range), who either lived in Somerset or spent a significant amount of time there. Core group members sent Amanda contact information for potentially interested individuals. She reached out to organizations like churches, banks, and schools, to recruit more interviewees.

5. Conduct Interviews:

Amanda interviewed 17 people whom she reached through core group references, and her own search for community members. She conducted these interviews over seven days.

6. Present and Revise Report:

Amanda analyzed and summarized the results of the interview, presented them to the core group, and revised the report based on their recommendations.

Somerset Interview Guide

Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Why did you move here? Did you stay for the reasons you thought you would?
4. Community Attributes
5. What are the schools and libraries like here?
6. Where do you go to shop? What do you think of shopping opportunities and food options around here? Farmers' Markets?
Follow Up: What do people find to be affordable here, in general, or not?
7. What kinds of things do you leave the community for?
8. How are outdoor activities important here?
Follow Up: What about gardens?

Growth and Movement

9. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?
10. How do you feel about population growth in your community?
Follow Up: What trends have you seen in the number of young adults where you live?
11. How does population growth of young adults affect you, and how does it affect your community?
12. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) thinking of moving here?
13. Why do people move here? Why do people stay here?
14. Who would not feel comfortable here?

What Young Adults Do

15. What do young people do for entertainment/recreation/local cultural life around here?
Follow up: What about organized recreational activities?
16. Where do young adults who live here work? Where do young adults live around here?
17. What role do you think young adults should play where you live?
Follow Up: To what extent do young adults engage in governance and politics where you live?

Your Community Satisfaction

18. How do you feel about your quality of life where you live?
Follow Up: Economically speaking?
Follow Up: Socially speaking?
Follow Up: Culturally speaking?
Follow Up: Politically speaking?
19. How would you want your town to grow? How would you want it to stay the same?
Follow Up: What would influence you to stay or leave?
20. What community groups are helpful to people around here? What are local projects or impacts that people have had?
Follow Up: What stories does your town have to share?

21. What does community mean to you? Where in your community are some places you have influence or would like to have influence?

Results for Somerset

While the identities of the 17 interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Participants ranged in age from 22-59. One person was 20-29, ten were 30-39, three were 40-49, and three were 50-59.
- Four participants had lived in the community for fewer than five years; three had lived there for five to nine years, four for 10-19 years, two from 20-29 years, and two people grew up in Somerset.

Overall, our 17 interviewees repeatedly cited multiple factors that were attracting young adults and keeping them in the community.

Schools

Fifteen out of seventeen participants stated that the school system encouraged young adults to live in Somerset. When asked about Somerset's strengths, or why they moved there, many noted that they were pleased with aspects of the schools, including what they perceived to be small class sizes and the convenience of the campus with all of the buildings close together. Interview participants said things like:

"The schools have lots going for them."

"That [one campus for all the schools] helps us do a lot of flexible sharing of staff and students..."

"The schools are small enough where you can get that personalized attention..."

"I'm very happy with the schools."

Ultimately, people's perception of the schools is good, but six participants also stated that it can improve. There seemed to be a concern that the schools could do more, and even that the school system needs to "reidentify" itself. Some participants also noted this feeling in general for the community.

"The school's kinda got to re-identify itself, with the next generation of people coming through. And we're headed in that direction."

"...[Test] scores have gone downhill. There's room to improve."

Sports and the Outdoors

Sports and the outdoors are an important part of the Somerset culture that young adults value. Eight participants noted the importance of school sporting events, sports leagues, and outdoor recreation as popular forms of entertainment in Somerset.

Three participants praised school sports in Somerset:

"It's a big sports town. Professional athletes come out of Somerset. They have awesome football."

"Everyone comes to [see] the football team"

"Friday night football games."

The core group also confirmed that athletes have gone on to play professional, including hockey and racecar driving.

Somerset also has a wealth of amateur sports leagues that are very popular among young adults:

"Volleyball leagues, softball leagues, bowling leagues."

"My age group – softball leagues, dart leagues, pool leagues, golf leagues..."

Somerset residents spend a lot of time outdoors. Somerset participants mentioned a wide variety of activities covering all seasons:

"Outdoor concert series."

"The river – plenty to do here for that."

"People fish, hunt, four wheel, snowmobile – people like their toys up here."

"We'll spend a day at the park, see the trails."

"People run the development - it's a mile around. It gets busy in the neighborhood [when the weather is good]."

The Apple River was frequently cited both as a popular area for recreation and as a nuisance because of the tourists and partying it attracts.

"The Apple River brings in the riffraff."

"You hear about bad things on the river and in the campgrounds, regarding tourists."

In reviewing our analysis, however, the core group affirmed that there are portions of the Apple River where tourists are scarce, especially during the week and in some places even during the weekend. And they noted that people also use it for canoeing and kayaking.

And one interviewee theorized that some residents move to Somerset after having first experienced it as tourists.

Proximity to Twin Cities, Hudson, Stillwater: Work There, Move Here

Fourteen participants praised Somerset's proximity to high-population urban areas, especially the Twin Cities, where people commute for work or amenities. Participants indicated that many Somerset residents commute, especially to the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and many work at Andersen Windows.

"The norm is to commute."

"[The] Majority [work] in the Twin Cities. It's easier to cross the river."

But participants noted that a number of young adults also work in Somerset. Locally, the Somerset school district and industrial park were most frequently listed as employers of young adults.

"The core of the Somerset employee base is the school."

"some work around here - there's a few factories that are better paying"

Participants view the proximity to cities around Somerset both positively and negatively. Ten participants noted the lack of options for fun and food in Somerset, sometimes attributed this lack to the multitude of shopping and food options in the broader area. And, indeed, while there is a general lack of shopping opportunities right in Somerset, there are a number of options nearby. For at least some residents the in-town options are, also "inaccessible, not feasible, too expensive," and this is ameliorated by the relative proximity of more urban areas.

"I don't do shopping in Somerset."

"Not many - very few [shopping and food] opportunities...But you have to keep in mind, we're four miles from New Richmond, and eight miles from Stillwater, 25 miles from St. Paul; which makes you a bedroom community. You'll never see a lot of those things because they're all around us."

"Sometimes they shop at the local grocery store, but for their main shopping they go to CostCo in Northern St. Paul, 40 minutes away, or the Hudson CostCo."

"Honestly, [shopping in Somerset is] horrible. But then you have New Richmond, Stillwater, and Hudson."

But four participants still affirmed that local relationships are important for people meeting their needs.

"Community is huge - that's what makes Somerset special. When we have needs, parents come out full force. That goes back years and years deep, or for new people like us."

"I have this saying that I teach my kids. Fairness does not equal equality. First, everyone gets what they need. The bulk of the population get what they need."

The core group mentioned the local presence of gas stations, banks, groceries, restaurants, healthcare clinics, and Emergency Services. And they also affirmed how people met their needs informally through local relationships.

Lower Cost Housing and Living: More Land, Fewer Homes

Thirteen participants named Somerset's low cost of living, and the availability of lower-cost housing and land, as attractive features for young adults. Being located some distance from urban areas allows folks to be more spread out and own more land at a more affordable price than they would find in or nearer the cities.

"We didn't move here for [restaurant] food. We moved for a spread-out yard. We used to live in a town home... We don't want to live that close [to our neighbors]."

"For under \$230K we got an acre and a half and a 2,800 sq. ft. home."

"Price is one; scenic living is another. You can get a three acre lot of land for the same price as a city lot."

"Starter homes [as a factor that attracts young adults] in the \$150K-200K. People looking to get acres."

Our interview respondents saw the economic benefits of living in Somerset as going beyond the cost of land and housing to include the overall cost of living.

"Low cost of living, relatively low."

"...It's the cost of living.."

"It's a cheaper cost of living, even with the commute."

"We want to live off the land."

Participants also distinguished between property in the village and in the township. In general, lots in the township are larger, at least three acres in size, and village homes tend to be older.

"Somerset is a town and a village. The difference between them is that the township has bigger lots, more open. The village has older houses."

"There are three acre plots in the township that run from \$250K to \$500K."

Though housing is relatively cheap for the area, Somerset residents have watched housing values go up and supply go down. The real estate market has shifted based on anticipation of the new Stillwater bridge. Three participants stated that folks have trouble buying a house that meets their needs and budget. Instead, they buy land and build.

"People were holding onto land, and asking prices that were silly."

"People are buying here - real estate is not available, you have to build."

In reviewing our analysis, the core group shared that, in 2010, 40 percent of Somerset village residents were renting. Ordinances were changed to encourage home-ownership. Ordinances also now incentivize development of houses in the village, rather than just the township.

Small Town Feeling

Fifteen participants affirmed that they experience a caring and close-knit community in Somerset. Three participants noted the importance of community-wide events in helping to create this sense of community. When asked what they would say to a young adult thinking of moving to the area, participants responded with statements like the following:

"It's a wonderful community. It's a close, tight knit community. If you're about the right stuff, they'll embrace you wholeheartedly."

"...it's a good place to live..."

"My wife and I would tell you it was a good place to raise kids...a rural setting."

"We're a nice, caring community – an absolutely great place to raise kids. Close to the cities."

Growing Somerset

In asking our interview participants how they would like Somerset to grow, most of them mentioned business growth rather than population growth. Eleven people mentioned the importance of business growth, and three of those desired a big box general retail store.

"It'd be nice to see it grow with more businesses, opportunities for things. Normal city stuff."

"[it would be] Cool to see more of a Hudson vibe."

"I'd love a vibrant downtown...with people walking...not empty storefronts."

A desire for a vibrant downtown was noted by five interview participants who expressed concern about abandoned storefronts and an old worn-out appearance.

How Somerset Compared to Other Municipalities

Our team completed a case study of nearby New Richmond. The study revealed common themes between Somerset and New Richmond. Our findings in Somerset were also reminiscent of other municipalities like De Pere, Brooklyn, and Evansville.

Proximity to Urban Centers

In both Somerset and New Richmond, proximity to Hudson, Stillwater, and the Twin Cities was mentioned by nearly all participants. In both municipalities, participants noted a split between those who work in the area, and those who commute. Overall, people estimated that roughly half work out of town and half work in the area in both places. Somerset and New Richmond differed slightly in that many Somerset participants noted also leaving the community for many, if not nearly all of their shopping, food, and entertainment needs. In New Richmond, many stated that they shopped locally for groceries, but frequently left town for clothes shopping and to have more diversity in food options. In both cases, proximity to nearby towns and urban centers was important.

Proximity to urban centers was also a prominent factor in Brooklyn and Evansville near Madison. In Somerset, a handful of participants mentioned that the proximity to other towns gave them the sense that Somerset is a "bedroom community," meaning that people may live in town, but are out of town for work and shopping during the day. This sentiment was similarly expressed in both Brooklyn and Evansville, towns within thirty minutes of Madison and Janesville. In Brooklyn, residents left the community for nearly everything but the school, bank, and gas station. Evansville has some shops, other employment, and a couple of dining options. However, interview participants frequently stated that they accessed amenities outside of Evansville.

Participants in De Pere noted that they valued their proximity for employment opportunities and larger entertainment such as major league sporting events and touring concerts in Green Bay. De Pere is also located near a highway that has access to Green Bay to the north and several cities for employment or family connections to the south.

Schools

The importance of schools is almost universal in our case study communities. In the communities of Black Creek, Plover, Brooklyn, Evansville, and Hayward, our interview participants emphasized the importance of *small* schools. People felt like they could get to know their children's teachers. Most importantly, however, small schools provided a way to build community. In Somerset, people emphasized school sports as bringing the community together. In Brooklyn, which did not have its own high school, the school provided a gathering space for arts and other community activities.

Housing

The importance of lower cost housing on large lots in Somerset was also echoed in many of our other communities. Many of our interviewees moved to these communities with a vision of rural life that included more space both inside and outside. And many of these communities are also experiencing an increase in housing costs and a shortage of homeowner housing in the sweet spot price range that has attracted young adults.

Somerset is also unusual among our case study communities in having a larger supply of rental housing. A shortage of rental housing has been a concern for some interviewees in places like Hayward and New Richmond.

So What? Implications for Somerset

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to gain and retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Our research findings also hold some implications for Somerset.

Some would say that Somerset is growing because it is in the right location: close enough to cities that provide world class amenities – Hudson, Stillwater, and the Twin Cities – but far enough to maintain a small-town, rural character. The new Stillwater bridge will provide an even shorter commute between Somerset and Minnesota. The promise of this bridge has boosted Somerset's attractiveness, as well as housing prices. Of course, this growth also brings risks. What people mention most about the attraction of Somerset is its "small town feel." At the same time, they have mixed feelings about the influx of new residents from the Twin Cities. The Meadows housing development came up a few times in our interviews with mixed feelings as people praised its lower cost but disliked its appearance. How to manage housing costs to not price young adults out of the market, while still meeting the desire for spacious homes and lots will be one of the challenges facing Somerset.

Somerset's wide open spaces, rivers, and rolling hills appeal to all its residents, as well as tourists. It has been the site of massive concerts, and tubing businesses have an outsized reputation. That tourism contributes to the economy, and helps support some of the restaurants and bars that residents enjoy. At the same time, it creates challenges of dealing with large numbers of people in a small community. Many of the same outdoor amenities that draw tourists also appeal to residents. But we did not hear about as much business development for residents' outdoor recreation, which may involve more "silent sports" such as hiking, biking, and kayaking. Are there civic and business opportunities to support diverse local outdoor cultures?

Somerset has its own school district, with smaller class sizes than surrounding districts. Residents are dedicated to the schools, which all share a campus. How will Somerset maintain this asset as the population grows, while still maintaining a small school culture?

Somerset is home to "big families" that founded the village. In the last few decades, Somerset has welcomed families from across Wisconsin, as well as from Minnesota. Throughout the interviews, leaders and participants communicated a difference between the old Somerset, the current Somerset, and the future Somerset. Old Somerset was smaller and more rural, with strong schools.

Current Somerset is busier, more socially diverse, and a home to commuters instead of farm families. The schools are moving past troubles in their administration. Currently, households embrace the reality of driving out of town for fun, work, and shopping. But residents want to see more in town, and The Chamber of Commerce is connecting residents with information about local businesses. Currently, a strategic community plan is being developed by the Chamber, the Village, the Town, and the school district. The downtown, from our interviews, seems primed to be a focus of that plan.

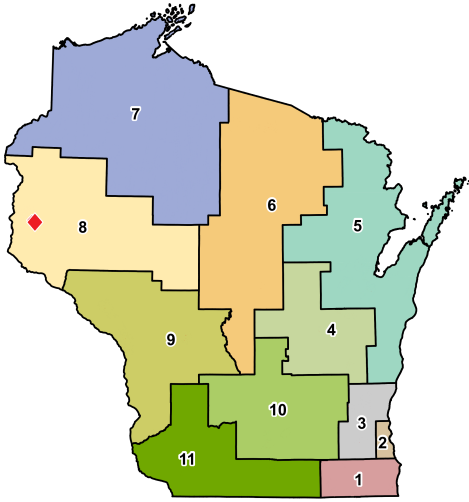
The future Somerset is coming on fast. Many participants, when questioned about growth in Somerset, responded that no matter what they felt, growth will happen. The collective dream for the future of Somerset values connections between households, their schools, and their local amenities. In this vision, Somerset leverages nearby cities, instead of depending on them. Older residents and big-name families share leadership with residents that care enough to make their voice heard. Somerset loves being fun, beautiful, and caring. They are ready to invest the time and patience to stay that way.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: New Richmond

by Sheamus Johnson

"We look out for each other."

Basic	
	Municipality City of New Richmond
	County St. Croix
	Year Incorporated 1857
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	8,375 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	8
Young Adult Gaining Measure	43% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	31% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	94% White (Non-Hispanic) 1.5% White (Hispanic) 1.3% African American 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.7% Asian 0.3% Other 1.6% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$69,840 (2015)
Median Income	\$53,265 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2005	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2007) \$92.85 million	
Notes		New Richmond is served by the School District of New Richmond	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Hillside Elementary School	K-5	Public
	Paperjack Elementary School	K-5	Public
	Starr Elementary School	K-5	Public
	St. Mary's School	K-8	Private
Middle	New Richmond Middle School	6-8	Public
	St. Mary's School	K-8	Private
High	New Richmond High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in New Richmond

The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

We reached out to UW-Extension in St. Croix County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. **Connect to New Richmond Leaders:**

UW-Extension educator Eric Biltonen responded and recommended we reach out to a number of influential government and business leaders to create a core group.

3. **Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:**

We met with the core group to address the following three points:

- How is this project relevant to New Richmond, and to your role in New Richmond?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

4. **Conduct Interviews:**

We administered the following interview guide to thirteen interviewees who we reached through recommendations from the core group.

5. **Present and Revise Results:**

We analyzed and summarized the results of our interviews, presented them to our New Richmond and Extension collaborators. Based on their feedback we conducted two more interviews and revised the research report.

New Richmond Interview Questionnaire

1. How long have you lived here?
2. How local is your family to where you live?
3. What would you say to someone who is thinking of moving here?
4. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) who is thinking of moving here?
5. Why do people move here?
6. Why do people stay here?
7. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?
8. Where do young adults who live here work? What about other people who live here?
Follow up: Work in the community, or in the cities?
9. Where do young adults live around here?
10. How would you want your town to grow? How would you like it to stay the same?
Follow up: How do you feel about population growth in your town.
11. Do you feel integrated or welcomed in your community?
12. Is your life here different than you thought it would be? Is it better? Worse?
Follow up: Ask if not answered in above question: Why did you move here?
13. How many people do you know in your town?
14. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?
15. Who contributes to your community?
16. What community groups are influential to people around here? Which ones are helpful?
17. What is entertainment like around here? What do you do for fun?
18. Where do you go to shop?
19. What do you think of shopping opportunities around here?
20. What are the schools like here?
21. What do you use that is outside of the community?

Results For New Richmond

While the identities of interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Six people have lived in the community for four years or less; five people have lived there for 7-10 years, one person for 19 years, and one was born there.
- Participants' ages ranged from the late 20s to the late 30s.
- Five people have local extended family, though extended family for most interview participants is three or more hours away.

Overall, our thirteen interviewees repeatedly cited a number of factors that were attracting young adults, and keeping them in the community.

Small-Town Feel, Great Community

Ten of the thirteen participants described New Richmond as either "great," "wonderful," or "nice." The overall perception is that New Richmond is a "great community" that is just the right size.

"I would say it's a great community to raise your children. It's not too big, not too small, it's the perfect size."

"It has a nice small-town feeling."

"I think it's a great community, I think some of the draws are that it is a small town but it's convenient to the Twin Cities and also convenient to an international airport. Shopping, what other stuff you may want to do, within an hour's drive."

Along with describing its "small-town" feel, six interview participants also described it as having a mix of small town and larger community characteristics:

"...it's a wonderful area that has a kind of a blend of big town and small town."

"...it's the perfect size for me, for us. You have the amenities you need, even though it's not a large city."

"...it's a great town, small town feel with some little bit of a larger town amenities."

The right-sized small-town feeling and sense of community, particularly for young families or those interested in raising children, may be a factor in retaining young adults in New Richmond.

Interview participants also generally perceived New Richmond as a welcoming community. This is particularly noteworthy given how many of the interviewees were newcomers. But three interviewees did mention that it was difficult for young adults to "break into" the community or connect with other young adults.

Proximity to Urban Centers

At some point in every interview people at least mentioned New Richmond's proximity to larger places, and seven of the thirteen participants coupled their positive perception of New Richmond with proximity to Hudson (WI), Stillwater (MN), and the Twin Cities (MN). Proximity to other urban areas is important for additional jobs, but also for shopping and other amenities that are not present in New Richmond. Participants offered the following perspectives on the value of New Richmond's location in relation to more populous places:

"A lot of people like New Richmond because of the close proximity to the Twin Cities."

"A lot of people like having the proximity to the Twin Cities, but not the hustle and bustle..."

"It's a good small-town feel, but yet pretty good proximity to the Twin Cities."

"Work is probably a major thing of it [why people move here]. There are a lot of people that commute to the Twin Cities, but the standard of living in New Richmond is a lot less than downtown Twin Cities. People like the W, Wisconsin, to live and raise a family. Education is pretty high around here, it's more of a safe town than compared to the east metro I think."

"...the location is big part of it, being in proximity to the Twin Cities. A lot of people commute to Twin Cities for work, but maybe don't want that big city type of a lifestyle. The smaller town in the proximity makes it attractive."

There was a lack of agreement among interview participants about whether or not there were adequate jobs in New Richmond. Overall, eight participants believe there is a near even split

between those that work in town and those that work out of town. Several others believed that most people work in the Twin Cities.

Affordable Home Ownership

One of the often mentioned appeals of New Richmond, outside of its small-town right-sized culture was the cost of living. Particularly important to people was the affordability of housing. Six people mentioned the cost of housing, contrasting New Richmond with either the Twin Cities or nearby Hudson.

"I can tell you why I moved, I moved because of housing prices. I can get a lot more house in New Richmond than in Woodbury or the Eastern side of the cities anyways."

"...we were considering Hudson, but the amount of house we could purchase in New Richmond was no question, very affordable."

"...very affordable to live for like extra curricular and the houses and land you can have compared to living 30 minutes closer to the city."

"...you can get a lot more house for your money in New Richmond."

It is worth noting, however, that when people discussed the availability and affordability of housing, they were referring to home ownership. Two people mentioned that affordable rental housing seemed more difficult to come by.

Good Schools and Family-Oriented

All but one participant perceived the schools in New Richmond positively. A large referendum to fund new school infrastructure increased taxes in New Richmond, which was noted by at least two participants. Despite a seemingly tongue and cheek attitude towards the high taxes at times, the overall feeling is that New Richmond is attractive for young adults partly due to the school system.

"So, we have a technical college, two year, then we have the Catholic school which is K-8, then we have three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. All of them are fairly new or renovated within the last five years. The school district is very well. We are almost always top of the state. For a while we had the biggest referendum when we renovated, close to 100 million. It's probably one of the main things that attract people here is the nice school district. The other communities around us are starting to do the same thing."

"They're top notch. With the elementary school, I do day care as well, communication is really great with families and teachers."

"I hope they're good, the taxes are high. I don't have any kids so I can't comment much, but I hear that it is good. We have a newer high school too."

"Excellent, we have been very happy with the schools. I was apprehensive of moving here only because it didn't have a great reputation back then, but it is much better now."

Desire for Steady, Tempered Growth

With the new bridge connecting Wisconsin and Minnesota near Stillwater, New Richmond participants desire growth in their town, but want that growth to be responsible and tempered. Many shared that they wish to see growth in businesses, particularly those that are not currently in New

Richmond. Participants overwhelmingly want to keep the small-town feel of New Richmond. Nine participants directly mentioned growth in relation to their perception of the current tight-knit community and small-town feeling.

"I like the fact that it is growing, but I hope it is steady and slow rate."

"It's still feels like a small town, I would imagine that it is going to grow and continue to grow with the bridge that connects Stillwater to Houlton, I guess I'm a little nervous that there will be that urban sprawl, that it will grow so fast that it's not prepared. Overall, the feel of a small-town [how they would want New Richmond to stay the same]."

"Well, I would like to see more restaurants come to New Richmond... I wouldn't want to lose the small-town charm I guess."

"I like the small town feel of it... Control the growth, but don't let it get too out of control."

How New Richmond Compared to Other Municipalities

Our team completed a case study of nearby Somerset, based on seventeen interviews. The study revealed some common themes between Somerset and New Richmond. Our findings in New Richmond were also reminiscent of other municipalities like De Pere, Brooklyn, and Evansville.

Proximity to Urban Centers

In both Somerset and New Richmond, proximity to Hudson, Stillwater, and the Twin Cities was mentioned by nearly all participants. In both municipalities, participants noted a split between those that work in the area, and those that commute. Overall, people perceive that roughly half work out of town and half work in the area in both places. Somerset and New Richmond differed slightly in that many Somerset participants noted leaving the community for much or nearly all of their shopping, food, and entertainment needs. In New Richmond, many stated that they shopped locally for groceries, but frequently left town for clothes shopping and to have more diversity in food options.

Proximity to urban centers was also a prominent factor in Brooklyn and Evansville near Madison. In Somerset, a handful of participants mentioned that the proximity to other towns gave them the sense that Somerset is a "bedroom community," meaning that people may live in town, but are out of town for work and shopping during the day. This sentiment was similarly expressed in both Brooklyn and Evansville, towns within a half an hour of Madison and Janesville. In Brooklyn, residents left the community for nearly everything but the school, bank, and gas station. Evansville has some shops, other employment, and a couple dining options. However, it was frequently stated that residents utilize amenities in places other than Evansville. While New Richmond residents did not so often characterize the town as a "bedroom community" they frequently mentioned leaving town to access a variety of amenities. These amenities were mostly those that are not available in New Richmond (clothes shopping and an international airport), or that allowed for a greater diversity in choice.

Participants in De Pere noted that they valued their proximity for employment opportunities and larger entertainment such as major league sporting events and touring concerts in Green Bay. De Pere is also located near a highway that has access to Green Bay to the north and several cities for employment or family connections to the south.

So What?

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

In combing through the qualitative data behind this study, several themes have emerged that have important implications for New Richmond in the future. These themes are described in greater detail here.

Schools and Referenda

While only two participants mentioned New Richmond's large school referendum, the results are certainly not lost on community members. The school system was almost unanimously praised by participants. The positive perceptions of the schools were not limited to the local K-12 school district. Interview participants also mentioned the local technical college. One participant noted that the technical college is particularly important for local employers looking for recent graduates to hire. Others noted that the high school focuses on preparing students for life after school in general while also offering courses with college credit. The presence of the technical school, coupled with a strong local school district, helps get people into the area workforce.

New Richmond has also seen the other side of the coin. Prior to the referendum, one participant noted that they were apprehensive about the idea of moving to New Richmond due to the district's bad reputation. Clearly the referendum and other local initiatives have changed residents' minds. The schools were highly regarded by participants in this study. Community support of the local school system is an attractive feature to young adults, especially those interested in starting or growing a family. The schools also provide a number of activities and opportunities for socializing. Many find a sense of community through their children's and their own involvement with the schools. The challenge for New Richmond will be to maintain that reputation over time as the new schools age and, if the local population continues to grow, run out of space.

Growth and the New Bridge

As in many other places in our study, New Richmond residents are aware that the new bridge connection to Stillwater, Minnesota will bring about growth and change. They have a desire for that growth to be steady and thoughtful. This could be a signal to city officials and other businesses to pay attention to the kind of growth that is taking place in New Richmond following the completion of the bridge. It seems to be an opportunity for desired growth, but should be done thoughtfully and with input from the community. Most seemed to see the growth as an opportunity for more amenities that they currently travel to other towns and cities to access. Residents generally thought that growth would positively influence their food options in town.

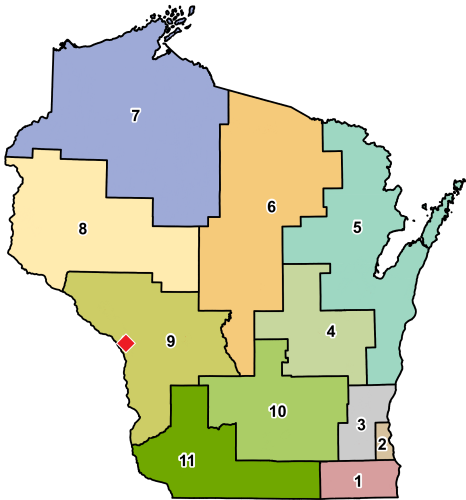
It is important to note here that one of the attractive features of New Richmond is that it is close enough to the Twin Cities to commute for work. Many residents mentioned that they can earn a city salary and live in New Richmond where the cost of living is significantly lower. People also seem to prefer communities like New Richmond due to their "small-town feel" that is markedly different from living in the city. With the new bridge connection to Minnesota, more people will likely become charmed by communities like New Richmond. The challenge will be to keep the small-town feeling and generally low cost of living while growing to meet the desires of current and new community members.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Onalaska

by Amanda Hoffman

"After having lived in big cities - it's easy to live here."

Basic	
	Municipality City of Onalaska
	County La Crosse
	Year Incorporated 1851
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	17,736 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	9
Young Adult Gaining Measure	14% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	29% (WI median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	89.8% White (Non-Hispanic) 0.9% White (Hispanic) 1.1% African American 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native 5.7% Asian 0.5% Other 1.7% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$80,777 (2015)
Median Income	\$53,737 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2015	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2014) \$28.6 million	
Notes		Onalaska is served by the School District of Onalaska.	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Eagle Bluff Elementary School	Pre-K – 5	Public
	Irving Pertzsch Elementary School	Pre-K – 5	Public
	Northern Hills Elementary School	Pre-K – 5	Public
	St. Paul's Lutheran School	K-8	Private
	St. Patrick's Grade School	Pre-K – 6	Private
Middle	Onalaska Middle School	6-8	Public
	St. Paul's Lutheran School	K-8	Private
High	Onalaska High School	9-12	Public
	Luther High School	9-12	Private

Conducting the Case Study in Onalaska

We conducted the Onalaska case study by having a researcher visit the area for a week in June of 2017. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. Network with Interested Individuals:

Our research team had connected with Chin-Chin Minnear from the 7 Rivers Alliance, "the economic development membership organization for the Upper Mississippi Region" (7riversalliance.org). She attended the Wisconsin Rural Summit in 2017, saw our team's presentation on the project, and noted her interest in the project. Our research team contacted her a few weeks later to invite her to help guide the study.

2. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

We reached out to UW-Extension in La Crosse County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project. Team member and UW-Extension

educator Allyson Watson recommended that we reach out to Karl Green of UW-Extension in La Crosse County.

3. Connect to Onalaska Leaders:

Mr. Green recommended a number of business leaders to reach out to, but we were unable to recruit anyone to provide feedback on shaping the interview guide.

4. Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:

Mr. Green and Ms. Minnear provided feedback over email on what questions they wanted to see on the interview guide for Onalaska. They both also referred us to individuals who lived or worked in Onalaska. We invited these contacts to interviews, or to provide recommendations for others we should invite to interviews.

5. Conduct Interviews:

Amanda Hoffman interviewed 17 people who we reached through core group references, and our own search for community members.

6. Present and Revise Report:

Amanda analyzed and summarized the results of the interviews, presented them to the core group, and revised the report based on their recommendations.

Onalaska Interview Guide

Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived here
3. Why did you move here?
4. Do you rent or own your home
5. Do members of your extended family live in this community or in a nearby community?

Around the Community

6. Are outdoor activities important here?
7. What do you think of shopping opportunities around here? Farmers' market?
8. What kind of things to do you leave the community for?

Growth

9. How do you feel about population growth of young adults here?
10. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of? Why do people move here?
11. Why do people stay here?
12. What would you say to young adult thinking of moving here?

People in the Community

13. What do young adults do for entertainment around here?
14. How do people here get around? Drive, walk, bike, carpool, public transport?
15. Where do young adults who live around here work?

Life Satisfaction and Community

16. Is your life here different than you thought it would be?
Follow-up: What would influence you to stay or leave?
17. How do you feel about your quality of life where you live?
Follow-up: Economically speaking?
18. What do you need from your community? Who contributes to your community?

Results for Onalaska

While the identities of the 17 interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Participants ranged in age from the mid-20s to the mid-40s. Seven people were 20-29, Seven were 30-39, and three were 40-49.
- Six participants had lived in the community for fewer than five years; five had lived there for five to nine years, two from 20-29 years, and 1 person grew up in Onalaska. One person grew up in Onalaska but now lived in La Crosse, and two others lived in La Crosse but had close knowledge of Onalaska through work.
- Eleven people were employed in Onalaska, one was a business owner there, one was employed in La Crosse, and two were employed elsewhere. Two were full-time parents.

Jobs and Cost of Living

For young adults whose careers may not have yet taken off, both a desirable job with a decent starter salary, and a home in a place with an acceptable cost of living, are important variables. Fifteen out of the seventeen interview participants emphasized how life in and around Onalaska was financially sustainable. They referenced the importance of jobs and/or the low taxes and cost of living.

"The taxes are lower in Onalaska than in La Crosse. There's a lot of people that commute in (to La Crosse)."

"An employment opportunity here [in Onalaska]... that's how I ended up specifically in Onalaska."

"I didn't have a preconceived notion...I was just coming to do the job I wanted to do."

When asked about quality of life in financial terms, one person responded:

"You can have the toys that you want...campers, RVs, boats, snowmobiles...motorcycles are pretty popular too."

Housing

One of the most important parts of the cost of living, especially for young families, is availability and cost of housing. When asked why they or others lived or stayed in Onalaska, Eleven participants emphasized the importance of housing availability, which they framed in financial terms. Four people specifically pointed to more affordable, better quality rentals than in La Crosse.

"I found that renting outside of the city is cheaper than renting in the city...there's not a lot of nice rental opportunities... [there are] a lot of older homes, or older apartment complexes. Onalaska and Holmen, they have nicer places you can rent."

"For the money, you get the same place, but a little more updated, a little more modern...a little bit more room. Low-end places jack up the prices [in La Crosse]."

Six people noted how home ownership was more affordable in Onalaska, maybe even more affordable than renting, and that it was possible to buy more space and pay less in taxes.

"You pay less taxes for a full acre in Onalaska...[there's] more space and less taxes."

"I think the housing is really affordable. It's cheaper to buy here than it is to rent."

And seven people referenced the importance of newer, higher-end but still affordable houses in Onalaska.

"There are not a ton of homes in the less than 100k range. But if you are making decent money, the housing market in Onalaska is hot."

"Because the taxes are substantially less than La Crosse, you get more bang for your buck. La Crosse is more fixer uppers. In Onalaska you get a newer home."

Proximity to the City

Many young adults find themselves in a kind of in-between life-stage, partly looking to settle down and partly still feeling energized by more urban experiences. Thus, being close to a city is important to many young adults. Twelve out of the seventeen interview participants discussed the importance of Onalaska being near La Crosse but still separate from it.

"While I don't mind having to drive somewhere, it's nice having everything close by."

"It's close to stuff if you want to go do stuff. It's not far from shopping, or fun stuff to do. It's quieter than La Crosse...it's very relaxed."

Three of these participants referenced being near other communities in the area, for work or recreation.

People boat on the river, spend the whole weekend...more out on French island- there's lots of places you can rent space...it takes ten minutes."

The role of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Somewhat unexpectedly, we have been finding that students graduating from nearby colleges and universities want to stick around after graduation, but not necessarily in the same community as the university. Eight people talked about how people moved to Onalaska because they came to La Crosse for college, and then they wanted to stay. Some were drawn to Onalaska because they wanted to move on from the "college party scene." The story of students that graduated and stayed in the area points to the importance of having a young adult retention strategy that leverages the influx of young adults into the area.

"I love the environment here so I decided to transfer here in 2008."

"I went to college at UW-La Crosse, and then never left."

"I went to UW-La Crosse. I moved away because I wanted to get away from the college scene."

Amenities and Growth

Part of young adults' desire to be near a city is to have access to its diverse amenities. But smaller places that reach a certain critical mass can provide some of those amenities locally without the other characteristics of urban places—congestion, density, and a sense of danger—that some young adults do not want to live in the midst of. Nine participants mentioned that people settle in Onalaska because of the way the community is growing and attracting amenities.

"The town is doing a pretty good job of growth, doing what they do to build things, bringing in different stores and things. I don't know how they do it."

"It's big enough to have everything you need but it's not too big that you have a four lane highway going through the center of it like Rochester."

"I just need the community to keep doing what they're doing...growth...expansion...keep employers happy...think of stuff before it becomes an issue."

Five interview participants did mention, however, that while shopping was good in Onalaska, those interested in local business shopping needed to go to La Crosse.

"what you don't have is more localized shopping...that's more in La Crosse."

"La Crosse has niche stuff."

"Family owned businesses, we love that about La Crosse...but here there's just Target."

Beauty and Recreation

Amenities are not just about the indoors—shopping, dining, entertainment. They are also about the outdoors, and outdoor amenities are important to young adults who are often quite physically active. Thirteen people discussed the importance of nearby natural beauty, parks, and outdoor recreation.

"Part of it is the bluff land. The topography...you can't find this anywhere else..."

"Probably find some place close to the river. Within walking distance...now you can cross Highway 35 [and get to the river] without taking your life into your own hands."

"I love it around here. All our parks systems are pretty close."

"Hiking up on Grandad's bluff, we have tons of hiking trails...last Saturday we didn't have anything to do so we took our daughter in her stroller to the swamp area...you see birds, snakes—there's always something to do."

The Mississippi River, and Lake Onalaska created by the river, are very important to residents and to others, without the stress and conflicts that tourism can sometimes create.

"It was 45 degrees and raining, and we saw tons of people fishing."

"The rivers - [we're a] big boating family. That aspect is very important."

In addition, biking, hiking, and winter skiing provide for all-season outdoor recreation.

Health

One of the more unique qualities of Onalaska that we have not heard so much in other places is the presence of a health-oriented culture. Five interview participants referenced the importance of a local health-oriented culture, with health-sustaining activities, amenities like organic food and proximity to diverse health care services.

"I feel like it's a really healthy place to live, healthy food, get to enjoy the outdoors."

"...there are a lot of chiropractors in the area...there's a lot of health classes...the new restaurants are trending towards healthy or organic"

Community – Social and Physical

A sense of community was very important to our interview participants. Thirteen interviewees said that they, or others, lived in Onalaska because of the presence of a supportive community composed of friends or family and opportunities for socializing.

"I really just have a support system. My immediate family lives where I grew up. My grandma lives two blocks from my house."

When asked what he needs from community, a young adult in their 20s who lives and works in Onalaska replied: "The people I interact with, it's a ton of people...going to community events that I know about because I help put them on...going to the Blue Moon is where you get the best sense of community for me."

Not everyone's social needs are completely met, however, as discussed by two participants, though we don't know what would better meet their needs.

"This area has a strong bar/drinking life, and that's not me."

"My friends that have left, they say there's nothing to do. They're the type that didn't get out to do anything. Versus our friends now who go to every single freaking event."

The sense of community in Onalaska also has visual, physical dimensions. Nine interview participants specifically praised Onalaska's comfortable, well-kept neighborhoods.

"People really invest in their homes and community."

"I feel like, living here, our neighborhood is very well taken care of...I appreciate that there are covenants built in to keep this neighborhood nice...if people leave things in their yard, their door will be knocked on."

"There's no bad spots to be in town."

Sense of Family

Twelve out of seventeen participants referenced the importance of a sense of family and home. They said that they or others stayed in the area because they wanted to be near family, or start a family, and feel rooted. Many described Onalaska as having a family-oriented culture.

"My sister had a baby, and family kept us around."

When asked what keeps people in Onalaska, one person said: "They have roots here."

"I left...for college and I stayed there for a while. I came back because my mother has health issues, so to care for her."

"I think it's a family driven community...a lot of people come back to raise families."

Work-life balance is important to people and at least one employer was praised for supporting that balance.

"Trane has been a really great company...that work-family life balance has been really important to us. I don't want my husband to work all the time...[We have a] stable income which you don't get when you run your own business."

Small Town Sense and Benefits

While Onalaska is very close to La Crosse, sharing a border but with its main residential areas separated by a freeway, fourteen people discussed the importance of the community's small town vibe, six of whom also pointed to the importance of feeling at home, or feeling rooted.

"There's still that small town vibe and I think that's what attracts people about this area"

"After having lived in big cities - it's easy to live here."

"La Crosse is a small city. But lots of people that come from small towns don't even want to live in a small city. They want to be on the outskirts."

"In the cities we spent more time in the car...friends are kind of scattered. In this community, you can get together with friends at the last minute...I think that's led to stronger relationships."

Schools

Schools are one of the most common important infrastructure resources across all of our case study communities. Eight participants mentioned the role of the Onalaska school district in gaining and maintaining young families.

"We moved here with the thought of our kids attending school...We chose after the fact that we are a homeschool family. We wouldn't send our kids to school in La Crosse, that's one thing we did know."

"We're going to have a kid and we don't want to switch school districts."

"At this point, I'm not moving. My son is a sophomore in high school. I have no intention of leaving until he's out of high school."

"Once you get established in a good school, it's hard to leave."

How Onalaska Compares to Similar Communities

Higher Education Institution Influences

Our case studies included three communities influenced by a university or college as well as a nearby larger city. De Pere, the home of St. Norbert College and very close to Green Bay, is a bit larger in population at nearly 24,000. Plover shares a partial border with Stevens Point (the home of UW-Stevens Point) and is somewhat smaller with a population a bit over 12,000. All three of these communities show an interesting mixture of traditional and progressive cultures. In Plover, sustainability and diversity are important ideas. In De Pere, historic preservation is important. And in Onalaska a health-oriented culture is important. But ideas like "family," and "small-town feel" are common across all our case study communities and also central to how interviewees think of these three places. All three of these places also attract their own college graduates as future residents. Plover and Onalaska in particular are interesting because of the graduates who have chosen to live near, but not in, the city of their alma mater. And in De Pere and Plover people seem to express a bit more comfort with more urban ideas like smaller lots.

Water Amenities

Another way to compare our case studies is by grouping those communities with important outdoor water-related amenities. Somerset, a small community in northwest Wisconsin, has the Apple River. West Bend, in east central Wisconsin, has the Milwaukee River. Delavan, in southeast Wisconsin, has Delavan Lake. Omro, north of West Bend, has the Fox River. While none of these are the mighty Mississippi, they all invoke a discussion of water-based recreation, even if it is just for a relaxing walk along its shores. Interestingly, Onalaska seems to stand out in people feeling happy about their access to water recreation resources without so many of the conflicts created by tourism (expressed in both Somerset and Delavan), or a feeling of less access than desired (expressed in Omro and West Bend).

Growth

One issue discussed in every community we studied was growth. In the more rural places such as Somerset and Omro, there were concerns that growth would threaten the small town feel, and people seemed comfortable with trading off a lack of amenities to preserve that small town feel. Those concerns were not as pronounced in places closer to cities like Onalaska, Plover, and De Pere.

So What?

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Our research findings also hold some implications for Onalaska.

Successful Integration of Tourism

One of the most intriguing things about Onalaska is its plentiful natural amenities that draw people from all over, and yet none of our interviewees mentioned frustration or conflicts with tourists. It is worth community leaders having further discussion to find out whether we simply talked to a select group of people or if tourism has become that comfortably integrated into the community. If they have achieved such successful integration, it would be worth figuring out how it was done.

An Older Identity

Another interesting aspect of Onalaska was that a surprising number of people in the interviews expressed skepticism that Onalaska's young adult population was growing. Most of them couldn't help but compare their community to La Crosse in that regard. There is a danger, if Onalaska holds an identity as a community lacking young adults, that it will be less attractive to young adults. Growing the young adult population further may call for making the existing population more visible through more activities and promotions.

A Lack of Identity?

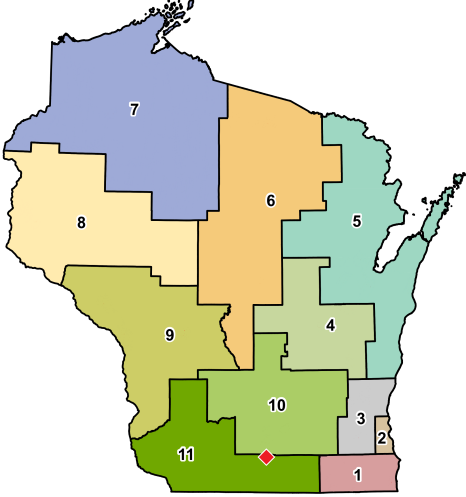
So many people reference La Crosse for local shopping and local food, and sometimes it seems as if Onalaska is a classic "anywhere USA" suburb of chain retailers. It may be worth a community discussion about what kind of identity Onalaska wants to have, especially with its well-regarded schools and outdoor amenities. Can Onalaska develop its own Main Street in ways that might attract young adults the way that La Crosse seems able to?

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Brooklyn

by Sheamus Johnson

"Brooklyn itself is pretty special, and I think the people that live here are pretty special."

Basic	
	Municipality
	Village of Brooklyn
	County
	Dane/Green
	Year Incorporated
	1905
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	1,401 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	10
Young Adult Gaining Measure	59% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	33% (WI Median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	98.9% (White, non-Hispanic and Hispanic) 5.9% (White, Hispanic) 2% African American 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native 0.6% Asian 1.1% Other 1.1% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$76,471 (2015)
Median Income	\$78,506 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2012	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2016) \$1.5 million	
Notes		Brooklyn is served by the Oregon School District	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Brooklyn Elementary School	K-4	Public
Middle	Rome Corners Intermediate School	5-6	Public
	Oregon Middle School	7-8	Public
High	Oregon High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Brooklyn

Out of the twelve case study municipalities, we chose Brooklyn as our first. Collaboration characterized our approach to data collection. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. **Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:**

We reached out to UW-Extension in Dane County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. **Connect to Brooklyn Leaders to Create Core Group:**

Mindy Habecker of UW-Extension recommended reaching out to business and school leaders, who agreed to form a core group.

3. **Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:**

We met with the core group to address the following three points:

- How is this project relevant to Brooklyn, and your role in Brooklyn?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

4. **Conduct Interviews:**

We administered the following interview guide to fifteen interviewees who we reached through core group members' recommendations.

5. **Present and Revise Results:**

We analyzed and summarized the results of our interviews, and presented them to core group, and revised them based on their comments and other information.

Brooklyn Interview Guide

Demographic

1. How long have you lived here?
2. Do members of your extended family live in this community or in a nearby community?

Tell me about people in your community.

3. What would you say to a young adult (20-39) thinking of moving here?
4. Why do people move here?
5. Why do people stay here?

Tell me about young adults in your community.

6. What strategies or factors that attract young adults to where you live are you aware of?

Tell me about the quality of life in your community.

7. How would you want your town to grow? What isn't here that would keep you here?
8. How would you want it to stay the same?

Tell me about your experience in the community

9. What does community mean to you? What does community look like here?

Tell me about what other places can learn from where you live.

10. What can other communities learn from your community? What stories does your town have to share?

Results for Brooklyn

We interviewed fifteen people in Brooklyn. The demographic data that we have about our interviewees are incomplete, as some information was collected through focus groups where demographic data was not collected.

- We did not collect age information in Brooklyn but, based on observation, a minority of participants were probably in their 20s, a majority were in their 30s, and a couple of people may have been in their 40s.
- Eight participants lived in Brooklyn. One of those had lived there a bit over 40 years—their whole life. Two others lived there between 11 and 21 years. The others were not specific. The remaining seven participants worked in Brooklyn, and some had quite close relationships with the community through the school and Brooklyn churches.
- Four people had extended family in Brooklyn, and two people had extended family nearby. Four people said their extended family lived outside the area. The others did not indicate whether they had extended family in the village or area.

Overall, our fifteen interviewees repeatedly cited a number of factors that were attracting young adults and keeping them in the community.

Strong, Tight-Knit School District

Participants consistently named the recently remodeled Brooklyn elementary school and school district as a factor in maintaining a growing young adult population. Nearly every participant, whether they had children in the school or not, mentioned the school as a huge attraction to young adults with children. Twelve participants mentioned the school in this way.

"People are in Brooklyn for the school district."

"The school is great, huge selling point for Brooklyn."

"...everyone works as a group, especially the school. The minute I walked through the door, everyone was open arms, its always open discussion. My daughter was in kindergarten, the 3rd and 4th grade teachers knew who she was."

This positive perception of the school as an attractor for young adults, or part of the reason they stay, is tempered by an outlook that the school is the primary asset for the community. As one person noted:

"I don't know if the village has a lot going on outside of the school, my perception is no."

Relative Proximity to Urban Centers

The location of Brooklyn is also a significant factor in attracting young adults and maintaining their residency. Situated less than a half hour from Madison, and roughly a half hour from Janesville, Brooklyn is close enough to bigger cities to hold down a professional job in the city without an overbearing commute. Additionally, proximity to an urban area allows for access to urban entertainment and shopping choices. But the distance from the cities allows people to feel like they are in an intimate, trusting community rather than the stereotypical suburb. Brooklyn is an ideal location for a home outside the hustle and bustle of the city, while still being close enough to it. Overall, eleven people noted Brooklyn's proximity to other cities or towns. Participants offered the following perspectives on the value of Brooklyn's location:

"Another asset to Brooklyn [is] it's centrally located to Janesville, Monroe, Madison, equidistant from all directions."

"It's a convenient location. You can easily commute from Madison to Janesville."

"It's a nice, peaceful place, with a close commute."

Affordability: Housing and County Services

Other aspects of living in Brooklyn allow residents to enjoy this proximity/distance in relation to the city. Interview participants emphasized the importance of Brooklyn's relatively affordable housing compared to larger urban centers. Six participants mentioned housing affordability. Additionally, Brooklyn is relatively unique in that the village is split almost evenly across Dane and Green Counties, and borders Rock County, allowing people to also choose a residence taking into account which county property taxes to pay, and thus, which county services to receive.

"...if you were selling Brooklyn, you've got lots of good points. One: The location of Brooklyn is ideal, you can commute to Madison in less than 30 minutes, you can commute to Janesville. Two: The housing affordability is a big deal for some families that are younger. Buying a house in Oregon vs. Brooklyn can save you thousands for the exact same house, [and] obviously the school."

"The fact that you can buy a house in Brooklyn and afford the taxes while being close to Madison, you can come home to things quieter here."

"The school system attracts younger families, but compared to Fitchburg and Oregon, it's the same school district. The difference is that it's more affordable in Brooklyn."

"One family I know wanted Dane county for 4-H to show animals for the fair, it wasn't the sole reason for their choice, but a part of it. It meant that they had to pick a range for their housing and taxes."

Small Town Sense of Belonging

Brooklyn's distance from the larger urban centers in the area allows for a "small town feel close to the city," as one participant put it. Seven interview participants cited the small town feel as something that they would like to stay the same in Brooklyn. They mentioned that they felt connected to their neighbors, knowing them and watching out for one another. This sense of connectedness and small town feel has likely fostered the sense of safety and community that was widely reported among participants.

"...you can always feel welcome. Neighbors provide resources, because everybody knows everybody. If you're not home, they'll watch out for you. It's a close knit community. It's a comfort to know, if you need them, your neighbors are there."

"I would definitely like to keep the hometown feel. I like the atmosphere of the country feel, there's something special about it. Not too huge."

"Nowhere else can I see myself raising kids"

Some interview participants also expressed concerns about the sustainability of that small town culture. With the rise in the number of commuters comes the threat of less connectedness among residents

"As far as the village goes, it's a sleeping village..."

"It's a quieter bedroom community."

"B's population has grown pretty large, there still isn't a new connection of new families that the fire and EMS are all volunteer. You'll see signs that say volunteers needed. How do we get families to embrace living here? We are asking for some civic responsibility for giving you a safe place and are happy to live at."

Amenities in Brooklyn

With Brooklyn's proximity/distance in relation to the city, and especially its small size, comes a lack of amenities. So while the elementary school, less expensive housing, and sense of community were strong attracters for young adults, the lack of local amenities that accompanied those strengths was a topic of discussion among our interviewees.

Perhaps the biggest need cited among participants was for new businesses in Brooklyn. More specifically, participants mentioned a restaurant or café, and a grocery store or pharmacy as the most needed businesses. Many said they want something they can grab a quick lunch at--perhaps a drive-thru--coffee, and a place to bring the family out for dinner.

"The community could use a health facility where people can exercise, be together outside, or cafes inside, a place for people to connect."

"It'd be good to have a grocery store." Others: "There could be a grocery store."

"Brooklyn could have a general restaurant. There should be something open in the morning – coffee, lunch." They later added, "A restaurant should be inexpensive, and a place to take the kids to."

And while a sense of community and "knowing your neighbors" were frequently mentioned as positive experiences of Brooklyn, participants mentioned a need for increased frequency in children's

and general community events/gatherings. Some suggestions were: a park or playground for kids, a splash pad (or pool), a library, and expanded recreation committee events.

"Some kind of draw like a big playground, or a great park with great equipment. A splash pad, something with water. There's not much for kids to do here in the summer."

"I would say a library would be nice. I don't want to pay for my daughter to go to daycare for an hour or two a day. A library where they could go... I think it would be a draw for parents. The library could have after school activities."

Some of these desires may be coupled with the perceptions of some interviewees that the country roads required to get to even basic amenities had a dangerous number of accidents. More local amenities would make driving, especially night-time driving, less necessary.

But our interviewees also understood how difficult it is to keep a business going in Brooklyn due to its location off the beaten path, residents' cost-consciousness, and the ease with which commuters could meet their needs on their way to or from work.

"You see a restaurant and think, ok three months... We had a little bakery. The prices started rising really fast. In a small community, you don't want to pay \$2.75 for a scone. You would in Madison, but here more like a \$1.50. Yup, at one time it was 75 cents for a cookie, then it became \$2. At that point, I'll bake some."

"People come here to sleep and leave to go to work. Once they go home, they don't want to come back out. They'll stop on their way home."

"Brooklyn is located where you've got 104 and 92 [highways]. You are just far enough away from [highway] 14 where all the cars are... There isn't enough stop-in business."

How Brooklyn Compares to Other Municipalities: Evansville

Once we finished interviews and analysis, our team completed a case study of nearby Evansville, which is either about 3.5 times larger than Brooklyn, or about 3600 residents larger, depending on your perspective. The study revealed common themes of attraction and some points of contrast between Brooklyn and Evansville.

Schools

In both locations, participants highly ranked schools as a motivating factor for why they moved there, or what they found attractive about the community. Some Brooklyn interview participants saw families moving to Oregon once their kids graduated from the Brooklyn elementary school. This phenomena was not mentioned in Evansville, which offers public education through the end of high school.

Proximity to Urban Centers

Virtually all participants in both places referenced the proximity to both Madison and Janesville. Evansville participants noted that "commuters" who live in Evansville often have jobs in Madison that pay competitive salaries in terms of Madison jobs. These commuters then bring in competitive salaries to Brooklyn and Evansville, where the cost of living is cheaper than in Madison.

Similar to Brooklyn, over half of Evansville participants cited their proximity to cities as limiting access to entertainment. But others said their distance from the city catalyzed community and activities in Evansville, since people had to "make their own fun." At least one Evansville participant cheered the

lack of bigger businesses. They'd rather commute to a Shopko than have its presence disrupt Evansville's "small town feel."

Housing Costs

In both communities interviewees emphasized how housing affordability affected their location decisions. People who either could not or did not desire to stretch their finances to fit Madison's housing costs found Evansville and Brooklyn desirable locations with a relatively easy commute.

Sense of Belonging

Participants in both Brooklyn and Evansville cited the "small town feel" and neighborliness as positive qualities thought to attract and/or maintain a young adult population. Residents also indicated overall feelings of safety in both locations.

Evansville participants described their community as "purposeful" – indicating not just familiarity, but a common sense of direction. Participants noted how groups of people pop up to fix something that is wrong, like the dredging and recontouring of their Lake Leota, which they saw as a success. Many Evansville participants marked the schools as an opportunity for involvement and belonging, like in Brooklyn.

New Residents and Old

Evansville highlighted the differences between their commuter population and long-time resident population a bit more starkly than Brooklyn participants. Evansville participants drew a distinction between the "commuters" and the "old guard" from both sides of that divide. Some cited a "tipping point" a decade away – where Evansville will be home to more new families than the old guard. One Evansville participant that grew up in the area feared this eventuality, while another voiced that they were glad to see more people that they don't know in Evansville. Other participants did not notice a change in the feel or life of Evansville at all. Brooklyn, perhaps because of its smaller size, does not seem to have that "tipping point" on its near-term horizon.

Business Development

Interestingly, Evansville participants also brought up a splash pad as something they would like to see in the growth of their community, much like residents in Brooklyn. There was also a general feeling that there was a need for growth in the form of restaurants (a place for families specifically cited in both municipalities) or other small businesses, but that residents in both locations wanted the growth to preserve the small-town feel. Evansville, being larger, already has some of the basics, and interviewee's desires were not as far ranging as for the Brooklyn interviewees.

How Brooklyn Compared to Other Case Study Municipalities

When we compare Brooklyn to our other case studies we see a number of important similarities in what influences young adult's locational decisions. These similarities occur regardless of region of the state or size. Schools stand out as an important attracter. So does appropriately affordable housing. And that means that housing needs to be perceived as affordable by the young adults looking for housing in the area. Young adults are more willing to pay higher prices in some areas than others. In Brooklyn, for example, as a couple of interviewees mentioned, young adults just starting a family are attracted by the housing costs that are lower than they are in Oregon. But as the children get older, and the parents' income increases, they may then move to Oregon to be closer to the middle school and high school.

One potentially unique housing characteristic of Brooklyn that differed from nearly all of our case studies was that one person in Brooklyn thought there should be larger lots for housing. In nearly all

of our other case study communities, one of the housing characteristics seen as attracting young adults were in fact large lots.

Proximity to cities was an important variable for every community we studied. Many young adults in all of these places wanted both the bright lights and excitement of the city, and the quiet felt safety of country life. Brooklyn fits right in with that dual lifestyle.

In contrast to most of our other case study communities, no one mentioned outdoor amenities being available in Brooklyn and only one person mentioned desiring such amenities. That is quite unusual as such activities seemed very important for young adults in other places.

So What?

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Our research findings also hold some implications for Brooklyn.

Why Young Adults Go to Brooklyn

Brooklyn may have the clearest combination of factors influencing young adults' location decisions as expressed by one interview participant and confirmed by others: "I think people are moving here because of taxes and housing prices. They stay because they have kids and the school." What is important about this is that Brooklyn didn't set out to attract young adults. It happened because of a combination of characteristics in Brooklyn that happened in an unplanned way. Now that we are getting a much better sense of what attracts young adults to a place and keeps them there, Brooklyn and other communities can more consciously make decisions about attracting and keeping young adults.

A Waypoint Village?

There are two aspects of Brooklyn, however, that the community should consider further. First, three of our interviewees noted that Brooklyn may be a temporary stop for young adults.

"Families love the education program, but after the kids get older, I do see the chance where families are ready to make that second move, they move to Oregon, their financials maybe have changed, they're not driving kids around to activities..."

There may not be anything wrong with this, and there may not be anything the community can or should do about it. But, to the extent it is a reality, Brooklyn can both welcome those new young families and can consider saying goodbye with the same welcoming style. A couple of our interviewees told stories of people returning to the community at some point because of the happy childhood memories they accumulated in Brooklyn.

Local Amenities

A second aspect of Brooklyn, which the community may also not be able to do anything about, is the desire for some basic amenities in the community. Brooklyn, because it is off the beaten path, will have to work harder to promote local businesses not just locally, but regionally, if they want those businesses to succeed. People in small towns will drive places, and there are plenty of small towns in

the area whose residents may drive to Brooklyn for something that is really special and that they know about.

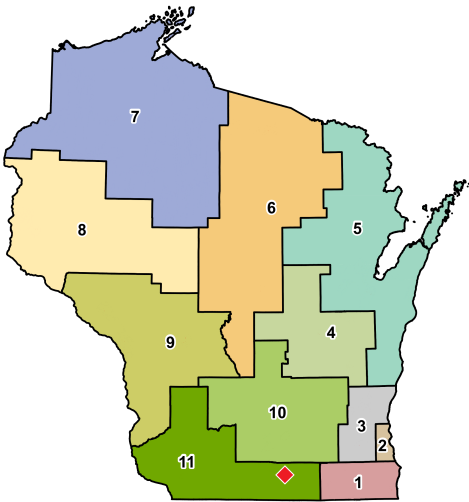
We also remain intrigued that outdoor activities really didn't come up in our interviews. Parks, trails, sports leagues, and such things may be a relatively cost-effective way to further enhance Brooklyn's attractiveness to young adults. They may also be a way to engage new commuter residents. But the community should have a discussion to make sure such outdoor amenities will be as desirable to young adults in Brooklyn as they are in other places.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

Case Study: Evansville

by Elisa Avila and Amanda Hoffman

"It's the perfect location for young folks raising a family."

Basic	
	Municipality City of Evansville
	County Rock
	Year Incorporated 1867(?)
Population and Growth	
Population (2014 if available, otherwise 2010, indicate)	5,012 (2010)
WI Workforce Development Region	11
Young Adult Gaining Measure	40% (WI median is -22%)
Young Adult Maintaining Measure	30% (WI Median is 24%)
Social/Demographic Data	
Racial stats, 2010 Census	93.3% White (non-Hispanic) 2.7% White (Hispanic) 0.8% African American 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native 0.7% Asian 0.5% Other 1.5% Two or More Races
Mean Income	\$65,650 (2015)
Median Income	\$57,273 (2015)

Planning/Other			
Year of Latest Comprehensive Development Plan		2015	
Schools			
Year and Amount of Last Referendum Passed		(2014) \$4,566,297	
Notes		Evansville is served by the Evansville Community School District	
Type	Name	Grades Served	Private/Public
Elementary	Levi Leonard Elementary School	K-2	Public
	Theodore Robinson Intermediate School	3-5	Public
Middle	J.C. McKenna Middle School	6-8	Public
High	Evansville High School	9-12	Public

Conducting the Case Study in Evansville

Out of the fifteen case study municipalities, we chose Evansville as our second. Collaboration continued to characterize our approach to data collection. The following points briefly review how we developed our interview guide and interview contacts:

1. Connect to University of Wisconsin-Extension:

In September of 2016, we reached out to UW-Extension in Rock County, requesting recommendations for community leaders who might be interested in our project.

2. Connect to Evansville Leaders:

Sheila De Forest responded, and suggested government, nonprofit, and business leaders who agreed to join the core group. Each agreed to provide feedback on our interview guide and contact list.

3. Develop Interview Guide and Contact List:

In October, we met with the core group members to go over the following questions:

- How is this project relevant to Evansville, and your role in Evansville?
- What questions should we include in our interviews?
- Who should we invite to interviews?

4. Conduct Interviews:

We conducted twenty-seven interviews in October and November of 2016. Sixteen people participated in group interviews and eleven had individual interviews.

5. Present and Revise Results:

We met with the core group, with the addition of Nick Baker of UW-Extension in Rock County, in November, after we conducted the interviews. We provided a preliminary analysis of our findings, and then revised the report based on their feedback.

Evansville Interview Guide

Demographic

1. How long have you lived here?
2. Do members of your extended family live in this community or in a nearby community?
3. What brought you here? Why did you move to Evansville?

Tell me about your experience in the community.

4. What does community mean to you?
5. What would you say to a young adult, ages 20-39, thinking of moving here?
6. Why do people move here?
7. Why do people stay here?

Tell me about the quality of life in your community.

8. What is entertainment like around here? What do you do for fun?
9. How would you want your town to grow?
10. Who would not feel comfortable here?

Tell me about growth in your community.

11. How does population growth affect you, and how does it affect your community?

Tell me about your experience in the community.

12. Who contributes to your community?

Results for Evansville

While the identities of the 27 interview participants remain confidential, a few key characteristics may prove useful to readers in their analysis of these findings.

- Participants ranged in age from the mid-20s to retirement age in appearance, though we did not collect exact age information.
- Four participants had lived in the community for fewer than five years, three for 5-9 years, fourteen from 10-19 years, one from 20-29 years, three from 40-49 years, and one for more than 50 years. One person responded that they had lived in Evansville "all my life." Five people grew up in Evansville, one of whom moved away and returned.
- Nine people had extended family in Evansville, and five others had extended family within an hour.

Housing Costs and Property Taxes are Enticing

Most of the people we spoke with did not grow up in Evansville, but had moved there at some point in their lives. In some cases that was because of family in the area or a new job. But, to the extent people could choose from a variety of communities in the region, part of what made Evansville attractive was cost of living. Twelve people specifically mentioned the affordability of housing in Evansville. One person described the housing as "modest" and attractive to new home buyers for that reason, a sentiment that others agreed with, telling stories about how they knew people who got a smaller lot and a smaller house in Madison for much more money. Another called the local housing market "ideal." One person also believed that Evansville has good landlords for those wanting to rent.

Proximity to Cities

Another aspect that twelve people valued about Evansville was the accessibility to other places such as Janesville or Madison, particularly for work, shopping and entertainment. One interviewee believed that 60-70% of people in Evansville commuted to work. When asked why people move to Evansville one person said, "Close proximity to Madison is a large part of it."

But the attractiveness of Evansville to young adults is also about its distance from Madison. For another interviewee, Evansville is "removed from work... It's a place to call home." The amount of *felt* distance from the cities was affirmed by another interview participant. It is also not just Evansville's proximity/distance in relation to Madison. One couple mentioned that Evansville is a midway point between their two jobs.

The attractiveness of Evansville to commuters, however, also presents some challenges for the community. A number of our interviewees had long lists of retail and entertainment options they desired in Evansville, but some of them also said things like "It's so easy to run to Janesville or Madison." So many commuters conveniently meet their needs on the way to or from work. Some also voiced a tension between "old guard" and "new guard." And one person expressed a concern that many of the commuters were highly educated white collar professionals, but didn't offer their education and skills to benefit the community.

Schools

The school district was mentioned as a draw and benefit of living in Evansville. Sixteen people had positive things to say about the schools and many believed the school system's reputation was a major draw for young adults. People often mentioned the school district not only as an important resource for children and students, but also as part of the community:

"The school system here is great, [you] feel connected, everyone attends all the events. They're community events, every parent attends."

Another interviewee described the high school's annual homecoming parade as a major community event. Two others described the schools as just the right size, "not too big and not too small," though they wished the pool referendum would have passed. Two other people expressed concern about the school district being "overwhelmed" because of Evansville's popularity.

Sense of Community

While people in most of our other case study communities mentioned the sense of community they felt, our Evansville interviewees may have expressed that sentiment the most strongly. Evansville is a place that feels safe and comfortable, especially for families. It is a place where "people greet you from the porch." Even in a context of an expanding community, people still feel not just connected, but mutually supported. Interview participants told stories of rallying around one resident paralyzed in an auto crash, and supporting the owner of a restaurant/bar damaged by fire. Some of the other things they said include:

"...I love it here. It's really friendly, and not everyone is into the small town thing, but it's homey. I feel safe here. I walk around a lot at night by myself."

"You can be alone or you can find people who will treat you like family"

"It's dangerous for us to run errands because anything can become a social opportunity."

There were some interview participants who were concerned that not everyone might feel the same sense of community in Evansville. Though families with kids might find everything they need, some respondents indicated that there may be fewer amenities and social opportunities for those who were single or did not have children. One interviewee noted that "For sure single people, I have single

friends who are like, 'no way'. There's not many apartments here so it's not [good for singles]."Additionally, two people worried that people of diverse races might not feel comfortable in Evansville, though both attributed that to Evansville being almost completely white rather than any overt racism in the community. One interviewee, for example, said "I don't see a lot of ethnic or racial diversity here. I think we're very welcoming here, but if you are the first of any group, it feels a little strange." And, indeed many interviewees mentioned a desire for more diversity in the community. Two interview participants did believe that people identifying as gay or lesbian are accepted in the community.

Additionally, when asked what kind of people would not be comfortable in Evansville, two people mentioned that people who are introverted wouldn't like it there. But one of the main responses, brought up by six interviewees, referred to people looking for an urban lifestyle:

"My friends in Madison like the anonymity of not knowing everyone in the grocery store."

"People who want a Starbucks every 50 feet [would not feel comfortable]."

"You have to be OK with being bored."

Recreation and Entertainment

People talked about the recreation and entertainment opportunities Evansville offered and lacked. Nine people mentioned the importance of Evansville's parks for both individual leisure activities like walking and biking and group activities like disc golf. Smaller groups mentioned strolling downtown (3 people, who also appreciated the renovations of downtown), biking in town or on trails (3 people), and festivals like the annual July 4 festival (4 people) which one person described as "Ginormous, it involves everyone." Four people also mentioned the bowling alley, some with hopes that new ownership and hours would make it more of an attraction.

A few people also mentioned attractions of the past, such as the now closed roller rink, or the restaurant that burned down, in discussing a lack of things to do in town, particularly evening activities. Three people wished there were a theater in town, and others mentioned that was one of the things they left town for. Most desired was some kind of nice restaurant, which seven people specifically mentioned. Five people also desired a pool, though two others noted that the community actually did have a pool. And one person was sensitive to the need for teen activities:

"I think that it would help if we have more activities for those younger teens."

Growth and Change in Evansville

The people we interviewed in general seemed to want a little more to do locally. Along with noting the desire for restaurants and a theater discussed earlier, there was a general desire for various kinds of retail options in the community. A few specific ideas that emerged from people include a pharmacy, convenience store, and kids clothing store. Apparently the desire for a Kwik Trip, noted by three people, is widespread:

"Everyone wants a Kwik Trip. I only go if I need something right away. It's a back-up for sure."

Two people also desired some more local industry to hopefully bolster the tax base and create more better paying local employment.

There is not a clear consensus on whether, and how much, Evansville should grow. One person described how people who grew up here say "it was nice when it was small," while others say "it's still

small!" There is some sense, expressed by six people, that village services, such as emergency medical services and police, are at or past their limit and that the school class sizes are too large. Two people worried that Evansville is approaching a "tipping point" where it is moving from being a small town to something larger with less sense of community. Two others cited nearby Oregon, with a 2010 population of 9,231 people, as having passed that tipping point.

To the extent that people wanted growth, it seemed the focus was more on growth of services and businesses than population. In responding to a question about desired growth one person said "I don't think it does [want to grow]." Though another person said they wanted growth to occur "Responsibly- commercial, retail, and residential all occurring at an even keel." And three people wanted any growth to be carefully planned.

How practical such growth is remains uncertain. Some interviewees expressed concerns that, due to their perception of Evansville as a "bedroom" or "commuter" community, there aren't enough people in town during the day to support a business staying open for a better part of the working day. There's not enough "stop-in business." The concern is that with so much of the working population employed out of town, the lack of regular customers limited opportunities for new businesses.

Evansville Compared with Other Municipalities

Brooklyn

Our research team also conducted a case study on Brooklyn, a smaller community just north of Evansville, prior to our Evansville study. We found some important similarities and differences. In both communities, proximity to Madison and Janesville was important for employment, entertainment, and shopping. People in both places also valued their distance from cities so that they could maintain a small-town culture. That distance also made for a more affordable cost of living for the people we interviewed. People in both communities also saw the schools as important community resources not just for the students, but for families. Restaurants and pools were desired and valued in both communities.

There were also some differences between the two communities. You could say either that Evansville is more than three times the size of Brooklyn, or that it has about 3,600 more people. Regardless, size does make a difference. Brooklyn has no high school, and some people move from the community when their children reach high school age and their incomes increase enough to afford housing closer to Madison. In this way, Evansville's high school is an important community resource. And the lack of commerce cited by interviewees in Evansville is even more pronounced in Brooklyn because of its even smaller population base.

Delavan

Another community we can compare Evansville to is Delavan, about a half hour to the southeast. While Delavan is larger, at 8,463 residents, it is similar in its distance from larger cities and the presence of important outdoor amenities. Evansville interviewee's comparisons to Oregon may also apply to Delavan. People in Delavan seemed a bit less concerned with the potential drawbacks of growth, which may mean that they've already reached a population size related to that "tipping point." At the same time, Delavan was not so large that people felt all their shopping and entertainment needs were satisfied. Delavan was also one of the most diverse communities we studied, and provides an interesting window into what the future might hold if Evansville's residents who desire greater diversity achieve that goal. Our Delavan interviewees both appreciated the diversity in their midst and were still working on ways to make the most of that diversity.

The other interesting contrast between Evansville and Delavan is that, while both have well-developed outdoor spaces, those spaces seem to be much more valued in Evansville. Evansville

parks are valued very highly, and appear to be one of the community's most important attractions.

So What? Implications for Evansville

Some of the results from our study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of a healthy, thriving community. While you may not be surprised to hear that a strong school system and proximity to another urban area for shopping and/or jobs are important to community members, it is important to remember that there are many communities that are struggling to retain their young adults due to a lack of these community amenities and attributes. We hope that the results of this case study affirm the good work being done in your own community while aiding others who will greatly value the observations and results gathered in your community.

Our research findings also hold some implications for Evansville.

Balance of Small Town Life and Urban Amenities

The balance between small town life and access to amenities is difficult to manage. Many people referred to their travel to nearby cities for amenities such as shopping and entertainment. People didn't describe these trips as particularly burdensome, just as part of life. The convenience and drivability to cities like Janesville and Madison for work, entertainment, and shopping is clearly important to many people. But most important to them is being able to live in Evansville instead of those larger places. They chose the qualities of the small-town community over some of the big city amenities because they get the benefits of small towns with larger city amenities an easy drive away. However, there was also a clear desire for some more basic conveniences: access to small conveniences that are not worth the trip to Janesville or Madison, but would be valuable in increasing the quality of life. And there was a strong desire for more evening entertainment—particularly restaurants and perhaps a theater. How practical those wishes might be without a larger population base, however, is difficult to determine.

The conflict that Evansville may face in the future is how to balance maintaining the small town feel with enough of the amenities that people enjoy and cite as reasons for staying or moving to the community. For example, people value the school district for the educational value but also for the social aspect. Maintaining the quality of the schools will be important in the future because it is a draw for new residents and also helps maintain the quality of life for current residents. Already, there are some residents who feel a concern about class size in the schools.

Family Life and Single Life

Another facet of life in Evansville is that it is very family friendly and family oriented. This is a great strength in Evansville as new families can easily find the resources and networks that would fit them best. The reality may be, however, that such a culture may leave out younger single people could have a more difficult time becoming integrated into the community. There may be no way around that. Evansville may be a community that young adults return to once they have begun a family, rather than a place they stay in during the transition from youth to young adulthood.

Old and New Residents

Another kind of balance issue facing Evansville is potential differences between life-long residents and newcomers, part of which also may involve class differences. To the extent that newer residents who commute identify more with the professional class, and with amenities such as arts and fine dining (mentioned by a few of our interviewees) compared to other residents who are more comfortable with informal DIY—do it yourself—community activities and fewer amenities overall, there will be tensions over community development in Evansville. Perhaps the most important wisdom about that tension comes from our interviewees who worry about Evansville reaching a tipping point and emphasize that growth needs to be careful and planned.

Gaining and Maintaining Young People in Wisconsin Communities

So What?

As we have noted in the case studies some, or even most, of the results from this study may not be surprising to you. Many of the themes brought up by participants are indicative of any healthy, thriving community.

So the question you may be asking is "so what"? If all we've done is discovered the obvious, why should anyone care? It's as obvious as going outside in the winter without a coat. Totally obvious and yet you all know people who ignore that obvious knowledge and suffer as a consequence. Just like we all know communities that don't take care of their schools and teachers, even though high quality schools is one of the "obvious" findings of this research. In fact, when we approached community leaders in our case study communities, many expressed surprise that they had ended up on the "gaining and maintaining" list. They hadn't even thought about trying to attract or keep young adults and many had simply concluded from the statewide statistics and the county-based studies that they were losing young adults.

So these "obvious" findings are only obvious in retrospect. Few people had even thought to ask the question, let alone imagine its possible answers. Thus, it is worth paying attention to these obvious findings. In only 15% of Wisconsin communities is the young adult population both growing, and above the median of 24% of total community population. And remember, the state median for the "growth" of young adults across all of Wisconsin's communities is a *negative* 22 percent.

So let's look for a moment at those "obvious" findings:

Schools are for more than students

Yes, it is crucially important for the schools to have a good reputation. But it is more than that. We heard many stories of parents who felt like both the schools and the classes were small enough that teachers and administrators knew the students and the families, and welcomed them to become part of the school. In many of those communities, schools were not just spaces for teaching but spaces for the community. People went to the plays, the concerts, the sports events. They decorated Main Street for the homecoming parade. They held community movie night at the local school. Even the elementary schools opened their doors for community events. We even heard stories like the one about the school librarian happy to serve the needs of home schooling parents.

The importance of the right kind of housing

It's easy to say that a community needs housing that will attract young adults, but what kind of housing is that? From our research it clearly varies from place to place. The youngest single adults may be more interested in rental housing. Families with growing children may want more space. People wanting to live closer to the city (but still far enough away) may be willing to pay more. People living further away may be willing to pay less. What counts as affordable may be different in different places.

We heard a strong theme from many of our interviewees that they wanted space—they moved to rural areas for large houses on large multi-acre lots. But this was not a universal theme. People in larger less rural places, like West Bend, did not give voice to the space theme with nearly as much emphasis. In more political progressive communities like Plover we also did not hear that theme with as much intensity. And there were the unique places like De Pere where historic preservation figured

into the picture. In Brooklyn, young families with the least income could afford, and welcomed, the smaller homes on the smaller lots.

Getting housing right is not easy. Hayward lacked affordable rental housing. Somerset believed they had too much rental housing. De Pere couldn't keep their housing appreciation under control (yes, constantly and rapidly rising housing value is not an unquestionably good thing). People were questioning Plover's large lots, and Somerset's smaller ones. Brooklyn seems to have temporarily found a good balance, but for how long we don't know.

Amenities, inside and out

So many people in so many of our case study communities mentioned the importance of outdoor activities for young adults. And, interestingly, the emphasis was often on the silent sports—hiking, biking, skiing—rather than motorized recreation. It makes a certain amount of sense that people attracted to the quiet small town life away from the noise and stimulation of the city would want their local outdoor activities to be quiet also. It is also important to note that, for many of these young adults, being outdoors is an all-seasons activity. But the importance of silent sports is not universal. In Hayward, motorized sports were also popular among young adults.

Inside, it is interesting how many people noted the importance of sit-down coffee shops for young adults. And it is worth mentioning that they didn't bring up the topic of coffee shops for the purpose of setting up their laptops and teleworking. They mostly mentioned them as gathering spots. One of the challenges in small towns is finding public gathering places where you feel like you can hang out without having to spend a lot of money or drink alcohol. Coffee shops offer that amenity. Also important for amenities are families to gather—pools, movie theaters, family-style restaurants, and other places to take the kids were important to the people we interviewed.

The Less Unsurprising Findings

Programs?

One of the surprising findings from this research is how few people mentioned anything about programs or organizations geared toward attracting and retaining young adults in a community. Only in Plover, where a number of the interviewees were recruited through a group dedicated to growing the area's young adult population, did such a group get more than an occasional mention. We asked everyone in Brooklyn whether they knew of any programs to attract and keep young adults, and no one could think of any. Now there may have been networks of young adults we missed, so we can't definitively say that such groups are useless, but they certainly don't stand out in the mix of causes that attract young adults to a community. And that should give us pause.

The Importance of Cities for Rural Life

The rural places most successful at gaining and maintaining young adult populations were those with more convenient access to cities. For sure, the people we interviewed saw cities as violent, dangerous, alienated, expensive, over-stimulating places. But many young adults still don't want to be too far away from them. Whether it is for the unlimited shopping, the diverse and high-quality cuisine, the professional services, the diverse entertainment, or the best-fit career ladder job, young adults want access to cities. Just go back to the map in the Stage 1 section of this report to see how important cities are to rural places. This goes hand-in-hand with another less unsurprising finding that jobs did not draw people to particular small communities. Jobs drew people to a region, and then they chose their home amongst the communities in that region. For so many, the jobs they want are in the larger city down the road. And we often heard an antipathy to big box chain stores, especially in smaller communities—another amenity people wanted, but wanted to be in the larger city they could drive to.

Of course, that does create a set of dilemmas. One dilemma is that, if we don't care for our urban areas, we may not be able to care for our rural areas. Recall that Milwaukee County, the most urban place in the state, has only two communities that met our standards for both gaining and maintaining young adult populations. The decline of Milwaukee may have affected its closest suburbs. Or take Duluth-Superior. Duluth has done much better than Superior at clawing back from deindustrialization, but not to the point where they have attracted a regional young adult population on at least the Wisconsin side of that metropolitan area. Could a serious influx of resources into Duluth-Superior help to create a regional young adult draw? And two of our case study communities—Plover and Onalaska—have as their urban magnet small cities where there is a worry about the aging housing and other infrastructure. Should those cities become less attractive, it is possible that the small towns around them could also become less attractive.

The other dilemma is that traditional rural life does not include people driving back and forth to cities for work and play. And rural life rejects government bureaucracy. People volunteer to maintain the rural community—whether it is with the iconic volunteer fire department or with the casserole you bring, without being asked, to the sick neighbor. But in the smallest rural communities we studied, the phrase "bedroom community" popped up with more frequency than we expected. People driving back and forth to work long hours on the professional ladder climb in cities have less discretionary time for the voluntary engagement that traditional rural small town life requires. If you are out of town for work every day you can't join the volunteer fire department where you need to be within the fastest possible drive to the fire station. This is the dilemma that Brooklyn is facing. And people in a number of our case study communities lamented the lack of volunteers for important community activities. The question must be raised whether there is an optimal size community—one with enough local professional jobs, and enough local amenities, that no longer depends completely on unpaid expertise to keep itself going.

We also need to recognize that the symbiosis between small towns and cities may be an artifact of cheap oil. Once that runs out, the convenience of driving to the city will rapidly diminish, and the cost will rapidly rise. We have, as a society, been unsuccessful at predicting what lengths we will go to secure oil to maintain the status quo. It is worth pondering, however, just what may happen to this urban-rural relationship if its lynch-pin, cheap oil, were to disappear.

The Desire for Diversity, and Tradition

We were struck by how many of the interviewees in our case study communities expressed an appreciation for diversity. Whether it was an appreciation for racial diversity in Delavan, sexuality and gender identity diversity in Evansville, or a desire for such diversity in other case study communities, the idea is on people's lips. Now, to be sure, people weren't always sure how to communicate across difference, but there seemed a genuine interest among young adults to live in a more diverse rural community. How much do people know about growing young adult diversity? Probably not much, because in nearly all cases they didn't know how to grow their young adult populations either.

This desire for diversity also runs into another desire—for tradition. Our interviewees regularly talked about having a "1950s" (or sometimes "1960s" but they clearly meant early 1960s) or "Mayberry" community culture of traditional values. These were not necessarily the same people as those expressing a desire for diversity, but they at least lived in the same community. One of the challenges for young adults and old will be imagining how to perceive diversity as a process of adding rather than subtracting.

Which Young Adults

One of the ways people think about the loss of youth from rural communities is in thinking about sending youth off to college and then not having them come right back. What we are beginning to learn, we think, is that those youth won't come back for some time. They especially won't come back while they are still single. In a number of our case study communities our interviewees admitted that singles wouldn't be happy in their communities because there wasn't enough to do and there weren't

enough other singles. In many cases there is not appropriately affordable housing in the form of rental apartments. In addition, the word "family" was just too prominent in our interviews. It was young families that were attracted to our case study communities, not young singles.

So young singles may be the most difficult type of young adults to attract. If that is true, it has implications for the kinds of economic opportunities communities want to make available, the kinds of housing they want to make available, the kinds of amenities they want to make available, and the kinds of schools they want to make available.

The University Town Sphere of Influence

Another surprising finding from this research was the influence of universities beyond their host city's borders. We did not expect to find university graduates locating around, rather than in, university towns. You may recall that we took pains to control for the effects of universities in identifying places with growing young adult populations. But we didn't have a way to control for a university's influences on nearby communities.

That happy accident has allowed us to learn something that can benefit non-university towns that are near university cities. We don't know how wide the university graduate effect extends. Plover and Onalaska share borders with their university cities. But we heard stories that Holmen, further up the highway from La Crosse and also on our list of places gaining and maintaining young adults, was also attracting UW-La Crosse college graduates. So, even if you're not a university town, your town may be close enough to attract those young adults. Succeeding in attracting them, however, may require a mix of housing, schools, and amenities.

The Future of the Rural Small Town in Wisconsin, or The Up North Dilemma

The map is clear. Wisconsin's most rural places are the least likely home for young adults. And there are no easy interventions for this condition, especially given Wisconsin's political climate. In a different political climate we could talk about subsidizing schools and housing, growing northwoods cities with urban infrastructure, planning appropriate housing development, and a variety of other measures that would create not just the communities, but the regions that attract and keep young adults. But those discussions will not be on the table for some time.

The question is whether, in the absence of such interventions, Wisconsin's northwoods communities, and its other most rural communities, can develop themselves with a relative absence of young adults. Our society does not have a model for a community without youth other than a retirement community. But in Wisconsin's northwoods we are not talking only about retirees. We are also talking about those whose children have left for college and, in contrast to the fortunate 15% of communities we found in other parts of the state where at least some eventually return, in the northwoods they may only ever return for the occasional visit.

Having said this, we must remember that Wisconsin's most urban place—Milwaukee County—is also in the race for least likely to be called home by young adults.

In addition, we should try to glean some lessons from Hayward, the main success story up north. Among the things we learned across many of our case study communities was how important outdoor amenities are to young adults. Nowhere was that more accentuated than in Hayward. There were enthusiasts for both silent sports and motorized sports, which can be a source of conflict but also a source of one kind of diversity. Both groups, however, require publicly accessible space for their favored activities. Hayward has also achieved fame for a single event—the American Birkebeiner ski race—which has now expanded to a year round schedule of activities. The

Birkebeiner runs from Cable to Hayward, but Cable does not show up in our list of communities that are gaining and maintaining young adults. So more is going on than the race. A number of our other communities also contain lessons for developing outdoor amenities attractive for young adults.

A Caveat

We must remind you to read all of our findings with some caution. We used census data that are now seven years old. The last census data was also collected in the midst of a national economic collapse that influenced the mobility of all age groups across the country. It is possible that things have changed substantially in the intervening years. Our interviewees rarely if at all brought up the economic collapse as an influencer of young adult location decisions, but the crisis period of that collapse was long enough ago that it may not be forefront in people's memories. So it may be that new places are gaining, or losing, young adults in Wisconsin.

What we believe this research most shows is the importance of learning about young adults. It is easy enough for every community in the state to engage the same kinds of conversations as we did, and we are happy to talk with anyone who would like to discuss how to do so. We include a short DIY manual in the appendix that people can use to start the process.

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