



LA CROSSE 2024

Housing Study



LA CROSSE
WISCONSIN

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1

Community Direction

The economy and housing market will experience ups and downs during the life of a housing study. The La Crosse housing study looks at conditions in the midst of an unprecedented time. None of the upheaval of the housing market after the 2020 pandemic changed the need to provide safe, attainable housing for all La Crosse residents. Instead, it further emphasized the need.



Why a Housing Study

A housing study serves several purposes. At a basic level, the housing market impacts the quality of life for residents of the region, people interested in moving to the area, and businesses seeking to recruit (and retain) employees. However, how much housing is built, and the housing people want/need does not always correlate. This is not because builders and owners/renters do not want it to. Instead, other forces often influence decisions.

For La Crosse, the housing market is not in balance. Like many other areas, forces are hindering a timely self-correction, including:

- Building costs
- Wages vs. home and rental costs and maintenance
- Uncertainty in the market for new products
- Ages (housing and people)

In 2024, leaders in La Crosse began a process to determine community housing needs, and how gaps in housing impacts the community. Through community engagement, interviews, community tours, and a market analysis, the process unveiled the market gaps and desires of residents and stakeholders. The following chapters summarize these opportunities and identify potential strategies to help correct the housing market.

The housing study is a resource for many people and organizations in the city, including:

City Staff. Staff are instrumental in developing programs and policies, whether supplementing other housing initiatives or crafting new programs. The housing study provides recommendations and a road map in association with the Comprehensive Plan.

Regional Builders and Developers. Builders and developers can use the study to understand the market and types of development to pursue in La Crosse, giving assurance for market demand and potential programs that can help fill financing gaps.

Local Employers. Employers should recognize the quality of life for their employees. Opportunities for employers to assist in the housing market can help attract and retain employees to live in La Crosse, ultimately giving them shorter commutes and potentially less turnover in positions as employees become invested in the community of La Crosse.

Economic Development Organizations. Similar to local employers, economic development organizations can use the tools in the study to create housing partnerships and market new opportunities for the community.

School District. The school district is a critical partner that is directly affected by housing supply for sustaining enrollments. The district can use the study to assist in approaches with other partners.



The study supplements many other recent efforts in La Crosse such as the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, the 2024 Pathways Home: A Plan to End Homelessness in La Crosse Plan, and the 2020 Climate Action Plan (see page 67).

Study Identified Goals

Overarching Action Applying to All Goals:

Complete a comprehensive review and update of the City's zoning code to evaluate barriers to development

1. Increase the supply of owner and rental units affordable to households making less than the area median income (AMI).
2. Foster greater housing diversity through strategic infill development.
3. Create more housing opportunities attractive to La Crosse residents, especially households with children.
4. Make building procedures and approvals in La Crosse a clear, predictable, and flexible process.
5. Secure and preserve existing housing.
6. Improve tenant and landlord relationships.

The study finds an average annual construction need of about 203-232 units through 2030. This rate is significantly more than what was produced in the previous decade, but necessary if the City wants to attract more workers, school enrollment, and stimulate movement in the housing market.

Developing the Study

The basis of policies and approaches comes from community outreach and a market analysis to help understand the needs of the community. A consultant team worked closely with a local technical committee, which included representatives and advocates from across the area.

A series of listening sessions in February and March 2024 helped better understand what is happening in the La Crosse market, along with a survey of the greater community, target landlords, and employees in the city. Building on the community input, various sources form the demographic and economic analysis. These include:

- The U.S. Decennial Census and American Community Survey
- County and City data on building activity
- Existing studies completed by economic development organizations, counties, and cities
- County GIS data
- Multiple Listing Services (MLS) data

Housing Terminology Used in The Study

There are many terms used to discuss housing needs and describe actions. Below is common terminology used throughout the study to describe certain situations, conditions, or intended actions.

Appraisal. Assesses the current market value and is usually a key requirement when a property is bought, sold, insured, or mortgaged. Comps (comparables) are needed; these are properties in the same area, have similar characteristics, and have an established value (recent sales).

Assisted Housing. In the context of this study, assisted housing is defined and refers to housing that caters to households that want or need additional services. This could include provided meals, cleaning service, shared maintenance, and other similar accommodations. This definition includes “assisted living units.” Often those in assisted housing are older adults that live independently well after retirement.

Attainable Housing. Any housing that is not financially burdensome to a household in a specific income range. Financially burdensome could be housing expenses that exceed 30% of the household income. However, it could also include situations where a household has high daycare costs, student debt, or other costs that limit income to spend on housing. Housing subsidized by Federal programs can be included in this definition.

Contract Rent. For renter-occupied units, the contract rent is the monthly rent agreed upon regardless of any furnishes, utilities, or services that may be included. Data for contract rent excludes units that pay no cash rent (Census.gov).

Cost Burdened. The household spends more than 30% of the HUD Area Median Income on housing.

Empty-Nester. A single person or couple without children living at home. Empty-nesters can include any age range, but most often refer to older adults whose children have moved out and no longer live at home.

Filter Effect. It occurs when higher-income households are “filtered” out of housing units that are well below the price points they can afford. Often it involves “move-up” housing that frees existing, more affordable housing. Today, the moves can be lateral in square footage and have upgrades in locations or amenities with smaller home square footages.

Gap Financing. Refers to short-term loan to meet an immediate financial obligation until sufficient funds to secure the longer-term financial need.

Gross Rent. Gross rent is the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (electricity, gas, water, and sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.) if these are paid by the renter (or paid for the renter by someone else) (Census.gov).



Leverage. Can describe engaged partner organizations (financial, organizational, and human capital) to enable more significant outcome, provide funding, or gain access to additional funds such as grants by pledging local resources.

Market Rate. The price that the broad number of homebuyers or renters are willing to pay for housing. Market rate housing does not have any restrictions on price. Generally, when the demand goes up or supply goes down, the market rate price will increase. Note, the market rate price may also be a price buyers must pay because there are no other options for their situation, putting them housing cost-burdened.

Median Household Income. This includes the income of the householder and all other individuals 15 years and older in the household, whether they are related to the householder or not. The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one-half of the cases falling below the median income and one-half above the median. For households and families, the median income is based on the distribution of the total number of households and families, including those with no income (Census.gov).

Mixed-Use. Mixed-use districts are areas with two or more different uses such as residential, office, retail, and civic in a compact urban form. Typical residential uses in a mixed-use district range from medium density to very high density uses.

Move-Up Housing. The idealized cycle of how people move in the housing market, referring to the process of moving from renting to mid-sized owner-occupancy to larger single-family homes. The “move-up” generally occurs with income increases, assuming adequate housing supply and variety is available, opening more affordable housing options for others. Recent trends indicate that “move-up” housing may not mean more square footage, but may include better finishes and amenities.

Universal Design. The process of creating products that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics. Ideally, the concept extends to neighborhoods.

Workforce Housing. Housing units, both renter- and owner-occupied that are affordable to the community’s workforce households. These households’ annual income is typically 80% to 120% of the Area Median Income.



2

Community Insights

Data, analysis, and community observations cannot alone tell the whole story of housing needs in La Crosse. The housing market analysis builds from the valuable ideas and opinions obtained from the people that live in and experience La Crosse.



Listening Session and Community Survey Insights

Residents, real estate agents, builders, employers, and industry members provide vital input for understanding a community and its housing market. Listening sessions and a community survey in February and March of 2024 provide insight into community members’ perspectives. This chapter provides a broad overview of the community input. Additional comments are spread throughout the housing study and in the Appendix.

Community Survey

The community survey was open in the spring of 2024 and received 1,798 total responses. Of those respondents, 1,427 were residents of La Crosse who 1,027 owned their own homes and 450 were renters.

Demographics

The demographic patterns of respondents helps understand how their perceptions change depending on the situations these households face. A comparison with reported Census data in the next section shows whether respondents are representative of the broader city.

Age of Respondents

Many respondents are in their family forming years or are empty-nesters (Figure 2.1). Proportionally, this is a good representation of those heading households as reported by the Census.

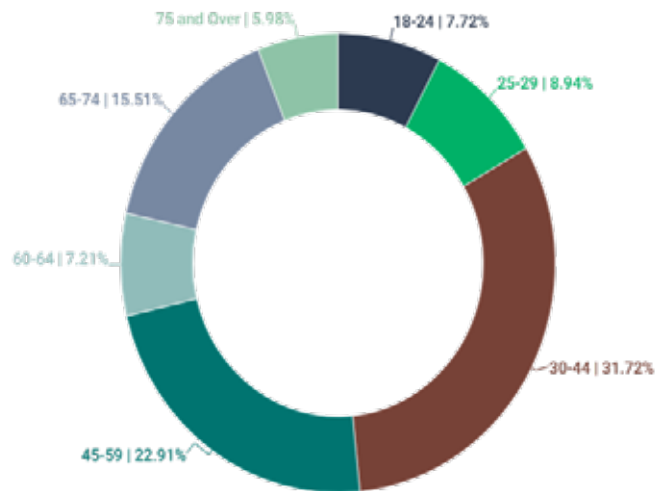
Owner and Renter Occupancy

A higher percentage of respondents own their homes than the city’s overall population – 66.7% of respondents vs. 46.3% reported in the Census (Figure 2.2).

Household Incomes

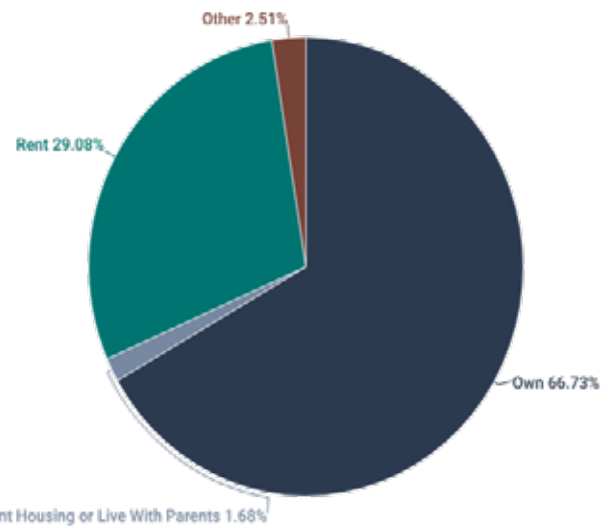
The estimated median household income in La Crosse in 2022 was \$51,836. However, the highest percentage of survey respondents had household incomes over \$100,000 (Figure 2.3). It is easy to assume these households can afford more for housing, and could skew the survey toward higher price points and larger units. Many people may tend to spend less on housing when given an option.

Figure 2.1: Age of Survey Respondents



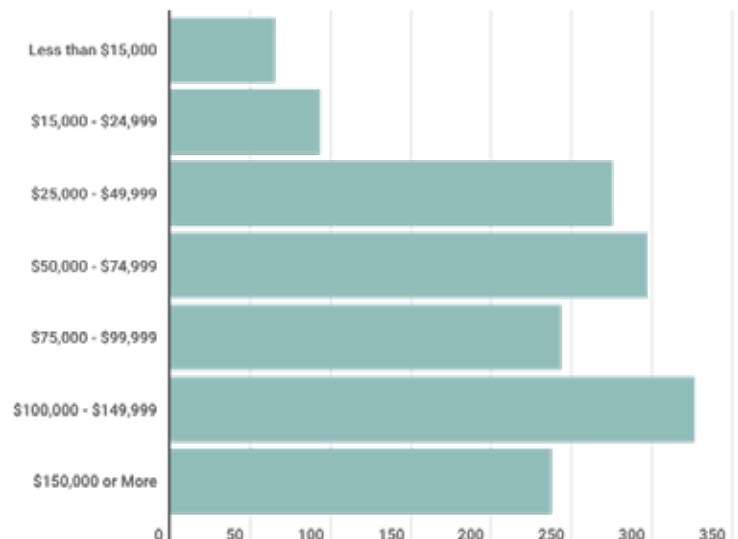
Source: Community Survey, 2024

Figure 2.2: Occupancy Status of Survey Respondents



Source: Community Survey, 2024

Figure 2.3: Household Income of Survey Respondents



Source: Community Survey, 2024

Cost of Housing

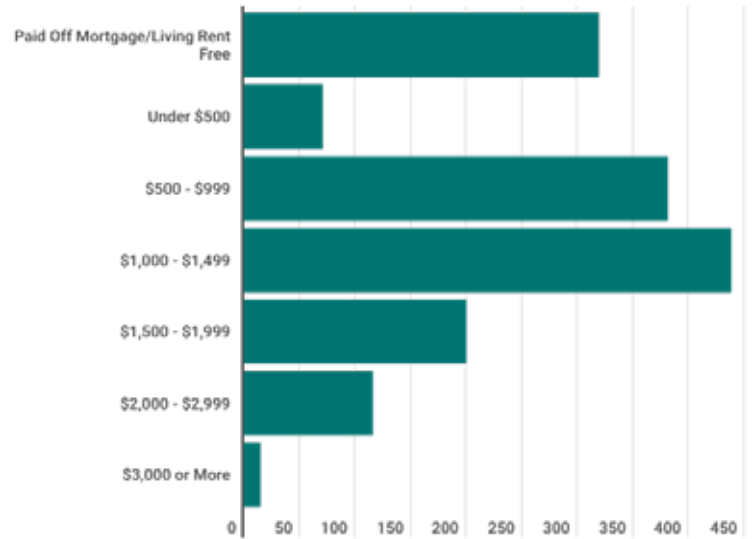
Only 21.4% of respondents spend \$1,500 or more on housing per month (Figure 2.4). However, compared to the higher level of high income range respondents, most respondents likely spend below 30% of their income on housing.

Household Needs

Respondents felt there was a shortage of every type of housing. Respondents were asked what is most important to them when looking for housing, and their top three were a cost they can afford (69.2%), that they like the neighborhood (52.7%), and the number of bedrooms (23.4%) (Figure 2.5). Renter respondents find cost more important than owner respondents.

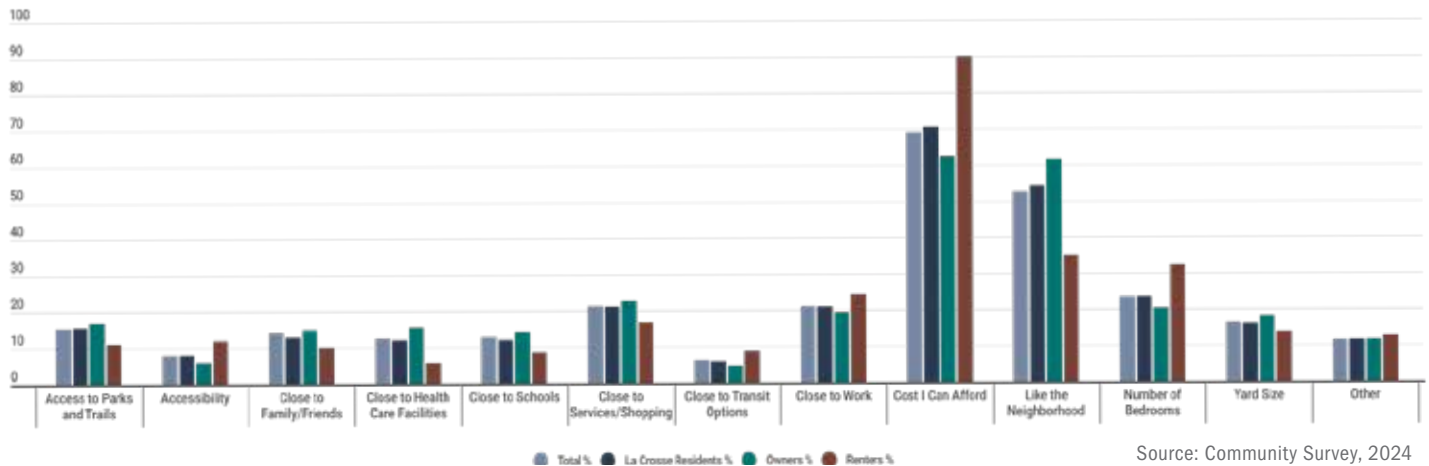
Respondents' largest housing concerns they had for La Crosse were housing costs (61.2%), cost of property taxes (43.8%), and available choices (38.7%) (Figure 2.6). Cost of property taxes is understandably much more of a concern for owner respondents.

Figure 2.4: Monthly Housing Cost of Survey Respondents



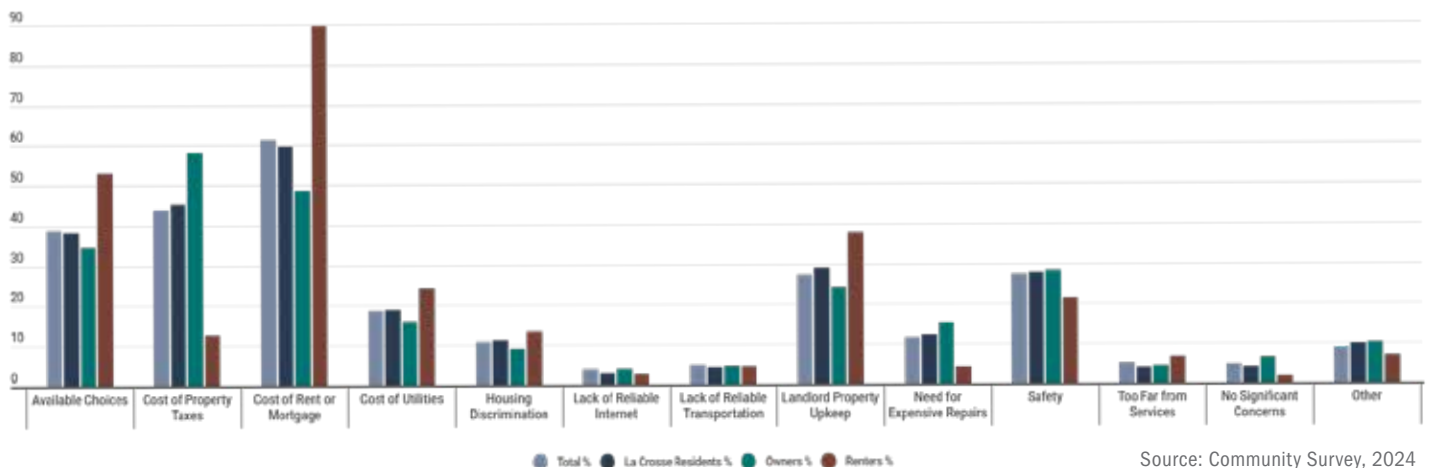
Source: Community Survey, 2024

Figure 2.5: Top Housing Needs of Survey Respondents



Source: Community Survey, 2024

Figure 2.6: Top Housing Concerns of Survey Respondents



Source: Community Survey, 2024

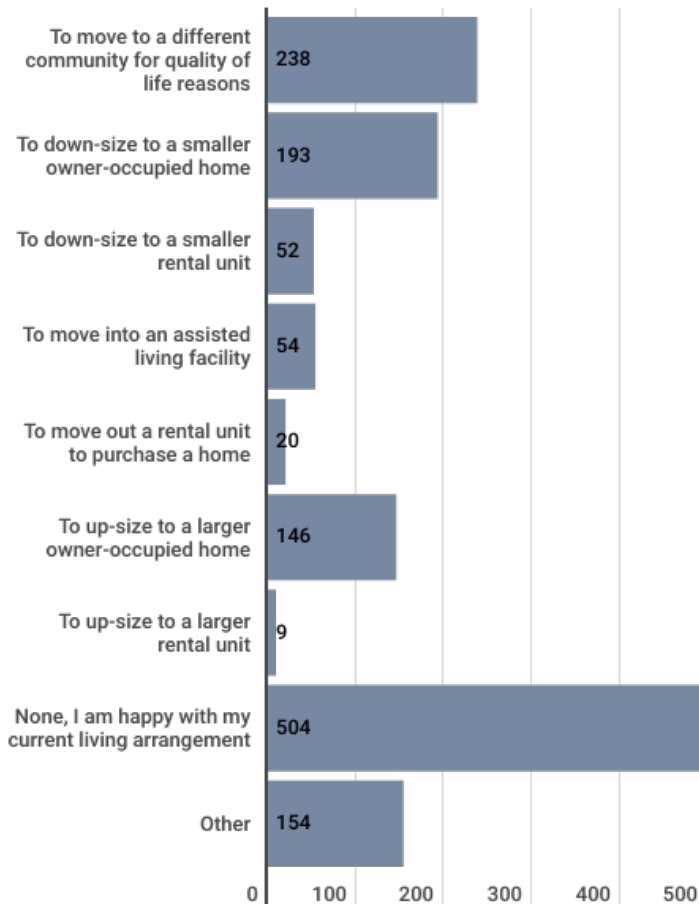
Needed Product Types

Respondents were asked how successful certain product types would be if they were available in La Crosse. Every housing type was seen as needed, with most respondents expressing interest in every option provided. This is a good sign and potentially an understanding by respondents that a healthy housing market needs to be as diverse as its residents.

Movement in the Market

Respondents were asked why they would look to move in the next few years. The most respondents (38.3%) were happy with their current living situation and not interested in moving. The second most frequently selected option was respondents expressing interest in moving to a different community for quality of life reasons (26.7%), followed by residents looking to move out of a rental unit and into an owner-occupied home (17.9%). Movement in the market is necessary for existing affordable units to become available to others wanting to live in La Crosse, but community leaders need to continue to invest to avoid losing residents to neighboring communities.

Figure 2.7: Potential Moves for Survey Respondents



Source: Community Survey, 2024

Most Favored



Affordable, small, two- or three-bedroom home: 94.4%



Mid-size three-bedroom home: 87.4%



Townhome or duplex: 78.2%



Independent senior living housing: 75.1%



Downtown upper-story residential: 65.0%



Accessory dwelling units: 63.3%



Apartment: 60.4%



Row housing: 58.2%



Large home with four or more bedrooms: 52.2%

Least Favored

Landlord Survey

The U.S. Census Bureau reported high vacancy rates in La Crosse at 9.6% in 2020. At the 2024 listening sessions, stakeholders shared that finding rentals is tough in La Crosse, indicating that true vacancy may be much lower. A survey sent to landlords in La Crosse helped better understand this disparity. Findings from the survey include:

- Approximately 450 units represented by landlord respondents with only 16 vacant units for a rental vacancy rate of 3.5%.
- The majority (69.3%) of landlords indicated it took two weeks or less to find a new renter when a unit becomes available.
- Most respondents felt no units were difficult to fill, with the highest demand for two-bedroom units.
- The majority of respondents were asking \$1,250 or less per month for units in multi-unit structures, and \$1,500 or less per month for single-unit structures.
- 73.1% of respondents do not accept rental assistance vouchers.
- Most respondents (88.4%) do not own or operate any short-term rentals. Most noted it is easier to have long-term tenants.

The landlords that responded to the survey show that rental vacancy is lower than perhaps the Census indicates. Many landlords are making investments to their properties and are also facing cost increases beyond their control. But it seems many are reluctant to accept guaranteed rent income through HUD voucher programs and the reasons should be explored.

Reflective Landlord Survey Comments

“Costs are rising, and competition is fierce for renters.”

“It is a difficult market for renters. There is limited inventory and high rental rates.”

“The large student population in La Crosse really drives the market and can make it challenging for families trying to rent.”

“[The market is] very strong if you are providing a good quality home with a solid representation of being responsive to the needs of your tenants.”

Workforce Survey

As part of the qualitative data analysis, a survey was distributed to employees who work in La Crosse, whether or not they live in La Crosse. The survey intended to gain insight into the wants and needs of La Crosse employees pertaining to housing, income, what they can afford, and whether or not they would elect to retire within the city. The survey received 438 responses. Response findings include:

- Approximately 65% of respondents feel their preferred housing type is not available in La Crosse.
- 62.9% of respondents employees commute less than 15 minutes from home to work, while only 4.6% have a commute of 30 minutes or longer.
- Respondents averaged high household incomes, with 53.0% having a high annual household income of \$100,000 or more.
- Of the respondents, 21.0% plan to retire in La Crosse, 41.7% do not wish to retire in La Crosse, and 37.3% are undecided on where they will retire.

The survey responses illustrate that employees working in La Crosse have looked elsewhere for housing and are more likely to move upon retirement, mostly attributed to real or perceived lack of suitable options.

Reflective Workforce Survey Comments

“Housing options in La Crosse in the last 10 years have changed significantly. More and more have found that houses are purchased by development firms, and then flipped and sold at astronomical prices.”

“It is important to think about housing options for people with disabilities, where the housing is accessible and has support options as needed.”

“We need less zoning restrictions to develop more affordable, non traditional housing options. Restrictions should be placed on corporations owning single family homes, and individuals owning more than 1-2 houses that they rent out on AirBnb.”

Listening Sessions

A series of discussions with community stakeholders, including Realtors, lenders, builders and developers, city staff, council members, employers, young professionals, and social service providers offered the most direct and beneficial insight into housing conditions in La Crosse.

The assets, issues, and opportunity themes later in the study reflect these conversations. The conversations with stakeholders match the quantifiable data in the Census, MLS listings, and local data. However, a few other themes from the conversations are not easily shown in measurable data:

Housing Conditions. Participants were concerned about their observations of gaps between the cost of housing and the condition. This was especially true for rental units. Overall, condition of neighborhoods was seen as an issue and the impact poor condition houses have on the ability to reinvest in the area.

Downtown. Most people were very enthusiastic about the reinvestments in downtown. Recent residential projects were seen as very successful, and these units fill quickly. What is perceived as high rents for La Crosse are not an issue to many because people are willing to pay higher rents for higher quality in downtown. Most felt there were still significant opportunities, but some of these would be more challenging rehabilitation projects.

Housing Diversity. There are few options in the market for those looking for something other than a single-unit detached home or traditional rental unit in a multi-unit structure. There are few innovative infill products that blend into neighborhoods, maintenance free units (owner or renter) that appeal to retirees, empty-nesters, and young professionals. Accessible units that meet the needs of the region's aging population and disabled individuals are also lacking.

New Construction. Construction rates of new units in La Crosse struggle to keep pace with population growth in the region. One reason is the lack of new lots outside of infill sites around lower adjacent home values. While most participants acknowledged that existing infrastructure is critical and topography is challenging, they also realized that a healthy market needs new options, options that are currently unavailable or unaffordable in La Crosse.

Quality of Life. Most participants acknowledged that quality of life and the perception of La Crosse were important issues to address. These perceptions have made it challenging to attract and retain the workforce to live in La Crosse. These range from the lack of sidewalks and walkability to the sense of safety and security even in neighborhoods.



3

Market Analysis

The careful examination of La Crosse today - its historic trends, population demographics, economy, and conditions of the housing market - reveals current challenges, helps forecast future needs, and informs a program to assist La Crosse's housing market. This chapter summarizes the quantifiable characteristics of La Crosse that strongly impact the housing market.



La Crosse Market Snapshot

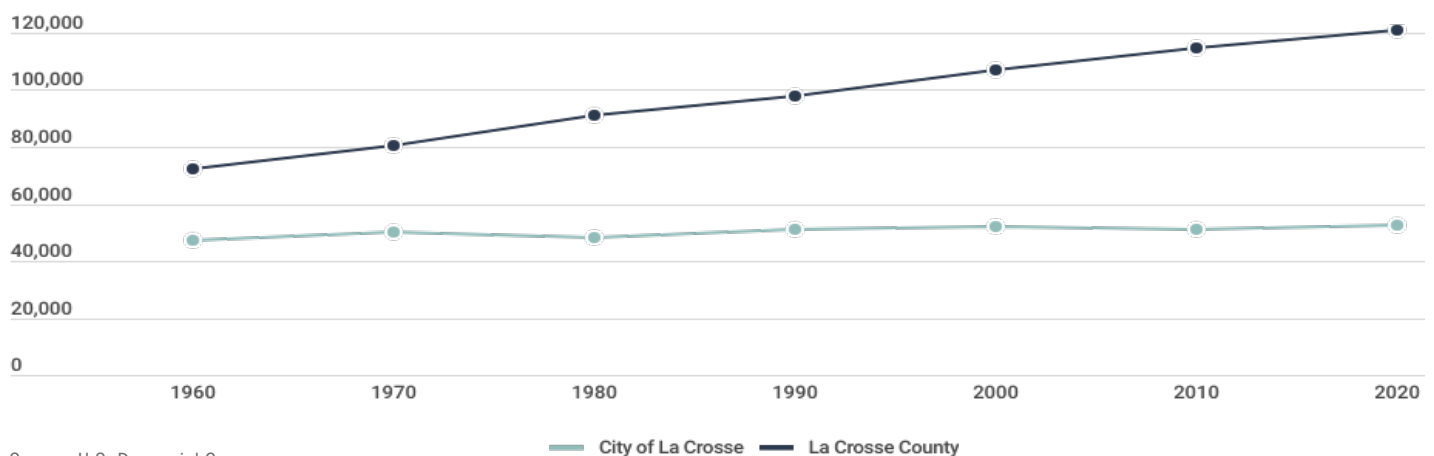
This section reviews La Crosse’s trends including population, household makeup, income, employment, affordability, and housing demand. Combined, they have a tremendous impact on the nature of the local housing market.

Historic Population Change

Historic population change provides context for how the community has changed and possible trajectory for future growth and development. Since 1990, La Crosse’s population has remained between 51,000 and 53,000. Despite the city experiencing slow growth, La Crosse county has seen steady growth since the mid-1900s (Figure 3.3).

More people are choosing to live in other areas around La Crosse either by choice or necessity. Between 2010 and 2020, the county grew 5.4%, ending the period at a population of 120,784. When excluding the City of La Crosse, La Crosse County experienced a growth of 12,802 residents between 2000 and 2020. With this growth, the city’s population makes up 43.6% of the county’s population. In 2000, the city made up 48.4% of the county’s population. Still, all of these residents, even those residing outside city limits, are important to supporting the La Crosse economy.

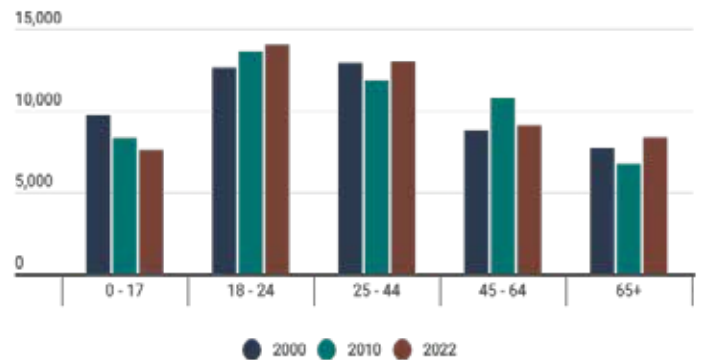
Figure 3.3: Historic Population Change



Source: U.S. Decennial Census

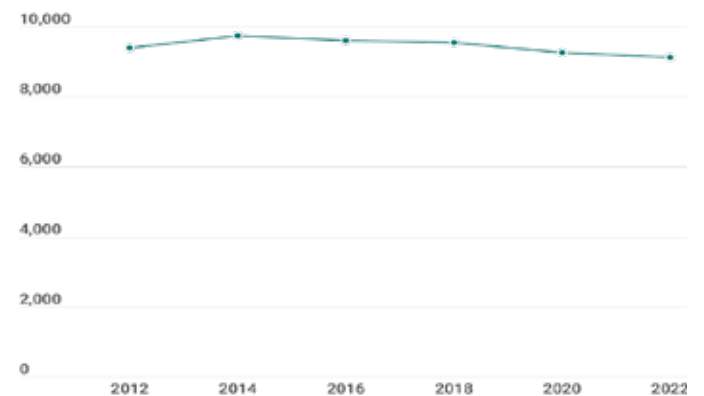
La Crosse continues to have a large college aged population with stable enrollments at the **University of Wisconsin La Crosse and Western Technical College**. However, the number of school aged population continues to decline while working aged populations have remained mostly unchanged since 2000 (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Age Cohorts Over Time



Source: U.S. Decennial Census; 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.2: University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Full Time Student Enrollment



Source: University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; RDG Planning & Design

Peer Community Comparisons

Looking at conditions in La Crosse versus peer communities helps understand if changing market conditions are unique to La Crosse or happening across different communities.

Four communities were identified as peer communities to La Crosse: Eau Claire, WI, Green Bay, WI, Rochester, MN, and Duluth, MN. While each of these communities is comparable to La Crosse in different ways, it is understood that different jurisdiction, county, and state policies may provide for different opportunities.

From strictly looking at population, there appear to be local factors contributing to La Crosse’s consistent population level. Over the last 20 years, La Crosse has not experienced as quick growth as its peers, with the exception of Duluth, who is the only peer experiencing a loss of population. Of the peer communities, Rochester is the fastest growing, experiencing a 1.75% annual growth over the last 20 years (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.4: Peer Community Growth 2000-2020

	2000 POPULATION	2010 POPULATION	2020 POPULATION	2000-2020 DIFFERENCE	2000-2020 ANNUAL GROWTH RATE
La Crosse, WI	51,818	51,320	52,680	862	0.08%
Eau Claire, WI	61,704	65,883	69,421	7,717	0.59%
Green Bay, WI	102,313	104,057	107,395	5,082	0.24%
Rochester, MN	85,806	106,769	121,395	35,589	1.75%
Duluth, MN	86,918	86,265	86,697	-221	-0.01%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

Population Projection

La Crosse has the potential to continue to grow. Right now, La Crosse county is growing with residents choosing to live in other communities in the county due to wants or necessity. These residents may in the future opt to live in La Crosse. However, the right housing will be essential for this growth to occur. In La Crosse, that might not all be new construction. If the city continued to see historic construction trends, the city would grow at 0.23% annually and reach 54,744 by 2045. This is more than the annual growth rate from the recent comprehensive plan of 0.08%. This growth rate can be reached through a combination of rehabilitation and new construction to meet the housing demand apparent and supported on the following pages.

Figure 3.5: Population Projection Scenarios for La Crosse



Source: RDG Planning & Design; City of La Crosse

Housing Occupancy

Since 2008, most cities in the midwest have seen more rental units converted or added to the market than owner-occupied units. This is for several reasons, including more restrictive lending practices, more young and older households who traditionally enter or transition in the market as renters, and pent-up demand after nearly two decades of little rental construction. La Crosse’s peer communities have similar ratios of owner- and renter-occupancy.

Actual available vacant units are low in La Crosse despite the total vacancy numbers shown by the American Community Survey. The total number of units and vacancy numbers for 2020 reflect fairly high vacancy rates for La Crosse and its peer communities. These numbers do not reflect the significant shortage of “for sale” vacant units stakeholders expressed experiencing in recent years.

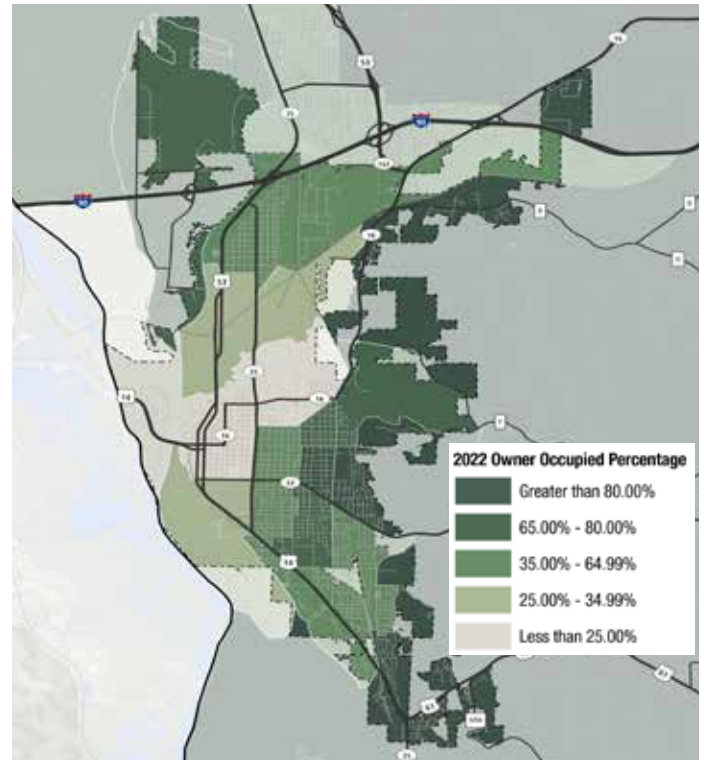
Using more detailed available data, the American Community Survey shows that in 2022, there was a 6.4% total vacancy rate in La Crosse. However, the reasons for these vacancies varies. Some of these units are vacant due to being seasonal homes, used for storage, or are sold or rented, but not currently occupied. When looking at only units that are actively for sale or for rent, the adjusted vacancy rate for La Crosse is 3.1%. This is much closer to the vacancy rate reported in the landlord survey (previous chapter) of 3.5%. Homes and units not occupied due to poor condition will need to be brought to the market as affordable and entry-level housing, while others will need to be demolished, creating space and opportunities for infill housing.

Figure 3.6: Peer Community Occupancy, 2022

	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS	OCCUPIED, OWNER OCCUPIED	OCCUPIED, RENTER OCCUPIED	% VACANT
La Crosse, WI	24,206	46.3%	53.7%	6.4%
Eau Claire, WI	30,375	57.3%	42.7%	5.1%
Green Bay, WI	45,645	54.2%	45.8%	3.8%
Rochester, MN	53,210	64.4%	35.6%	4.9%
Duluth, MN	39,762	59.8%	40.2%	6.8%

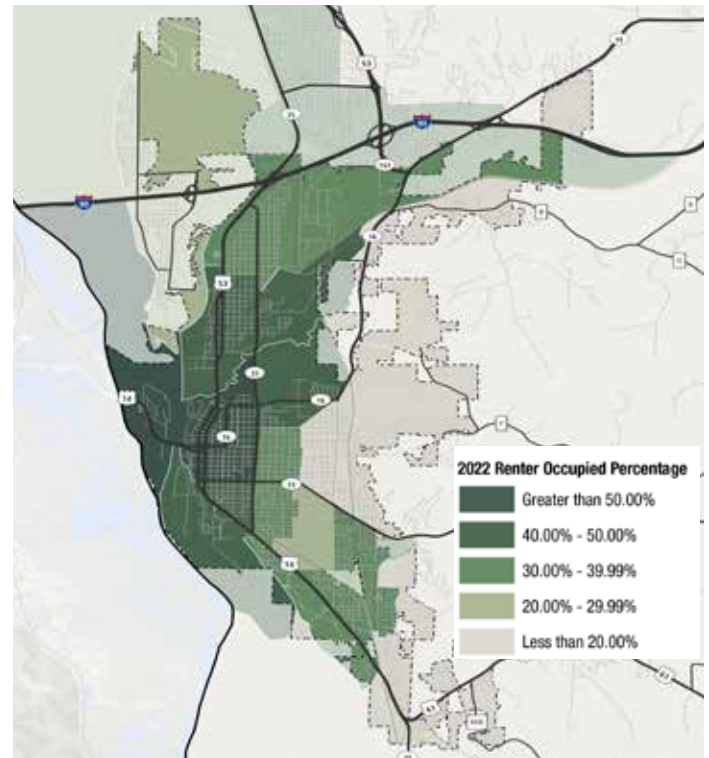
Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.7: Owner-Occupied Percentage, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.8: Renter-Occupied Percentage, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Housing Occupancy by Age

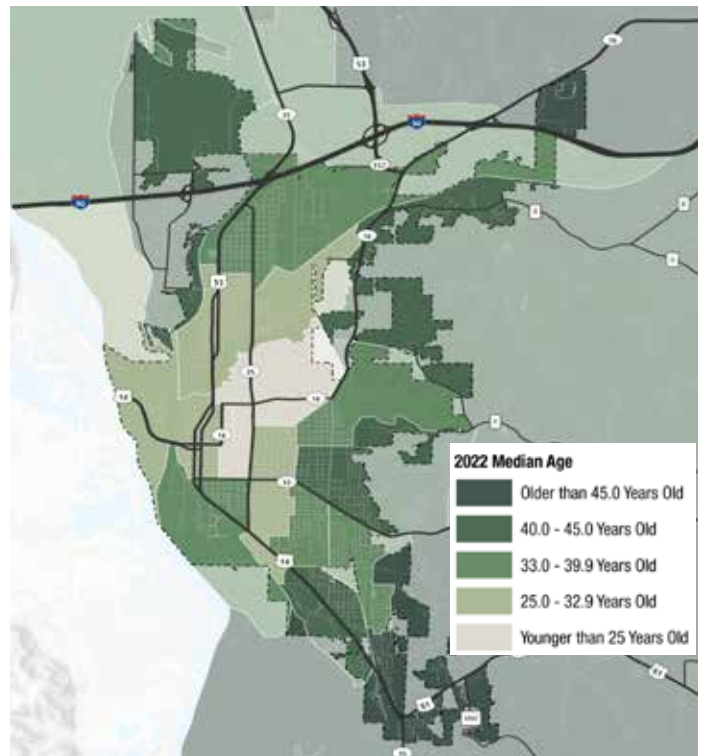
Over the last decade, there were a increased number of owner-occupied households over the age of 55. Most of these householders are empty-nesters, potentially looking for housing that better fits their current stage of life than the homes they may have raised families in.

However, fewer householders under the age of 55 owned their homes, and more rented. This could be from rising other debts, increases in home prices, disinterest or inability to complete required maintenance, and stagnant wages.

Age of Housing

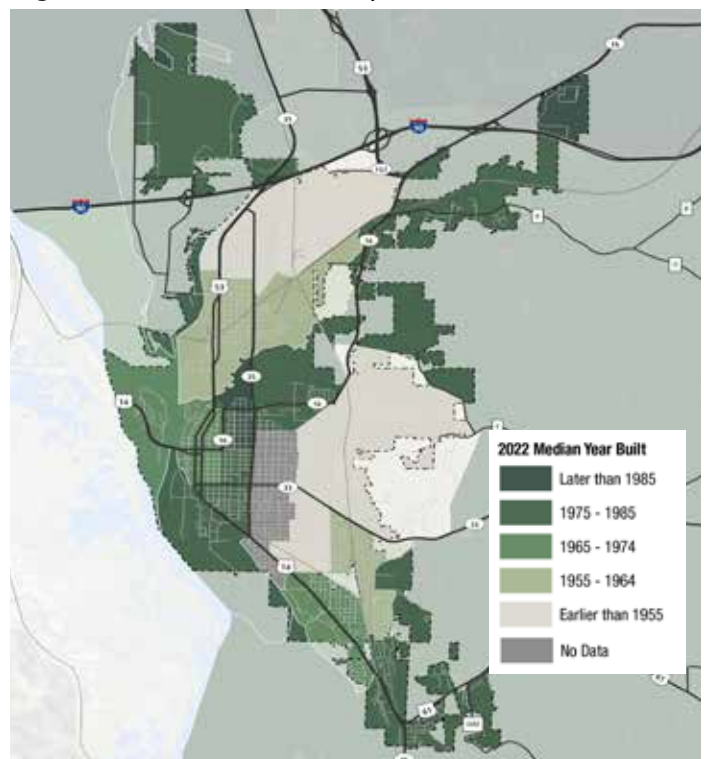
Much of the city's housing stock was built before 1975. This correlates to the value of housing. The older the housing stock, the lower the median home value tends to be but higher the maintenance and utility costs. Well maintained historic districts are the exception. The price of a newly constructed home without subsidy will always be greater than an existing home. When the difference between these numbers is significant, it can make it challenging to produce new housing at appraisals that meet the cost to build. Alternatively, the higher costs of new housing can drive up the price of existing housing as existing home are cheaper than new builds, but people are still willing to pay much more given the lack of other options in their price range.

Figure 3.9: Median Age of Householder, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.10: Median Year Built, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Income and Employment

Employment Sectors

There are over 29,000 individuals over the age of 16 employed in La Crosse. The largest industries are educational services, health care services, and retail. These industries comprise 44.8% of all the jobs for residents. These industries can be impacted in different ways during a downturn in the economy. For example, retail workers were negatively impacted by the recent pandemic, and educational institutions saw a change in enrollment patterns.

Figure 3.11: Employment by Sector, 2022

SECTOR	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Total Population Over 16	45,370	100%
Employed	27,957	63.9%
Unemployed	1,024	2.3%
Not in Labor Force	16,265	35.8%
Education and Health Care	8,587	30.7%
Retail	3,934	14.1%
Arts, Entertainment, and Service	3,913	14.0%
Manufacturing	2,824	10.1%
Professional, Scientific, or Managerial	1,913	6.8%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	1,512	5.4%
Construction	1,234	4.4%
Public Administration	783	2.8%
Other	2,476	11.7%

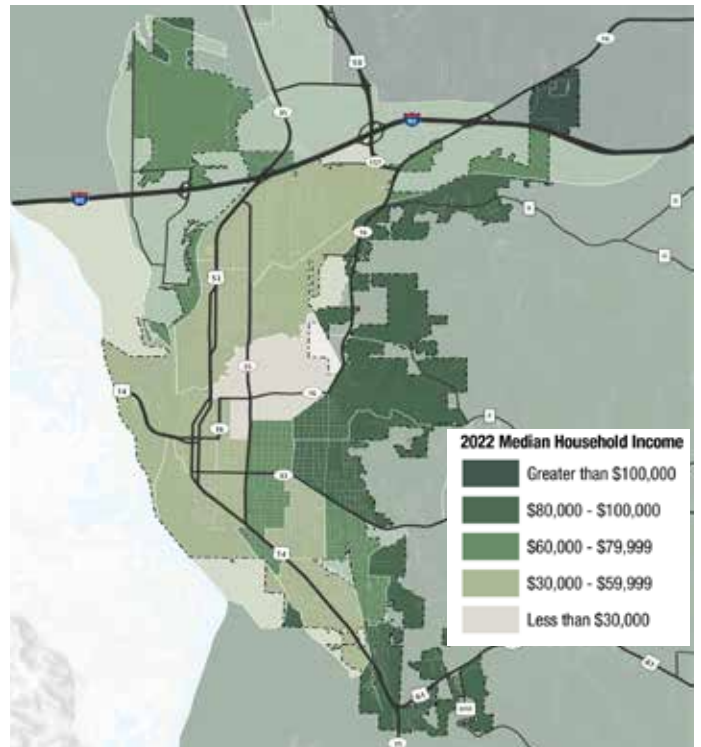
Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Household Income

A household’s income includes everyone in the household earning an income. As a result, today many households have at least two sources of income.

- **The median household income in La Crosse is growing.** From 2017-2022, the median household income grew 22.7%, from \$42,243 to \$51,836. This is much faster than the 8.3% growth seen in the five year period prior, from 2012-2017.
- Between 2012 and 2022, the median household income in La Crosse grew 32.9%, from \$39,014 to \$51,836. Over that same period, median gross rent grew 40.1%, from \$672 to \$941, and median home values grew 43.3% from \$126,200 to \$180,800. This indicates that, while wages are rising, they are not keeping up with the rising cost of housing.

Figure 3.12: Median Household Income, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey; RDG Planning & Design

Commuting Patterns

The City of La Crosse does not operate in a vacuum. Employees come and go, with an increasing trend for younger prospects to decide where they want to live first rather than first seeking employment. Therefore, La Crosse must look beyond strong employers to attract and retain people. Quality housing is one component, along with other amenities like parks, trails, a vibrant downtown, events, schools, and appearance.

- **Many people employed in La Crosse travel into the city for work.** La Crosse sees about 24,000 more people traveling into the city for work than out. Figure 3.12, below, displays the number of employees that live and work in La Crosse, the number of employees that live outside of the city, but work in La Crosse, and vice-versa.
- Capturing a portion of the workforce living outside but working inside the city is important. Just as important to the human capital these individuals provide is their engagement in a community, which people tend to do more of in the communities where they live. Attracting these people to live in La Crosse may be possible with the right housing options available.

Tax Rates

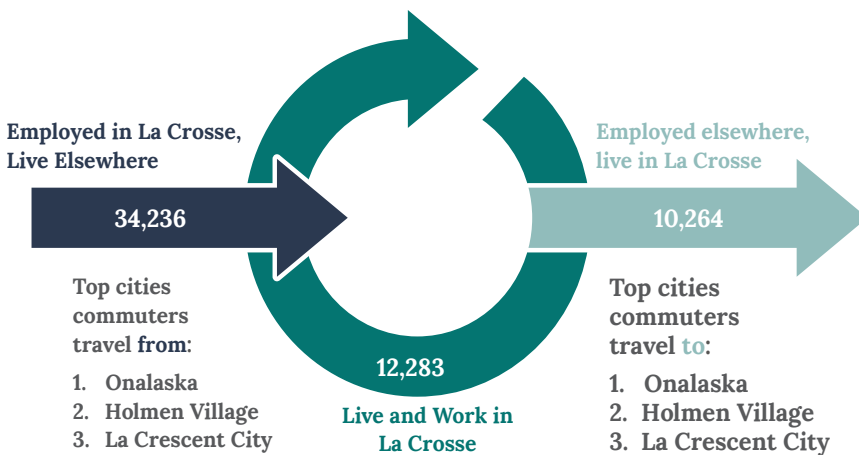
Many attendees of the listening sessions and survey respondents mentioned La Crosse having high property tax rates. When comparing property tax rates with peer communities, La Crosse does not have a dramatically high tax rate. Some perceived discrepancies may come from a difference in school district tax or county tax, which the City does not set.

Figure 3.14: Peer Community Tax Levies, 2023

	PROPERTY TAX LEVY
La Crosse, WI	0.88
Eau Claire, WI	0.74
Green Bay, WI	0.88
Holmen, WI	0.75
Onalaska, WI	0.89
West Salem, WI	0.92

Source: Wisconsin Department of Revenue

Figure 3.13: Employee Commuting Patterns, 2022



Source: Census OnTheMap

Home Sales

While data sources like the Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics lag current conditions by some extent, monthly data can be obtained through the Multiple Listing Service (MLS).

Various conditions starting in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation rates, have led to historically low inventory in homes for sale. Between 2019 and 2022:

- Median sales price jumped 36.3%.
- On average, only eight more homes were listed than sold annually, leaving little extra inventory for buyers to have options.

This is only four years of data, and is the most recent data available, but illustrates the extreme conditions facing the local housing market leading up to and at the time of this study. The impact of this means less people moving, more people staying in homes that do not meet their needs, and more competition for rental units.

Construction Activity

Construction activity has been steady over the last decade with little fluctuation. The most units were produced in 2013 and 2015 with large multi-unit projects. Since 2010, 22 single-unit homes have been constructed on average in La Crosse every year, with an average of five units in duplexes and 92 units in multi-unit structures. Simultaneously, 47 units have been demolished annually.

Figure 3.15: Home Sales in La Crosse County

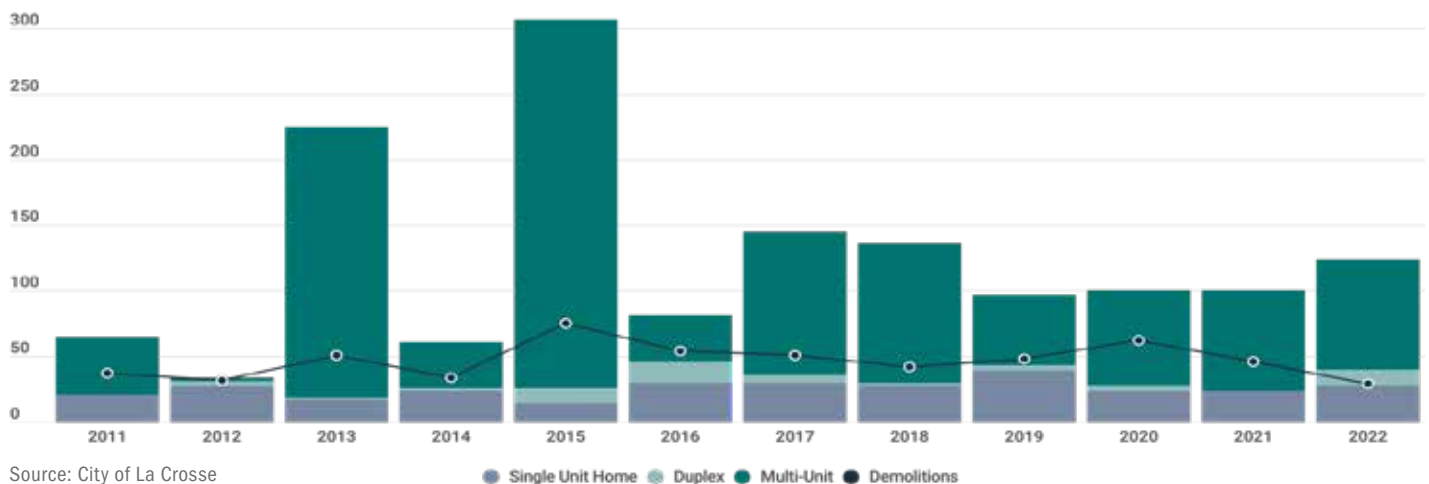
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Homes Sold	1,336	1,447	1,420	1,308
Homes Listed	1,489	1,170	1,092	944
Median List Price*	\$175,000	\$214,900	\$291,250	\$209,950
Median Sales Price*	\$158,100	\$161,500	\$203,750	\$215,500
Average Days on Market	26	24	14	16

*Denotes the median list/sales price for the month of June in the year listed

Source: Multiple Listing Service (MLS)

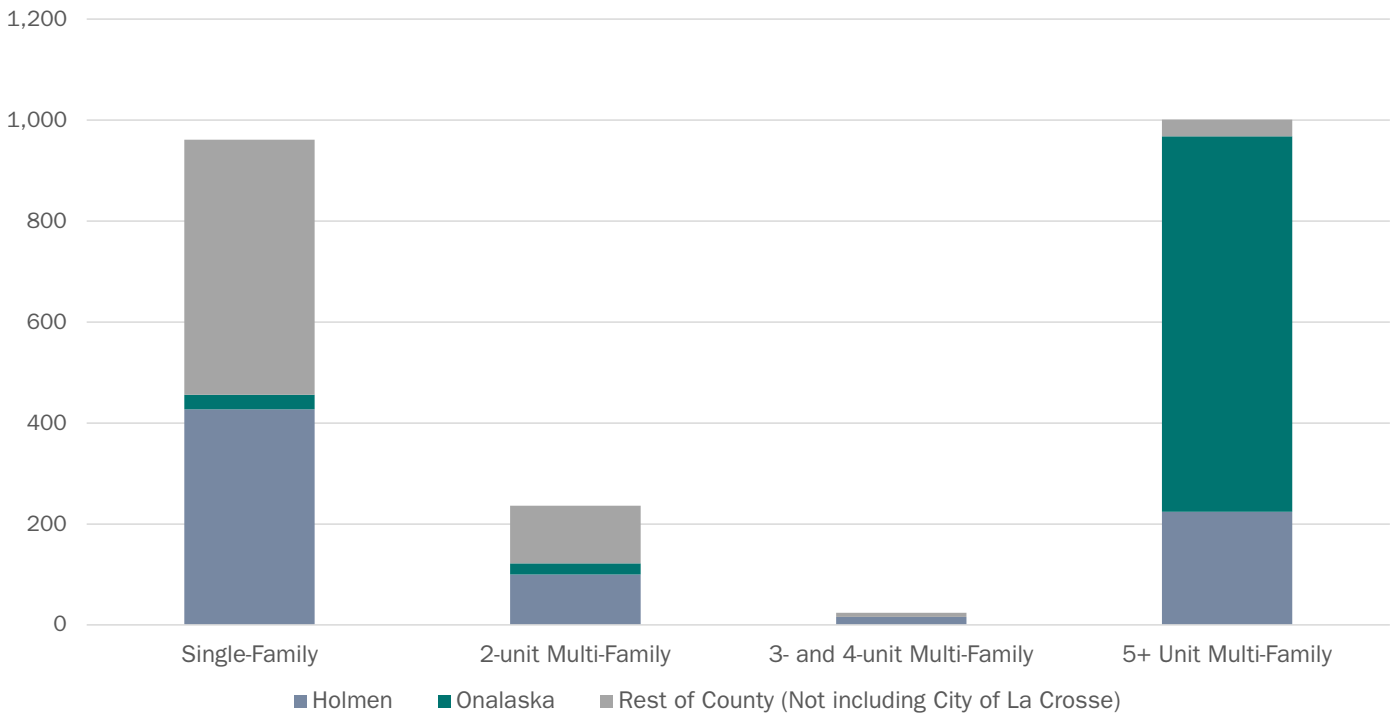
While the City of La Crosse is about 43% of the county population, it accounted for under 30% of new residential units in the county from 2018-2023. Onalaska, like La Crosse, is seeing strong multi-family construction, while Holmen is seeing more single-family construction. Land cost, availability, and ease of approval processes were brought up in discussions as possible reasons.

Figure 3.16: Construction and Demolition Activity in La Crosse



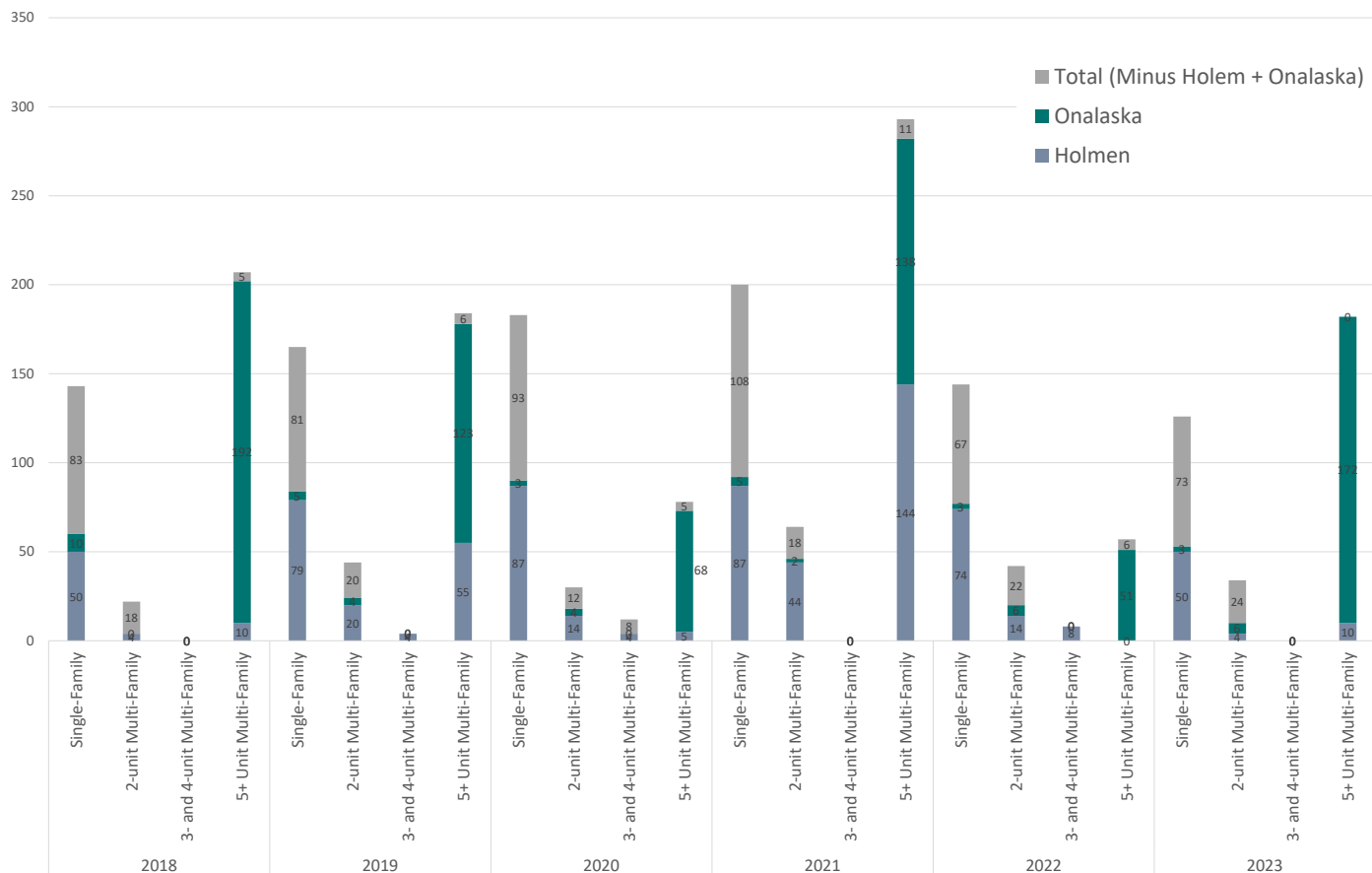
Source: City of La Crosse

Figure 3.17: Construction Activity in County, Excluding the City of La Crosse, 2018-2023



Source: U.S. Census Building Permits Survey

Figure 3.18: Construction Activity in County by Year, Excluding the City of La Crosse, 2018-2023



Source: U.S. Census Building Permits Survey

Affordable Housing Units

Many subsidized units for lower income residents are in the City of La Crosse. These units are occupied by all types of households. For example, a survey of the Hmong community in the winter of 2022-2023 found that 82% of respondents were wage workers, but 47% of them depend on at least one form of public assistance.

- In 2021, the inventory of federally subsidized rental housing in the City of La Crosse included 1,372 units, which was about 11.3% of the city's total rental stock. Of these subsidized units, 593 were HUD public housing units. The remaining units are privately owned and receive federal subsidies. Housing Choice Vouchers are not included in this inventory.

- By 2025, the affordability restrictions on 201 units of federally subsidized housing in the City of La Crosse are set to expire. Restrictions on an additional 30 units are set to expire by 2030. In some cases, the units may remain affordable even after the restrictions expire due to a rental market conditions. However, the removal of affordability restrictions will allow for rents to rise substantially if owners do not renew, reducing the stock of units renting at an affordable level.

Figure 3.19: Affordable Housing Projects in La Crosse County



Source: La Crosse County Housing Authority, www.policymap.com

Home Values

Values are highest where new development is more prevalent and lowest in the periphery neighborhoods around downtown. Home value is not the same as sales price (market value). Sales prices are often inflated over home value, especially in a low supply market like La Crosse.

Contract Rent

Rent is rising by more than inflation in La Crosse and peer communities. Contract rent is the rent agreed upon regardless of any furnishings, utilities, or services that may be included.

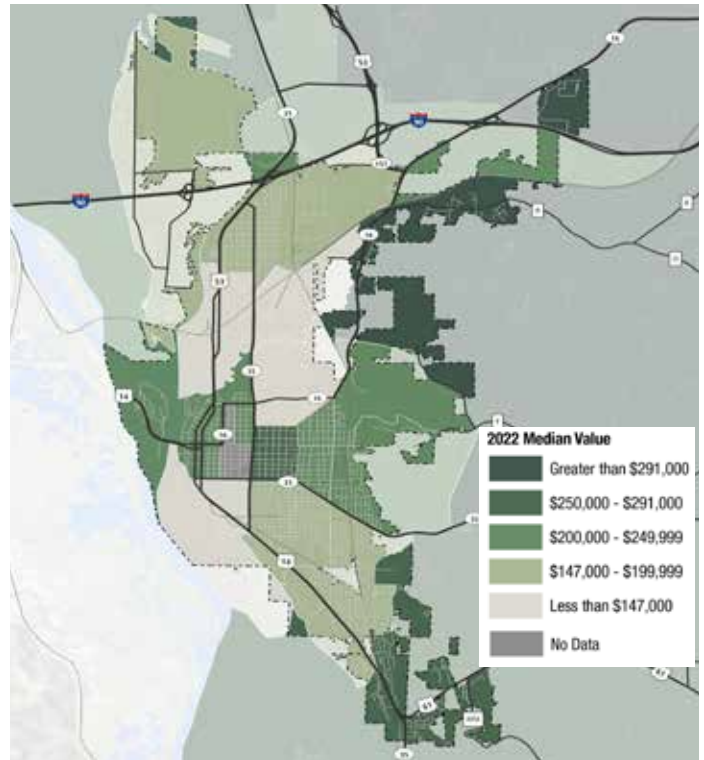
- Between 2012 and 2022, the median contract rent in La Crosse went from \$567 to \$807, a 42.3% increase. Over the same period, the rate of inflation was approximately 29.3%.
- In 2022, the difference between the lower contract rent quartile and upper contract rent quartile was \$464. In 2012, that gap was just \$287.

Figure 3.20: Peer Community Median Home Value and Median Contract Rent, 2012 and 2022

	2012 MEDIAN HOME VALUE	2022 MEDIAN HOME VALUE	2012 MEDIAN CONTRACT RENT	2022 MEDIAN CONTRACT RENT
La Crosse, WI	\$126,200	\$180,800	\$567	\$807
Eau Claire, WI	\$142,400	\$214,200	\$583	\$803
Green Bay, WI	\$132,200	\$174,500	\$548	\$738
Rochester, MN	\$168,600	\$274,600	\$691	\$1,102
Duluth, MN	\$152,300	\$208,200	\$626	\$915

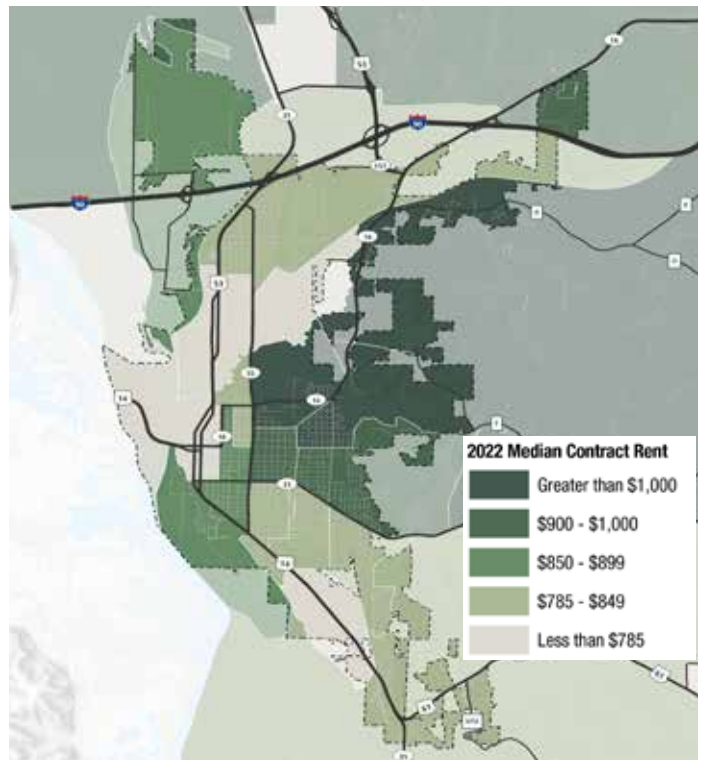
Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.21: Median Home Value, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.22: Median Contract Rent, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Affordability by Cost Burden

A cost burdened household is defined by HUD as one that spends more than 30% of their income on housing (including utilities, taxes, insurance), either for a mortgage or rent). Cost burden takes into consideration both local housing costs and incomes. Therefore, if a market has very high housing costs but also has higher incomes, then the level of cost burden may be similar to a market with low costs and low incomes.

Young residents, renters, and low income households in La Crosse face higher housing cost burden than owners and higher income households. Additionally, a higher income household spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs affects quality of life less than for a lower income household. Take the example below of annual costs for a two adult, one child household, assuming all aspects of household A and B are the same except for income:

This is a simplistic example and only covers basic expenses at a modest living standard. Household B will have to cut expenses somewhere else if forced to spend 30% of their income on housing. These cuts are likely related to using more public transportation (if available), finding a job closer to home or remote, lower quality food options, and alternative child care that might involve part time work of a householder or finding a relative to help with care.

Household A: Annual income =	\$100,000	Household B: Annual income =	\$50,000
• 30% spent on housing =	\$30,000	• 30% spent on housing =	\$15,000
• Annual transportation cost in La Crosse =	\$16,800	• Annual transportation cost in La Crosse =	\$16,800
• Day care for one child, 40 hours a week =	\$10,560	• Day care for one child, 40 hours a week =	\$10,560
• <u>Food expenses =</u>	<u>\$10,200</u>	• <u>Food expenses =</u>	<u>\$10,200</u>
• Amount left for other expenses =	\$32,440	• Amount left for other expenses =	-\$2,560

Source: Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator, January 2024. Data are in 2023 dollars for the La Crosse/Onalaska metro area.

When comparing to peer cities, La Crosse has seen a higher increase in the number of cost burdened renters since 2010. The number of cost burdened homeowners did not increase nearly as much as the number of cost burdened renters. Possible reasons include:

- Low rental inventory that drives up rental prices.
- Stagnant local and regional wages.
- An aging housing stock that lowers home values.

Figure 3.23: Peer Community Cost Burdened Households, 2022

	TOTAL COST BURDENED	COST BURDENED OWNERS	COST BURDENED RENTERS
La Crosse, WI	35.5%	20.3%	48.7%
Eau Claire, WI	29.6%	18.6%	44.7%
Green Bay, WI	30.4%	17.6%	45.4%
Rochester, MN	28.2%	15.8%	50.1%
Duluth, MN	37.8%	19.8%	63.5%

Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Cost Burdened Homeowners

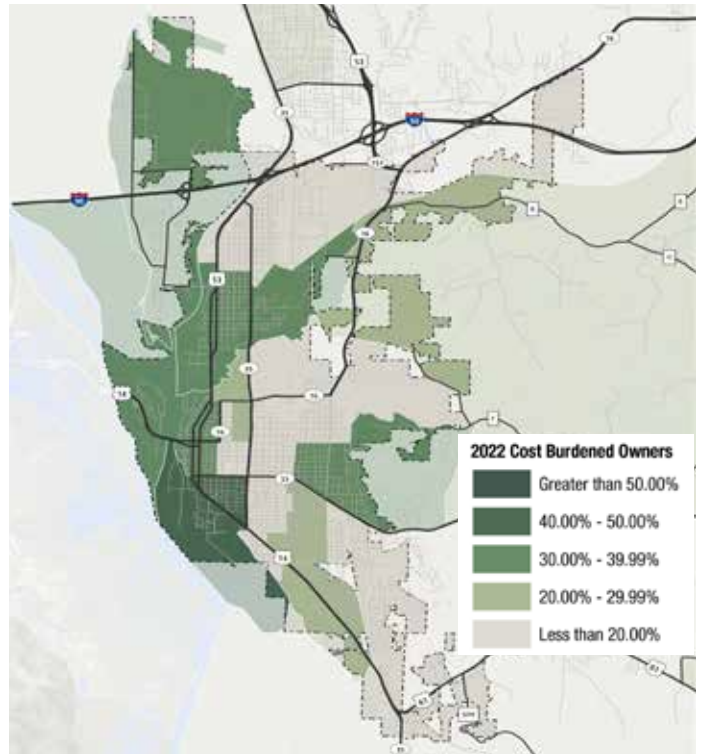
Due to financing requirements, owner-occupied households are less likely to be spending more than 30% of their income on housing than renter-occupied households. In addition, homes purchased between 2013 and 2020 often had low mortgage rates. Owners having purchased since 2020 are more likely to have higher monthly housing costs. The neighborhoods south of downtown show the highest owner cost burden in La Crosse.

- Neighborhoods with higher home values versus neighborhoods that are largely cost burdened are somewhat inversely related. This makes sense, because higher home values do not necessarily mean more cost burdened residents as people with higher incomes can afford higher cost homes and have more choices in their price range to avoid cost burdened situations. Lower income households do not have as many choices where to live in their price range and may have to spend more of their income on housing than optimal.

Cost Burdened Renters

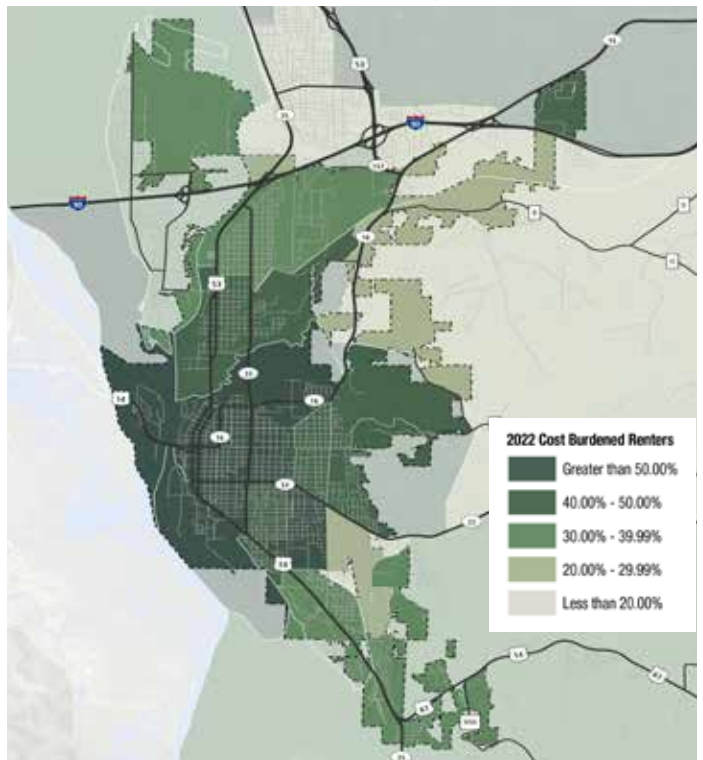
Cost burdened renters are spread throughout the city with pockets of higher percentages in the downtown area and near university campuses. Most contract rents citywide are over \$600/month, although the area with the highest renter cost burden has some of the lowest median contract rent ranges. This is largely because those that reside in these neighborhoods have lower income levels, and have few other choices where to live. Students with low incomes living off-campus also contribute to some of the cost burden counts even though their income might be supplemented by other means, such as by parents and loans.

Figure 3.24: Cost Burdened Owners, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

Figure 3.25: Cost Burdened Renters, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey

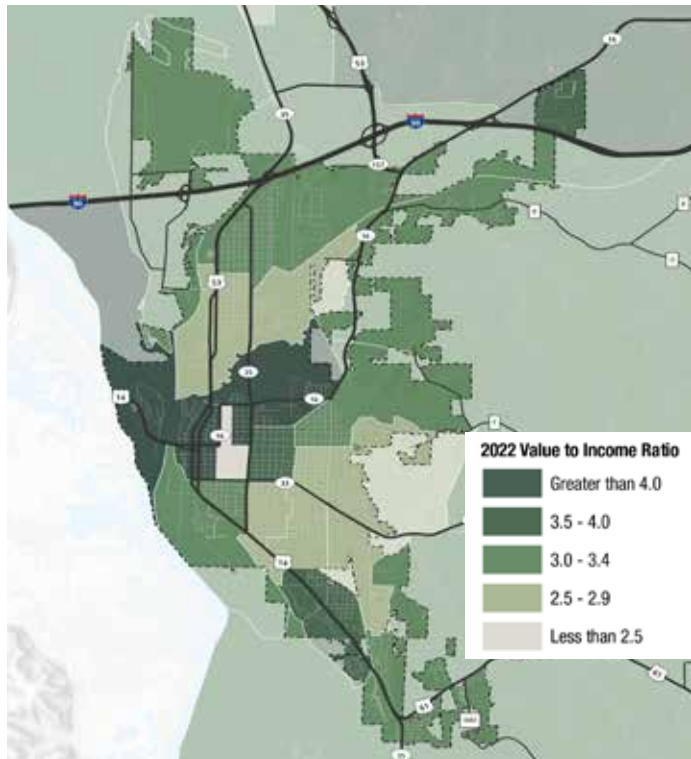
Value to Income Ratio

A traditional analysis metric for evaluating affordability in the ownership market is to compare household income to the home's value.

- An affordable, self-sustaining ownership housing market, with adequate value and revenues to support market-rate new construction, typically exhibits a value to income ration between 2.5 to 3.0.
 - › Ratios above 3.0 present affordability issues while ratios below 2.0 are significantly undervalued relative to local household incomes.
- La Crosse's values to income all vary by neighborhood, from undervalued to unaffordable.
 - › The downtown core has the highest value to income ratio in the city. There are also pockets of near-unaffordability near the University of Wisconsin La Crosse campus, which may be partially explained by the low incomes of college students.
 - › There are several neighborhoods with values that are potentially too low to support new, unsubsidized market rate development, including the north central east and south central east sections of the city.

Why are low/undervalued areas concerning? The real or perceived instability in a neighborhood may create problems securing funding for new construction or renovation of existing structures, challenges with appraisals at cost to build, and concerns for investment security and growth.

Figure 3.26: Value to Income Ratio, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey; RDG Planning & Design

Figure 3.27: Peer Community Value to Income Ratios, 2022

	2022 MEDIAN HOME VALUE	2022 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	VALUE TO INCOME RATIO
La Crosse, WI	\$180,800	\$51,836	3.49
Eau Claire, WI	\$214,200	\$63,882	3.35
Green Bay, WI	\$174,500	\$59,174	2.95
Rochester, MN	\$274,600	\$83,973	3.27
Duluth, MN	\$208,200	\$63,545	3.28

Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey; RDG Planning & Design

Affordability Gaps

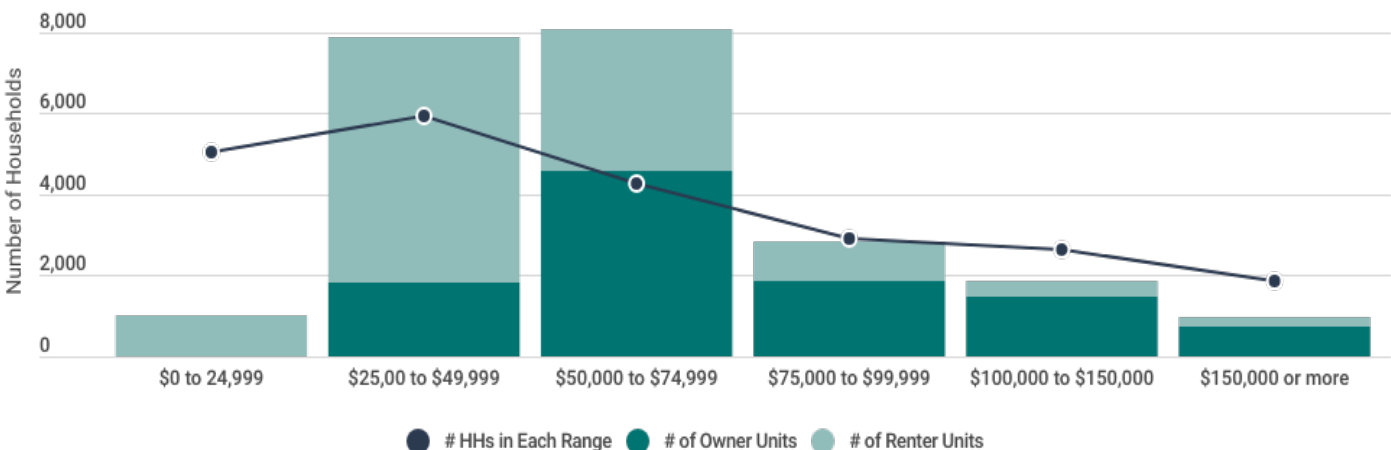
Figure 3.28, below, evaluates the number of households in different income ranges (black line) and the quantity by price of ownership units (dark green) and rental units (light green) to meet household income levels (where the household spends no more than 30% of their income on housing costs). A positive balance (where the bars exceed the black line) indicates more housing within the affordability range for that respective income group, while a negative balance (where the bars do not reach the black line) indicates a shortage.

A housing shortage affects the lowest income households because of the limited choices they have in the market. When supply is low, a middle or high income household can often choose a lower priced one or housing in another community. When higher income households choose to live in homes below their price point, fewer options are available for lower income households, forcing them to live in potentially substandard units or spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

- **La Crosse has a large stock of housing affordable at 30% of income for households making between \$25,000 and \$75,000 annually.** Many of these are rental units and ownership options with people spending much less of their income on housing.

- › Participants in the listening sessions and those that took the community survey noted a need for more options in general, especially for move-up or new downsizing options, which cannot be met by the current housing market in La Crosse. When faced with this lack of options, these households stay in their current homes longer, a home which could be a more attainable options for someone else.
- › Rising mortgage interest rates in 2021-2023 have some role to play in lack of movement. However, the new normal for rates is started to set in for more people in 2024 and less people are willing to wait for them to drop before moving.
- The limited supply of high-end rentals affordable to households making more than \$75,000 annually is not only reflected in the numbers in the graph below, but in the demand for new units, such as those in the downtown neighborhood that are quickly rented.
- **The largest gap exists for households that can only afford the lowest cost options, price points that cannot be produced new, but comes from the existing housing stock already in the market and subsidized units.** Some of the gap shown for households with incomes under \$25,000 comes from the student population.
- Lower income households are impacted more by the lack of housing in the higher price points due to the competition that it creates for the existing units that are affordable to them.

Figure 3.28: Gaps in Units versus Affordable Household Incomes, 2022



Source: 2017-2022 American Community Survey; RDG Planning & Design

La Crosse Housing Demand

La Crosse’s forecasted future housing needs stem from a demand model that builds on the population projections, housing trends, and community conversations to forecast the demand for additional housing. A calculated approach to housing demand helps create policies, partnerships, and strategies to meet these needs and enhance existing strengths in the housing market.

Housing Demand Model: 2030

The housing demand analysis builds on the population projections presented in this chapter, trends, and community conversations to forecast the demand for additional housing. The model is built on the following assumptions:

- Household population will grow through the end of the decade.
- Average people per household is expected to decrease slightly through the end of the decade. Some of this is expected as college student population rises and the baby boomers continue to age, who both tend to have smaller households with no children.
- Unit demand at the end of the period is calculated by dividing household population by the number of people per household. This equals the number of occupied housing units.

- A manageable housing vacancy rate that provides housing choices for residents moving to the community. The 2020 Census reported a total vacancy rate of 9.6%. However, the rental landlord survey indicated a point in time vacancy rate closer to 3.5% and ownership sales data indicates low inventory. The model increases the “for rent” and “for sale” vacancy rate over time, which means more units are needed to satisfy pent-up demand and increase the number of units on the market at any one time.
- Unit needs at the end of each period are based on the number of actual household demand plus the number of projected vacant units that will support a healthy housing market.
- Units that are demolished or converted to other uses are taken off the market and need to be replaced. Homes in poor condition or obsolete should also be gradually replaced in the city’s housing supply. The number of units lost annually is based on historic demolition trends and the community’s desire to return some historic single-unit homes to their original use. While some units will be lost, the priority should always be on saving units, as these are often the most affordable units in the city.
- Cumulative need shows the number of total units needed between the base year of 2022 and the year indicated at the end of the period.

Figure 3.29: Housing Demand Forecast at 0.25% Annual Population Growth*

END OF PERIOD	2022	2025	2030	TOTAL
Population at End of Period	51,978	52,369	53,027	
Household Population at End of Period	47,289	47,645	48,243	
Average People per Household	2.10	2.09	2.07	
Household Demand at End of Period	22,519	22,818	23,329	
Projected Vacancy Rate	3.1%	3.8%	4.9%	
Unit Needs at End of Period	-	23,716	24,533	
Replacement Need (total lost units)		135	225	360
Cumulative Need During Period		610	1,042	1,652**
Average Annual Construction		203	208	206

Source: RDG Planning & Design

Figure 3.29 shows an average annual construction need of about 203-232 units through 2030. This rate is significantly more than what was produced in the previous decade, but necessary if the City wants to attract more workers, school enrollment, and stimulate movement in the housing market.

*Similar to 2010-2020 housing construction activity translated to added household population. Note: The High Growth Scenario in the Comp Plan illustrates a 0.40% annual population growth and La Crosse averaged 120 new units per year from 2010-2022.

**Units added in 2023 drop the cumulative need to 1,624, or 232 units annually through 2030.

Housing Development Program

Building on the housing demand model, the development program forecasts production targets for owner- and renter-occupied units based on the following assumptions:

- Distributions are based on the percentage of current households within the income ranges. Income range distributions reflect those in La Crosse County to show area needs that the City of La Crosse can help meet.
- Owner-occupied units will be distributed roughly in proportion to the income distributions of the households for whom owner occupancy is financially appropriate.
- Most low-income residents will be accommodated in rental units.
- The city currently has a split of approximately 46% owner-occupied and 54% renter-occupied units. The increasing cost of construction and limited land will likely continue to support higher density owner-occupied configurations and rental units. To meet this demand, the model assumes a 50/50 split between rental and ownership units to help meet more of the area demand for ownership options.

Approximately 22% new rental units should rent for less than \$500 a month.

- New rental housing construction demands rents above this range. Therefore, to produce housing priced below \$500 per month, programs like low income housing tax credits will need to be leveraged.
- Some units in the \$500-\$700 range can be produced by producing higher priced units. Households looking to move up in housing may choose the higher priced units, opening up the \$500-\$700 units for the lower income households.

Approximately 16% of additional owner units should be priced under \$150,000.

- Products being constructed today will not meet this demand. This demand will only be met through older existing units and the construction of products in denser configurations with land or infrastructure cost assistance.
- Partnerships and assistance will also be needed for most new ownership products in the \$150,000-\$225,000 range. Still, some of the units in this below market rate range derives from new construction at higher price points and assisted living options that entices some existing residents to move to these new units that better fit their needs and preferences.

Figure 3.30: Housing Development Program

END OF PERIOD	2022-2030
Total Need	199-225 units annually
Total Renter Occupied	50%
Under \$500	22%*
\$500-\$700	11%
\$700-\$1,000	20%
\$1,000-\$1,500	26%
\$1,500-\$2,000	12%
\$2,000+	10%
Total Owner Occupied	50%
Under \$87,500	9%**
\$87,500-\$150,000	7%**
\$150,000-\$225,000	21%
\$225,000-\$300,000	20%
\$300,000-\$450,000	26%
\$450,000+	26%

Source: RDG Planning & Design

*Most are heavily subsidized units, programs to preserve affordability, HUD, LIHTC. Some of the percentages should shift to higher rent ranges to account for students who are living off-campus.

**Comes from subsidized, rehab, and vacant units in the existing housing stock.

4

Housing Goals and Policy Areas

La Crosse will need to navigate various policy directions to meet the needs of its current and future population. Policy approaches will apply differently based on the issues and opportunities of differing areas in La Crosse.



Housing Goals

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan identifies several housing related goals that form the basis for the housing policies approaches in this study. The community insights and market analysis in the previous sections reinforce that the Comprehensive Plan housing related goals are still relevant.

1. Increase the supply of owner and rental units affordable to households making less than the area median income (AMI)
 2. Foster greater housing diversity through strategic infill development
 3. Create more housing opportunities attractive to La Crosse residents, especially households with children.
- Additional goals for housing needs in La Crosse arising from the community insights and market analysis include:**
4. Make building procedures and approvals in La Crosse a clear, predictable, and flexible process.
 5. Secure and conserve existing housing.
 6. Improve tenant and landlord relationships.

Neighborhood Approach

La Crosse has many sound neighborhoods with good housing stocks. A fundamental element of neighborhood improvement is building upon existing assets. These assets provide an anchor and identity for the neighborhood, supporting property values, reinvestment, and property maintenance.

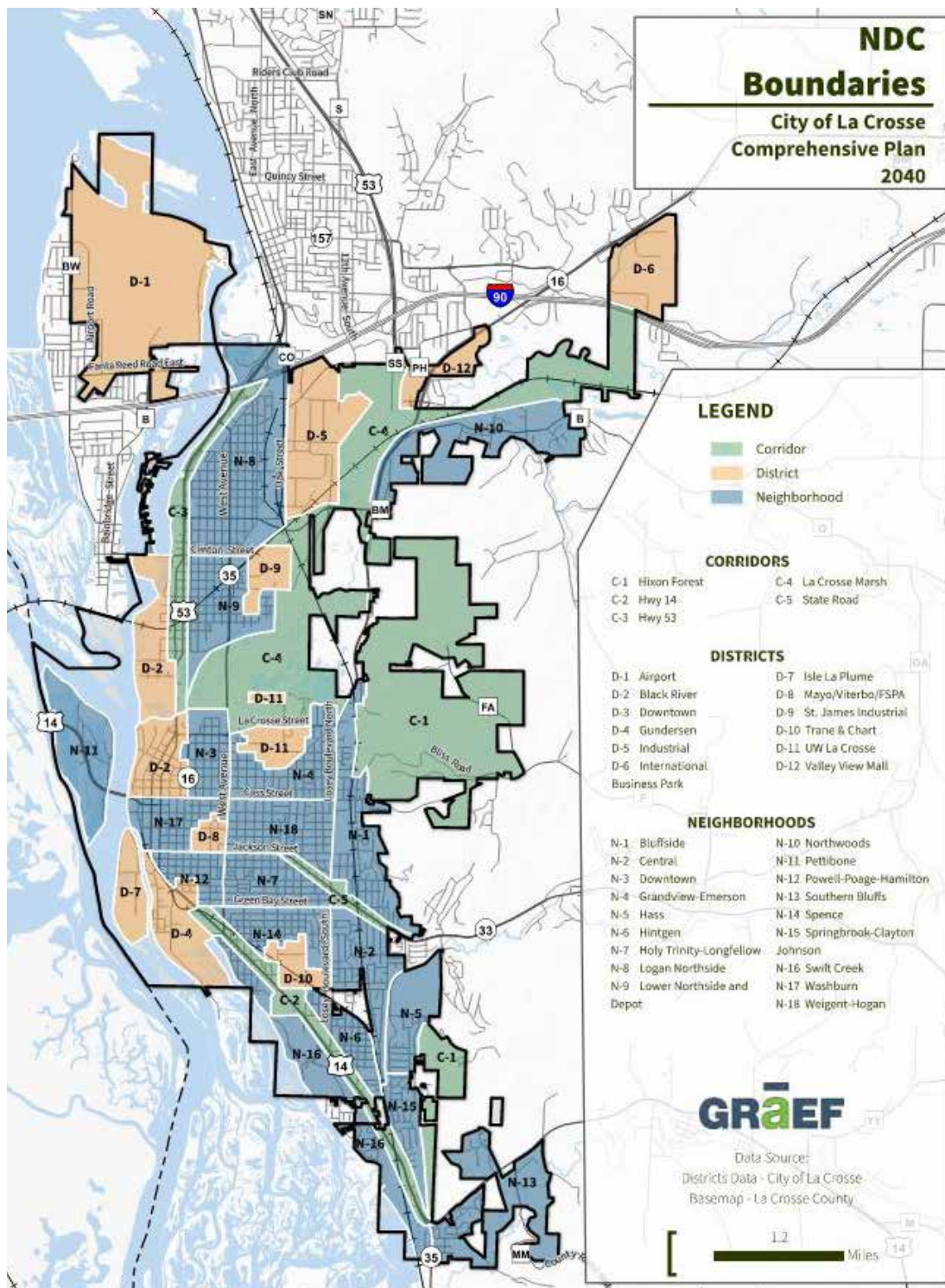
Policy Areas

From La Crosse's early historic neighborhoods, the city expanded outward to contemporary developments. These diverse neighborhoods present distinct needs and opportunities based on existing conditions. The following section details high-level policy opportunity areas based on previous planning efforts, existing neighborhood conditions, community desires, and housing needs.

Figure 4.1 identifies targeted housing policy within the Comprehensive Plan neighborhood and district boundaries in La Crosse. Using existing boundaries allows alignment of policy directions with current or future neighborhood level planning. The map identifies potential conservation, reinvestment, redevelopment, and development areas. It represents a general assessment not based on a house-by-house inventory but on broader neighborhood evaluations. Additionally, the 2023 Comprehensive Plan provides a vision for future uses and development characters for each area.

Housing policy generally falls within four categories described on the next pages that can be inter-mixed within one neighborhood area. Not every block in every neighborhood is applied a category. Many areas are in stable condition and do not require immediate widespread policy intervention. Rehabilitation and housing enhancement programs are most effective when targeted at specific areas to generate momentum at a neighborhood level.

Figure 4.1: Neighborhood, District, and Corridor Boundaries



Neighborhood Conservation

These neighborhoods are in relatively good condition with only a limited number of blighted properties that require attention. Some areas are or could be historic neighborhoods, and many are the next wave of the housing stock to reach 50 to 60+ years old. Neglecting them could lead to a need for future stabilization measures. Policies should focus on conserving the existing housing stock through a coordinated rehabilitation strategy.

Policy Approaches

- Invest in public features and amenities to encourage private market upkeep. Appropriate enhancements in conservation neighborhoods include park improvements, active transportation safety improvements, and street infrastructure.
- Maintain the housing stock in good repair through regular assessments and code enforcement.
- Promote local neighborhood organization or publicly organized clean-up days and neighborhood scrap trash collection days.
- Provide assistance or other encouragement for local neighborhoods to organize regular neighborhood gatherings such as block parties, home tours, and other events that build neighborhood pride and positive resident interaction.
- For any structures beyond rehabilitation, target the parcel for infill development that respects the character of the surrounding neighborhood in terms of use, style, and density.
- For historic neighborhoods, continue to seek State assistance or apply for historic status for neighborhoods of potential significance. Maintain the character of the area as repairs and infill development occurs. Historic designation opens up rehabilitation incentives and acts as a marketing tool to attract new residents and generate neighborhood pride.



Stabilization

Characterized by an aging housing stock, these areas differ from the conservation areas in condition and the level of maintenance needs.

While much of the housing in these areas may be in good condition, more homes remain in poor-to-average condition in addition to larger pockets of vacancy. In the same way conservation areas represent an affordable housing opportunity, the rehabilitation areas present this same opportunity, but these areas require greater attention and investment, particularly because of the socioeconomic conditions of their residents. There may also be sites that are large enough and clustered enough that a target program to remove deteriorated structures and develop vacant lots will have a major impact.

Policy Approaches

- Invest in public features and amenities to encourage private market action. Appropriate enhancements may include new parks, new park features, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian improvements, community gardens, and gathering places.
- Neighborhood deterioration might occur, in part, because of compatibility issues with adjacent land uses. For example, when an industrial use is next to a single-family neighborhood, households may elect to live elsewhere. These compatibility issues should be explored and the impacts should be mitigated through relocation of the use or an improved buffer between the land uses.
- Target land assembly and appropriate infill redevelopment. This includes any structures that cannot be rehabilitated to target for demolition and acquire for infill redevelopment. The greatest challenge to infill development is often assembling the land where redevelopment can occur. This will require public and semi-public involvement to stimulate action, as detailed in the next chapter.
 - › While not preferred, demolition can be an appropriate intervention if the property cannot be rehabilitated, the property poses a risk to public health and safety, and the land can be acquired and held for redevelopment or appropriate reuse.
- Target rehabilitation programs to blighted areas with the highest priority given to those homes with structural issues and a lower priority given to homes with aesthetic issues only. Appropriate actions include an owner-occupied rehab program, a rental rehab program, a first-time home-buyer rehab and down payment program, and an exterior paint program.
- Target property maintenance initiatives on properties with moderate infractions. Appropriate actions would include clean-up days, neighborhood trash collection, not-for-profit clean-ups, and code enforcement.



Redevelopment/Reuse

Redevelopment opportunities are case-by-case examples of blighted or vacant land that redevelopment could transform into an attractive and productive use with a residential component.

The redevelopment of these strategic sites should be designed to eliminate blight conditions, support private market reinvestment in surrounding areas, and create new taxable value and uses. Infrastructure improvements and removal of deteriorated structures should create safe housing and stronger neighborhoods. The area could be a single site or lot. All districts and corridors could be candidates for a mixed-residential environment.

Policy Approaches

- Be sensitive to any displacement that may occur because of the redevelopment. Plans that relocate residents impacted by the redevelopment should occur first through outreach and public awareness of alternative housing opportunities for any future areas. Offering alternative housing options while construction is happening on a site may also be essential.
- Target areas with high concentrations of vacant or underused land for acquisition, redevelopment, and/or rehabilitation. Examples might be sites with tax delinquency, bank foreclosures, or avenues through not-for-profit agencies. Maintenance and management should accompany any acquisition in the interim period before rehab or redevelopment occurs.
- Solicit competitive proposals from the development community to generate the best reuse/redevelopment plan for strategic redevelopment opportunities. A public or not-for-profit role in the acquisition and assembly of land creates a public interest in the reuse of the property and, therefore, a development agreement can place conditions on the redevelopment including use, bulk, density, and the price points for units created.
- Consider an expedited review process for infill and redevelopment projects led by the private market.
- Explore creative financing and program applications to create a positive and concentrated impact on a neighborhood.



Images on this page sourced from Google Streetview, 2024

New Development

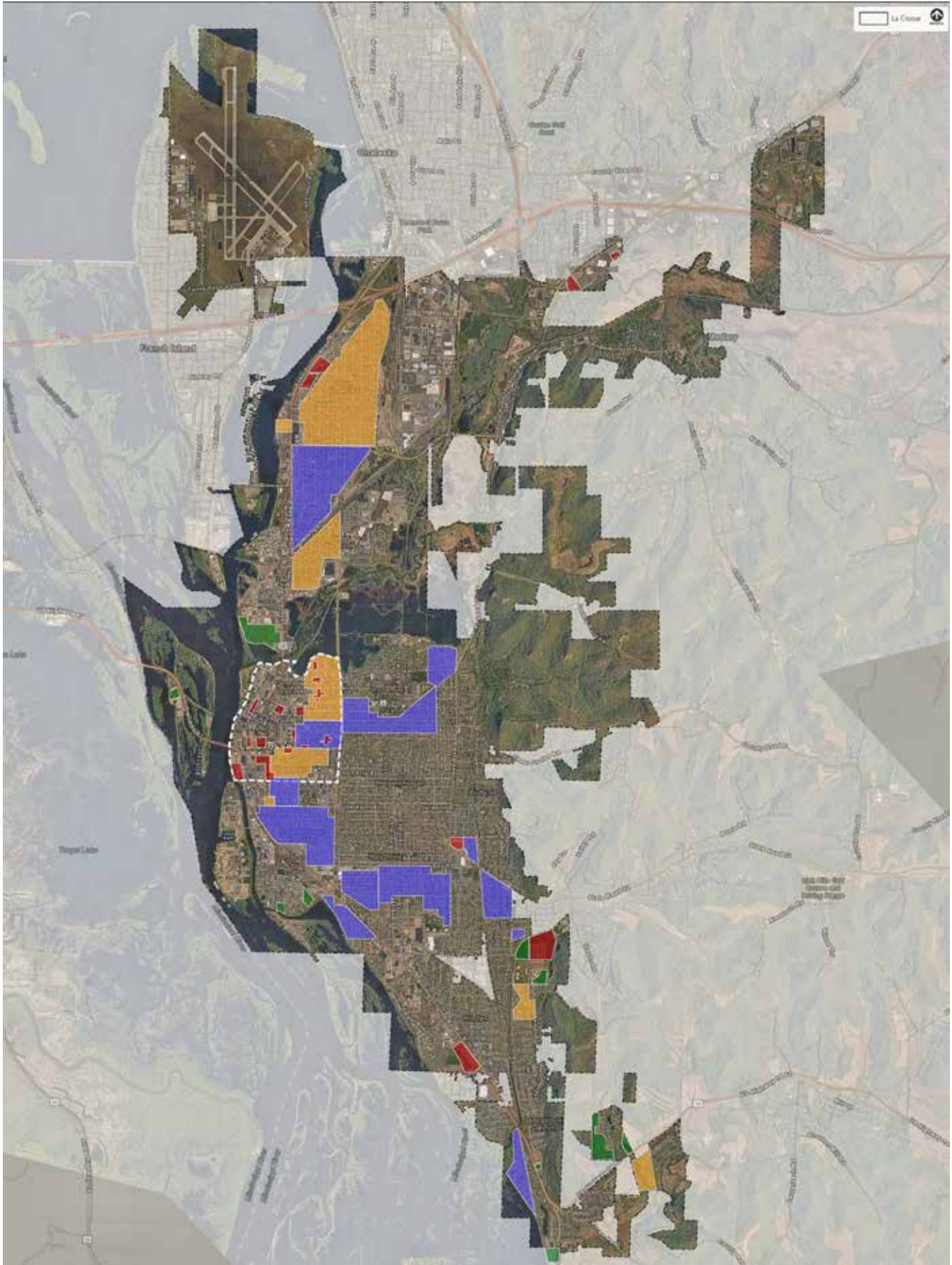
This area is generally where development did not exist in the past and is free from major barriers, or these barriers could be overcome, for new housing development. Access to water services, sewer services, and transportation connections are some of the most important factors when considering sites for new development.

Policy Approaches

- Use the Comprehensive Plan as the guide for development and land use policy.



Figure 4.2: Opportunity Policy Areas



Bluffside Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low to medium density with maximum density of four units.
- Constrained by topography to the east and some floodplain in central areas. Limited to no new development opportunities.

Housing and Household Context

- Mostly single-family in good condition.
- Higher assessed values and higher incomes.
- Mostly owner-occupied housing.
- Few to no vacant lots. Stable vacancy rates.

Zoning Context

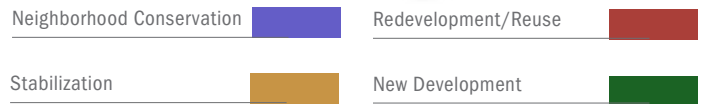
- Nearly all R1 Single-Family. Little to no variation from single-family units permitted under current zoning.

Policy Area Context

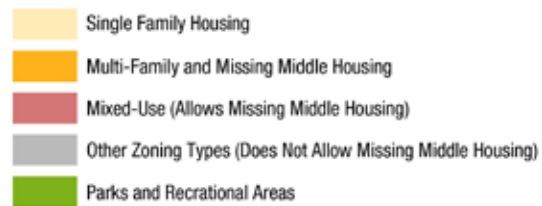
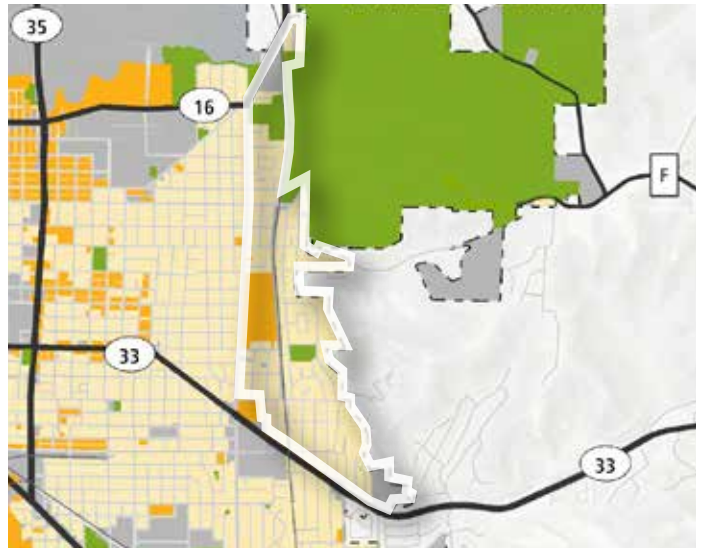
The good condition of most housing does not indicate a major need for policy intervention in the near term.

- Redevelopment: Vacant 6.3 acre commercial on Losey Boulevard and State Road.
- Neighborhood Conservation: around the redevelopment site and other commercial areas.
- Accessory dwelling units can fit the context of the neighborhood where many detached garages on alleys could be converted. Smaller lots in most areas do not leave room for new structures to accommodate ADUs.
- R1 Zoning should allow more flexibility for duplexes.

Bluffside Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Central Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low-density residential desired.
- Constrained by some minor flood risk along the railroad.

Housing and Household Context

- Mostly single-unit and some multi-unit in good condition.
- Low cost burden and generally attainable housing costs for resident incomes.
- Mix of owner- and renter-occupied housing.
- Few vacant lots and fully built out. Some evidence of exterior updates and infill replacement. Lower vacancy than other parts of the city.

Zoning Context

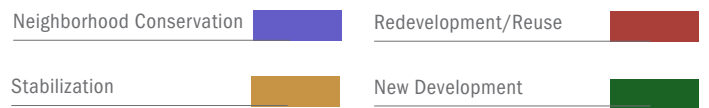
- Nearly all R1 Single-Family zoning.
- Pockets near and along 32nd Street of C1 Local Business, PD Planned Development, and R3 Special Residence. Some are spot zones for a single duplex unit. The Planned Development at Mac Harley Land could offer broader zoning insights to allow more by-right citywide.

Policy Area Context

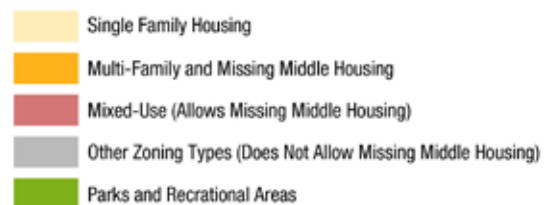
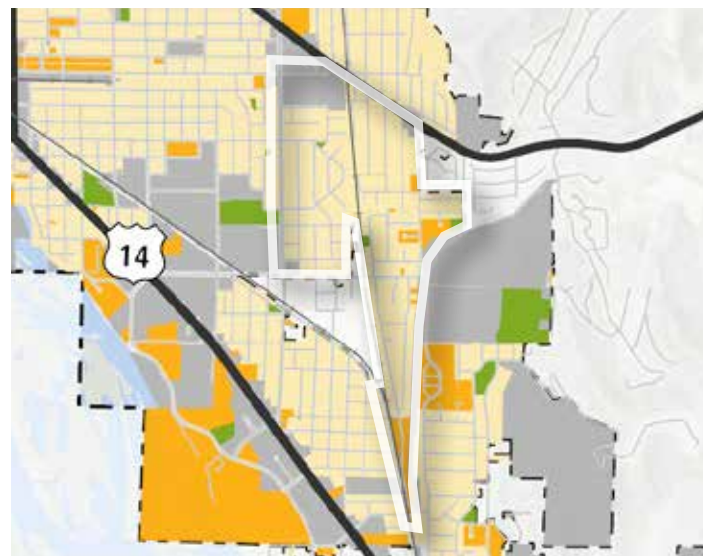
A focus for the area is maintaining the housing supply in good condition and the existing non single-family units. Support the neighborhood with amenities as an attainable place to live near the high school.

- Neighborhood Conservation: Ensure that older housing and multi-family units stay up-to-date with maintenance.
- Accessory dwelling units can fit the context of the neighborhood where there are some detached garages on alleys that could be converted. Smaller lots in most areas do not leave room for new structures to accommodate ADUs.
- R1 zoning should allow for more flexible uses, including the construction of duplexes and triplexes.

Central Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Downtown Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: All types of housing desirable with a focus on offering medium to higher density arrangements that can leverage proximity to downtown services in a transitional neighborhood design setting.

Housing and Household Context

- Lower assessed values than many other parts of the city. Somewhat lower contract rents associated with older apartment stock. Some of the oldest housing stock in the city is in this neighborhood.
- More renter-occupied housing targeting students.
- Fair housing stock condition with needed repairs visible on many blocks.
- Vacancy rates higher around the university, reflecting the on-going transition of students in and out of units. However, few vacant lots.

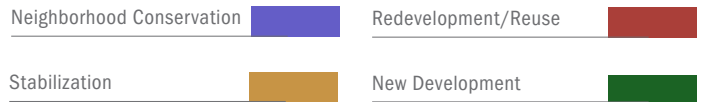
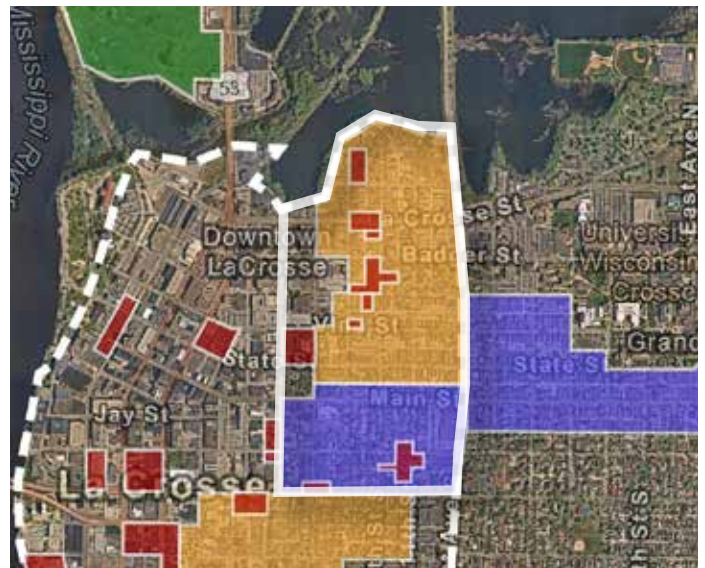
Zoning Context

- Most of the area allows a variety of housing types by right.
- A wide mix of lots size that have been combined and split over time from the original plat. Generally, deeper lots are around 8,000-9,000 square feet, many with multi-unit structures. The standard lot width is around 50 feet.

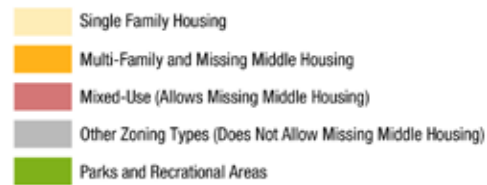
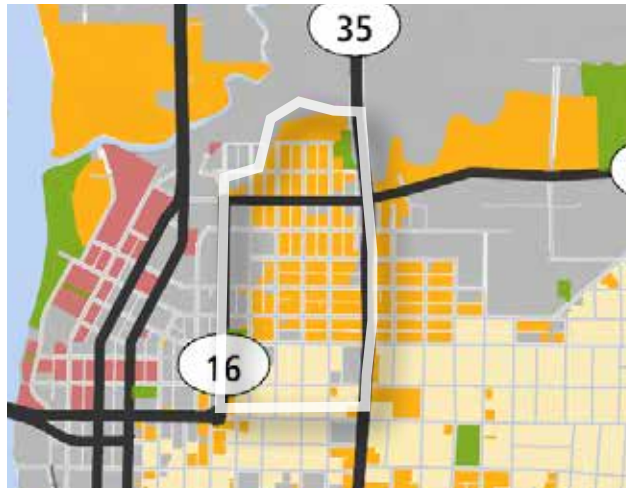
Policy Area Context

- The 2021 Imagine La Crosse Downtown Plan includes recommendations for various townhome and mixed-use infill and redevelopment possibilities for this area, along with more general development opportunity sites.
- Gradual phasing out of older and lower-yield commercial and industrial uses for redevelopment that include a housing component and consider affordable housing targets.
- Neighborhood conservation policies for areas on the south where housing transitions to detached unit neighborhoods.
- Stabilization policies for most of the area with strategic redevelopment allowed to maintain and improve the condition of the housing stock.

Downtown Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



- Continue partnership efforts to balance student housing and density forces. In partnership with the University/ College, maintain policy that gives residents a higher degree of predictability and include a well defined area where housing is predominately student occupied. Outside of these areas, older house conversions and improvised apartment buildings should be gradually phased out through policy actions and approaches.

Grandview Emerson Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: A desire to retain low to medium density housing types in single use or mixed-use arrangements. Higher densities are not envisioned.

Housing and Household Context

- Higher assessed values in many parts of the area than other neighborhoods in La Crosse. Some higher values reflect higher density infill projects. Low cost burden for owners. The student population is reflected in higher renter cost burden.
- Good housing stock condition overall.
- A mix of owner and renter households, with more ownership housing towards the south and eastern parts of the area.
- Vacancy rates higher around the university, reflecting the ongoing transition of students in and out of units. However, few vacant lots.

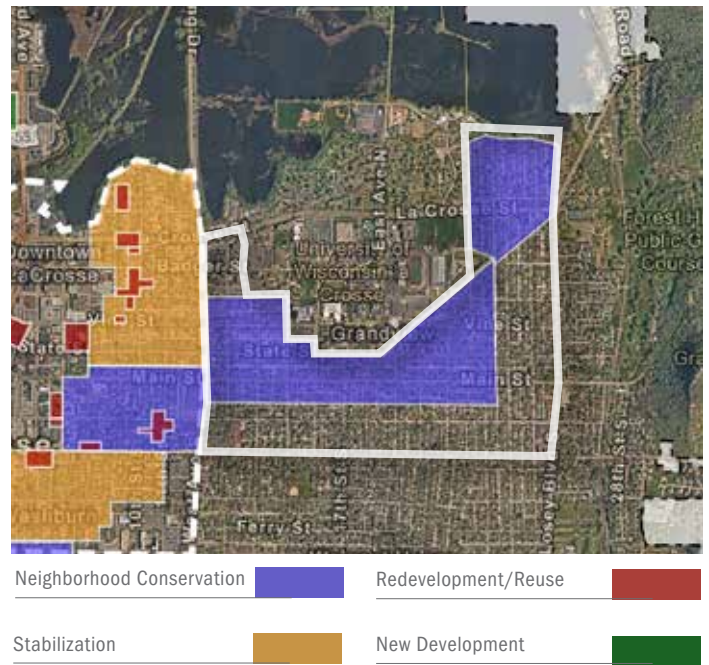
Zoning Context

- Housing variety allowed by right in northwest parts of the neighborhood with predominately single-unit permitted under current zoning in south and eastern areas.
- A wide range of lot arrangement as lots have been consolidated for different uses over time. Lots in the northeast average around 5,000 square feet while lots in the south and southwest can range to 7,500 square feet and much larger.
- Areas along Vine Street have seen multi-unit structures fitting on 9,000-10,000 square foot lots with parking in the rear.

Policy Area Context

- The proximity to UW-La Crosse leads a need to balance student housing demand with existing residents, a challenge experienced by every city with a significant university presence.
- Neighborhood conservation policies for areas closest to campus and smaller, more affordable housing area in the northeast part of the neighborhood.
- Monitor the condition of housing and maintenance violations in other areas over time.

Grandview Emerson Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



- Continue partnership efforts to balance student housing and density forces. In partnership with the University, maintain policy that gives residents a higher degree of predictability and include a well defined area where housing is predominately student occupied. Outside these areas, older house conversions and improvised apartment buildings should be gradually phased out through policy actions and approaches.

Hass Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: All types of housing and densities appropriate for the neighborhood.
- Constrained by topography to the east.

Housing and Household Context

- Generally good housing stock with a few older apartment complexes that may need updating in the near term.
- Average assessed value units. An affordable neighborhood for many households.
- Few vacant lots, but the Trane site offers the largest vacant site available in the city.

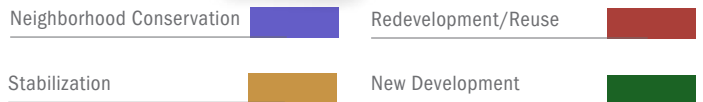
Zoning Context

- Predominately single-unit permitted under current zoning, other than the Hillview Terrace Assisted Living facility and apartment complexes south of the ball fields.
- Larger lots than other parts of the city, generally over 8,000 square feet. Reflective of new subdivision regulations at the time of platting.

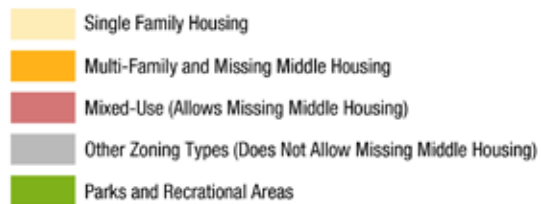
Policy Area Context

- Redevelopment of the Trane site is a priority that should include a housing component to some extent.
- Stabilize the condition and maintenance of the apartment complexes to continue providing more attainable rental options for some.
- Monitor the condition of other areas over time. No immediate policy intervention needed.
- Support new accessory dwelling unit conversions of existing structures. Larger lots in some areas do offer some new addition opportunities.
- R1 zoning should allow for more flexible uses, including the construction of duplexes and triplexes.

Hass Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Hintgen Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: A variety of housing types can be appropriate to supplement existing low-density housing types.

Housing and Household Context

- Good housing stock condition overall with limited signs of neglect.
- Average to above average assessed values compared to other neighborhoods. An affordable neighborhood for most owners. However, a moderate amount of renters face cost burden even with lower contract rents than other areas of La Crosse. Some of this is attributed to the older adult living complexes on the south side, south of Broadview Place.
- Few vacant lots and lower vacancy rates of existing units than other areas of La Crosse.

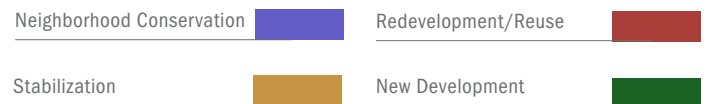
Zoning Context

- Predominately single-unit permitted under current zoning. Little variation in housing allowed by right under current zoning.
- Smaller lot sizes under 7,200 square feet on the north side with increases sizes going south as new subdivisions with horizontal ranch style homes or deeper lots were added over time, reaching around 9,000-10,000 square feet. Lot orientations and widths vary greatly.

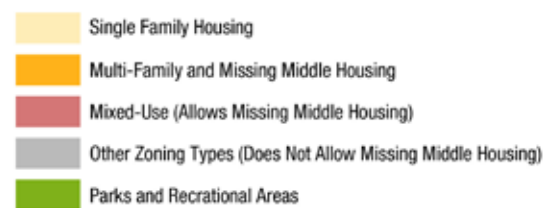
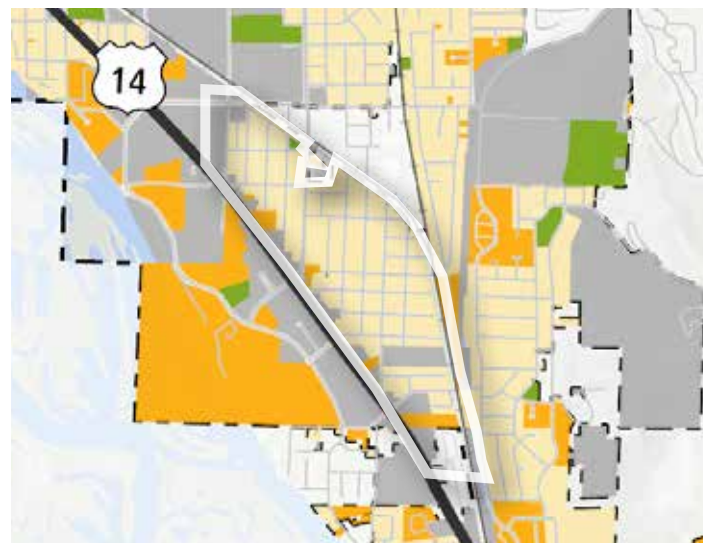
Policy Area Context

- Monitor the condition of housing and maintenance violations over time. No immediate policy intervention needed.
- Support new accessory dwelling unit conversions of existing structures. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots on the northern end of the neighborhood if following new development regulations.
- R1 zoning should allow for more flexible uses, including the construction of duplexes and triplexes.

Hintgen Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Holy Trinity-Longfellow Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: A variety of housing types can be appropriate to supplement existing low-density housing types.

Housing and Household Context

- Good housing stock condition overall with limited signs of neglect.
- Average assessed values compared to other neighborhoods. An affordable neighborhood for most owners. However, a moderate amount of renters face cost burden even with lower contract rents than other areas of La Crosse.
- Few vacant lots and lower vacancy rates of existing units than other areas of La Crosse.

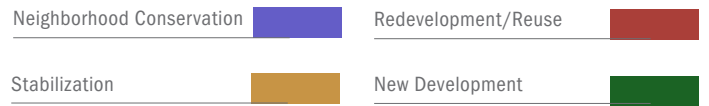
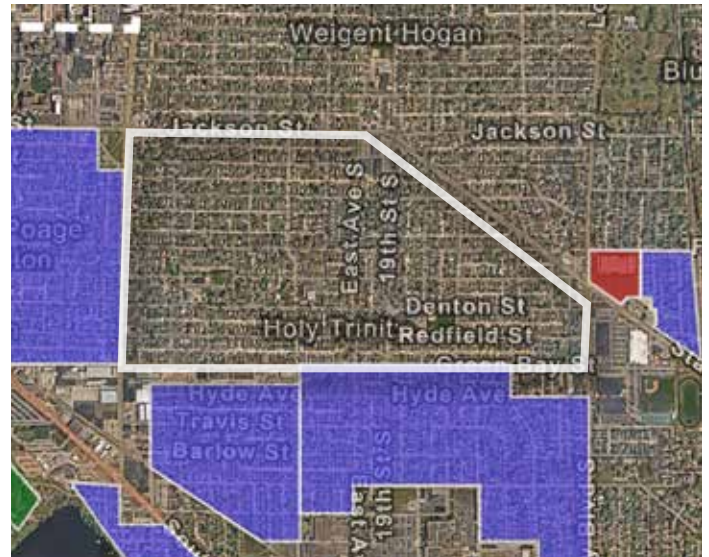
Zoning Context

- Mostly smaller lot single-family housing on lots under 7,200 square feet and more typically around 6,000 square feet. Lot widths generally range from 50-60 feet. Lot splits of corner lots are common.
- Mostly single-family units permitted under current zoning. More housing variety permitted along Jackson Street and Green Bay Street.

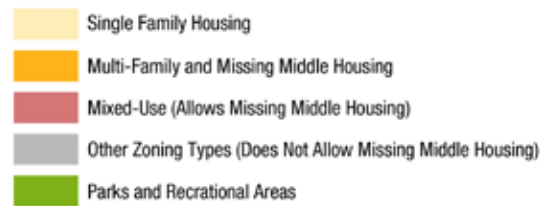
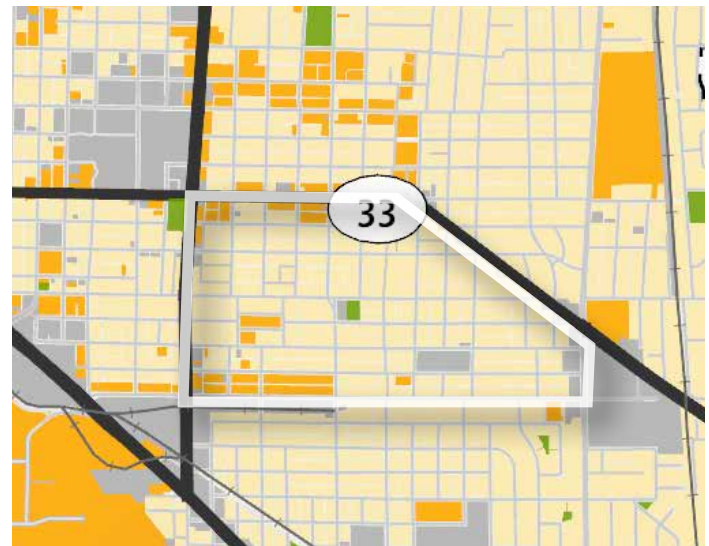
Policy Area Context

- Monitor the condition of housing and maintenance violations over time. No immediate policy intervention needed.
- Support different housing arrangements if proposed and adequately serviced.
- Support new accessory dwelling unit conversions of existing structures. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots if following new development regulations.
- R1 zoning should allow for more flexible uses, including the construction of duplexes and triplexes.

Holy Trinity-Longfellow Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Logan-Northside Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Desired to remain mostly as modest low-density residential up to two stories in some areas. Some higher-density options could be suitable along major streets.
- Constrained by floodplain regulations and costs for retrofits in northern areas.

Housing and Household Context

- Typical to lower assessed values compared to other neighborhoods. More housing options for households with lower incomes.
- Few vacant lots but higher vacancy rates of existing units than other areas of La Crosse.
- Fair condition overall with more prevalent exterior condition items in some areas.

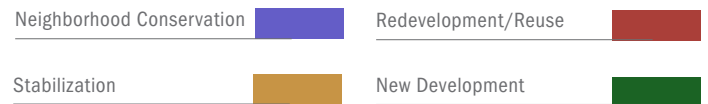
Zoning Context

- Mostly smaller lot single-family housing on lots under 7,200 square feet, many between 5,000 and 6,000 square feet. Lot widths as low as 35 feet in some locations. Typical lot widths around 40-50 feet.
- Mostly single-family units permitted under current zoning. More housing variety permitted near the south end of Highway 53.

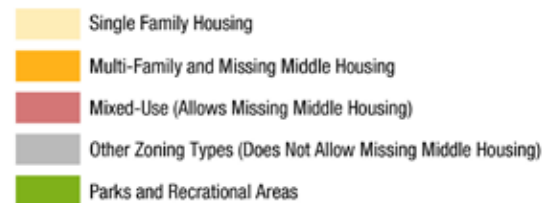
Policy Area Context

- Stabilization of housing on the north side, especially for areas in the floodplain. Unique policy solutions needed to finance maintenance for these households.
- Neighborhood conservation policies appropriate more on the southern ends of the area.
- Redevelopment opportunities for obsolete parking and commercial uses along the highway.
- New structures for accessory dwelling units will not fit on most lots. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots if following new development regulations.

Logan-Northside Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Lower Northside and Depot Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: A mix of all types of residential desired.
- Constrained by floodplain regulations and costs for retrofits in northern areas.

Housing and Household Context

- Some of the lowest assessed values in the city, but many owners are still facing cost burden.
- A handful of vacant lots and apparent stable vacancy rates of existing units.
- Fair to good condition north of the railroad tracks and lower exterior conditions visible for areas south of the railroad tracks.
- A wide mix of housing types scattered throughout.
- A higher presence of rentals and student population. Recent multi-family development are showing success in being able to navigate flood issues.

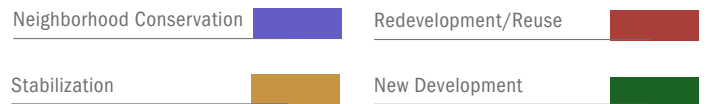
Zoning Context

- Mostly smaller lot housing on lots under 7,200 square feet, many between 5,000 and 6,000 square feet. Lot widths as low as 35 feet in some locations. Typical lot widths around 40-50 feet.
- More variety of housing types permitted under current zoning than many other neighborhoods in La Crosse.

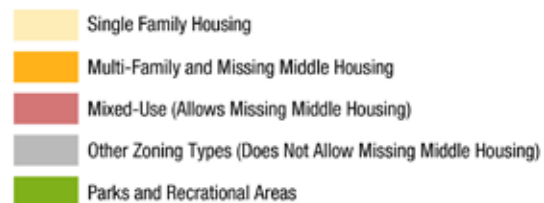
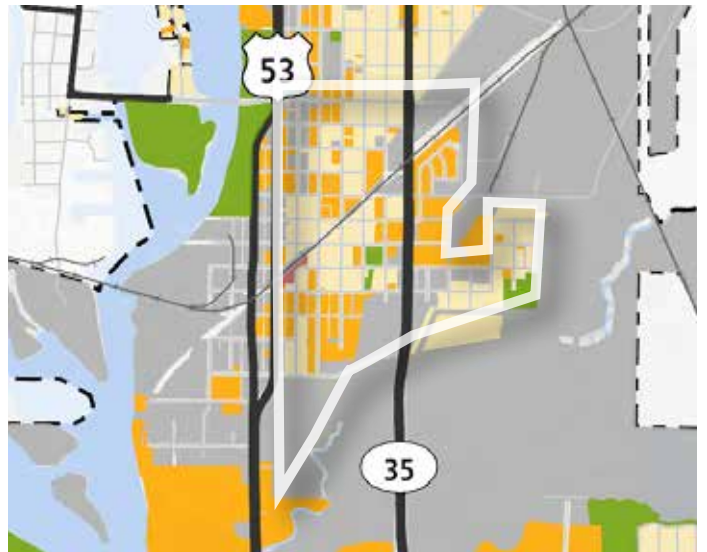
Policy Area Context

- Stabilization for single-unit housing south of the railroad tracks and west of George Street, working within floodplain regulations for critical maintenance.
- Neighborhood conservation approach for areas north of the railroad tracks.
- New structures for accessory dwelling units will not fit on most lots. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots if following new development regulations.

Lower Northside and Depot Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Northwoods Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Desired to remain single-unit housing, but with the opportunity for duplexes and attached housing.
- Constrained by topography on the south and floodplains on the north.

Housing and Household Context

- Almost all owner-occupied single-unit housing on larger lots. More recent attached condo units added near North Woods School that could be replicated if cemetery land is not needed in the future.
- Good condition, newer housing stock. Some new housing growth and vacant lots left to be developed
- Some of the highest home valuations in the city, but households tend to face low cost burden because of higher incomes.

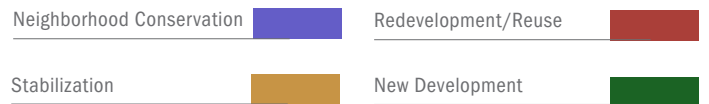
Zoning Context

- Nearly all of the area is restricted to single-unit detached housing.

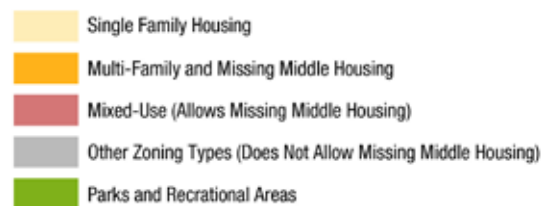
Policy Area Context

- Support attached housing arrangements if proposed and adequately serviced.
- Support new accessory dwelling unit additions or construction.

Northwoods Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Pettibone Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: New development not recommended except for a small area that is out of the floodplain.
- Entirely in the floodplain.

Housing and Household Context

- Only a small area of attached housing available on Pettibone Pointe Way. Higher cost rental housing options tailored to a specific market.

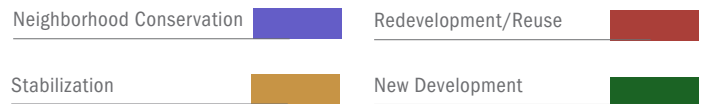
Zoning Context

- Almost all kept for parks and conservation.

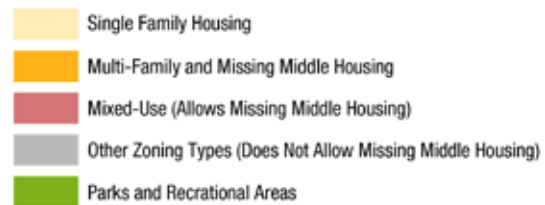
Policy Area Context

- Support build out of final medium-density parcels. No other new development.

Pettibone Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Powell-Poage-Hamilton Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Preservation of small lot single-unit neighborhoods, but all types of housing desirable in appropriate locations and design oriented to the street, such as the Denton Street Condos.

Housing and Household Context

- Average to lower assessed values for the city, with higher values on scattered infill projects throughout the neighborhood. Owners and renters in the area face higher cost burden than other areas of the city.
- Some of the older housing stock in the city.
- Few vacant lots remain but the Census is reporting somewhat higher vacancy rates of existing units than other parts of the city. This could be for reasons other than being for sale or rent.
- A wide mix of housing types scattered throughout.
- Generally good exterior conditions with target public investments evident. However, maintenance programs may be needed to supplement neighborhood incomes.

Zoning Context

- Restricted single-unit zoning in the core parts of the neighborhood with more housing types permitted on the periphery near commercial areas and major streets.
- Mostly smaller lot housing on lots under 7,200 square feet. The typical subdivision in the area platted around 7,000 square foot lots but lots as small as 4,000 square feet are not uncommon. Typical lot widths are around 40-50 feet.

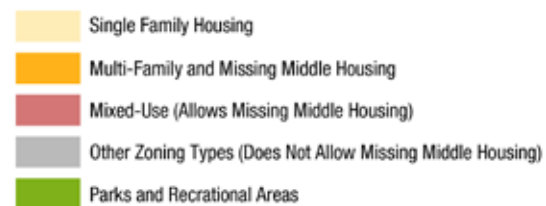
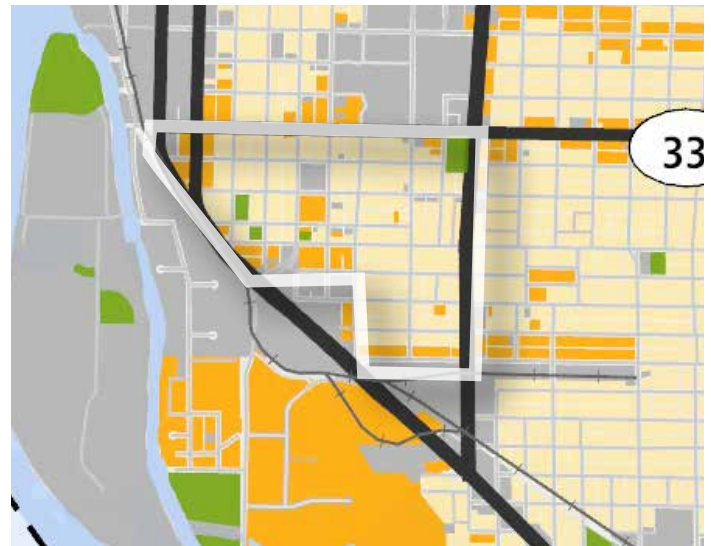
Policy Area Context

- A lot of effort and neighborhood championing have occurred in this area. These efforts should continue to be supported. This included targeted City policies with replacement homes and La Crosse Promise.
- Neighborhood conservation approach is appropriate for the entire area given its proximity to services, jobs, and lower cost housing options.
- New structures for accessory dwelling units will not fit on most lots. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots until the zoning ordinance is updated.

Powell-Poage-Hamilton Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Southern Bluffs Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Desired to be low-density residential and allowing medium-density residential and low-intensity mixed-use.
- Constrained by floodplains, conservation areas, and boundary agreements with the Town of Shelby.

Housing and Household Context

- High assessed values and higher incomes for owner-occupied households. But many renters are cost burdened.
- Most platted lots are built.
- Mostly single unit detached and attached structures.
- Generally newer developments in good condition. The Pineview Mobile Home Park along County Road MM is in relatively good condition as well.

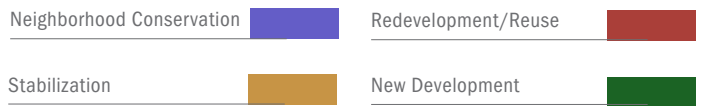
Zoning Context

- Residences are zoned R1 Single Family, R5 Multiple Family (Pineview), and PD Planned Development. Areas zoned PD south of Highway 61 include attached housing arrangements. It is possible the PD zoning was required to permit attached housing.

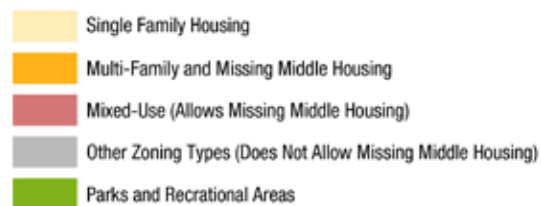
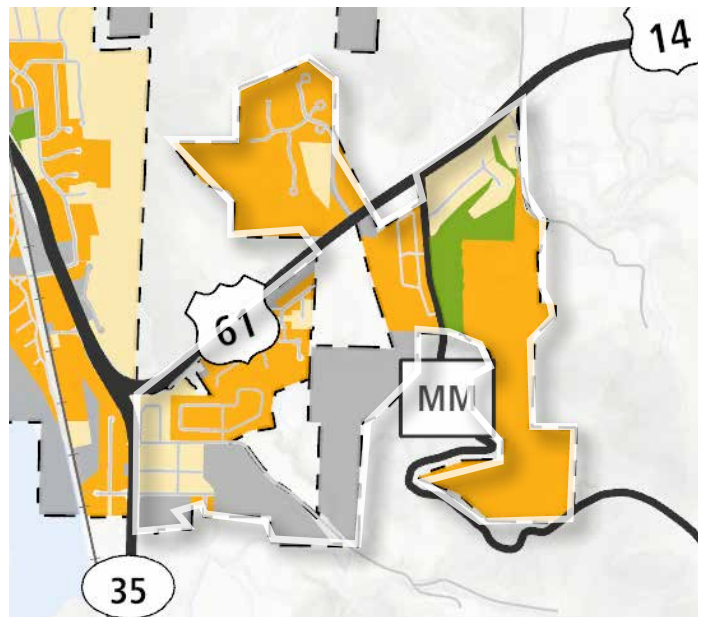
Policy Area Context

- Working the boundary agreement with the Town of Shelby is a critical step to determine infrastructure investments and new development areas.
- Stabilization of Pineview Mobile Home Park to ensure the units do not further deteriorate and monitor code violations. Most are still in fair condition and provide more affordable options in the area.
- Infrastructure investments can create new development opportunities in the Waterford neighborhood. Streets can be extended, but development needs to be planned in clusters to protect existing natural resources.
- Allow accessory dwelling units because of the number of larger lots that could accommodate a detached unit and parking.
- Evaluate why a PD was required for some areas and consider making two to four unit attached units allowed by right.

Southern Bluffs Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Spence Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Most residential allowed except for higher-intensity mixed-use.
- Fully developed. Any new units will come from redevelopment or additions to existing developed lots. No immediately evident redevelopment sites.

Housing and Household Context

- Stable assessed values and moderate household incomes. Provides attainable housing in many household’s price range. But renters are more cost burdened than owners.
- Mostly single-unit detached housing for own or rent.
- Good to fair condition housing. A stable neighborhood overall.

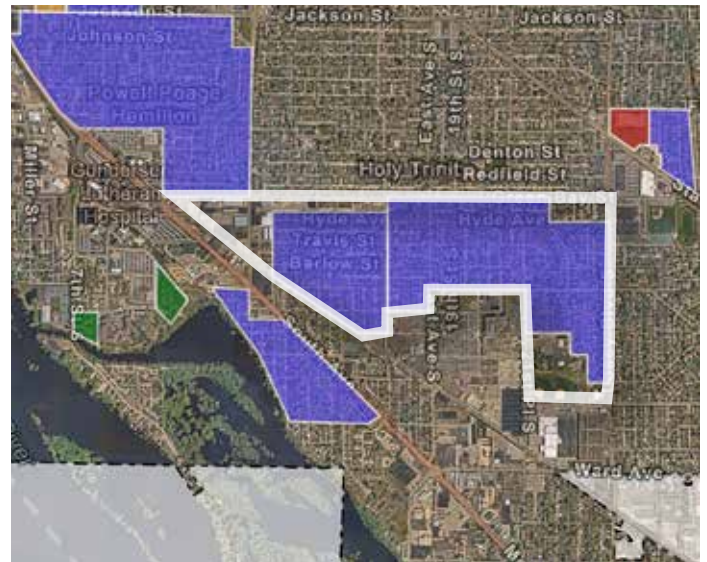
Zoning Context

- Mostly R1 Single-Family zoning. Recent infill along Green Bay Street near Losey Boulevard required PD Planned Development zoning. The exceptions required for PD zoning should be considered to allow by right.

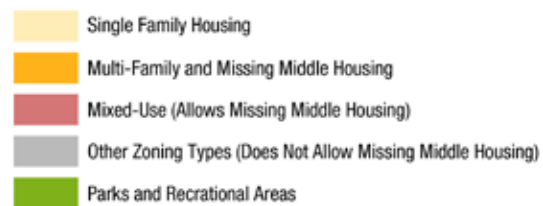
Policy Area Context

- Focus on housing and infrastructure maintenance. The Navy Reserve infill subdivision development provides an example of possible arrangement of new housing in existing neighborhoods across the city.
- Accessory dwelling units can fit the context of the neighborhood where there are some detached garages on alleys that could be converted. Smaller lots in most areas do not leave room for new structures to accommodate ADUs.

Spence Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Springbrook-Clayton Johnson Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low to medium-density residential desired for primary uses.
- Constrained by topography to the east.

Housing and Household Context

- Few rental occupied housing options, but those renters are more cost burdened than owners in this area, where multi-unit housing exists on the south end along 33rd Street S, but still lower than other parts of the city. Some of the burden reflects older, retiree households with fixed incomes.
- Much higher assessed values for homes abutting the bluffs on the east. Average assessed values for homes on the north side of the area. Overall, the neighborhood has higher assessed values than other areas of the city.
- Overall a newer housing stock in good condition.
- No vacant lots and apparent stable vacancy rates of existing units.

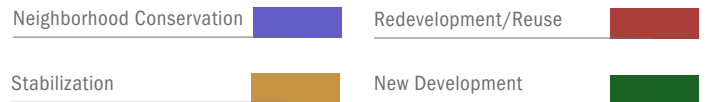
Zoning Context

- A good portion of the neighborhood permits multiple housing types by right, evidenced by multi-unit condos and attached housing on the southwest.
- Most single-unit detached housing developed right at 7,500 and above square foot lots, likely representative of the current code in place at the time of development. Attached units are generally on separate 5,000 square foot lots.

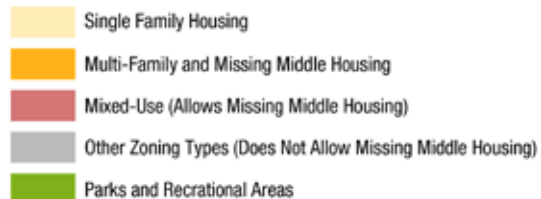
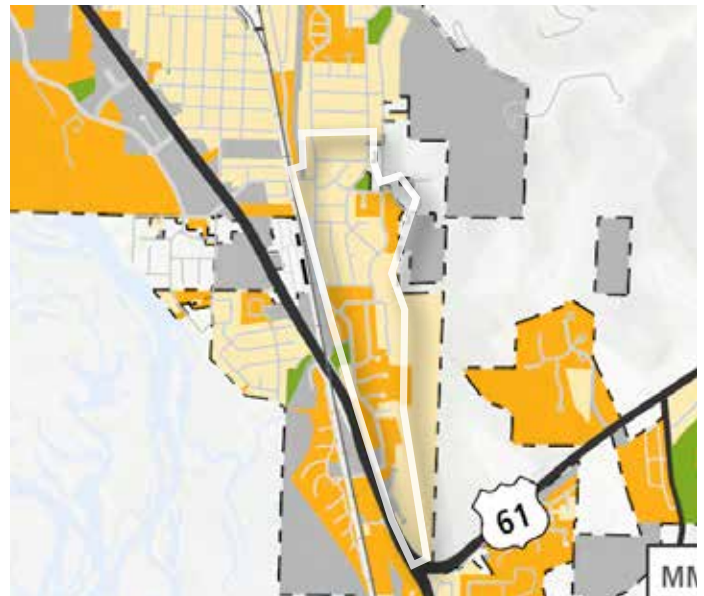
Policy Area Context

- Monitor the condition of housing and maintenance violations over time. No immediate policy intervention needed.
- New structures for accessory dwelling units will not fit on most lots given the lot arrangements and existing build out of homes. Attached accessory dwellings may be more feasible given larger home and garage square footages.

Springbrook-Clayton Johnson Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Swift Creek Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low and medium-density residential desired. Note, this neighborhood area does not include properties immediately adjacent to Highway 14.
- Constrained by the river on the west and Highway 14 on the east.

Housing and Household Context

- Generally higher valued housing and lower cost burden on households because of higher incomes and lower rents than other parts of the city.
- More options for older adults on the south end of the area, reflected in higher median ages.
- Few vacant lots, even in the manufactured home park along Rivercrest Drive.
- A wide mix of housing types scattered throughout.
- Generally good exterior conditions.

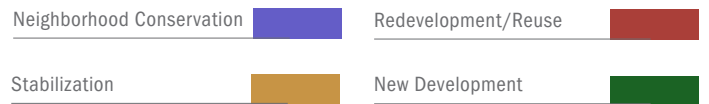
Zoning Context

- Zoning in the neighborhood permits a wide variety of housing.
- Single-unit detached developments range from 80-foot-wide, 8,000-9,000-square-foot lots on the south side to 50-foot-wide, 6,000-7,000-square-foot lots on the north side.
- Various other combinations of multi-unit and attached units on single lot development and split lot development.

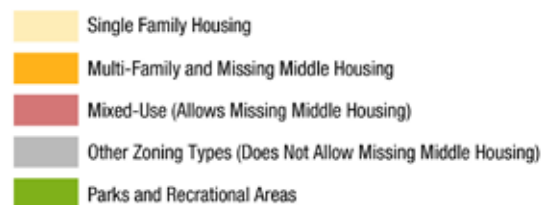
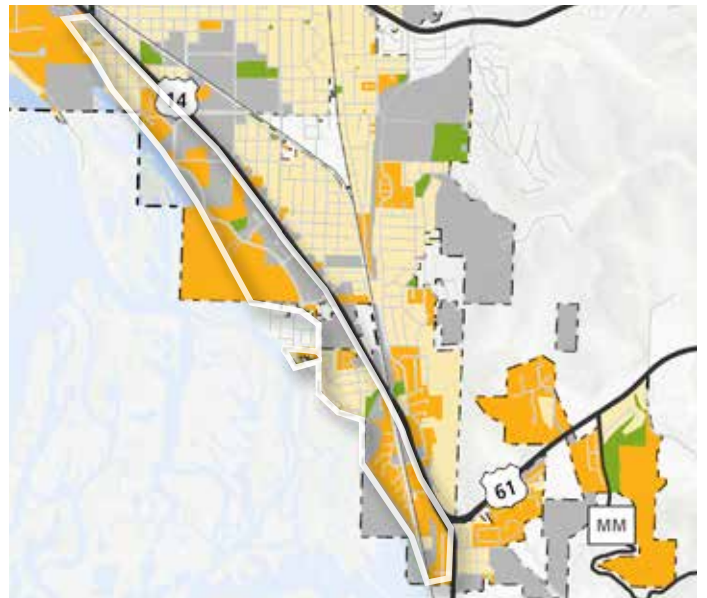
Policy Area Context

- Neighborhood conservation for the manufactured home park on Rivercrest Drive that is in good condition and should be kept that way.
- New development opportunities outside city limits to the south if extending River Run Road.
- Support higher density uses and redevelopment along Highway 14 where excess parking and obsolete commercial uses transition.
- Monitor the very north neighborhood blocks for neighborhood conservation.

Swift Creek Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Washburn Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low to medium-density residential desired for primary uses. Mixed-use environments encouraged.

Housing and Household Context

- Average assessed values with lower owner household cost burden than the city. However, much of the neighborhood is renter-occupied and renters are at the higher end of city cost burden. Median household incomes are lower than in eastern parts of the city.
- Includes some of the older housing stock in La Crosse.
- A few vacant infill lot opportunities. Redevelopment or conversion of poor conditions homes to new multi-unit structures has been a trend in the past.
- Scattered homes in poor condition with evidence of reinvestment on various blocks. The targeted housing improvement and replacement programs are making a difference with improved curb appeal block-by-block.

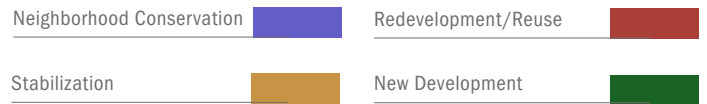
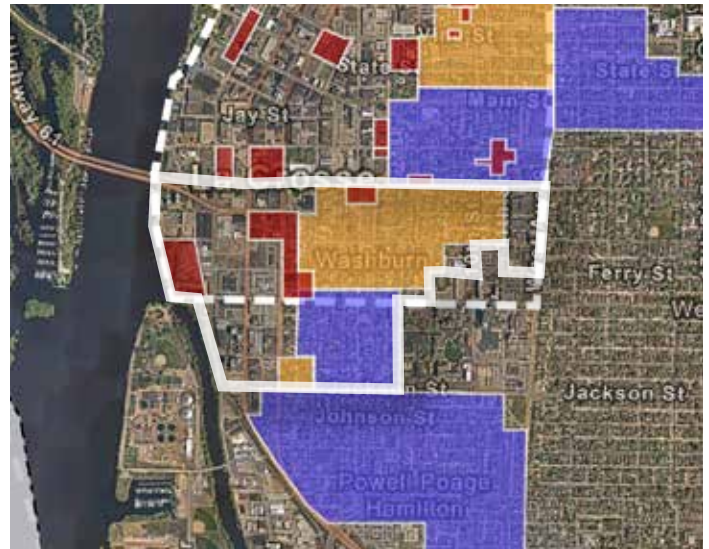
Zoning Context

- Much of the area is single-unit permitted zoning. Other housing types are more permitted on the periphery of the neighborhood near Viterbo University and along major streets.
- The Washburn Residential zoning overlay encompasses most of the area and focuses on neighborhood design and single-unit uses.
- Most lots tend to be under 7,500 square feet, but vary based on years of lot splits and consolidations.

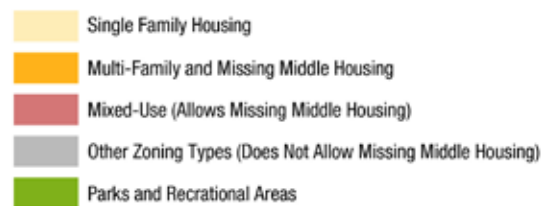
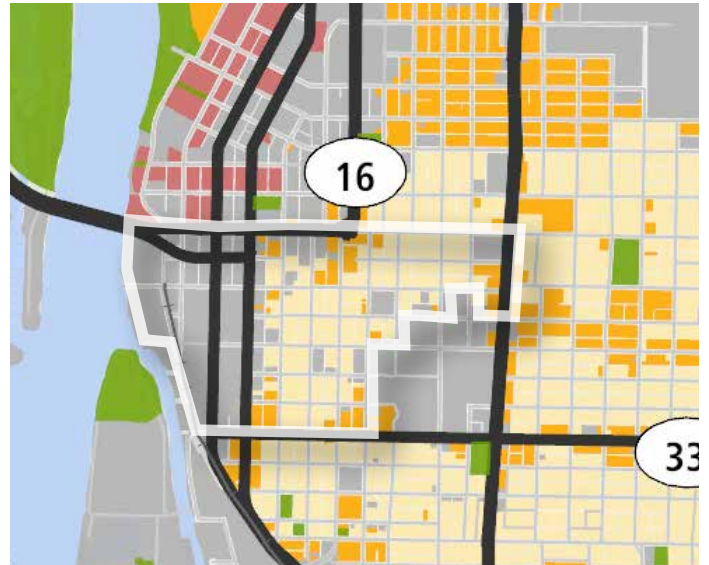
Policy Area Context

- The northern half of the neighborhood falls with the 2021 Imagine La Crosse Downtown Plan. The plan calls for several strategic sites for residential infill and redevelopment.
- Stabilization policies continue to be appropriate for much of the neighborhood.
- Conservation policies should target areas that have seen improvement to ensure they remain viable as other blocks improve.
- New structures for accessory dwelling units will not fit on most lots. Detached garages on alleys provide some opportunities if possible to convert.

Washburn Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for many lots until the zoning ordinance is updated.

Weigent-Hogan Neighborhood

Land Use Vision Summary

- Future land use: Low to medium-density residential desired for primary uses. New housing options encouraged.

Housing and Household Context

- Higher assessed values on the northern side of the neighborhood with generally above average values and rents in the remainder. Owners are much less cost burdened than renters.
- The area is a transition between lower income households in western areas to higher income households in eastern areas.
- A mix of owner and renter households. Stable vacancy rates.
- Few, if any, vacant infill lot opportunities.
- Structures are in good condition overall with few visible signs of poor maintenance.

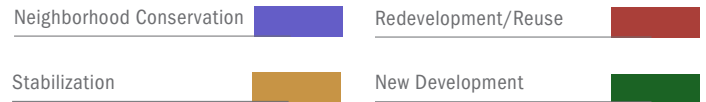
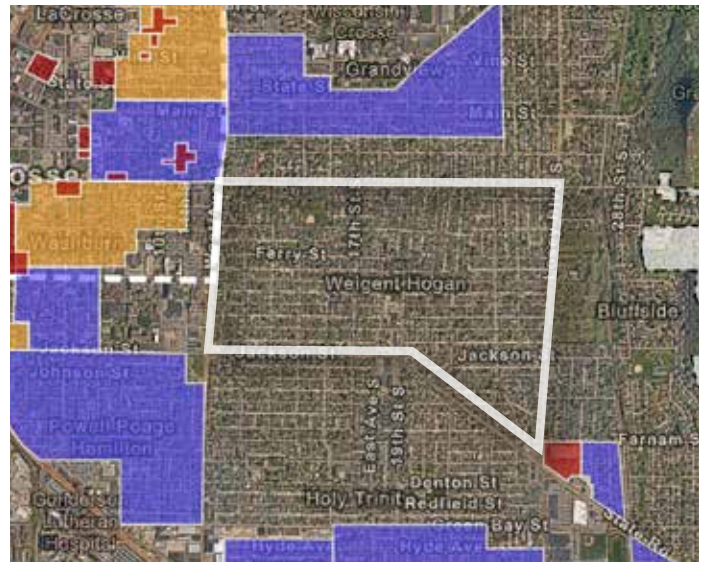
Zoning Context

- A mix of housing types permitted by zoning in the core along Ferry and Market Streets and along highways. Other areas limited to single-unit uses permitted by right.
- Lots tend to be around 50 feet wide, with lot areas depending on the depth of the lot and whether the portions of rear yards have been split off into additional lots over time. Deeper lots reach around 9,000 square feet while shallower lots range around 7,000 square feet.

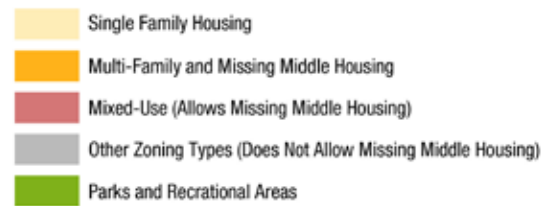
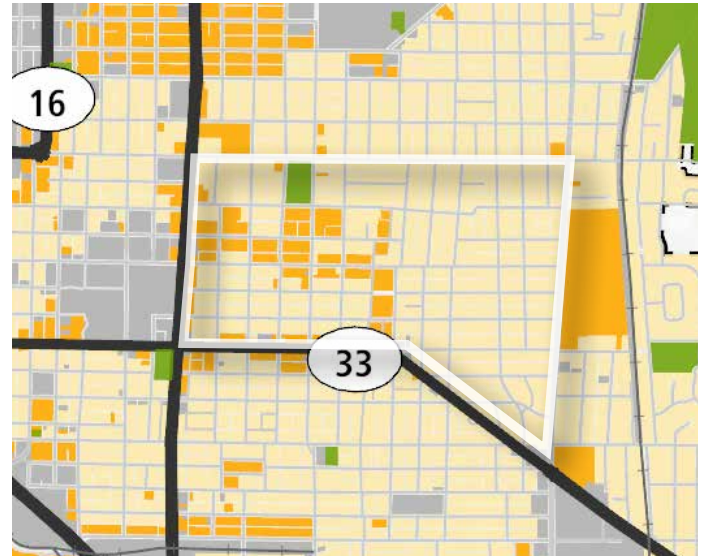
Policy Area Context

- Deeper lots provide more opportunities for accessory dwelling units, as well as different existing garage arrangements.
- Immediate structural policy not needed but monitor for future neighborhood conservation policy. Ordinance updates should allow many housing types.
- Flexibility in nonconformity regulations likely needed for some lots until the zoning ordinance is updated.

Weigent-Hogan Neighborhood Boundary



Maximum By-Right Residential Zoning



Districts and Corridors

With La Crosse's limited land for new subdivision development, most districts and corridors should be considered candidates for mixed residential components.

Land Use Vision Summary

Future land use: Most districts and corridors are desirable to have medium and high density residential and mixed-uses. The exceptions are major industrial districts and environmental areas.

Policy Area Context

- Create partnerships with district and corridor property owners to implement redevelopment of unneeded, obsolete, and underused space to add residential density through redevelopment or conversion of full sites or portions behind properties directly facing streets.
- Many sites are adjacent to existing neighborhoods with their own neighborhood context that should be considered when establishing a redevelopment program.
- Redevelopment that uses community incentives and gap financing should be required to offer a mix of housing types and densities and a percentage of affordable housing units.

5

Housing Policy Approaches

The policy approaches for citywide and specific policy areas are not a silver bullet to overcome all housing challenges. The private market has a role to play as well, including macroeconomic situations at the state and national level. However, approached collectively with the right partners, these concepts can stimulate needed steps to move the housing market forward in La Crosse.



WHO NEEDS TO BE AT THE TABLE?

A wide spectrum of partners will help bring together expertise from across the community to implement housing actions and approaches. As indicated throughout this chapter, these partners include, but are not limited to:

- City of La Crosse
- La Crosse Housing Authority
- La Crosse Area Planning Committee
- Realtors
- Builders and Developers
- La Crosse High Schools
- Colleges and Universities
- Lending Community - Banks, non-profits, etc.
- Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region
- Employers
- Non-profit Housing Services
- Adjacent Jurisdictions
- State of Wisconsin

HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

Action will be ongoing and ever changing. For example, no one could have reasonably predicted the nature of the 2020 pandemic and how exactly it would affect housing. Thus, the approach is flexible and should use tools as opportunities arise and warrant. But the action is also targeted to address the most imminent needs in La Crosse. Note, that when price points and household incomes are referenced, these are in 2022 dollars according to data sources and will need to be updated over time.

What the Policy Approaches CAN do:

- Establish a blueprint for new public policy and programs geared toward different housing products.
- Stimulate conversation on existing programs and level of funding.
- Show builders and developers the high demand for housing products in La Crosse, and the price points needed.
- Motivate other partners and employers to get involved in solutions. Whether staff assistance, housing development, or direct funding of programs.
- Show residents the opportunities available to them to improve their homes and living conditions.

What the Policy Approaches CANNOT do:

- Force builders or developers to construct a certain housing product, or housing at all.
- Force residents to make improvements to their homes (although code enforcement can).
- Affect challenges at the national level including interest rates, lending standards, raw material costs, and federal funding sources.
 - › However, it can help organize policy/ programs that decrease risk in lending, create gap financing methods, and offset material costs when appropriate.
- Require redevelopment of any specific site or building.

Housing Programs and Organizations in 2024

Below is a list of programs found on public websites in the summer of 2024. The list is likely not exhaustive.

City of La Crosse

- TIF
- Infrastructure assistance
- Housing Rehab Loan Program – 1% deferred loan
- Rental Loan Conversion Program – no income requirements
- Mayor’s Home Energy Challenge, Focus on Energy, and Xcel Energy incentives
- Floodplain Relief Program
- Lead Safe Homes Grant Program
- Landlord Mitigation Program – reduce risk for renting to low rental history applicants
- Fire Sprinkler Grant Program
- Replacement Housing Program
- 1st Time Homebuyer Downpayment Assistance Program

La Crosse Housing Authority

- Housing Choice Voucher
- Public Housing

Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region

- La Crosse Area Critical Home Repair
- Homeownership program
- ReNew the Block and Neighbors Day

Couleecap

- Homeless Assistance
- S.O.A.R. Program Social Security Outreach, Access, and Recovery
- Home weatherization program, Furnace Repair and Replacement, Water Conservation Program
- Homebuyer education, down payment assistance

State of Wisconsin

- Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) – Home improvement loan program, Refi Advantage, developer financing options
- Wisconsin Help for Homeowners (WHH)
- Infrastructure Access Loan Program (WHEDA)
- Restore Main Street Loan Program (WHEDA)
- Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program (WHEDA)
- Vacancy to Vitality Loan Program (WHEDA)
- Home Repair and Rehab Loan (Home R&R Loan) (WHEDA)

Other Organizations

- La Crosse Promise - Place-based scholarships; Neighborhood program
- Pathways Home Plan
- New Horizon’s Rapid Rehousing
- Thriving Families of La Crosse County - Donated homes for homeless
- Coulee Tenants United

Plans and Studies Referenced

- 2024 - Pathways Home: A Plan to End Homelessness in La Crosse
- 2023 - 2040 Comprehensive Plan
- 2023 - River Point District, Creating an Elevated Living Experience. Planning Development District
- 2023 Cia Siab, Inc. Hmong Housing Needs Assessment
- 2022 - City of La Crosse Housing Fee Report
- 2021 - Imagine La Crosse Downtown Plan
- 2020 - City of La Crosse Housing Affordability Analysis
- 2020 - Climate Action Plan
- 2019 -Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice
- 2018 - US Highway 53 Corridor Study
- 2018 - City of La Crosse Neighborhood Revitalization Commission Action Plan Prioritization

Policy Approach Tools

Overarching Action Applying to All Goals:

Complete a comprehensive review and update of the City’s zoning code to evaluate barriers to development

The conversations during the housing study process continually came back to regulatory and procedural barriers to housing development. Comments with examples came up from all different stakeholders. While national narratives are explaining more and more the need for widespread zoning reform, local codes do vary. However, there are many opportunities in the City of La Crosse’s code to remove barriers to achieving housing goals. Updates to the city zoning and subdivision codes contribute to advancing all other housing actions and approaches in this section.

Because of the importance and frequency of comments regarding regulations, the following is a detailed review of updates that can help achieve the housing goals, actions, and approaches in this study.

Zoning and Subdivision Code Review: Barriers to Housing Goals

This section summarizes the study consultant’s review of the La Crosse Municipal Code to identify possible barriers to reaching the goals of the 2024 Housing Study. The items below reflect an outsider’s analysis with limited consultation with local staff. Staff may administer some regulations differently than interpreted by the consultant. The reader should not construe anything in this section as legal advice.

National studies and research reports indicate many external forces prohibit the ability to meet local housing needs. Many of these are outside a community’s control, such as construction costs and financing rates. However, one significant finding in many studies is the negative impact of local regulations on housing affordability.

The City of La Crosse is due for a full zoning and subdivision code rewrite as a result of amendments folded on top of each other over time. The following pages are essential to consider to meet housing goals. Note: the term “by right” as used in this section means a standard or use is allowed without additional approval procedures.

THE COST OF REGULATIONS

A 2022 report by the National Home Builders Association found that 40.6% of the cost of multi-family development and 24% for single-family development was from government regulations. These were national studies, that included states and locations with greater environmental and other impact related fees than perhaps applicable to La Crosse. A preliminary assessment would indicate that this may be on the high side for a project being completed in La Crosse and that further research is needed.

However, it is true that regulations have added to the cost of development over the past 50 years. Often these regulations are put in place based on lessons learned with regard to life and safety. Tornadoes, flooding, and fire have all led to requiring different practices in how and where we build. These often do add costs that currently have to be passed along to the consumer. Additionally, infrastructure costs such as streets are often passed along to the property owners, especially in developing areas where the traffic is being generated. These are all things that we need to make our communities safe and livable places, however, there are few funding strategies that do not pass these costs on to either the consumer or taxpayer.

Regulations, policies, and funding sources should regularly be reviewed and researched to identify best practices for both reducing costs but also improving safety and quality of life.

Code Item A: Allow more residential use types and variety across all residential districts

Nearly 67% of all city-zoned land outside of Agricultural zoning that allows residential uses by right falls under the R-1: Single-Family or WR: Washburn Residential districts. Neither of these districts allows dwellings other than single-family residential by right. Any other housing type in these districts requires going through approval procedures to receive approval if allowed. For example:

- Existing non single-family dwellings can continue as nonconformities and in certain areas but generally cannot be expanded or duplicated without special approval. If these nonconformities are ok today without issues, why not make new dwellings allowed under similar designs?
- New duplexes or two-family dwellings on one lot are not allowed in R-1 districts. If associated with the same development standards, a duplex has the same impact as a single-family attached dwelling.
- Sec. 115-142. R-1 Single Family Residence District Regulations (a)(4) – A specific area is called out to allow two or more family dwellings that existed prior to April 10, 1997. This area should be rezoned to a higher district to allow more housing variety by right or allow these uses by right in the R-1 district.
- Two-family dwellings containing more than three bedrooms in the R-2 and R-3 District should be allowed by right instead of requiring a conditional use permit.

Additionally, each more intense residential zoning district only takes a small step up in permitted residential uses. For example, the R-2 district only adds on allowing two-family dwellings of no more than three bedrooms by right and the R-3 district to four or more family dwelling that existing before 1997, and so on for the multiple dwelling districts. A small step up in residential use allowances for each residential zoning district still requires a full rezoning procedure.

Recommendation. Expand the allowed residential use types in all residential districts and question whether conditional use permits and nonconformity restrictions.

Code Item B: Allow mixed-use building types more broadly

There does not appear to be a mixed-use land use type allowed by right outside the CBD and commercial districts where residential is allowed on upper floors. The Planned Development District appears to be the vehicle applicants are using to achieve easier mixed-use development. However, the approval standards in the PD District are largely up to the review body to determine if the application is appropriate.

Recommendation. Add a definition for mixed-use to allow these types of structures in more districts. Explicitly allow mixed-use structures in most commercial and high-density residential districts by right.

Code Item C: Adjust residential bulk standards

Minimum lot sizes, lot widths, setbacks, open space ratios, and other site dimensional standards indirectly regulate feasible housing types even if more housing types are permitted by right in a zoning district. Inhibiting standards include:

Minimum lot size. Minimum lot sizes can be reduced in many districts to match residential zoning objectives.

- R-1 District – The minimum lot size by right is 7,200 square feet. However, any lot platted before 1938 can be below 5,000 square feet, and lots platted between 1938 and 1966 can be as low as 5,000 square feet. If a 5,000 square foot lot is ok in one part of the R-1 district, then it can be permitted in other parts of the same district. These are minimums. The requirement does not require lots to be 5,000 square feet (8.7 gross dwelling units per acre). But it should be allowed as an option. Reduce the minimum lot size in the R-1 district to 5,000 square feet.
- R-2, R-3, Low-Density Multiple Family District – Same lot size recommendation as the R-1 district above. Consider a minimum lot size below 5,000 square feet for these districts.
- Multiple Dwelling District – Regulation minimum lot size by area per unit or a set number, not both. If regulating by area per unit, reduce the minimum from the current 1,500 square feet per family. At this rate, a four to eight-plex apartment or townhome would require a 6,000 to 12,000 square foot lot, which can limit infill possibilities.

Minimum lot width. Minimum lot widths are a significant driver of overall lot size. Even if the minimum lot size is permitted to be low, an overly large minimum lot width still results in larger lots.

- Sec. 113-140. Lots –
 - › Every lot has to have 30 feet facing a public street and be 60 feet wide at the building setback line. Two attached dwellings separated by a lot line are exempt. However, there is no mention of more than two attached dwellings, and the lot width at the setback line still has to be 30 feet wide in the subdivision code. A statement that lot widths must conform with the zoning regulations could also create contradictions when amendments are made. Reduce this lot width standard. There are several reasons to reduce minimum lot widths:

- › It gives more options for different housing arrangements where the developer can maximize available overage space in the development.
- › It gives more flexibility to provide more moderate to high density single-unit neighborhoods as defined in the district descriptions.
- › Lots have to have a minimum average depth of 100 feet. The subdivision standard for a minimum lot depth of 100 feet could be eliminated. Lot depth requirements are generally not needed to regulate density. There are more opportunities for variety in housing types without a lot depth requirement. Additionally, most newer developments (and many older developments) do not subdivide lots with depths less than 100 feet anyway. This is because of consumer preferences for backyards, space for rear yard garages, and other amenities.

Minimum setbacks. Building codes and safety warrant a level of setback between buildings. But, arbitrary minimum setback distances can limit the buildable area and make building on infill sites difficult by requiring larger lot sizes to make projects work.

- Sec. 113-140. Lots – Eliminate the subdivision standard that corner lots have to have an extra ten feet of width.
- Residential district front setbacks – Front setbacks influence the design, arrangement, and types of housing that can fit on a lot. The 25 foot front setback can be less to allow more room in the rear yard for accessory dwellings and better frame the streetscape like more traditional neighborhoods. Reduce the minimum front setback to at least 20 feet. A front setback of 10-15 feet should also be considered. Twenty feet for the lowest density districts would still allow room for cars to park on a driveway and not obstruct sidewalks.
- Residential district side setbacks – Where required, minimum side yard setbacks can be five feet and still comply with building codes.

Recommendation. Generally reduce minimum bulk requirements as examined above in certain districts. Consider using maximum standards in areas where density is directed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Code Item D: Lessen nonconformity restrictions in appropriate situations

Existing residential homes will continue to be the most affordable in the community. Each existing residential unit lost is an affordable unit lost. Therefore, the code should consider all steps necessary to maintain existing homes that are not nuisances and in good condition. Additionally, loan financing can be more difficult if a property is coined nonconforming by the city.

Recommendation. Evaluate nonconforming regulations to ensure that compliance requirements focus mostly on properties with records of nuisance or building code violations rather than merely seeking more properties to align with regulations that did not apply at the time of construction. Examples include:

- **Universal Design waivers.** Consider allowing modifications or additions to a residential nonconforming use that add Universal Design upgrades and internal accessibility improvements.
- **Minor modifications.** Allow a range of one-time deviations to residential nonconforming uses if no previous violations exist. Ten percent deviations could be a starting point. Some cities allow a minor modification process that is essentially an administrative zoning exception. The process sets out the exceptions permitted and gives administrative approval and notice to surrounding property owners. This process could also be used in other districts and not just for nonconforming situations.
- **Restoration after damage.** Exempt residential uses in residential zoning districts from the 50% compliance trigger for lot size, setbacks, building size, and parking when damaged. Instead, allow restoration of these damaged structures to the condition at the time of damage.
- **Adaptive reuse and reconstruction.** Consider allowing adaptive reuse and reconstruction for any nonconforming building so long as the property has no known nuisance complaints or safety violations
- **Conditional use permits.** Consider allowing a conditional use permit procedure to allow a property owner to make a nonconformity conforming.

Code Item E: Reduce minimum parking requirements

Parking is often the first item a developer considers and one of the most expensive in terms of land not used for income-producing property. Additionally, high parking requirements can lead to inefficient land development. Typically, a developer knows the amount of parking needed for the use and to sell the final built product.

Recommendation. Consider opportunities to reduce the minimum parking requirements. In general, a developer will provide the number of parking spaces they feel is needed to market the use. Possible reductions include:

- Like in the Neighborhood Center Overlay District, reduce residential parking requirements to a minimum of one space per unit and count on-street spaces for all residential use types.
- Consider counting on-street parking to count for residential uses.
- Consider reducing or eliminating parking requirements for desirable land uses such as affordable housing, mixed-uses, and infill development.

Code Item F: Multifamily Housing Design Standards

Division 3 lists design standards to “improve the appearance, quality, and functions of multifamily housing.” It establishes a Design Review Committee (DRC) to review applications. The following items can be more clear or amended:

- **DRC procedures.** The meeting times, review timelines, and allowable exceptions are not clearly stated in the code, leaving room for interpretation and uncertainty.
- **Minimum off-street parking.** The stated requirement is one space per bedroom, which contradicts the supplemental parking space requirement of 1.5 spaces.
- **Design materials.** The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes good site design, landscaping, and quality corridors. The Multifamily design standards on building materials in certain areas are beneficial. However, an easier to interpret approach is to list all prohibited materials instead of allowed materials for easier evaluation, given the ever-changing types of materials.

Code Item G: Evaluate Planned Development (PD) District approvals

Over 16% of city zoned land is PD zoning. The PD district requires special review and approvals. Flexibility is allowed, but approval criteria are often subjective and up to the Council’s discretion. The approval timeline is also longer at a maximum of 60 days from submission to the Plan Commission, and there are more submittal requirements. However, the district is still used frequently.

Recommendation. Review past modifications and exceptions granted on PD applications. If more than four or five similar exceptions have been granted, consider making the exception allowed by right in the underlying district. A common request through a PD application may indicate an underlying deficiency in the code. It may be easier to allow the common requests by right rather than require a more extended procedure for the same result.

Code Item H: Evaluate exceptions and modifications granted in established neighborhoods

As noted above, there are many exceptions and modifications allowed throughout the code. The most evident application of exceptions is through Planned Development (PD) zoning approvals. About 16.5% of zoned parcels in the city are PD zoning. Many PD’s apply to more recent housing developments. It appears the City wants to allow flexibility in residential infill neighborhoods. If the City is granting a lot of the same exceptions through these PD’s, those standards should be permitted by right.

Recommendation. Review past modifications and exceptions granted on residential development. If more than four or five similar exceptions have been given, consider making the exception allowed by right.

Code Item I: Review procedures

Time is a significant cost in the development process. Unnecessarily long approval timelines create uncertainty and can often be mitigated. City staff are busy, but priorities for moving applications along can alleviate housing barriers.

Recommendation. Evaluate whether all review timelines are appropriate and where there are opportunities to reduce approval periods. Approval timelines for rezonings, subdivisions, and administrative design review seem reasonable at a maximum of 30 days from a completed application. Regular evaluation of approval timelines should examine what standards are essential for Council review versus administrative staff review.

Code Item J: Make it easier to determine everything that applies to a property/project

Codes that have been amended over time rather than rewritten evolve to have standards and exceptions in many different places of the code. Because of this, there may be recommendations in this memo that are in fact allowed. There are many instances in the code with contradictions and “this section supersedes other sections.” With the number of exceptions and subjective approval criteria spread throughout the code, it may not be clear to an outside developer that certain exceptions may apply to their property. Instead of trying a more innovative design, a developer may be inclined to go with the path of apparent least resistance by copying residential development types approved previously.

Recommendation. The current requirement for pre-application conferences for certain applications does offer a way to mitigate confusion. Ultimately, the easiest solution is a full rewrite of the code for better organization. An intermediate solution is to create consolidated summary sheets of code requirements that can be posted on the City website. The summary sheets would list all the development regulations, exceptions, and places to build residential uses like duplexes, townhomes, multiplexes, and multi-family uses.

Code Item K: Be more clear on the intent of residential districts and seek consolidation

There are eight base residential zoning districts, plus Planned Development districts and the Neighborhood Center Overlay Districts. Nearly every step up in housing type comes with its own district. The existing zoning map illustrates this, where neighborhoods with more housing types have many different district “colors” scattered around the map. The dimensional standards across residential districts also do not provide much variation before a rezoning to another district is required. The R-2, R-3, and R-4 districts are especially quite similar.

Additionally, there are no purpose or intent statements for each zoning district. An intent statement gives the general purpose of the district and how it aligns with city goals and objections. While it may seem minor, an intent statement gives decision-makers and staff an initial guide to what the district hopes to accomplish.

Recommendation. Consolidate the number of zoning districts and include an intent statement for each zoning district. Align the intent statement with the comprehensive plan future land use districts.

Code Item L: Make sure to avoid subjective decision-making criteria whenever possible

In addition to the dispersion of exceptions and different allowances for overlays spread throughout the code, the code also includes various subjective decision-making criteria. Subjective decision-making should be avoided whenever possible. Objective criteria will help maintain consistency between changes in staff and leadership and restore approval expectations for builders and developers. Some subjectivity examples include:

- **Sec 103-268 Rules and definitions.** The Housing and Property Maintenance section defines “attractive appearance” as being “determined by the administrative officer under the regulations of this article or as determined by an authority designated by law or this article.” Changes in administrative officers over time can quickly change the ruling on what is “attractive.”
- **Sec 113-140 Lots.** States that “the lots should be designed to provide an aesthetically pleasing building site and a proper architectural setting for the buildings contemplated.” Who determines what aesthetically pleasing means?
- **Sec 115-156 Planned Development District.** Basis for approval “Whether the proposed Planned Development District is consistent in all respects to the purpose of this section and to the spirit and intent of this chapter; is in conformity with the general plan for the La Crosse Area or component plans thereof for community development; would not be contrary to the general welfare and economic prosperity of the City or of the immediate neighborhood; and, that the benefits and improved design of the resultant development justifies the establishments of a Planned Development District.”

Code Item M: Code Clarity

Amending codes over time rather than rewriting leads to standards and exceptions in many different places of the code. Because of this, there may be recommendations in this memo that are allowed. It may not be clear to an outside developer that certain exceptions may apply to their property. Instead of trying a more innovative design, a developer may be inclined to go with the path of apparent least resistance by copying residential development types approved previously.

It may seem minor, but the clarity of a code goes a long way to building trust with users and consistency with decision-makers. Right now, the code contains a lot of legal jargon and cross-references that are only listed with a section number. A few simple items in a code rewrite will help greatly:

- **Clear language.** Code can be written more clearly and in modern terminology and still be enforceable and legal. There are a lot of long descriptions in the code that are hard to understand and interpret. Some instances appear contradictory in different parts of the code. For example: Sec. 115-148. Washburn Neighborhood Residential District lists in (g) that a pre-application meeting is recommended while (g)(2) states a pre-application meeting is required.
- **Cross-references.** Cross-references to other portions of the code are made with the section number. These are linked in the online code. Adding a simple section text title to the cross-reference will help understand the reference while reading instead of having to go to the reference mid-sentence to understand the reference. For example, in Sec. 115-148. Washburn Neighborhood Residential District (b)(1), the code says: “Any use permitted in the Single-Family (R-1) District, excluding subsection 115-142(a)(10).” The understanding is much more clear by adding “Any use permitted in the Single-Family (R-1) District, excluding subsection 115-142(a)(10), R-1 Conditional Uses.” Doing so also protects against inconsistencies if code sections change by cross-reference numbering is missing. The additional narrative title helps identify the intended correct section.
- **Images and illustrations.** A code update should include the extensive use of illustrations.

Code Item N: Miscellaneous Items

Below are a variety of other items to consider for housing goals:

- **Sec 103-107 Substitutes for buildings.** Prohibits using shipping containers for principal buildings. Shipping container homes are likely not appropriate in many historic La Crosse neighborhoods. However, there are examples in other cities of innovative ways to use containers for homes and accessory dwellings. For some, this can be a cost savings and reduce waste. The City may want to consider situations where shipping containers can be used through a conditional use permit and design standards.
- **Sec 103-329 Light, ventilation and heating minimum standards.** There are requirements for insect screens and storm windows on all exterior windows. This may be a building code requirement. But if not, it might be a relatively minor item that inspectors are charging landlords and owners that may not be necessary.
- **Article II Mobile Home Parks.** Mobile homes are an affordable housing option for many. While the development of new mobile home parks is not happening much anymore, existing parks in good standing should be maintained. Some of the Mobile Home Park standards in the code adopted in 1980 may no longer be relevant to parks today. Eliminating these unnecessary standards can keep existing parks conforming and allow more flexibility for repairs. An example is in Sec. 107-36. Service building and accommodations. This section requires a service building with shared toilets, showers, and laundry.
- **Sec 113-135 Street arrangement.** The subdivision code does not allow alleys in residential districts. Alleys can provide access to ADUs or other smaller units without requiring large expenses in street construction or larger lot sizes, and they should be allowed.
- **Sec 113-137 Street design standards.** Consider allowable reductions in local residential minimum right-of-way and pavement widths, 60-foot and 36-foot respective minimum standards. Land and infrastructure costs can be lower when less land is needed for the streets. Lower width could also help when trying to develop on constrained sites with topographical challenges in La Crosse. Many residential streets can be less than 36 feet wide of pavement, especially when on-street parking is not allowed. Many existing neighborhood residential streets have less than 36 feet of pavement width.
- **Sec 115-148 Washburn Neighborhood Residential District(g).** Require instead of recommending a pre-application meeting with staff. There are enough detailed standards that a meeting will increase understanding for a smoother process.
- **The Fire Department.** Their level of involvement in enforcement and review of zoning should be matched by their involvement in housing policy and plan development (if not already happening).
- **Think about upcoming ways that developers and homeowners might use renewable energy to make housing more affordable.** Adjust standards to allow small-scale solar or wind energy systems on more properties in residential districts.
- **Definitions should be reviewed for updates to meet housing goals and create consistency.** The definition of “family” is an example. Many cities are getting away from defining “families” because of the difficulty in enforcement and changing the composition of households. Cities with universities often use the definition of family to regulate student housing density, which is facing increasing challenges. In La Crosse, the term “family” also has a different definition for the R-1 and Washburn Residential district, the R-2 district, and the R-3 and R-4 district. This is confusing and opens up challenges in enforcement. Generally, it is recommended to avoid using the term “family” in zoning regulations. For example, Iowa City, IA (larger population but also a much larger university) defines it as:
 - › Iowa City, IA: “One person or a group of persons that meet the definition of “household” - An individual or group of individuals that reside within a single family dwelling or within a dwelling unit of a two family dwelling or multi-family dwelling as a single housekeeping organization, where the responsibilities and expenses of maintaining the household are shared among the members; also a group of individuals that meet the definition of a group household, as defined in this title.

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 1: Increase the supply of owner and rental units affordable to households making less than the area median income (AMI)

Actions and Approaches

1. Action: Continue to actively partner with housing developers to pursue funding opportunities for the development and rehabilitation of income-qualified rental units; continue to promote the City's Affordable Housing Loan Fund to incentivize affordable multi-family housing developments

Target Areas

Citywide

Approaches

A) Permanent Affordability Guarantees. Most programs that support the development of affordable housing units have no guarantee that these units will remain affordable into the future. Over time programs expire or succeeding owners are not required to meet income qualifications. A growing movement is looking at ways to maintain permanent affordability for future generations. These efforts can include land trusts, land use commitments that are tied to property deeds, or covenants tied to city assistance on a project. Every project is different and therefore a mixture of these opportunities should be explored.

Examples:

- Shared Equity Housing/Deed-Restricted Housing. These units usually have a legal agreement securing the affordability of the unit between 30 and 99 years.
- Community Land Trusts (CLT). A CLT is a private, nonprofit organization that owns land on behalf of a community to ensure affordability. In a CLT, homeowners purchase just the improvements, and those units may have deed restriction that limit the appreciation of the home. In this shared equity model, a homeowner builds equity, but the amount of equity is limited to maintain affordability for the next homeowner.

Housing Action Team for Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing - Bloomington, MN

The partnership formed by the city and other organizations took the lead to identify apartment complexes for preservation and infill based on size, condition, proximity to transit and amenities. The team works to acquire NOAH apartments before private developers can. In one apartment complex acquisition, the team:

- Preserved 306 existing affordable units.
- Redeveloped a site via tax credit for rehabilitation and 172 additional new units.
- Established a maintenance plan that addresses critical health and safety issues.
- Provided housing stability and long-term affordability for one of their most challenging multifamily developments.

- Purchase protection programs. Nationally and locally, non-profits are beginning to purchase homes to protect unsubsidized affordable units. In these cases, they work with Realtors and neighborhood leaders to protect housing from outside investors and cash buyers who out-compete local buyers using traditional financing. Some homes may be existing rentals and the goal is to maintain unsubsidized affordable rents. Generally, the non-profits are not looking to hold the properties but rather ensure affordability and help build wealth for traditionally marginalized populations or neighborhoods.
- **Lead.** Non-profit, community development corporation, etc
- **Partners.** City of La Crosse through providing lots/land, assisting with site prep, or providing funding for the initial housing construction
- **Target Households.** Owners at low Area Median Income
- **Target Housing Types.** All

B) Inventory of expiring units and approach to maintaining affordability. Managers of HUD subsidized units such as Low Income Housing Tax Credit projects can initiate a process to leave the program after a certain number of years. These projects are getting harder to do for developers, thus preserving the existing inventory is essential. This starts with knowing future intentions for these properties.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Housing Authority, property managers
- **Target Households.** Renters qualifying at low Area Median Income
- **Target Housing Types.** Multi-unit

C) Community development finance institution for financing help for properties with affordable rents (but unsubsidized). The lending community is intimately involved in all aspects of the housing market. While many aspects of their business and practice are tightly regulated, other aspects do permit innovation and proactive participation in the housing market. CDFI's can bring together financial institutions and those interested in doing a variety of projects that aim to strengthen La Crosse. CDFIs are private financial institutions dedicated to lending to low-income, low-wealth, or disadvantaged communities who have difficulty accessing traditional lines of credit.

- **Lead.** Non-profit, Lending Community
- **Partners.** City of La Crosse
- **Target Households.** Owners and renters below 100% Area Median Income
- **Target Housing Types.** All at lower price points, 100% Area Median Income affordable

Great Housing Strategies Toolkit - Grand Rapids, MI

The City of Grand Rapids has made housing a forefront policy for the community. Much like this study and its Task Force follow-up, Grand Rapids began their initiative with a robust community listening schedule. The efforts evolved into a series of focused work groups to develop policy and program recommendations. Work groups include:

- Land use and zoning
- Housing finance, economic
- Workforce development
- Low-income and vulnerable populations

The ongoing efforts have resulted in a Housing Strategies Toolkit listing all the available programs or initiatives in progress and what they will address.

<https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Departments/Community-Development/Housing-Rehabilitation-Program/Great-Housing-Strategies>

D) Program toolkit or guide for developers to follow when utilizing assistance to build affordable units. It is often much easier, and profitable, for a developer to stick to products and designs that have been successfully approved in the past. If encouraging or requiring different products and price points as recommended in this study, then provide help for getting starting. These new approaches can be especially challenging for smaller building and development companies that do not work in markets outside of La Crosse.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Builders/developers, Homebuilders association
- **Target Households.** Owners and renters below 100% Area Median Income
- **Target Housing Types.** All at lower price points, 100% Area Median Income affordable

2. Action: Investigate and document the condition of dilapidated rental properties; increase building code enforcement for non-compliant properties.

Target Areas

Neighborhood Conservation, Stabilization areas

Approaches

A) Prioritize resident safety by proactively inspecting rental property and enforcing building codes (continue).

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Property owners, property managers, landlords
- **Target Households.** All renters
- **Target Housing Types.** All renters

B) Promoting existing programs. Marketing existing programs, neighborhood clean-ups, and local trade resources for home maintenance needs should complement a consolidated resource for all the programs that exist today (see Action 3.2.A).

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Realtors, Landlord Association, Neighborhood Associations
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** All

C) Create and promote a code education program for landlords and property managers.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Landlord Association, Neighborhood Associations
- **Target Households.** Renters
- **Target Housing Types.** All

Housing Navigators Program - South Central Indiana

The “Housing Navigators” program, managed by the South Central Indiana Housing Opportunities, is designed for both tenants and landlords to create safe and stable rental housing. Volunteers with the program are trained to help individuals and families access local housing resources, advise them on their rights and responsibilities, and look up information using the Housing4Hoosiers website. They also help distribute the “Renting in Indiana” handbook. The handbook provides information on:

- Finding an affordable housing option
- What to look for in an apartment
- Understanding a lease
- Utilities and deposits

Training is provided several times a month throughout Bloomington, IN with special hours for the Housing and Eviction Resource Table group.

<https://sciho.org/programs-and-projects/housing-navigators/>

3. Action: Evaluate and promote stronger education and awareness of existing laws concerning tenant rights.

Target Areas

Citywide

Approaches

A) Ordinance updates. See page xx.

B) Continue Building and Expanding Partnerships. The City cannot be the only proactive player to educate, nor have they been in the past. Partnerships build trust and, ultimately, respect for residents and landlords.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Housing Authority
- **Partners.** Landlord Association, Colleges/ Universities, Non-profits, Housing Advocates
- **Target Households.** Renters
- **Target Housing Types.** All

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 2: Foster greater housing diversity through strategic infill development

Actions and Approaches

1. Action: Within existing neighborhoods, develop more townhomes and buildings with 4 to 16 units as transitional infill development adjacent to large apartment complexes, commercial uses, and transit corridors.

Continue to evaluate the financing and regulatory impediments to such housing and offer solutions such as tax incremental financing support as feasible.

Target Areas

Citywide with more incentives granted to target opportunity areas

Approaches

For all approaches, Take a public role geared towards sites that can provide mixed-income developments. Vacant infill sites in neighborhood conservation and stabilization areas are appropriate for higher incentives. Locating in these areas for the first time using these approaches might be more appealing to potential buyers and more visible.

A) Free or Reduced Infill Development Lots. Most cities and non-profit organizations can acquire property through estate gifts, tax delinquency, or property liens. By offering free or discounted lots for new development, the total development cost is significantly less than in greenfield development and the city reaps the benefit of using its existing infrastructure while also directing investment to existing neighborhoods. This is different from investors buying older housing, demolishing, and rebuilding larger homes on the lot.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Non-profit developer
- **Partners.** Lending community, Builders and developers
- **Target Households.** Preference to moderate market rate or lower
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products not present in La Crosse today or products on difficult infill sites

Infill Lot Consolidation - Ottumwa, IA

Ottumwa has taken aggressive action to remove dilapidated property and structures in floodplains. Over time the City built an inventory of owned infill lots. However, the lots were scattered throughout the city rather than consolidated in one area. To help a developer take on a scattered lot development approach, the City offered an infill development incentive package for developing 30 lots that included:

- Purchase price of \$125 per lot, distributed over three years of closings.
- Using another city program to provide \$10,000 per unit.
- Qualified tax abatement.
- Developer application to the State of Iowa Workforce Housing Tax Credit program.

In exchange, the developer is providing:

- Workforce housing priced units, as defined by the State of Iowa.
- Units at least 1,000 square feet for single-family units and 800 square feet for multifamily units.
- Completion of units within seven years.

B) Budget for property acquisition and land assembly. One of the biggest hurdles to infill development is the assembly of lots. Market demand in some parts of the city may not require involvement by the City in land assembling but in other locations, where demand is not as high, the City can play a role in fostering affordable housing development. The City has the ability to do land acquisition and has in the past. Using the policy area guide in the previous section, the city can also guide the type of development that occurs by neighborhood.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse Non-profit developer
- **Partners.** Non-profit developer, Development corporation, partnerships
- **Target Households.** Moderate market and below
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products not present in La Crosse today or products on difficult infill sites

2. Action: Prioritize underutilized areas within the City for redevelopment into multi-family residential or mixed-use developments, such as surface parking lots and vacant office space

Target Areas

Redevelopment opportunity sites

Approaches

A) Streamline permitting processes for developers engaged in converting unused commercial/office space into residential.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Builders/developers, property owners
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** Medium and higher density

3. Action: Support innovative housing production methods such as pre-fabrication, and partner with local organizations also exploring these new construction methods

Target Areas

Citywide, preference to target opportunity sites where values are stable

Approaches

A) Demonstration Project. Attracting different housing types and methods, especially on infill sites, will require a combination of several action tools in this chapter. However, focusing efforts on a demonstration project may be a good idea to show builders, and residents, the financial success such a project can have.

A demonstration project is typically a public-private partnership effort to construct a housing type or method not being built in the city today. The “demonstration” is to show how that product can be built, but more importantly, to show the demand when the units are sold or filled quickly. It could be beneficial to pursue a demonstration project after more targeted neighborhood improvements have been completed to ensure future success and value appraisals.

Missing Middle for Chattanooga, TN

With help from the Incremental Development Alliance, Chattanooga leaders and stakeholders undertook an intensive developer workshop to identify solutions for missing middle housing types. The process resulted in a development packet that lays the framework for a developer to pursue these projects including:

- Picking a building type based on the developer’s financing options and site circumstances.
- Guides and site plans for good urban design amid traditional single-family neighborhoods.
- Technical considerations for packaging development applications.
- Bank packages for different building types to show how to bring the project to life by proving profits for lenders.

<https://www.incrementaldevelopment.org/>

<https://www.cneinc.org/creating-homes>

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Non-profit developer
- **Partners.** Lending Community, Builders and developers; Realtors
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products not present in La Crosse today or product on difficult infill sites

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 3: Create more housing opportunities attractive to La Crosse residents, especially households with children.

Action and Approach

1. Action: Create more accessible housing opportunities with amenities and formats desired by older adults to encourage the turnover of single-family housing units from older adults to first-time homebuyers.

Target Areas

Citywide, with preference for areas near transit and services

Approaches

A) Use any other actions and approaches to tie outcomes to Assisted Living Facilities and Independent Living Communities - Rental and Owner, Universal Design features.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Various
- **Target Households.** 65+
- **Target Housing Types.** Universal design, Assisted living, maintenance free

2. Action: Increase public awareness of the City's housing repair and rehabilitation programs for income-qualifying households. Partner with local organizations like Habitat for Humanity to expand housing rehabilitation assistance for families making 80-120% AMI

Target Areas

Citywide and target areas

There are many resources already administered by the City and its partners.

Approaches

A) One-Stop Housing Program Database. There are many resources scattered throughout the City and different agencies that can help residents. Most are for households below a certain income threshold, but not all. This leads fragmented efforts targeted at specialized solutions. Programs to address housing needs mean little if people are not using them or are unaware that they exist.

Each entity understandably has its own strategic plans and targeted programs that could be included in a central database of housing programs. The database can also include a page for other financial assistance programs. Housing is typically the highest regular expense for a household. However, the cost of other necessities affects the price that can be spent on housing. For families, especially childcare, transportation, and school costs are a non-negotiable barrier to attainable housing options. Reducing these costs can increase housing options.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Partnerships, Realtors, Neighborhood Associations
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** All

3. Action: Encourage and facilitate the construction of new owner-occupied units as infill development projects throughout the City. This could include detached units but should also include various forms of attached unit housing.

Target Areas

Neighborhood conservation, stabilization areas

Approaches

A) Land Assembly and Free or Reduced Infill Development Lots. Use the public role geared towards sites that can provide mixed-income developments. See Action 2.1.A.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Development Corporation
- **Partners.** Non-profits, lending community
- **Target Households.** Preferred 120% of Area Median Income or below, owner or renter
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products

B) Budget for property acquisition. The City does this to some extent through community development and other general funds. See the Case Study on Ottumwa, Iowa's infill lot disbursement approach (page 79).

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Lending community, non-profit, development corporation
- **Target Households.** Preferred 120% of Area Median Income or below, owner or renter
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products or new products to the market

Housing Bonds - Greensboro, NC

In October 2016, Greensboro put to vote a \$25 million bond project to fund the purchase, construction, and improvements to housing for low to moderate households. Projects include housing or neighborhood revitalization programs or providing loans and grants to individuals, developers, or other organizations for both single and multi-family projects. The bonds are projected to leverage \$54 million in investments in 1,007 housing units. Projects include:

- Development or buyer assistance for 320 units of workforce housing
- Code compliance repair through a revolving loan fund for 120 repairs with property liens
- Handicapped accessibility improvements for 80 units
- 27 new supportive housing units targeted to homeless/disabled/veterans.
- Revolving loan fund for 50 low income homebuyers
- 150 units of heating systems, lead-based paint, health hazards and emergency repairs
- 150 affordable multi-family units
- 30 owner-occupied home rehabs

Using a city bond initiative is not exclusive to larger cities like Greensboro. Newton, Iowa population 15,000, used a bond initiative to assist with subdivision development and incentivizing housing construction after the Maytag closing resulted in a loss of confidence by the development community.

<https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/financial-administrative-services/bond-information>

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 4: Make building procedures and approvals in La Crosse a clear, predictable, and flexible process.

Action and Approach

1. Streamline approvals for desired products

Target Areas

Citywide

Approaches

A) Ordinance updates. There are ways to increase opportunities for administrative site plan approval. Especially when housing proposals meet comprehensive plan goals and targeted housing needs. Exceptions include:

- The project requests an amendment to the comprehensive plan.
- The project requests a change to the zoning or subdivision ordinance.
- The project requests a rezoning.
- State or Federal law requires a public hearing because of specific funding or permit procedures.

Updates should include processes for better interdepartmental coordination. Review of site plans is not only on the shoulders of the planning department. Many departments partake in review processes. Open and timely communication between departments is critical for the success of efficient approvals (public works, engineering, stormwater, inspections). Better departmental communication means education on how departments impact housing costs and how to make changes without sacrificing public health and safety.

B) Education and Communication. Updates to codes should be made known to potential housing producers. Ideally most are involved in the code update process. Technical assistance and communication is especially important for less experienced local builders, investors, or community members interested in a community project.

Pre-Approved Housing - South Bend, IN

Facing a shortage of affordable housing and hundreds of potential infill lots, the City of South Bend, Indiana developed a set of pre-approved, ready to build housing plans. The plans are small to middle scale housing developments or what the city has described as a “Sears Catalog” of housing options that are contextually appropriate to South Bend’s neighborhoods and fit with local building materials and techniques. The plans can be used in any zoning district that allows the selected building type per the current zoning ordinance.

https://southbendin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SBBT_Catalog_22-0112-lowres.pdf



- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** County, utility companies, builders/developers, homeowner association
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** All

2. Allow administrative approvals for more projects

Target Areas

Citywide

Approaches

A) Pre-approved site plans. Builders and developers will stick to what they know will get approved when regulations are subjective and uncertain to reduce risk and financial insecurity. Vetted and Council approved example site plans and products should be created to facilitate faster administrative approvals and certainty for target housing products and price points. These pre-approved site plans should be for variety of lot sizes for infill and greenfield development.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Builders/developers, lending community, Area planning, non-profits
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products, mixed-use, or options that can provide lower price point housing

3. Assist in lot development to achieve desired products

Target Areas

All policy areas

Approaches

A) Pre-approved site plans and infill development guide. See Action 2A as well, which can be tailored for unique infill lot sizes.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Builders/developers, lending community, Area planning, non-profits
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** Missing middle products not present today or products on difficult infill sites

Infill Housing Palette – Shawnee, OK

The City of Shawnee, OK (pop. 32,000) initiated the program in 2023 to develop five housing designs to fit on smaller lots occurring throughout the city. With review completed by various city departments, anyone from the general public can access and use the plans. The plans include floor and elevation plans. All designs fit on lots that are 25 to 50 feet wide. The house designs focus on:

- Front entryways
- Parking in the rear
- Options for different door and window treatments
- High quality building materials

https://www.shawneeok.org/government/departments/planning/infill_housing_palette.php

Lot Prep Guide

Midwest Housing Development Fund (MHDF), Inc. is a non-profit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that helps meet nontraditional financing needs for the creation, development and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing in a multi-state region.

To assist partners in development, MHDF created a Lot Prep Guide to lead people thinking about infill, redevelopment, or new lot development. The guide is divided into common topic areas, including:

- Physical site considerations
- Legal considerations
- City processes

A checklist for each topic provides minimum items to undertake for approaching lot development. The Guide provides a valuable resource for smaller or less experienced people looking to develop housing.

<https://mhdffinc.com/midwest-housing-resource-network/>

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 5: Secure and conserve existing housing

Action and Approach

1. Target programs, policies, and incentives to different areas over time based on neighborhood conditions and potential to meeting community goals.

Target Areas

Neighborhood conservation and stabilization areas

Approaches

A) Use the Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization areas to tier housing programs.

Many case studies and research show that more targeted neighborhood investment strategies do better at stimulating investment and neighborhood appeal. For La Crosse, this means setting neighborhood target priorities for focused investment programs. La Crosse Promise used this approach. The policy should include various programs with adequate funding to allow many households in the target area to access.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse
- **Partners.** Non-profit developer, Area planning, Realtors
- **Target Households.** Preferred for those under 120% Area Median Income

Invest DSM Block Grant Challenge - Des Moines, IA

An initiative started in 2020, Invest DSM offers programs targeted to specific local neighborhoods in Des Moines. One program called the Block Challenge Grant aims to create momentum through a batch improvement approach. To participate in the program, groups of at least five neighbors within a visible distance of one another's front doors must apply together. They are then eligible for matching funds up to \$2,500 for exterior improvements depending on the size of the application.

At six months into the program, Invest DSM has granted funds to 240 homeowners and landlords who were current on their taxes or lease obligations. The average investment per property was \$4,576.

<https://investdsm.org/programs/>

- **Target Housing Types.** Repair, rehabilitation, and redevelopment in targeted neighborhood areas, all housing types. The first tier of targeted investment should be one to three areas that:
 - › Has a mix of stable home conditions and homes with visible needs for repair. This would be the first pilot area to gain momentum for continuing the approach in others. In the most blighted area may make it more difficult or take longer to gain momentum.
 - › Is on visible corridors. An area that could influence first impressions.
 - › An area where there has been interest from residents in the past, or current use of existing programs. This will help with outreach and initial program start-up if people are familiar with the City or other agency.
 - › Are not overly large. Each investment area tier could be around twenty to thirty blocks, but ultimately follows local neighborhood boundaries.

The first tier may last several years, evaluating the successes and barriers each year. After making adjustments from lessons learned, the approach can then move on to another area.

B) Neighborhood Level Outreach. The 2023 Comprehensive Plan take a heavy neighborhood approach and the City of La Crosse has many great neighborhood associations established. This organization provides a way to assist in targeted programming and general outreach. To see real change occur, all neighborhoods need to foster a grassroots movement. Support for projects needs to come from many, not just a few. Also, the more residents connect with each other, the more opportunities to build partnerships to improve neighborhoods. There are several things neighborhood champions can be empowered to do:

- Connect with neighbors on social media and at community events. Create a social media page on a chosen platform for the designated area.
- Participate in City meetings and/or organize local neighborhood meetings/gatherings.
- Organize volunteer efforts that improve the neighborhood and bring neighbors together.
- **Lead.** City of La Crosse with Neighborhood Association leaders
- **Partners.** Residents, landlords, tenants, universities and colleges
- **Target Households.** All
- **Target Housing Types.** All

Housing Next - Ottawa County, MI

Housing Next was formed as a 5-year pilot initiative to work closely with local units of government, developers and non-profits to remove barriers to the creation of more housing supply at all price points. It is an independent organization, not a non-profit, acting as a middle person to navigate resources and connect developers with projects. It is nested within the structure of the Greater Ottawa County United Way and funded by the community foundations of Holland/Zeeland, Grand Haven and private donors in Ottawa County. Some of its initiatives include:

- Evaluate local zoning standards to find ways to reduce regulatory barriers.
- Works with developers to find available land, assemble preliminary development plans that align with a community master plan and seek out funding opportunities.
- Works with other non-profits and housing advocates to seek out long-term funding mechanisms and organizational structures.

Historic preservation versus rehabilitation.

The are several schools of thought about historic preservation when maintaining properties. At one end is strict adherence to the historic materials, methods, and look no matter the cost - this may mean “mothballing” the building until funds are secured. The other end is sacrifice “historic significance” for the sake of rehabilitation and improvements.

For La Crosse, this is a tricky balance. The older housing stock, and particularly the designated Historic Districts, add character and a certain value to the community are a primary goal in the Comprehensive Plan. Implementing the housing policies means having these conversations with the community and the Historic Preservation Commission. There is often compromise to make to not create an overly burdensome financial cost to the owner, especially for the overall benefit of the district.

Policy Approach Tools

Goal 6: Improve tenant and landlord relationships

Actions and Approaches

1. Create opportunities for increasing the number of quality tenants and landlords.

Target Areas

Citywide

Approaches

A) Tenant and landlord education programs.

Resources for a more formalized program with an existing community partner should help educate renters on what it means to be a good tenant in addition to their rights as a tenant. Resources do exist but can be better marketed and supported with additional resources. Programing should also be considered for problem landlords that receive multiple complaints or citations. Much like a traffic violation class, this program could lower fines if completed by the landlord. The challenge of this type of program are the large number of management companies. (Also see Housing Navigators - South Central Indiana case study on page 78)

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Housing Authority
- **Partners.** Landlord Association, renters, Realtors, property managers, colleges/university
- **Target Households.** Tenants and landlords
- **Target Housing Types.** All

B) Preparing and Distributing a Property

Standards Manual. This should be a friendly and clear document that sets out the legal requirements and expectations for individual building and property maintenance. It can also help to provide useful information, such as sites to dispose of or recycle unwanted household items. It can be distributed by real estate agents and landlords or be the first step in the enforcement process. The City sends a letter notifying a household that they have a violation and have a certain number of days to address the issue before further action.

This document could be included with the letter. This material needs to be distributed to students moving off

Nebraska Renter Training Program

Nebraska RentWise is a renter education program based in Nebraska with active-learning curriculum to help renters obtain and maintain rental housing. The program stresses tenant responsibility, providing participants with a certificate after completing the nine hour education course. The six modules provide how-to information on unit maintenance and creating collaborative relationships with landlords and neighbors. These modules include:

- Communication with landlords and neighbors
- Managing your money
- Finding a place to call home
- Getting through the rental process
- Taking care of your home
- When you move out

The RentWise program is run through a coalition of members representing several local housing focused agencies. There are over 600 trainers across Nebraska that teach the RentWise program. Several trainings are offered each month with a few dual language courses.

www.rentwise.org

campus. It should also provide students with information on “how to be a good neighbor.”

The Imagine La Crosse Downtown Plan suggested a “seal for approval” for units that pass regular inspections with recognition when people inquire about rental housing through different agencies. This will not fully address the issue, and the majority of landlords in the city maintain their properties to a high standard, but this could be one more tool used to encourage continued investment in existing units.

- **Lead.** City of La Crosse, Housing Authority
- **Partners.** Landlord Association, renters, Realtors, property managers, colleges/university
- **Target Households.** Tenants and landlords
- **Target Housing Types.** All

Policy Approach Tools

State Level Advocacy

Housing approaches can be improved through additional state-level actions as well. As a major city and region in the State, La Crosse should be coordinating with partners, including adjacent jurisdictions, to lobby for State-level changes in housing policy. A few items below would help advance the goals of this study.

1. Land Banks

Land banks are governmental nonprofit organizations that can acquire vacant, abandoned or dilapidated properties for renovation or demolish for future development. Land banks are appealing in some communities because they allow for land assembly without the city having to hold and maintain properties. Wisconsin does not have enabling legislation allowing eligible organizations and cities to establish land banks.

2. Continue Affordable Housing Funding

The Wisconsin Legislature has added to affordable housing funds, most recently a \$525 million investment in 2024. This should continue to be a priority for the city and its partners to lobby for in future years.

3. Property Tax Relief Structures

Cities in Wisconsin cannot grant property tax breaks, abating payment or reimbursements, per state laws. This eliminates a valuable tool for cities to target property rehabilitation and infill development. For example, some cities in other states can hold property taxes steady for a period of time for property owners doing rehabilitation work. In another example, taxes in high value growth area can be graduated for retiree households on low incomes to allow them to affordability age in place.

For La Crosse, there may be solutions to evaluate with legal advisors even given the State limiting laws. For example:

- Nebraska has a program called Value Improvement Program (VIP) for historic properties. The valuation is frozen and increased over time. Outside of the VIP, you can't do a tax rebate or freezing of values in Nebraska either. Just an individual municipality could but that's a small portion. Alternatively, Lincoln, NE has a TIF program for rehabbing older rental properties.
- The Neighborhood Revitalization Program in Kansas is a tax refund instead of abatement or graduated rate.

4. Eviction Support/Procedures

Current programs should be expanded. Some programs partially funded by COVID relief dollars are at risk. If solutions to avoid eviction can be identified, it is a win for both the landlord and the tenant.

As noted earlier in this document, affordability is defined differently for every household. During discussions with stakeholders, many noted the struggle to find housing for those making between 80% and 120% Area Median Income, a range that is often too high to qualify for federal programs but still below affordable market rate housing. Affordability for these households may be an issue, but different strategies will need to be applied based on household income and product types. The following matrix summarizes policy approaches based on household income and affordable housing options.

- POLICY APPROACHES FOR ALL**
- Ordinance Updates
 - Inspections and Building Codes
 - Promoting existing programs
 - Landlord and property manager education
 - Streamline processes
 - Demonstration projects
 - Pre-Approved site plans
 - Infill development guide
 - Universal Design
 - One-Stop Housing Program Database
 - Neighborhood Level Outreach
 - Tenant and landlord education programs
 - Property Standards Manual

AREA MEDIAN INCOME LEVEL	HOUSEHOLD INCOME	AFFORDABLE RENT*	AFFORDABLE OWNERSHIP*	COMPARABLE SINGLE INCOME SOURCE OCCUPATION***	POLICY APPROACH NEEDS
<29%	<\$15,000	<\$350	Not appropriate	Student, Part-Time Worker	Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, State and Federal programs for very low income, senior only housing tax credit rentals, emergency housing programs - transitional and temporary housing, permanent affordability guarantees, maintaining expiring units, Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization policies
29% - 58%	\$15,000 - \$30,000	\$350 - \$700	Not appropriate	Waiter/Waitress, Dishwasher, Hotel Desk Clerk	Rental rehab programs, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Gap financing for land and infrastructure costs, Gap financing for tax credit projects, permanent affordability guarantees, maintaining expiring units, program toolkits, free or reduced infill development lots, Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization policies
58% - 96%	\$30,000 - \$50,000	\$700 - \$1,150	\$100,000 - \$150,000	Social Worker, Construction Worker, Restaurant Cook, Banker, Nursing Assistant	Depending on household size Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Gap financing for tax credit projects, Gap financing for land and infrastructure costs, program toolkits, free or reduced infill development lots, budget for property acquisition and land assembly, Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization policies
96% - 135%	\$50,000 - \$70,000	\$1,150 - \$1,650	\$150,000 - \$230,000	Elementary School Teacher, Guidance Counselor, Bus/ Transit Driver	Infrastructure and lot development assistance for units affordable to 80-120% AMI, free or reduced infill development lots, budget for property acquisition and land assembly, Gap financing for land and infrastructure costs Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization policies
135% - 193%	\$70,000 - \$100,000	\$1,650 - \$2,400	\$230,000 - \$335,000	Dental Hygienist, Police Officer, Accountant, Civil Engineer	Neighborhood Conservation and Stabilization policies, Gap financing for land and infrastructure costs, Market rate development
193%+	\$100,000+	\$2,400+	\$335,000	Dentist, Education Administrators, Pharmacists, Experienced Positions, Higher Up Management	Market rate development

*Provides some room to be below 30% of income on rent for other expenses. Assumes little other debt obligations.

** The estimate represents the high end of affordable ownership by assuming a 20% downpayment and little other debt obligations. At interest rates in June 2024.

***Source: <https://nhc.org/paycheck-to-paycheck/>

A targeted approach is needed to provide housing for the region. Without intervention from the City and its partners, housing for all age groups will continue to be in short supply, the housing market will continue to be less affordable, and La Crosse will struggle to have adequate housing options and stable or growing populations.

This housing study recommends several approaches to help meet housing demand. Some of these approaches may be appropriate for one target area or household and not another. However, an area partnership approach makes sense to allow larger scale opportunities for developers and to share resources among groups. By participating in this study, leaders have already recognized a need for action. This recognition needs to be combined with strong leadership and decision-making from future leaders, partners, and adjacent jurisdictions to implement long-term strategies.

The next step is for community leaders to organize the partnerships necessary to develop strategic approaches that address the goals in this chapter.



Appendix

Full Survey Results
Supplemental Maps

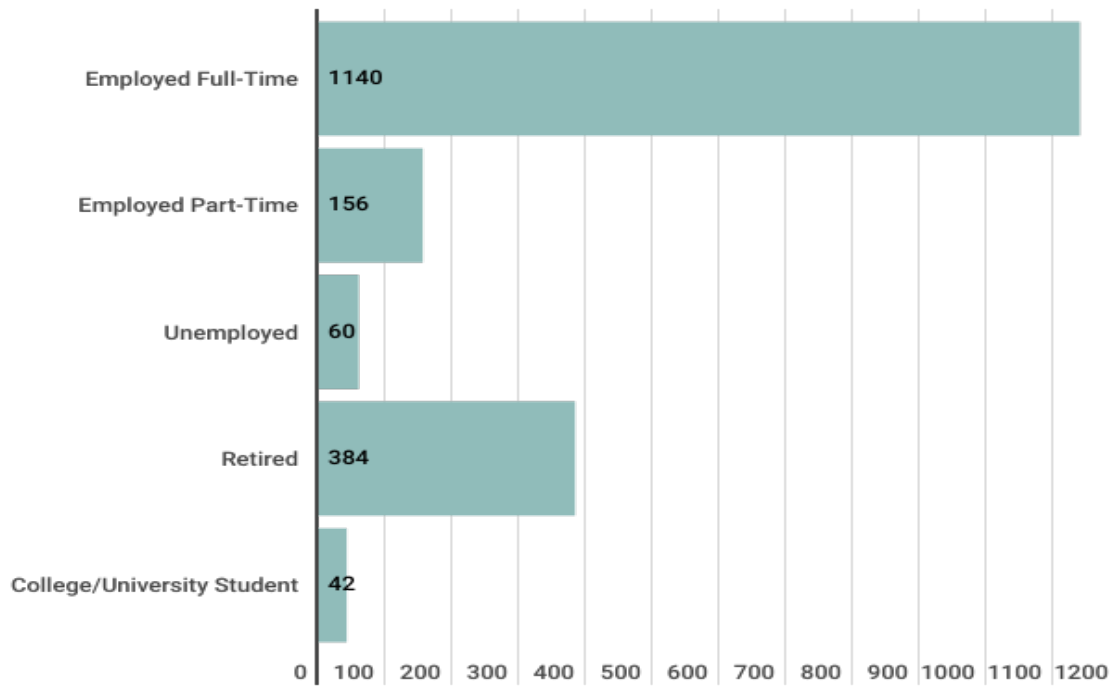


Full Survey Results

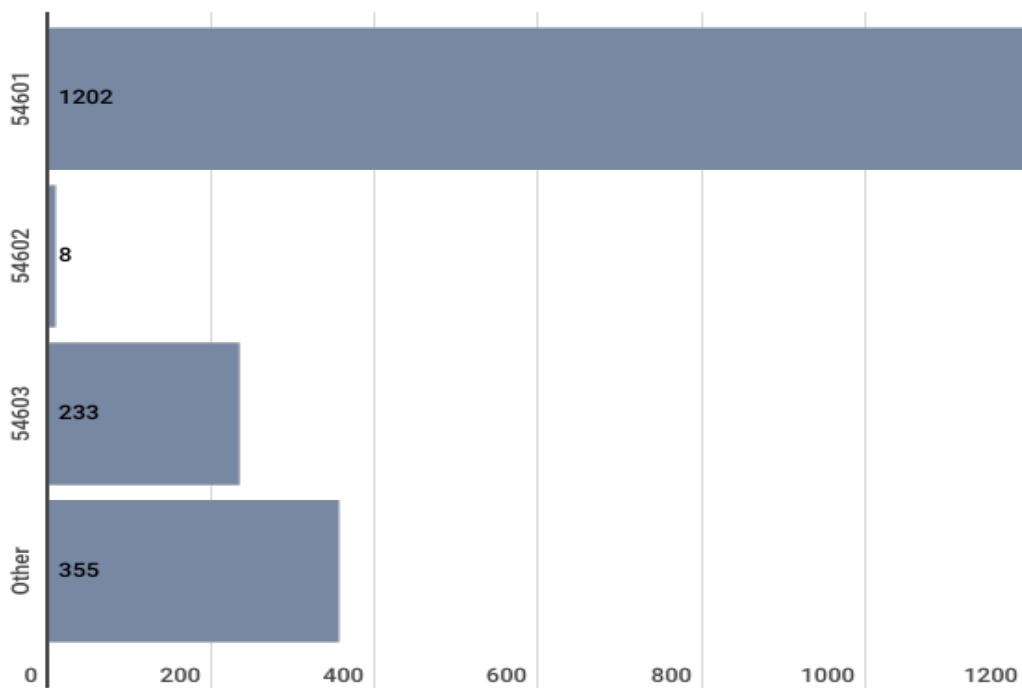
Community Survey

• 1,798 responses

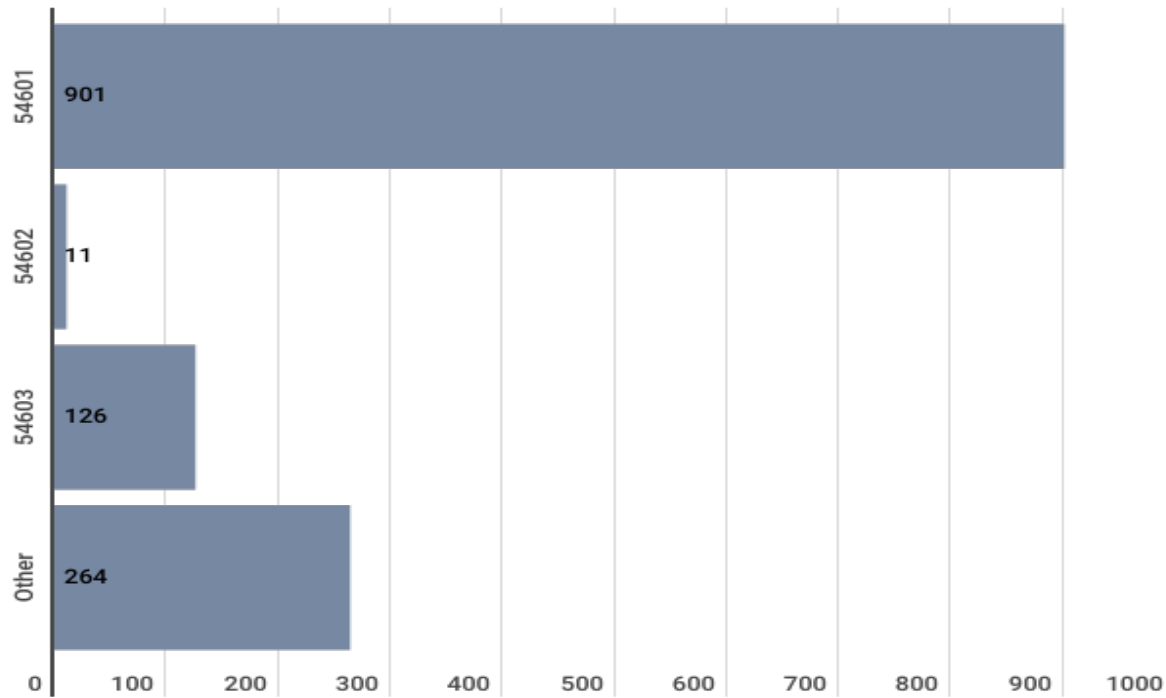
Do you work (full or part-time) or represent any of the following groups? If multiple apply, choose the one that applies to the most of your time.



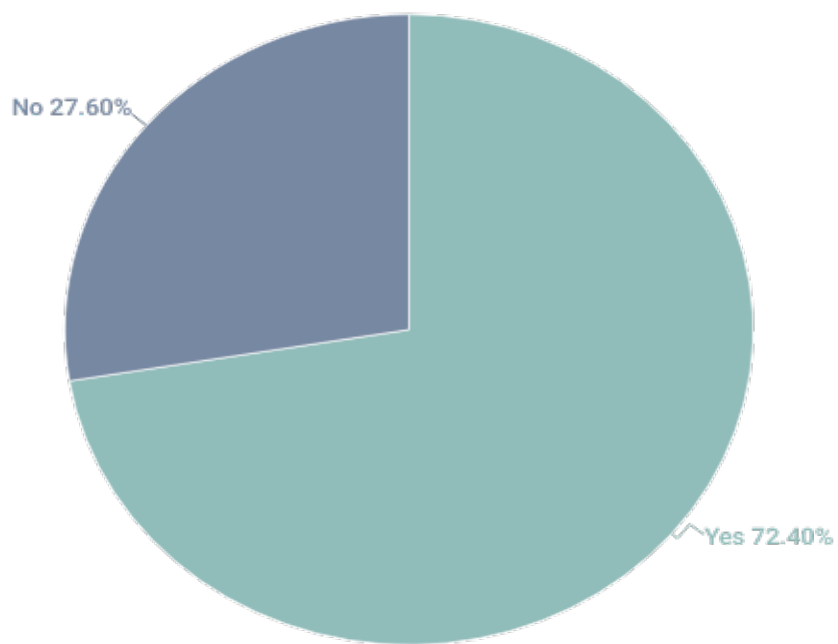
What is your home zip code?



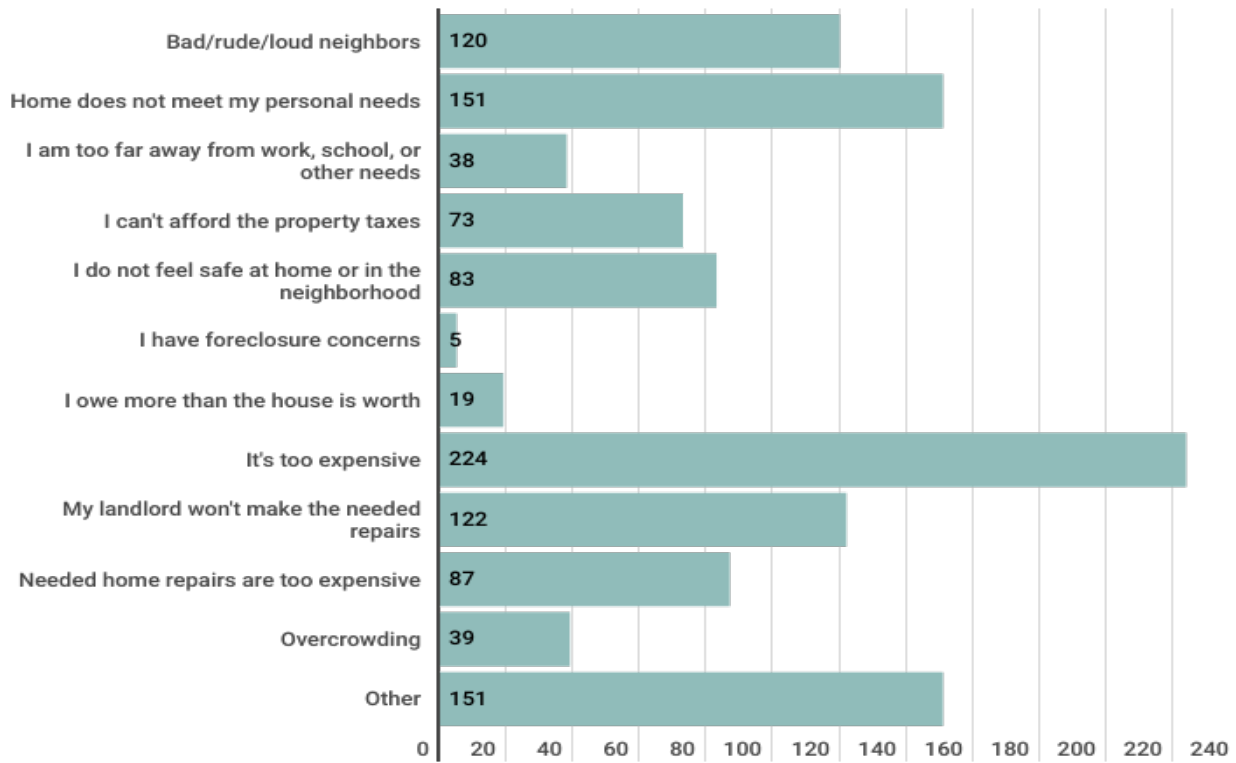
What is the zip code you work in? If you are not in the work force, please skip this question.



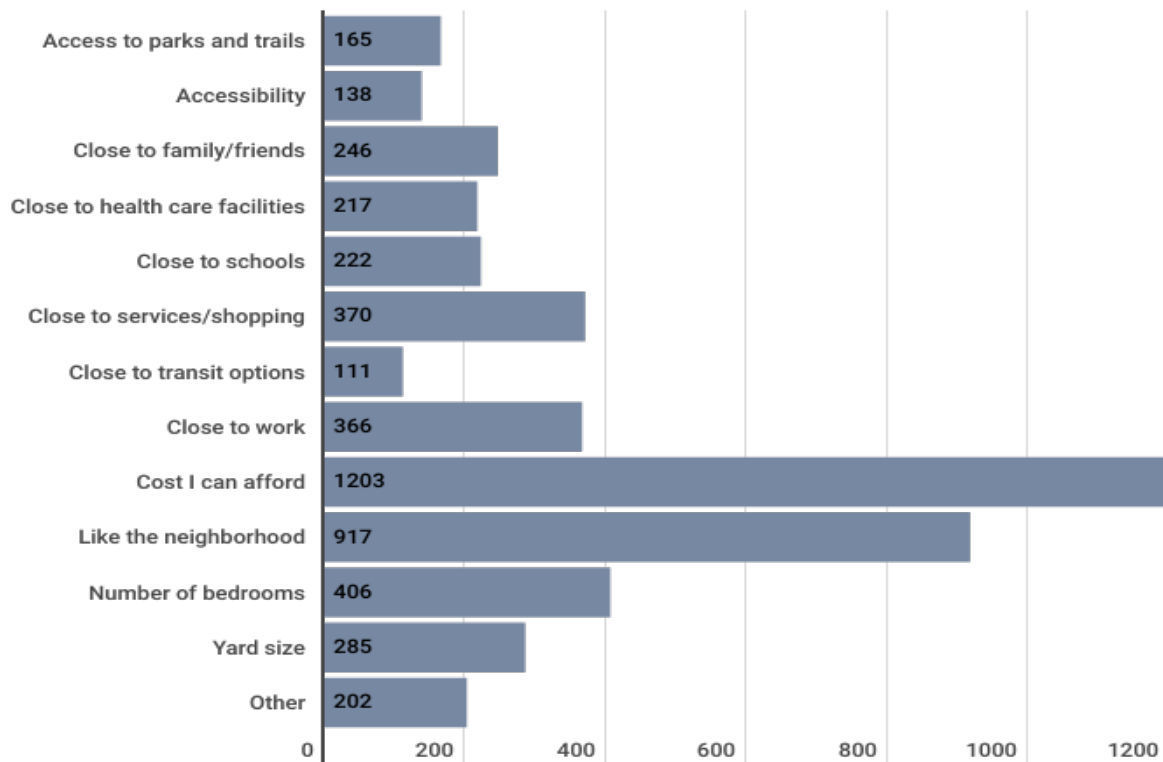
Are you satisfied with your current housing situation?



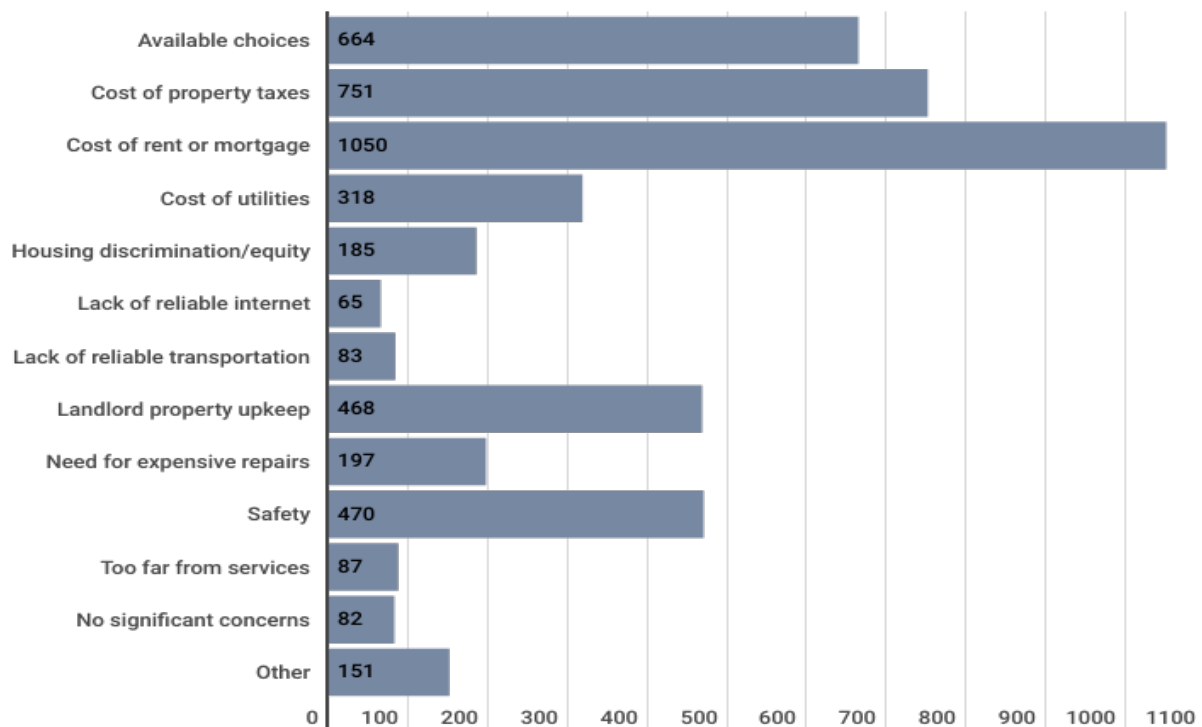
If no, why not? (Select all that apply).



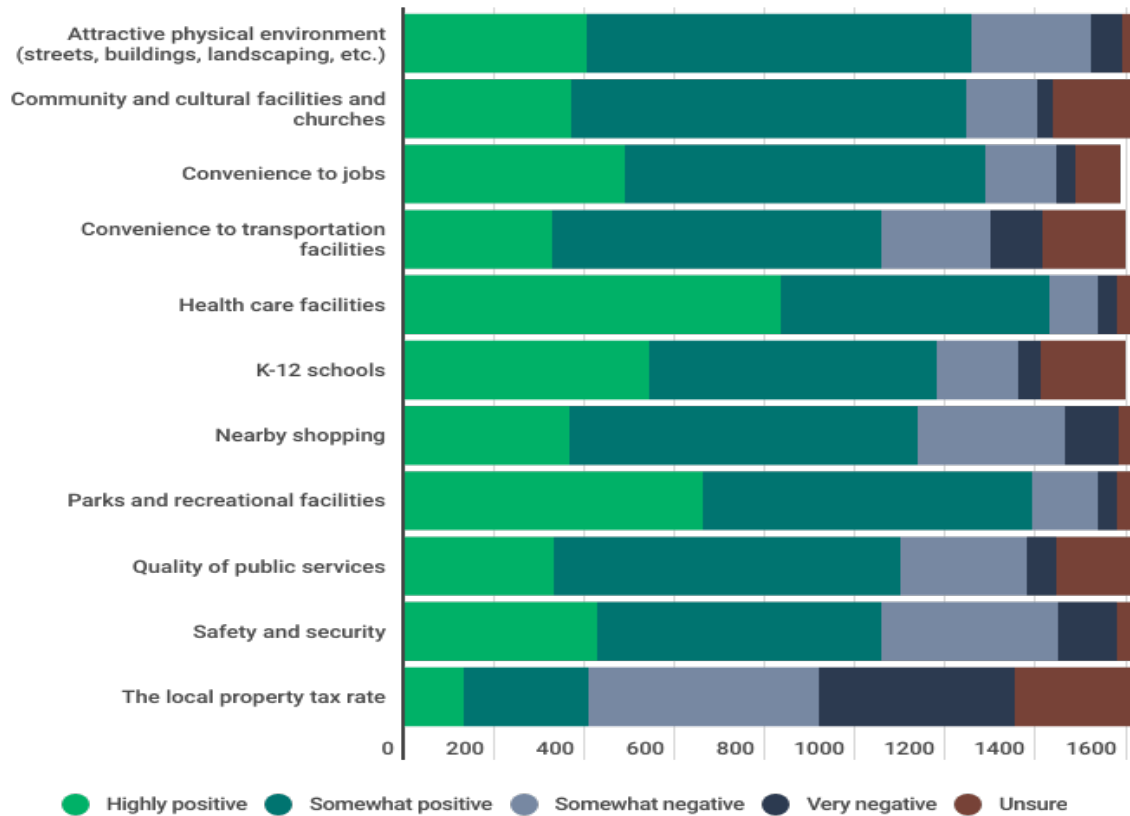
What factors are most important to you when choosing housing? (Select top three).



My biggest concern regarding housing in my community is:
(Select top three).



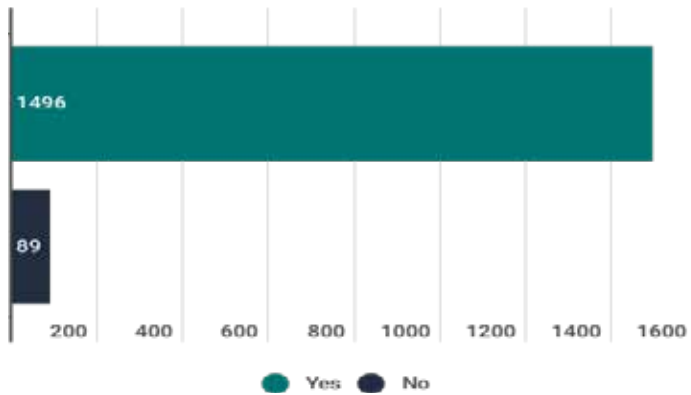
Thinking about the amenities that are currently in or near your community, how would you rate the impact of each one on the attractiveness of your community?



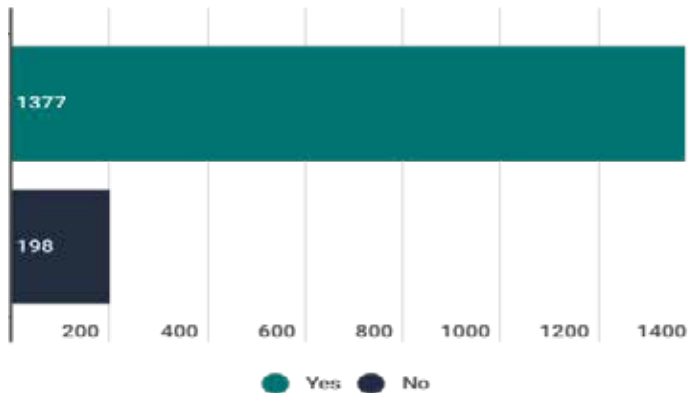
Do you think the following housing products would be successful in La Crosse?

“Successful” means, if available, people would want to live in this product.

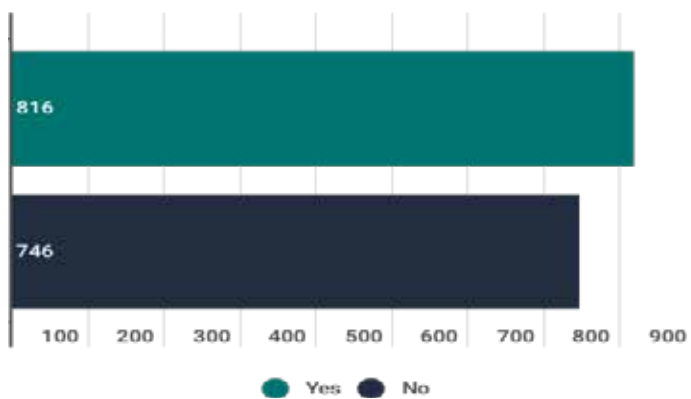
Affordable, small two- or three-bedroom house



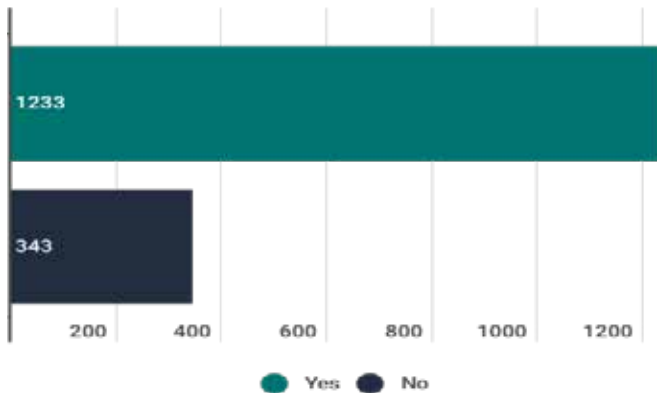
Mid-size, three-bedroom house



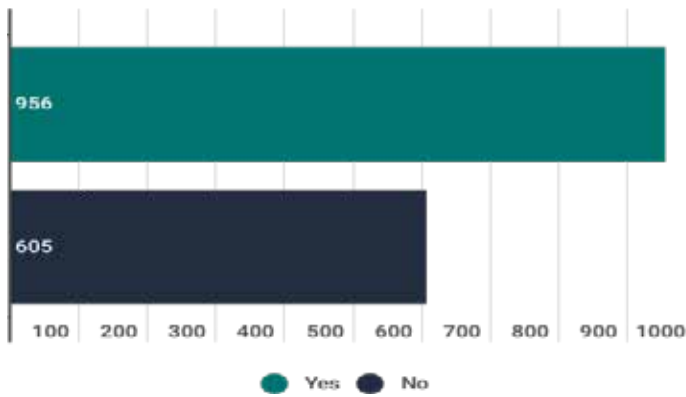
Large house with four or more bedrooms



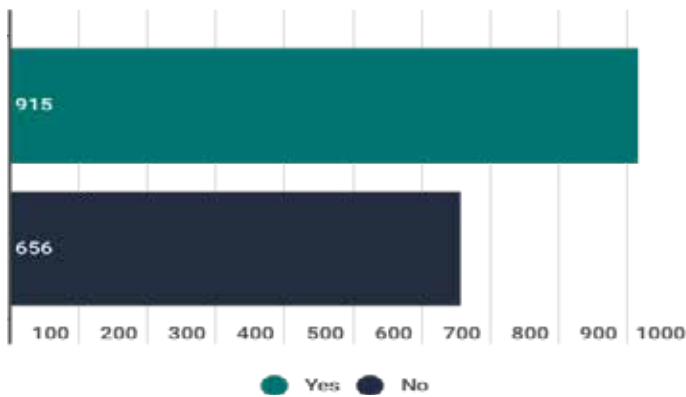
Townhouse or duplex



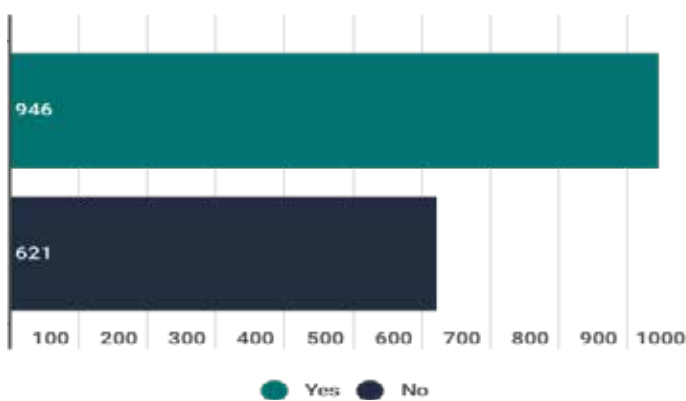
Smaller multi-family (tri- or quadplex)



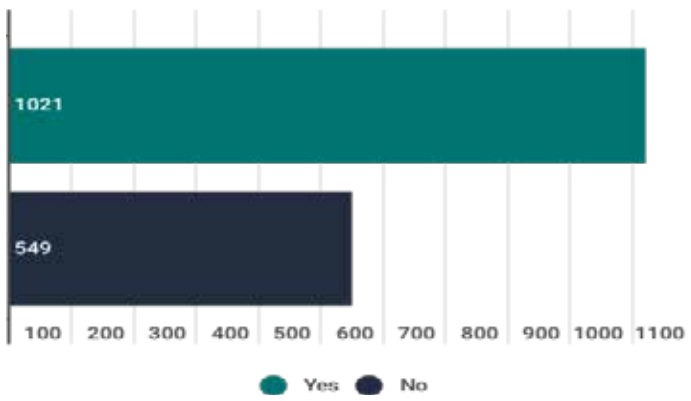
Row housing



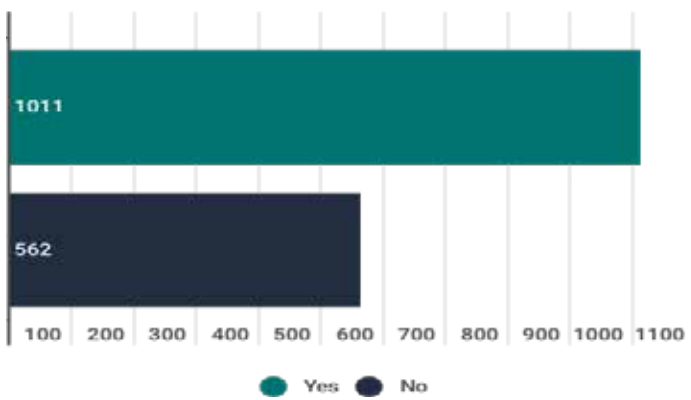
Apartments



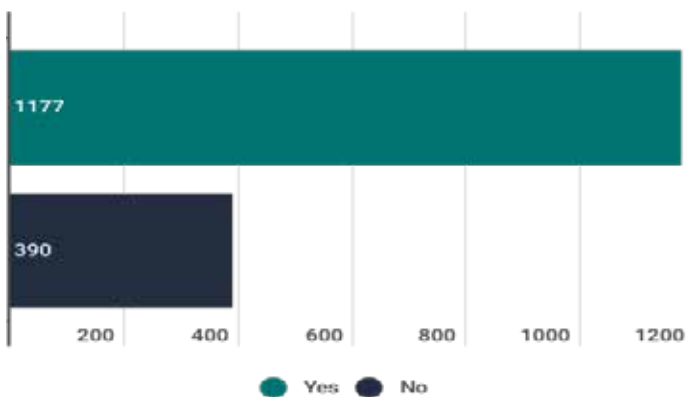
Downtown upper-story residential



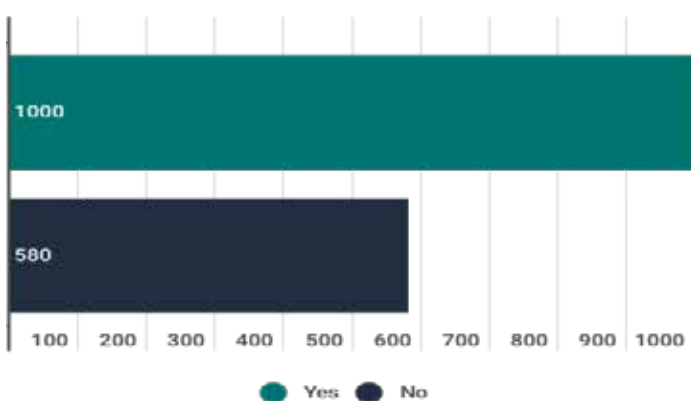
Commercial/residential mixed-use



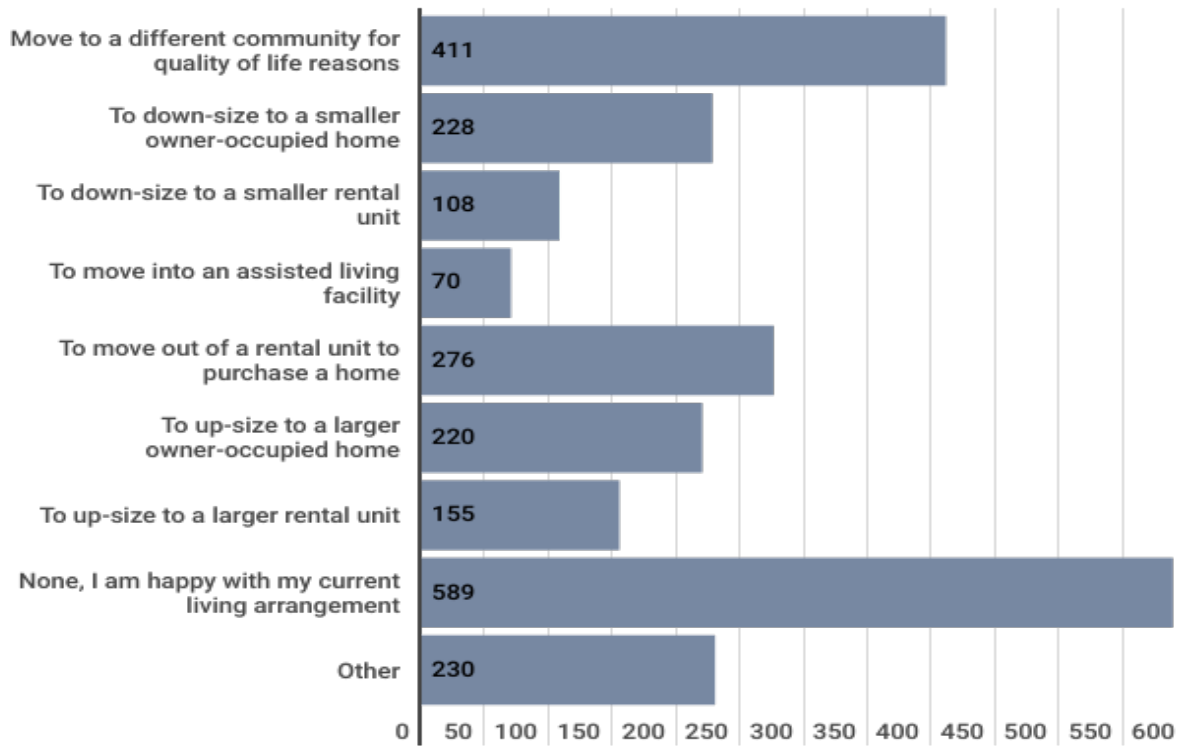
Independent senior living housing



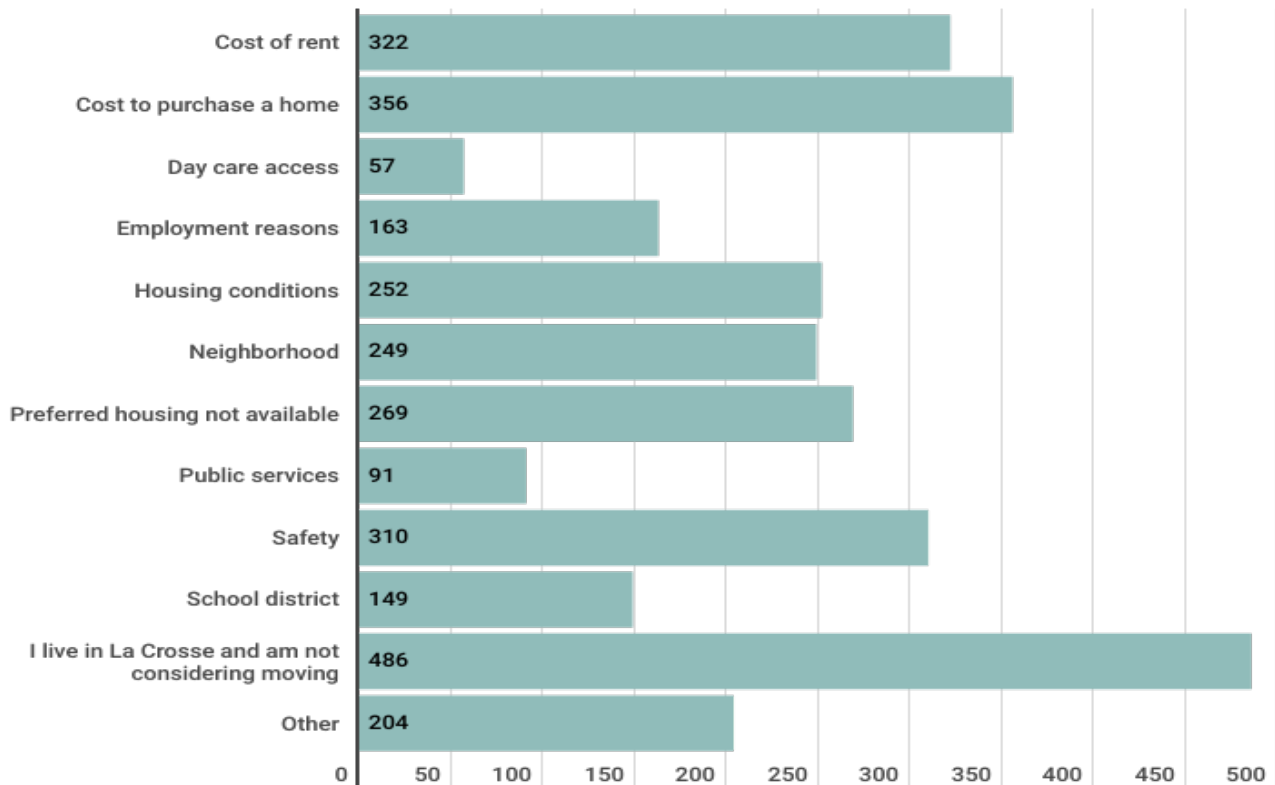
Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)



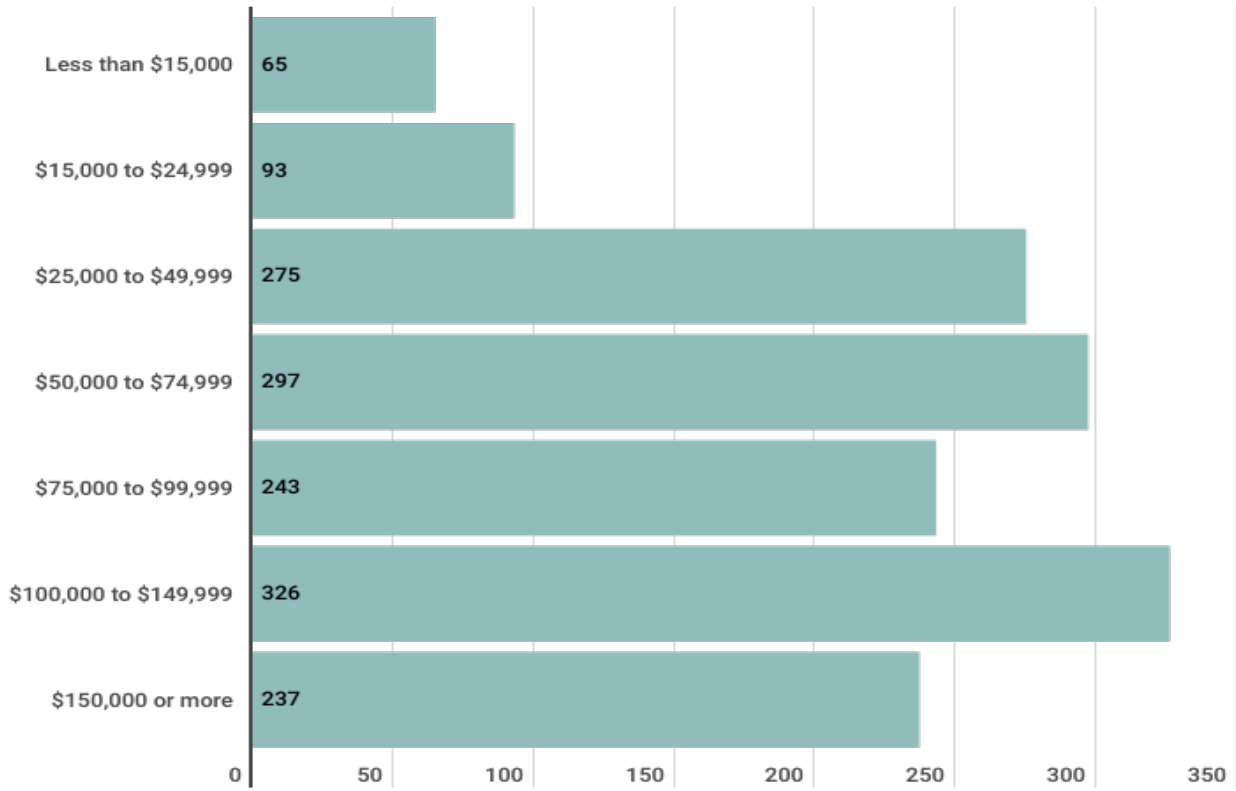
If you live in La Crosse, or are considering moving to La Crosse, is there any reason you'd look for a new place to live in the next three years? (Select all that apply).



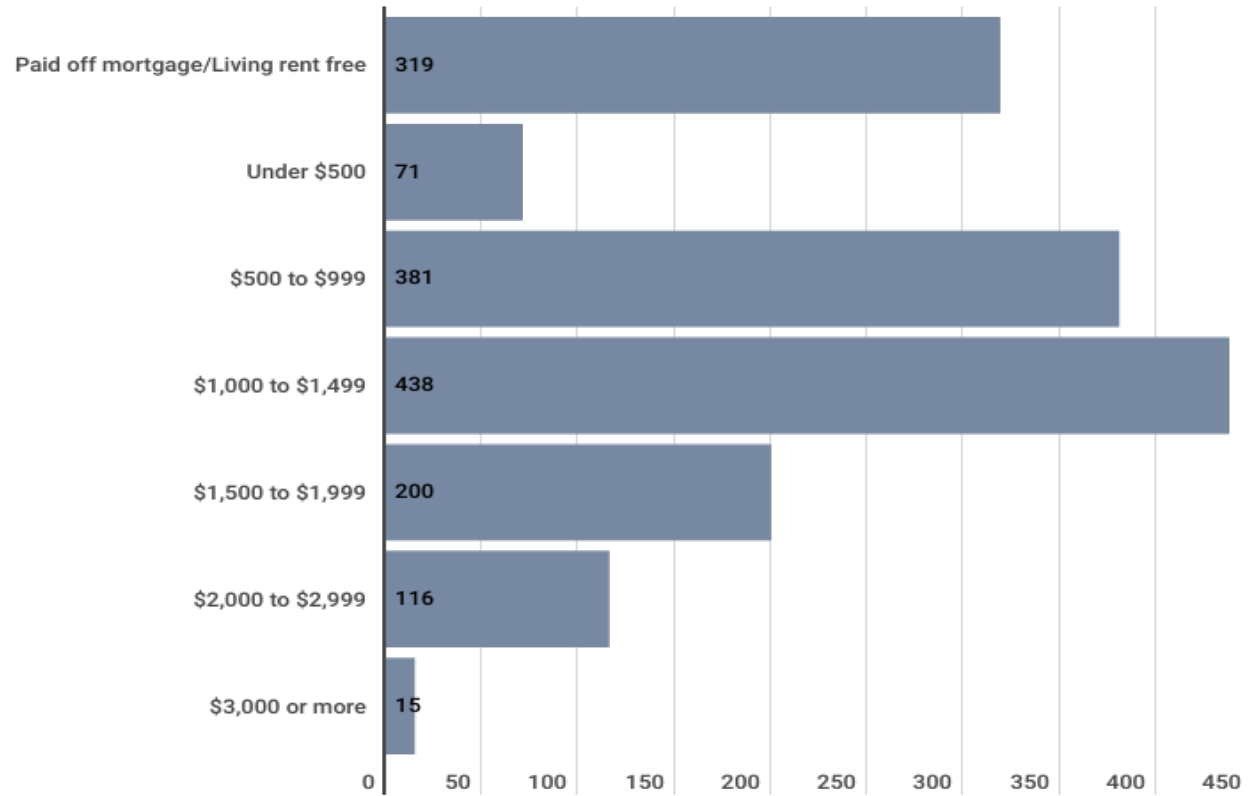
If you do not live in La Crosse, or are considering moving out of La Crosse, what are your reason(s)? (Select all that apply).



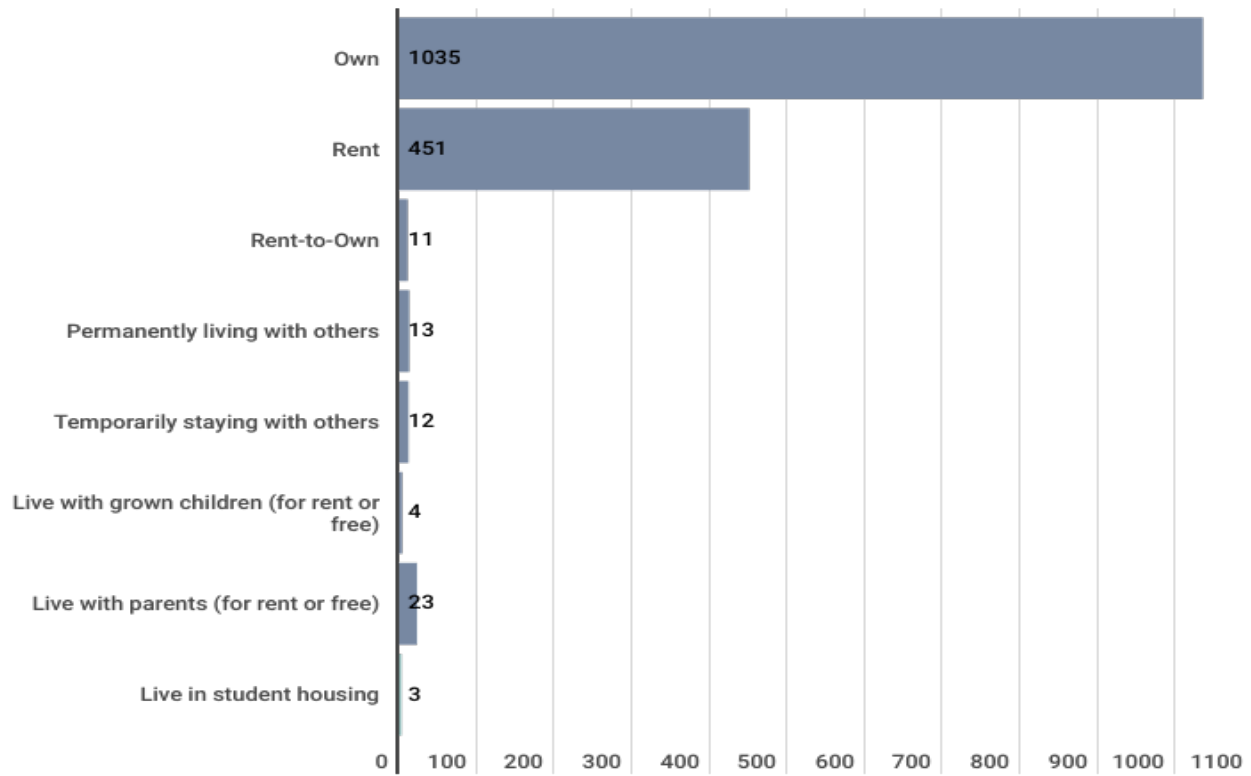
What is your household's annual estimated income?



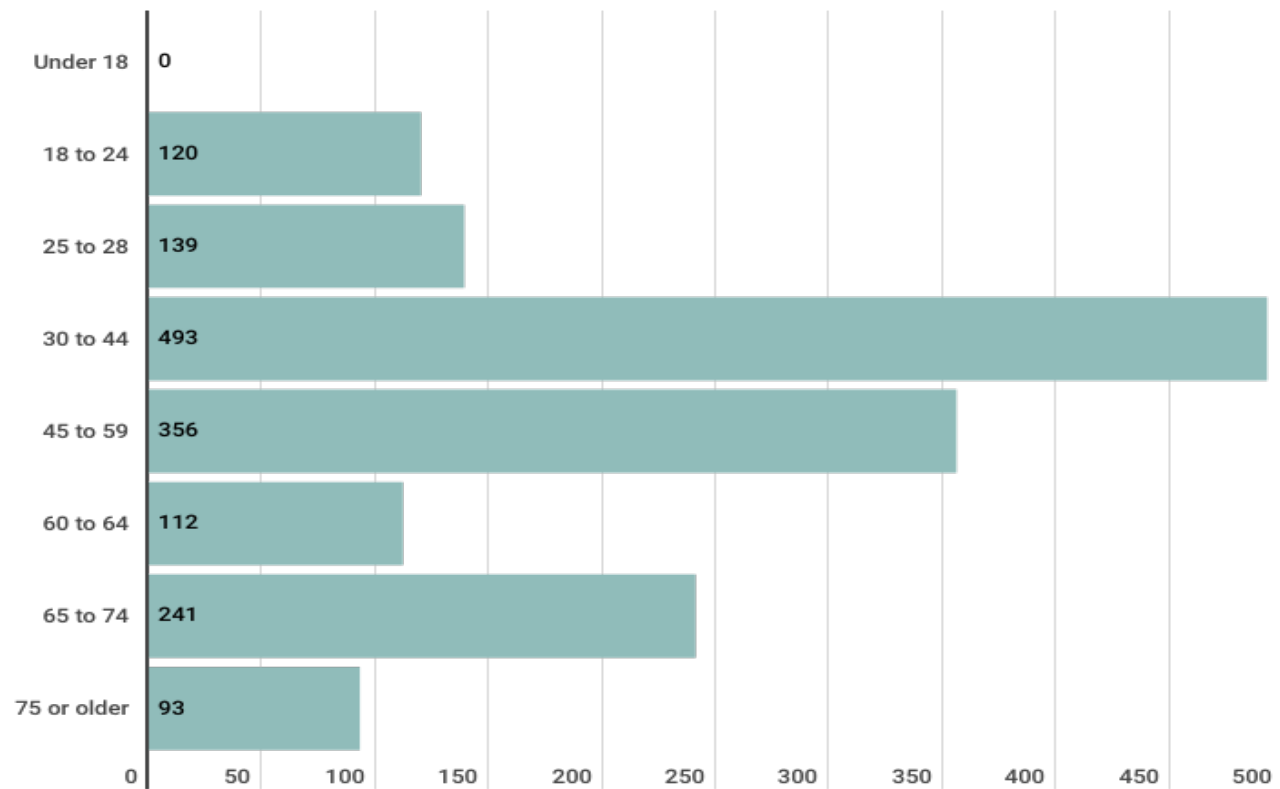
How much is your monthly rent or mortgage payment?



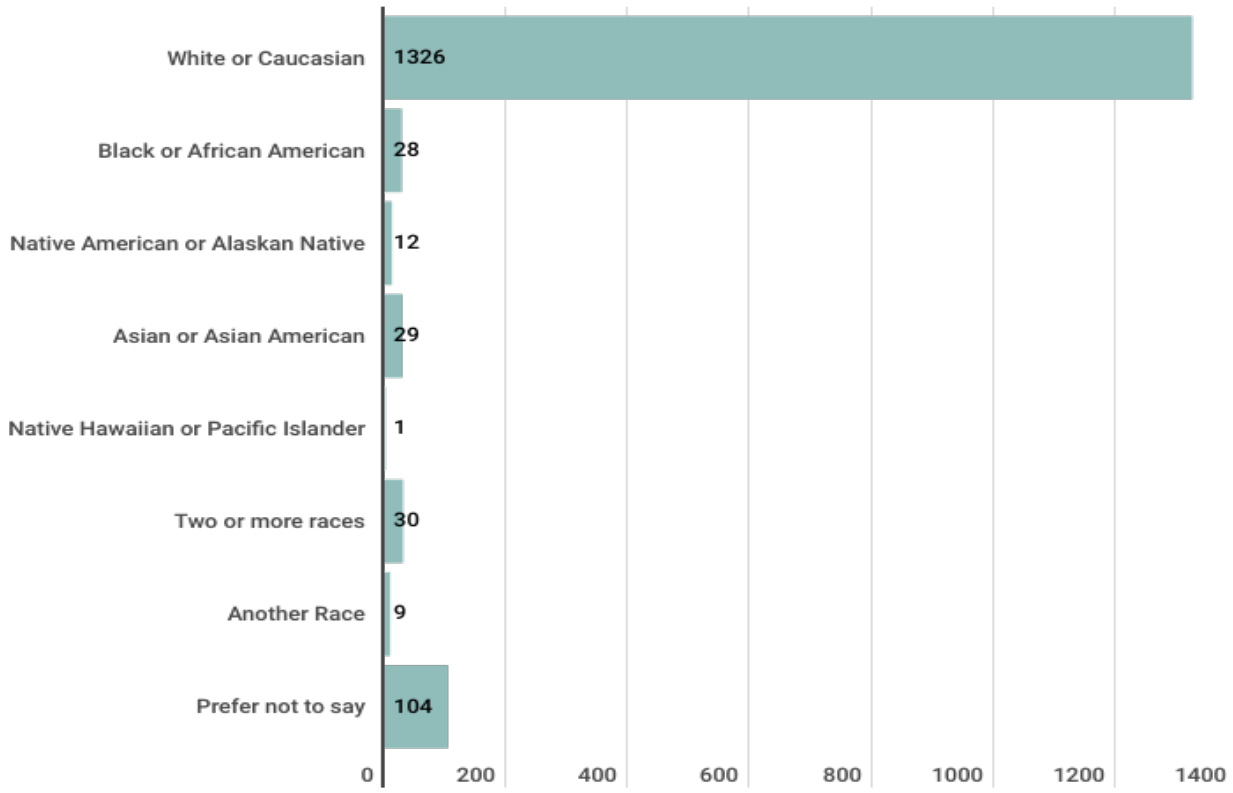
Do you rent or own your home?



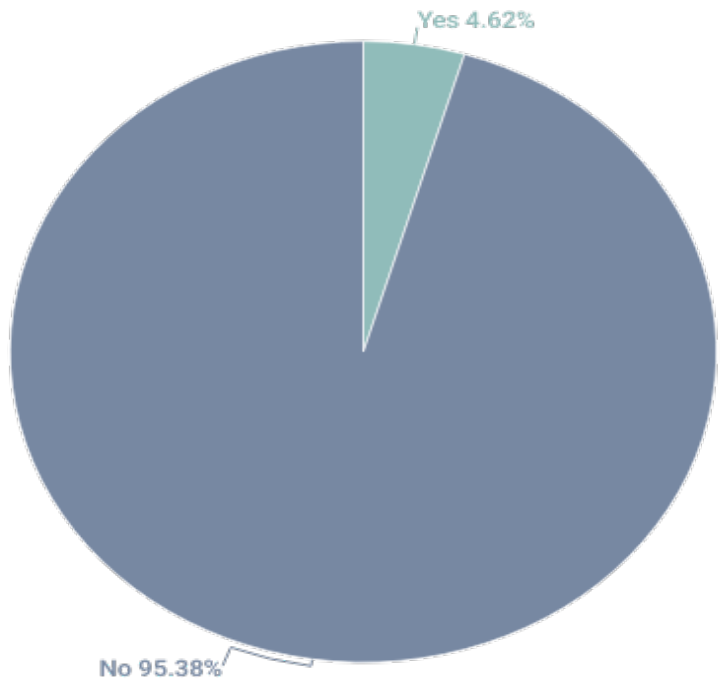
What is your age?



What is your race?



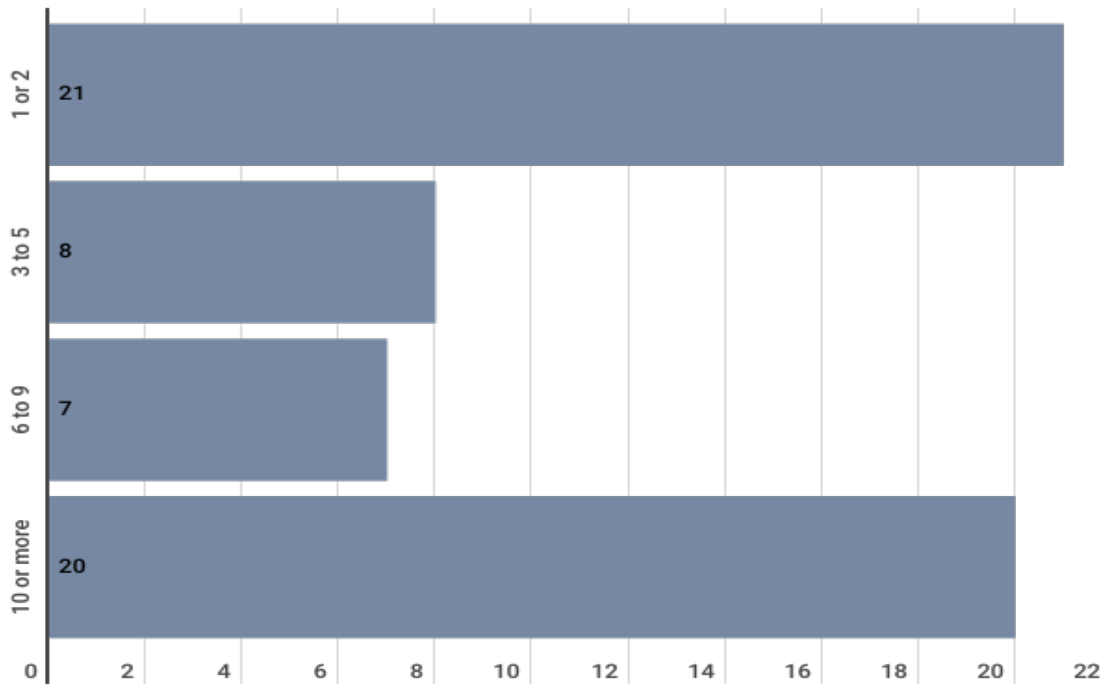
Are you Hispanic or Latino?



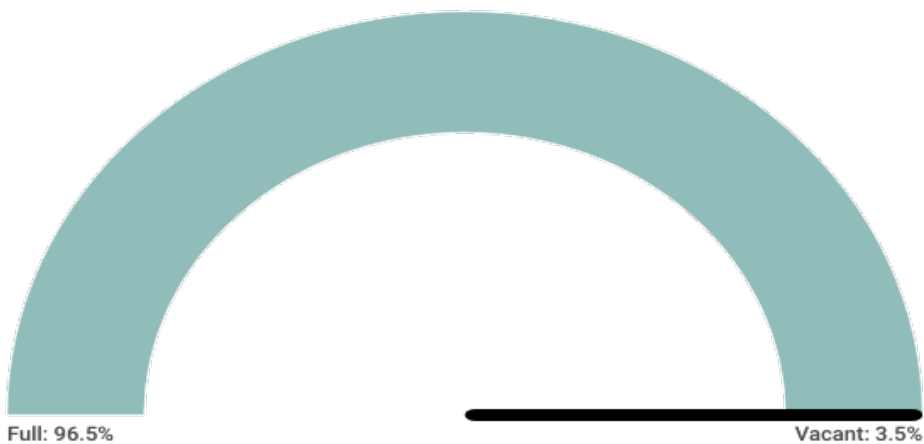
Landlord and Property Manager Survey

- 56 responses
- Approximately 450 units represented

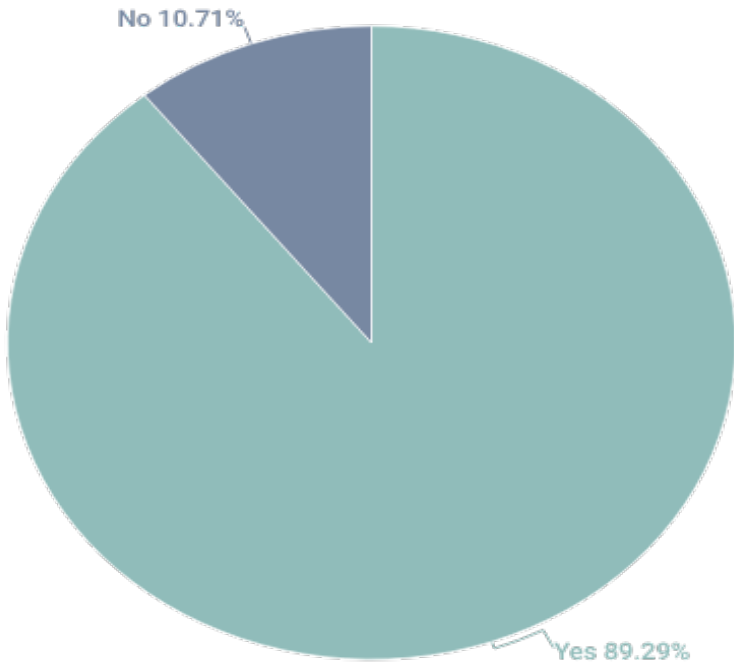
How many units do you own or manage in La Crosse?
(Please enter total number of units, not just structures).



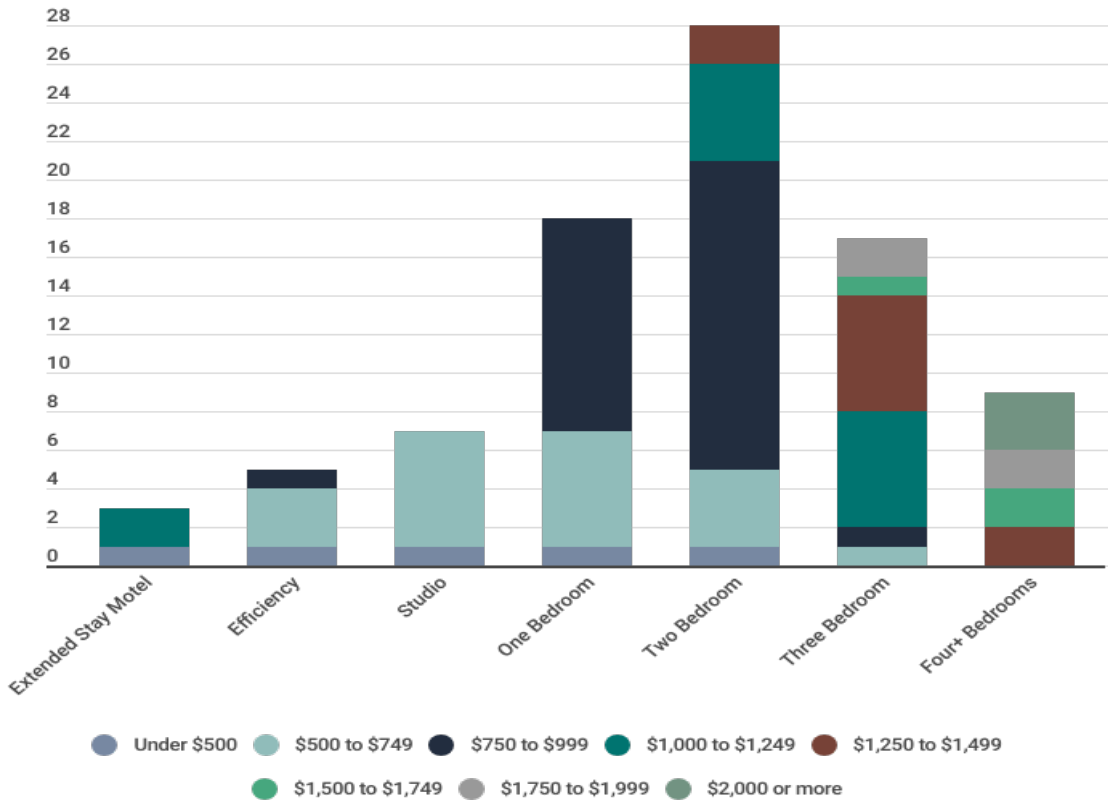
Of the units you own or manage, approximately how many are vacant at this time?



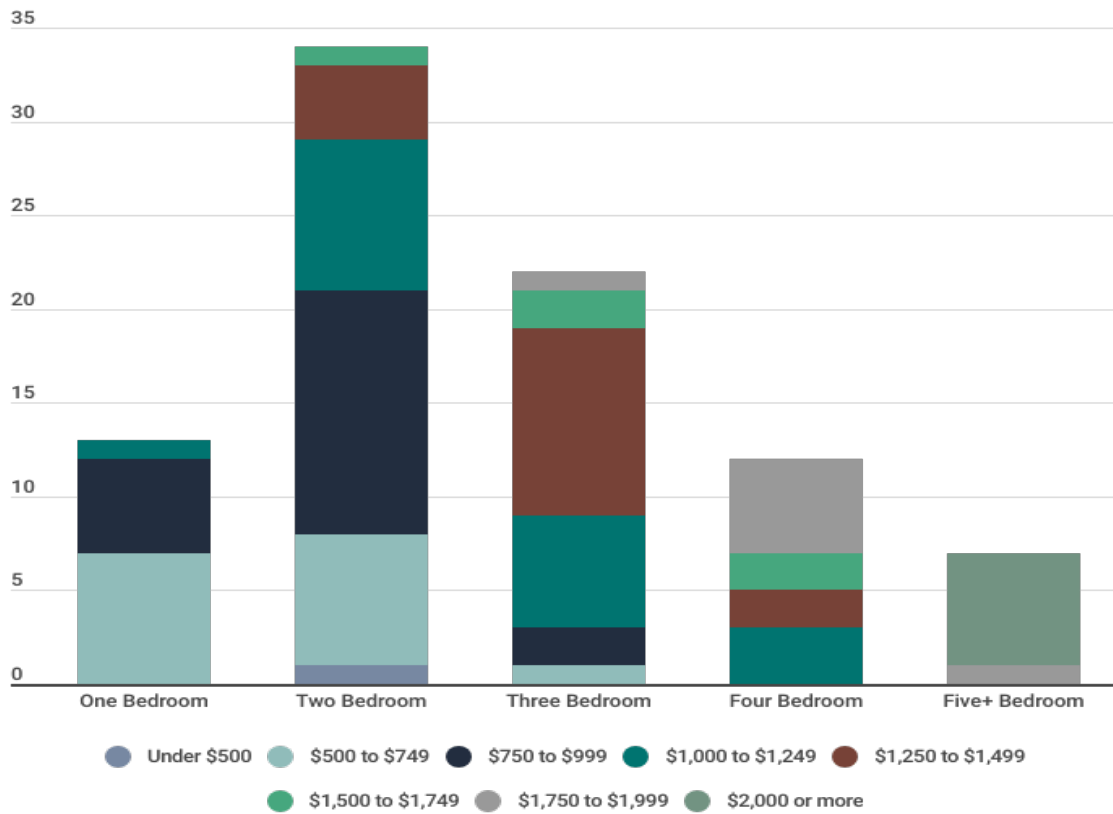
Is your current level of vacancy typical for the past year?



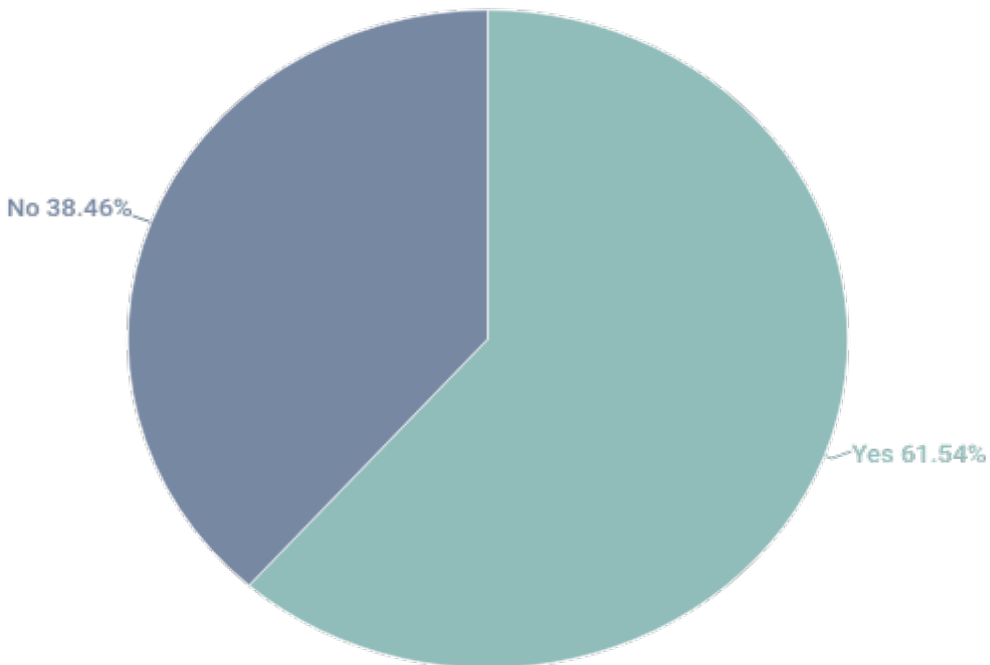
What are the approximate monthly rent ranges for your apartment units? (3 or more units per structure).



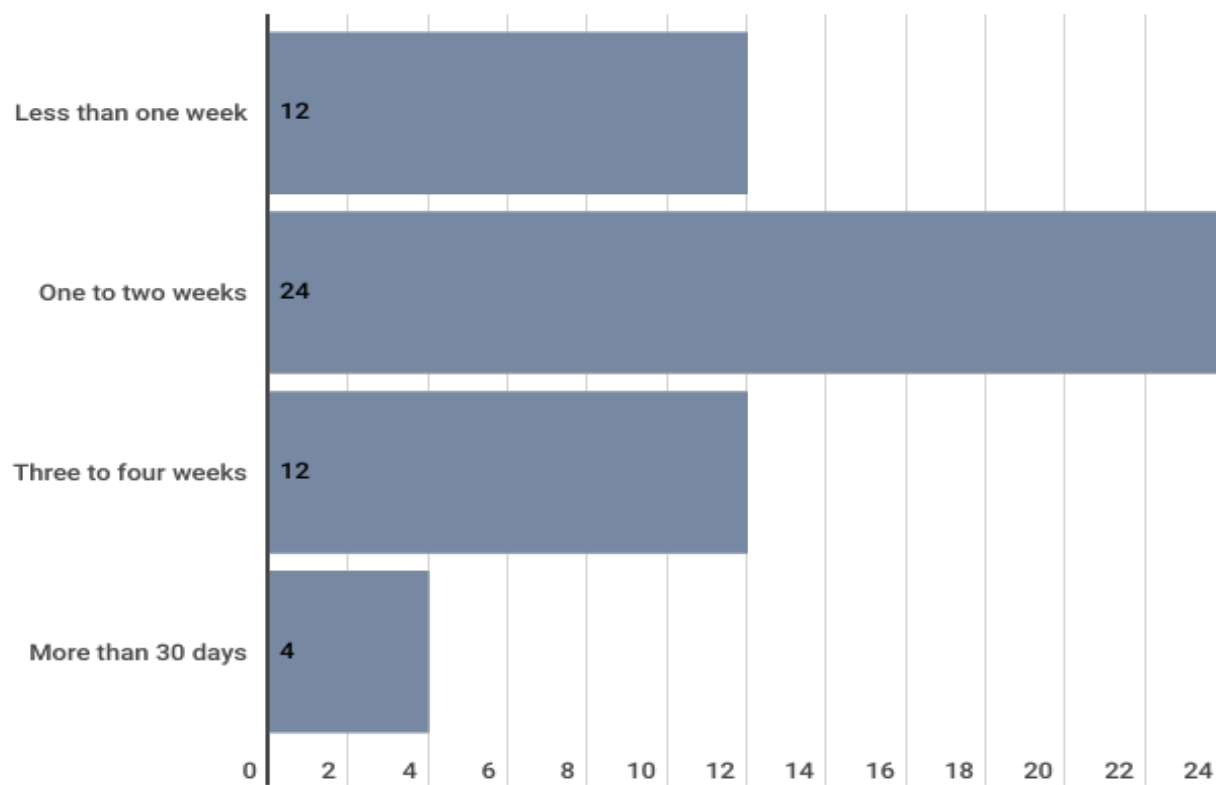
What are the approximate monthly rent ranges for your townhomes, duplexes, and single-family units?



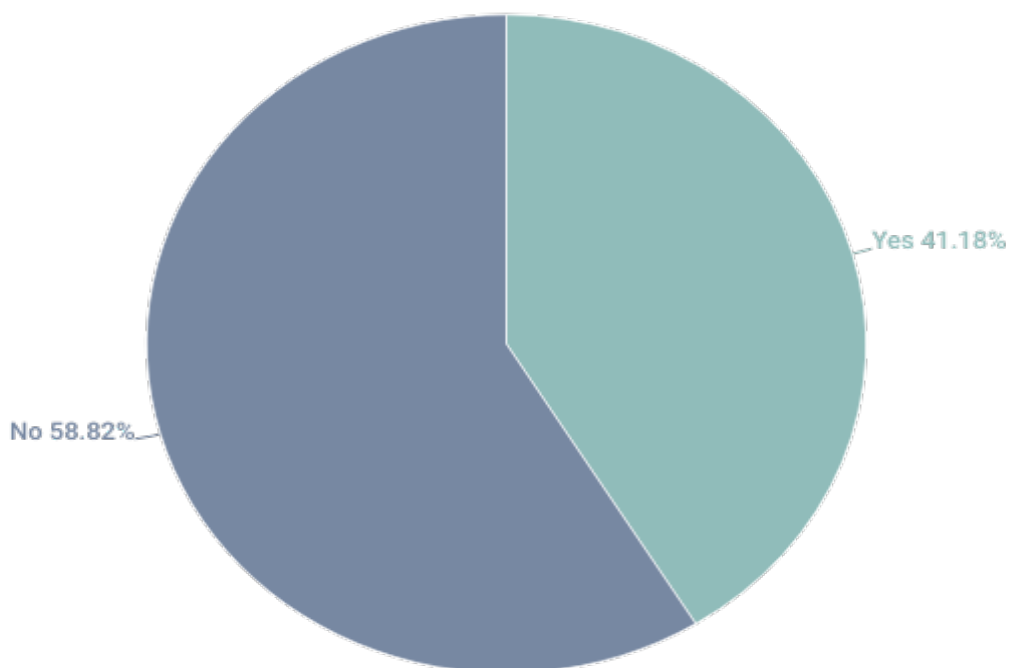
Have you raised rents in the last 12 months?



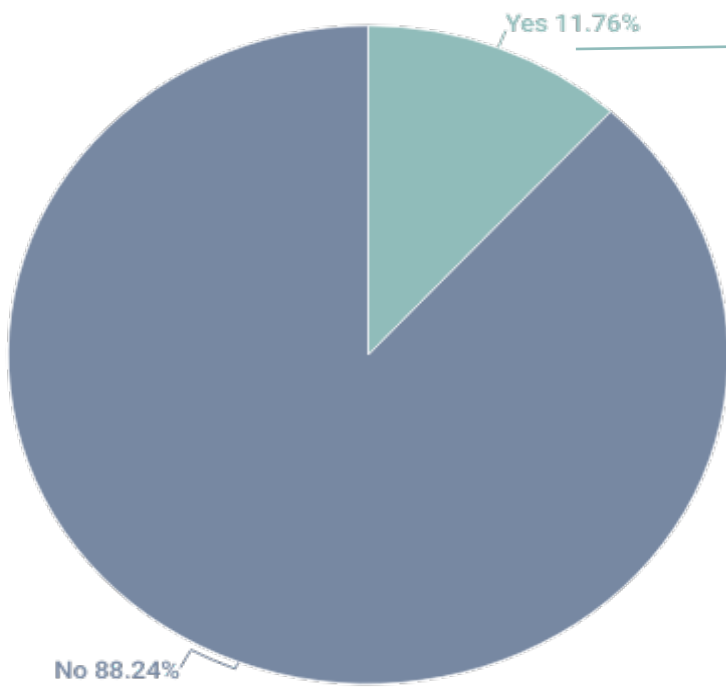
How long does it take to find a new renter for a unit?



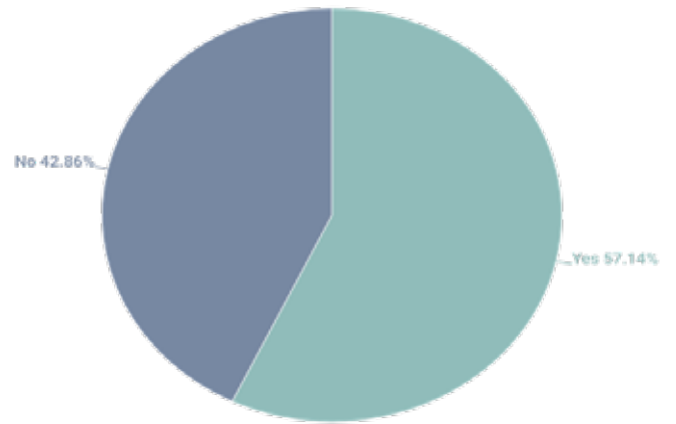
Do you accept Section 8 vouchers?



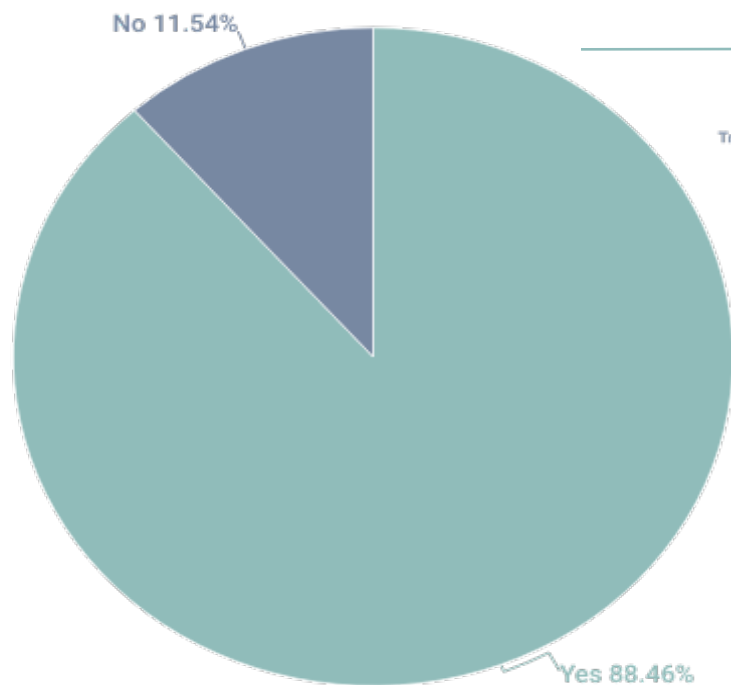
Do you own any short-term lease units? (Such as AirBnb or VRBO).



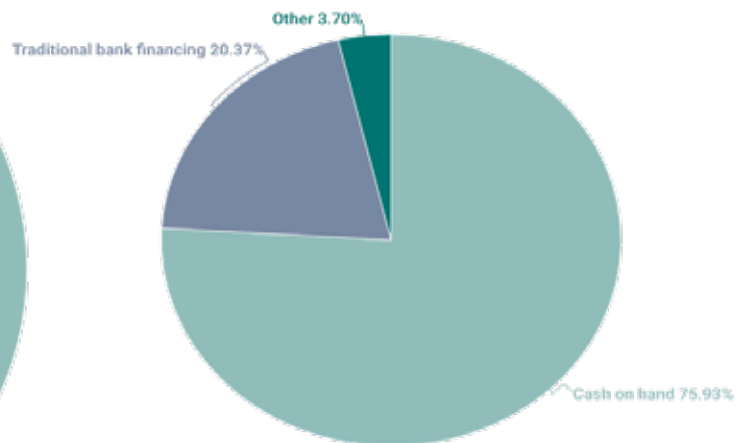
If yes, have you converted any long-term rentals to short-term rentals (such as AirBnb or VRBO) since 2020?



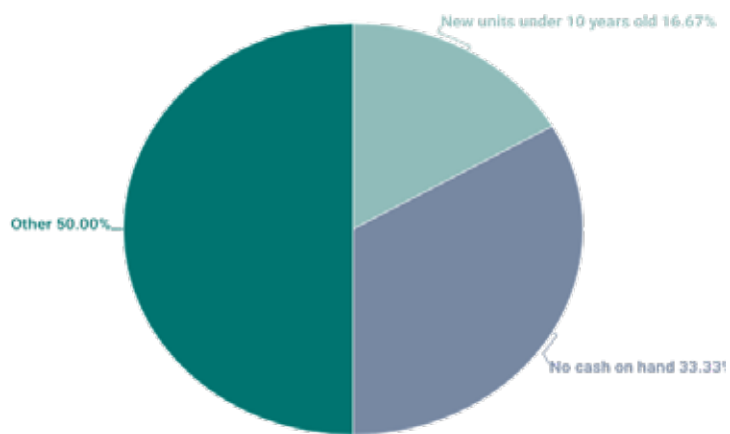
Have you made any capital investments in your rental properties in the last five years?



If yes, what type of financing did you use? (Check all that apply).



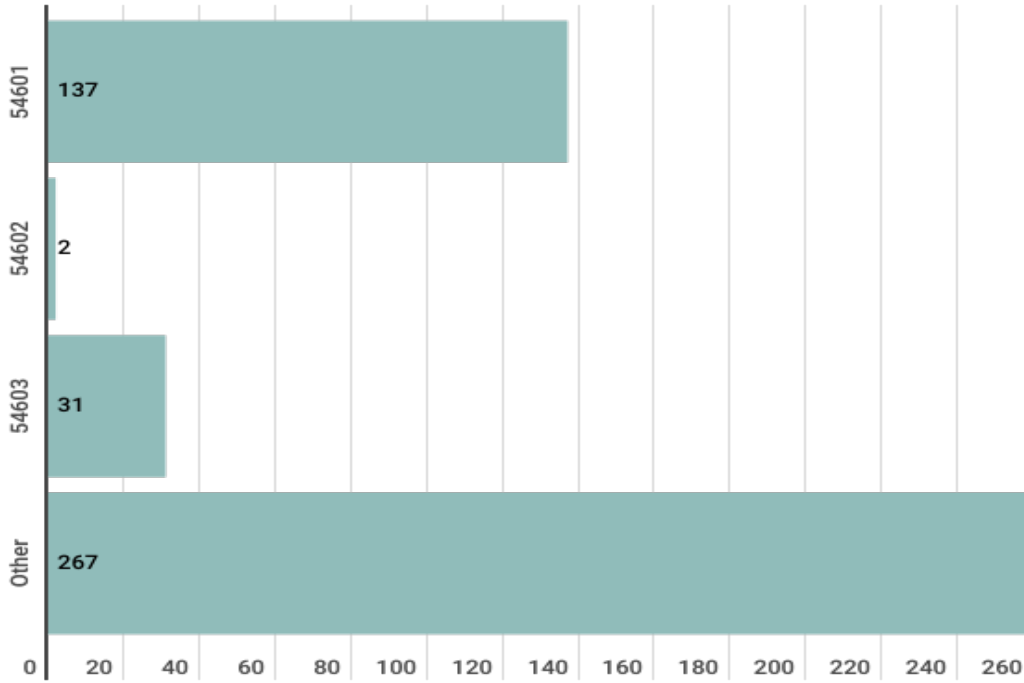
If no, what is the reason? (Check all that apply).



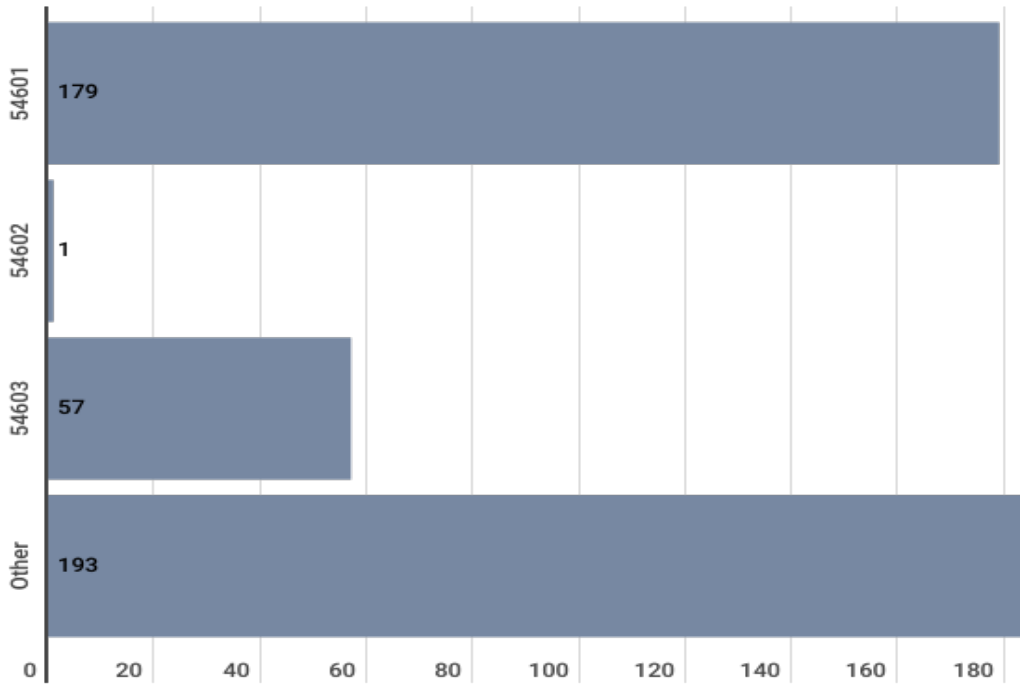
Workforce Survey

• 438 responses

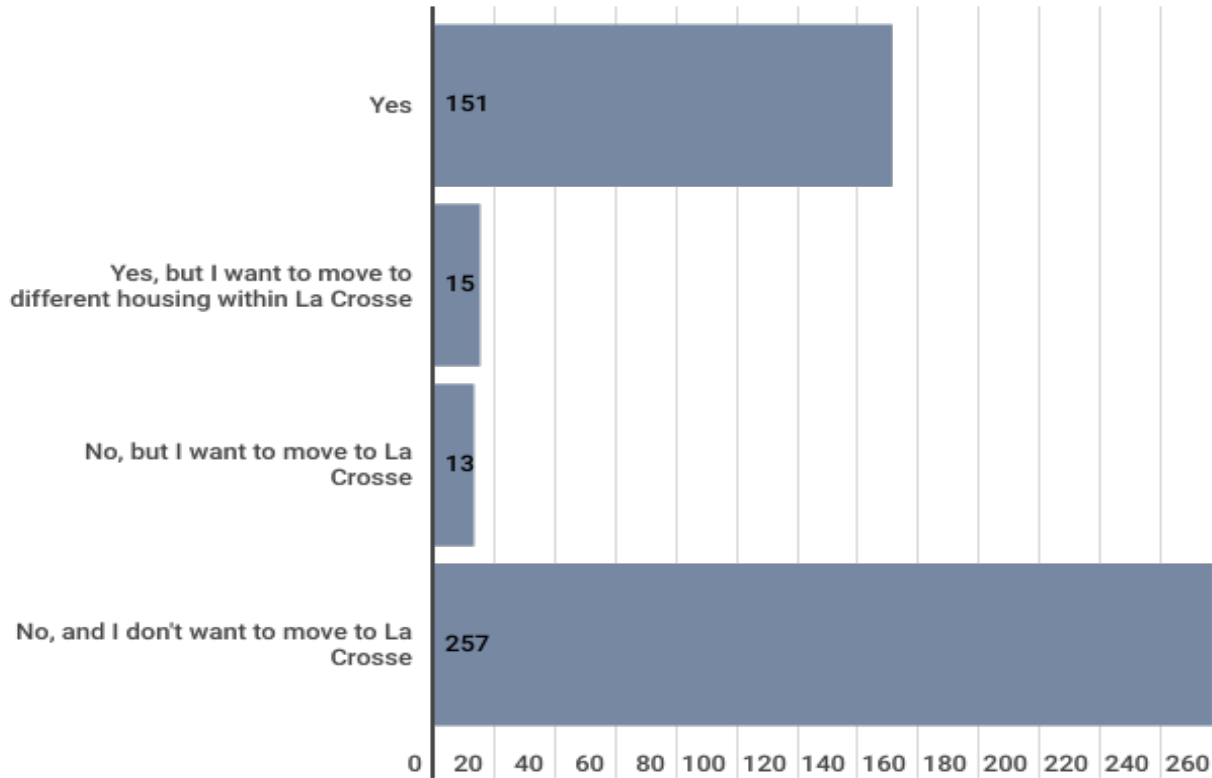
What is your home zip code?



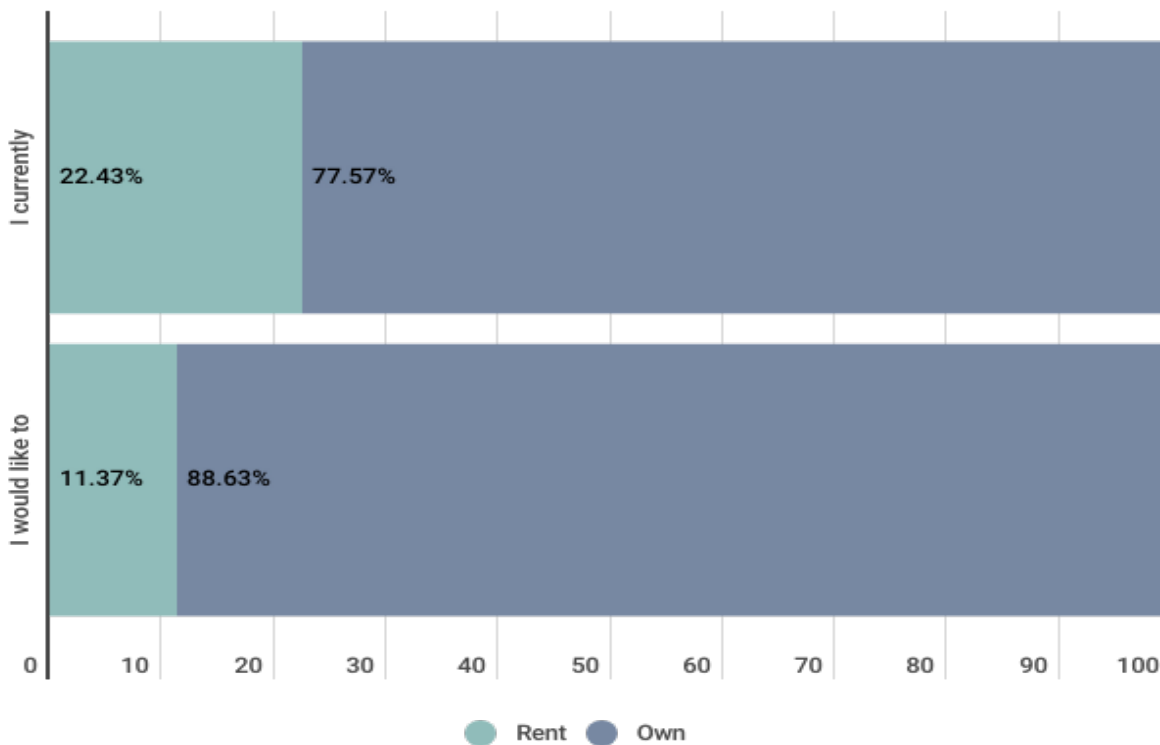
What is your work zip code?



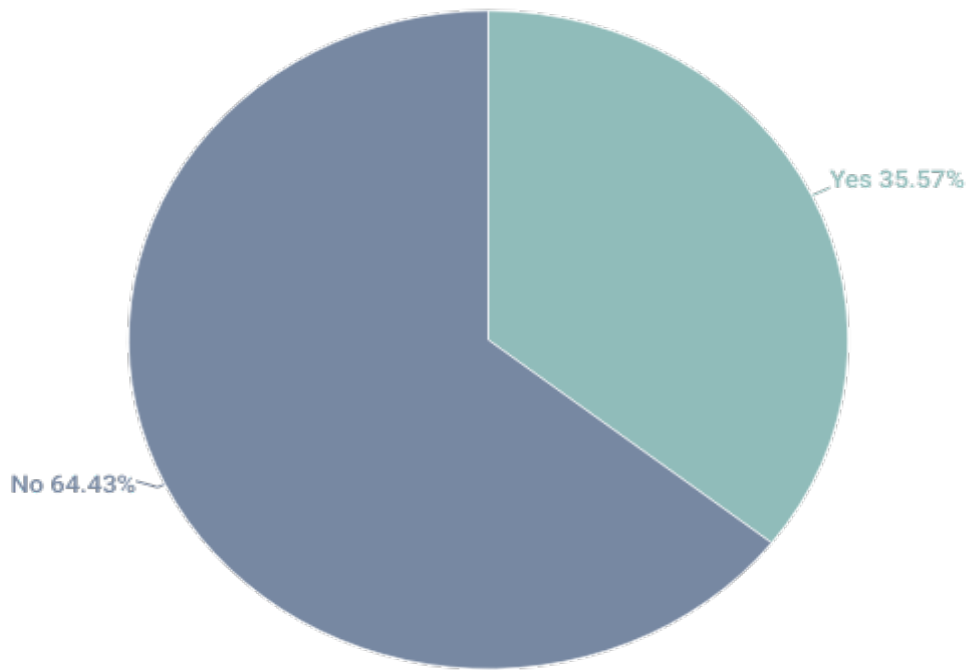
Do you live in La Crosse city limits?



What describes your current and preferred housing situation?



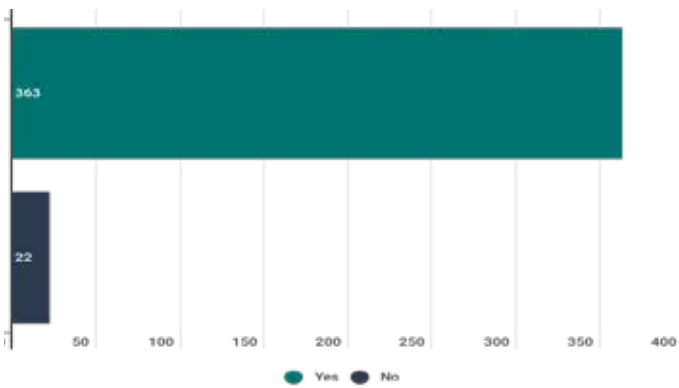
Do you feel you can find your preferred housing option in La Crosse?



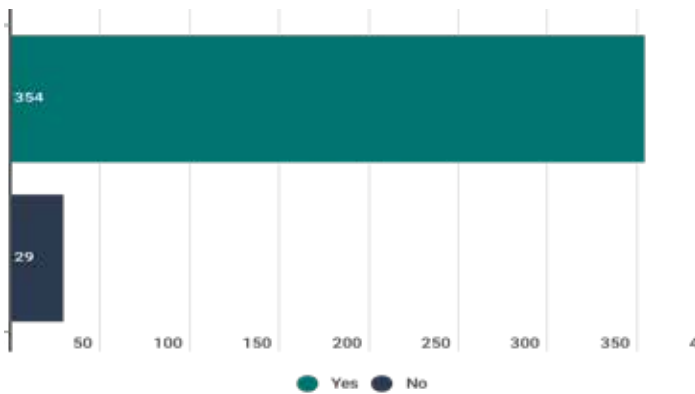
Do you think the following housing products would be successful in La Crosse?

“Successful” means, if available, people would want to live in this product.

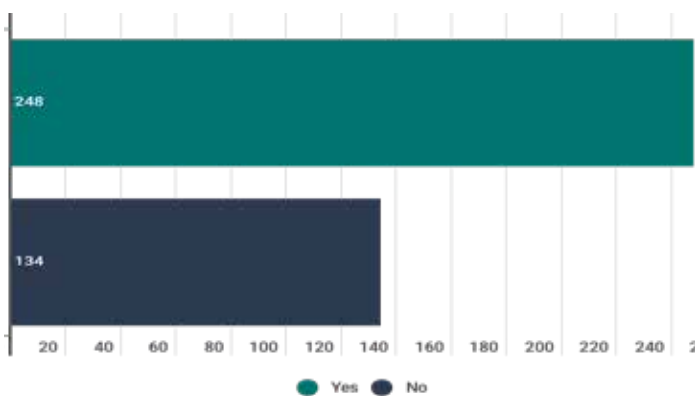
Affordable, small two- or three-bedroom house



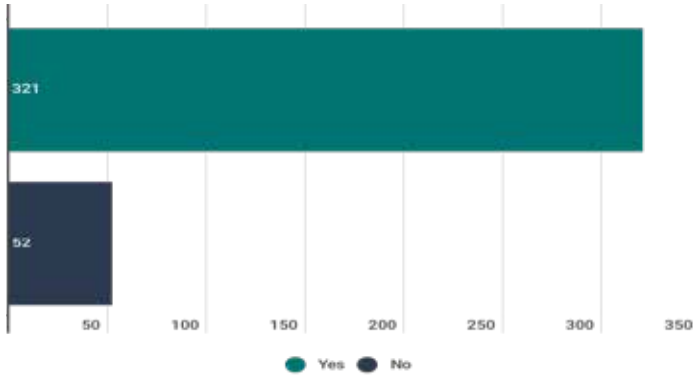
Mid-size, three-bedroom house



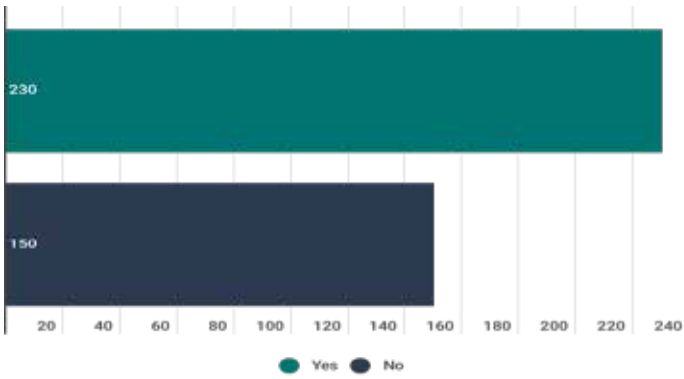
Large house with four or more bedrooms



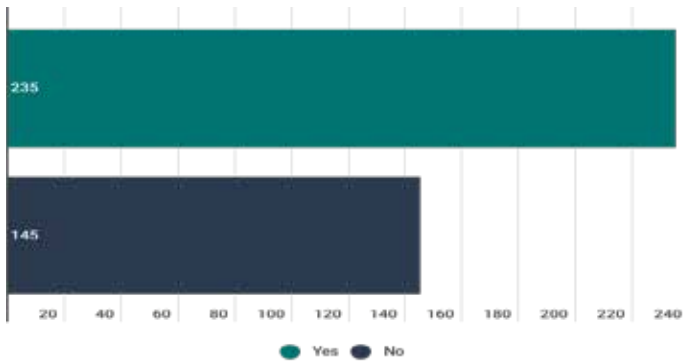
Townhouse or duplex



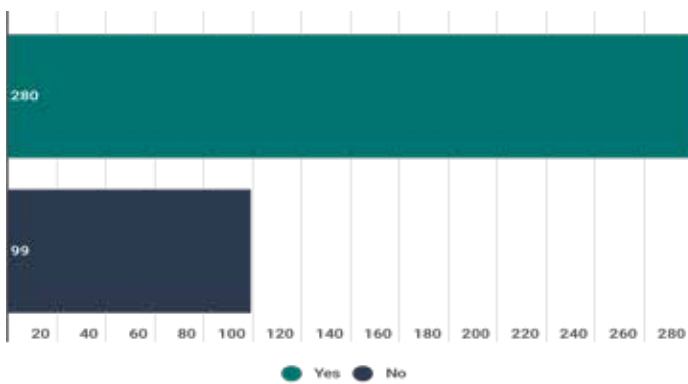
Smaller multi-family (tri- or quadplex)



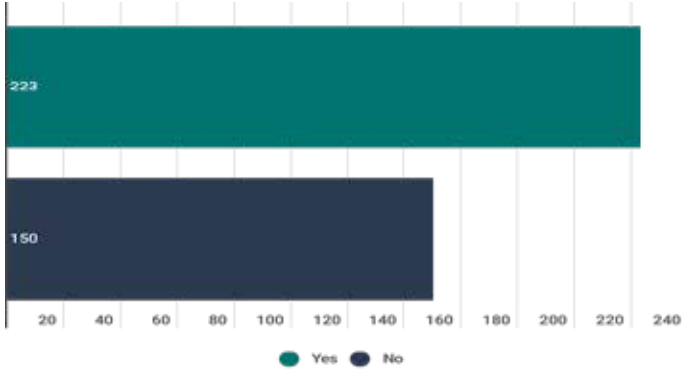
Row housing



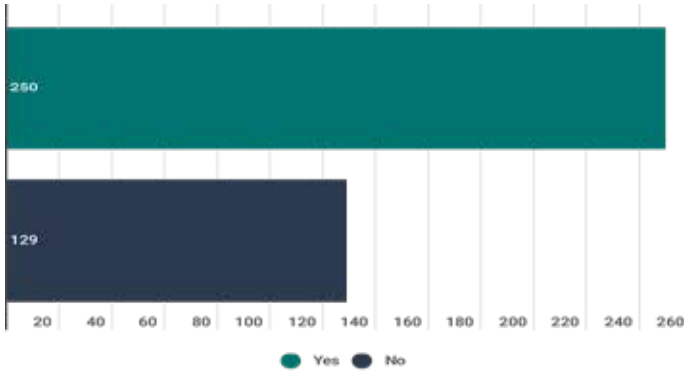
Apartments



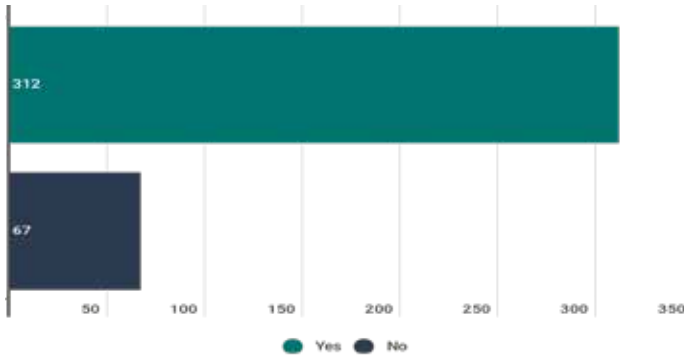
Downtown upper-story residential



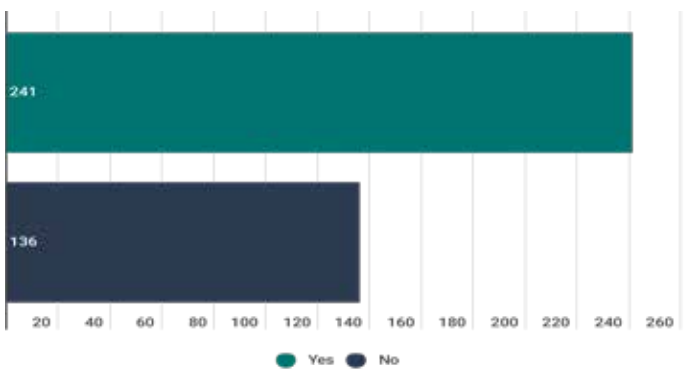
Commercial/residential mixed-use



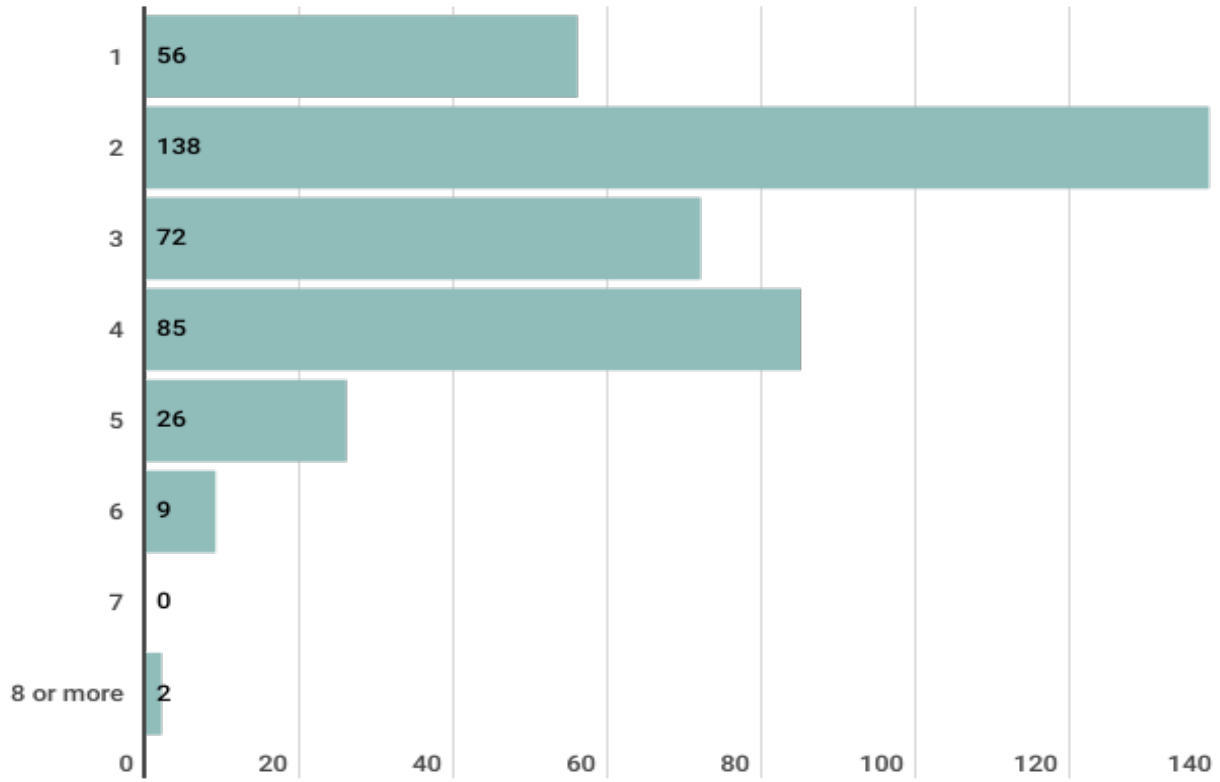
Independent senior living housing



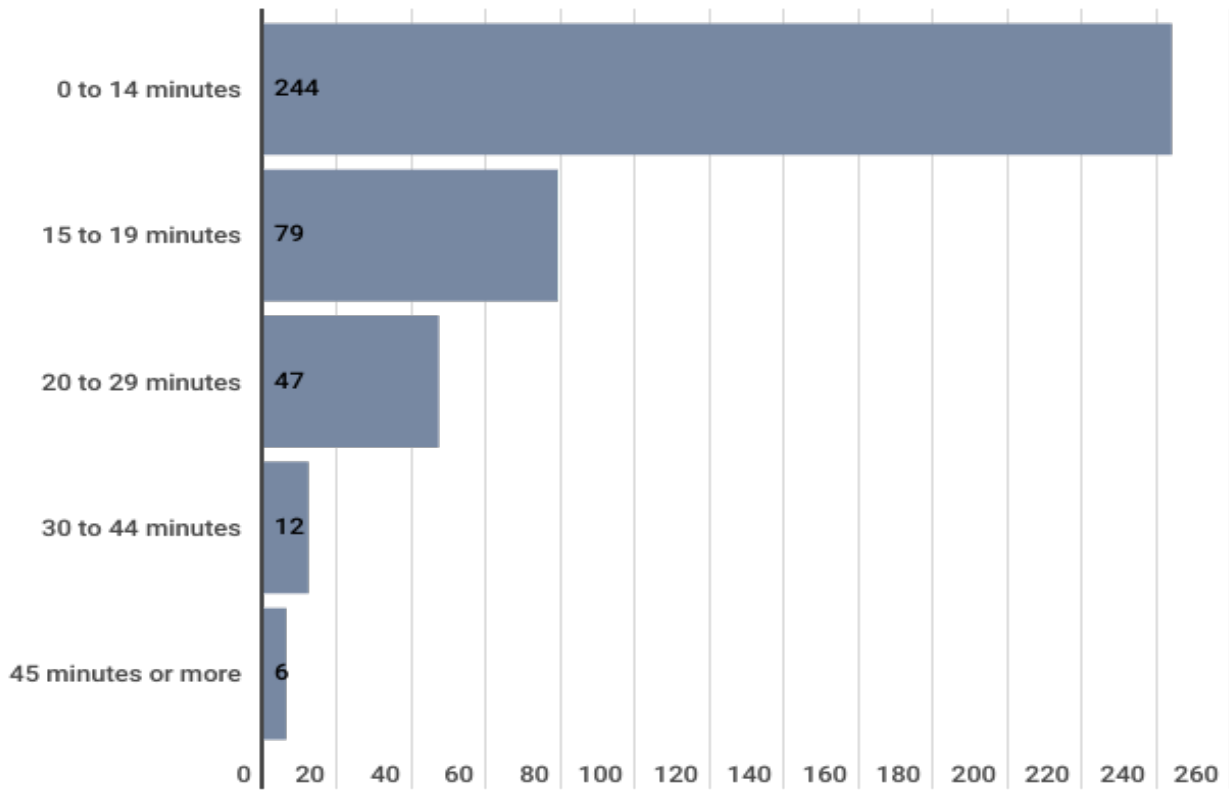
Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)



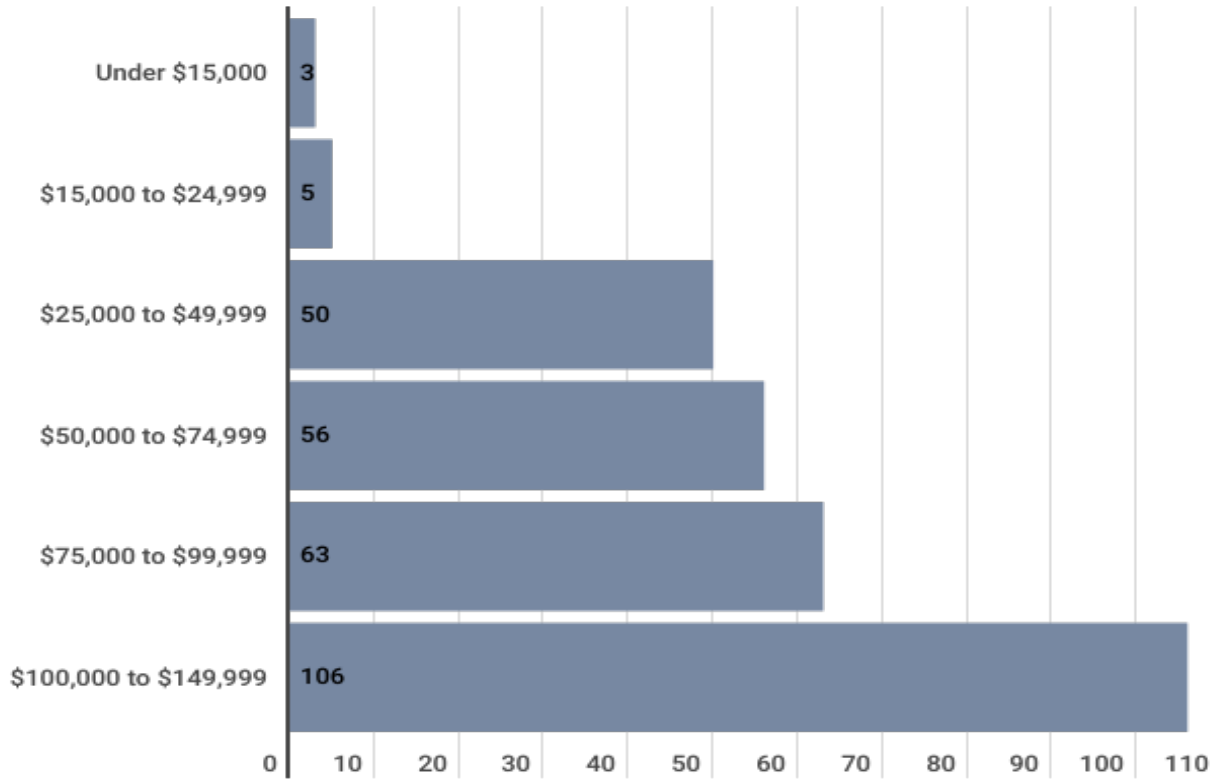
How many people currently live in your household?



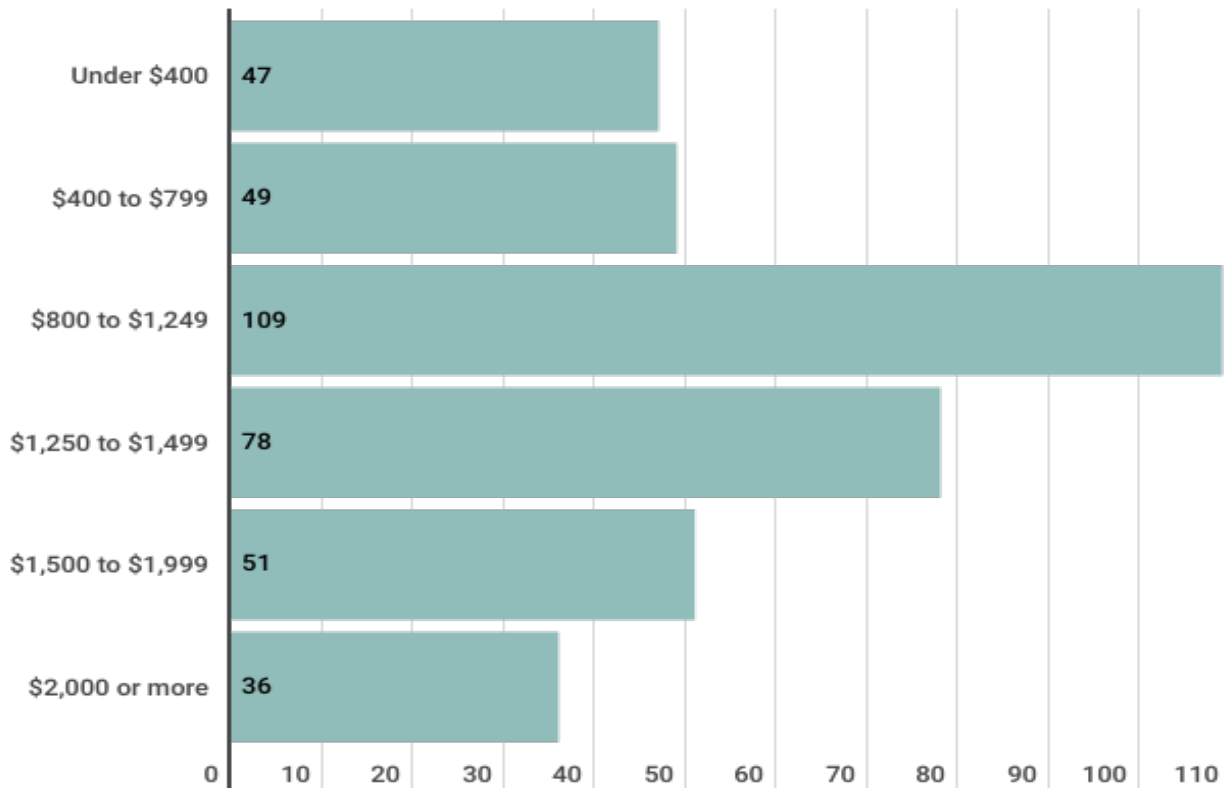
How long is your commute to work?



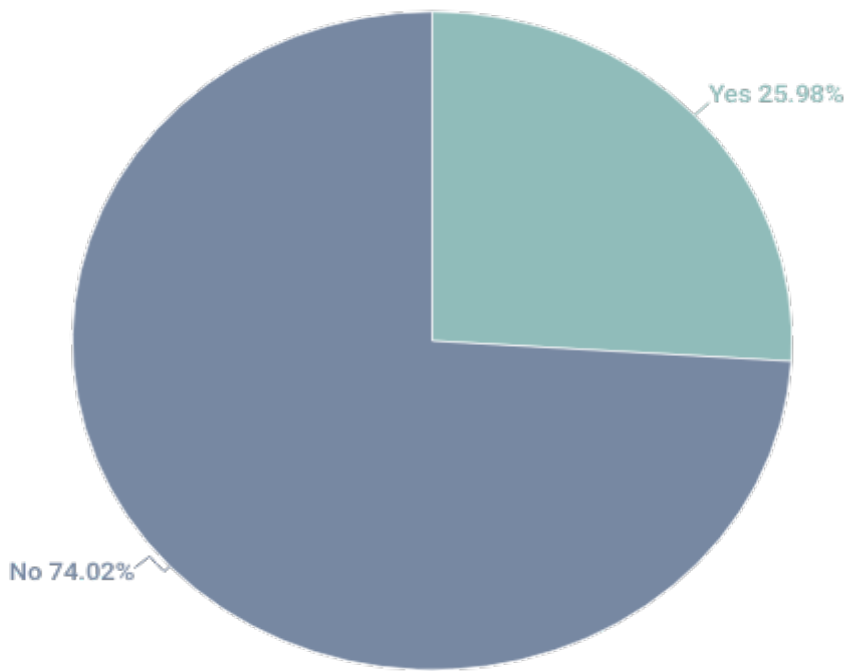
What is your current annual household income?



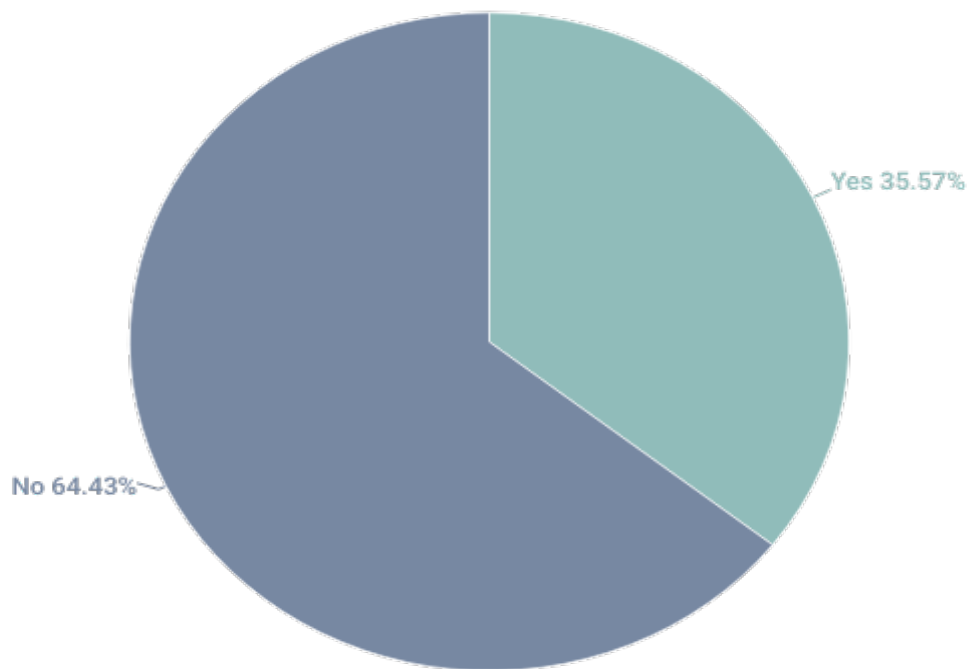
How much is your monthly rent or mortgage payment?



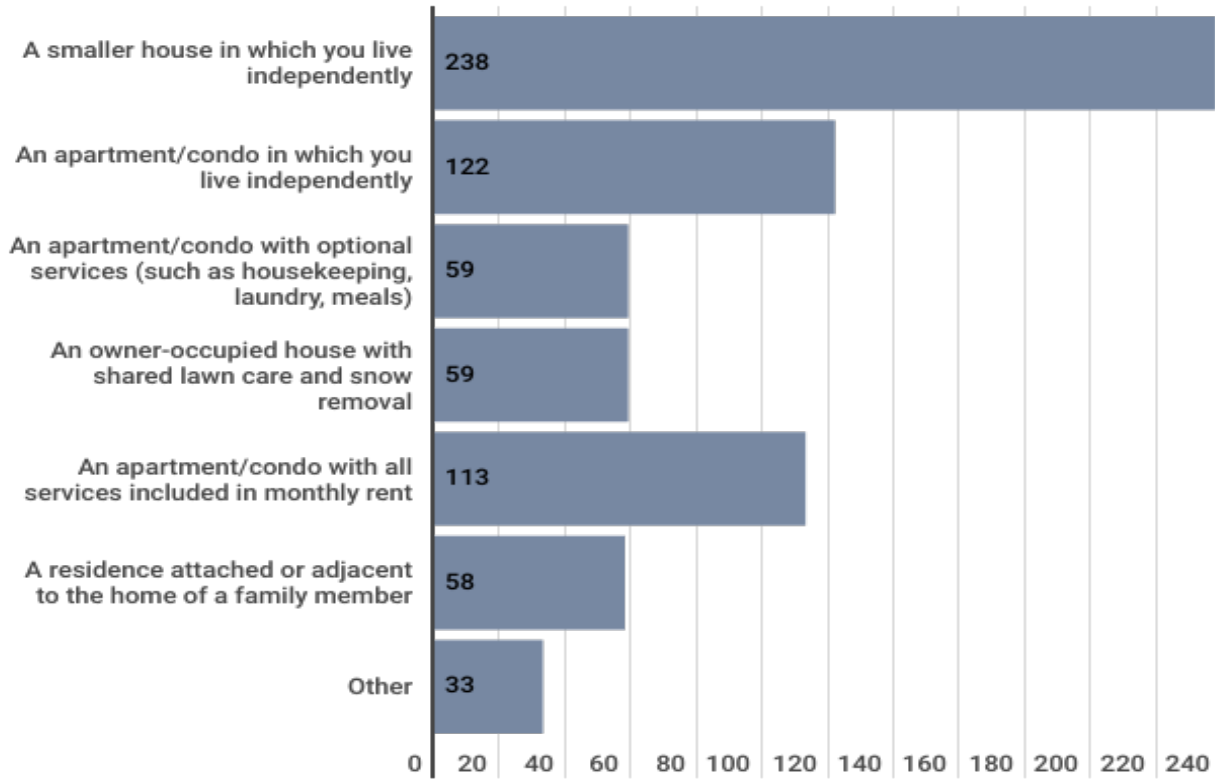
Are you 55 or older?



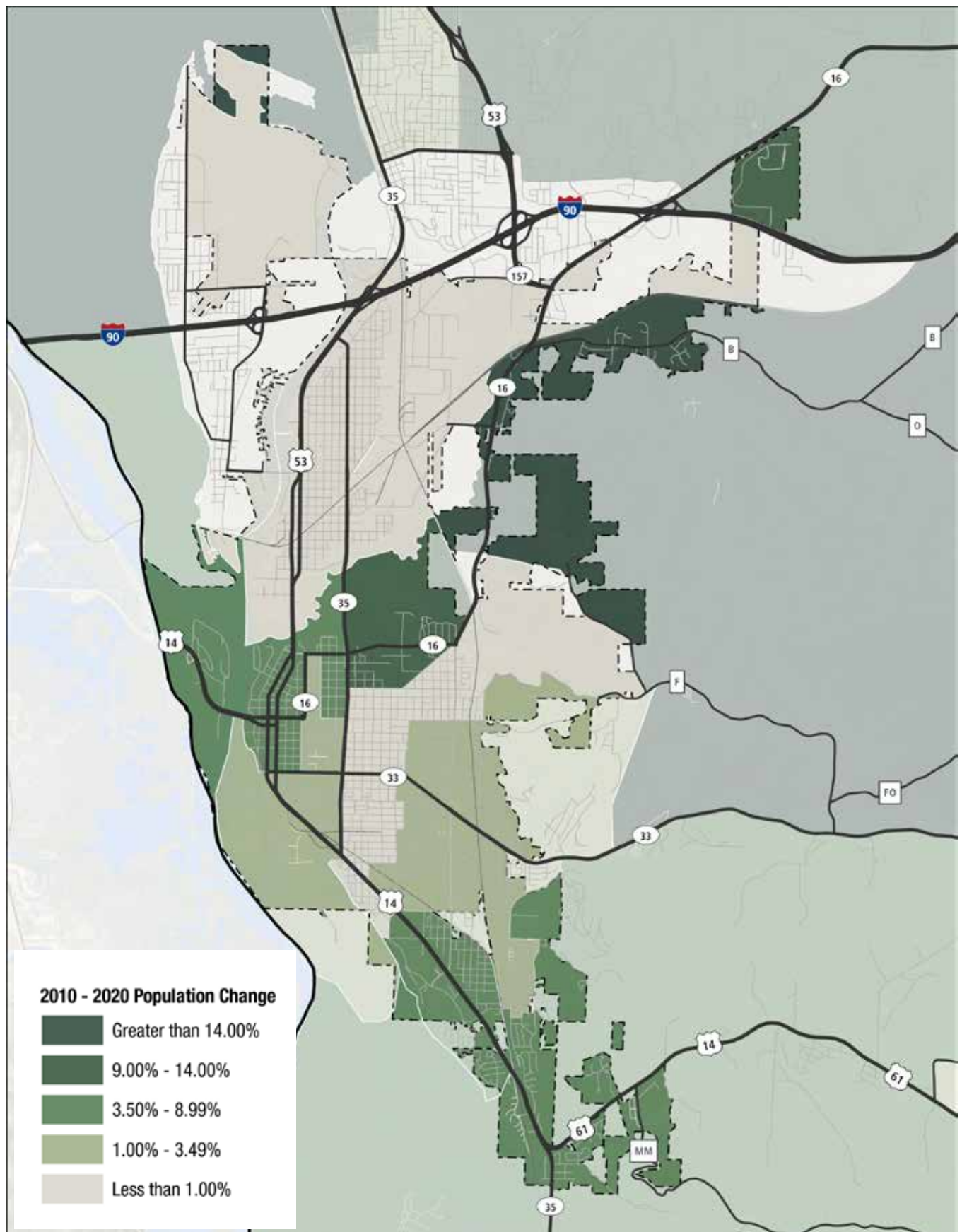
Do you plan to retire in La Crosse?



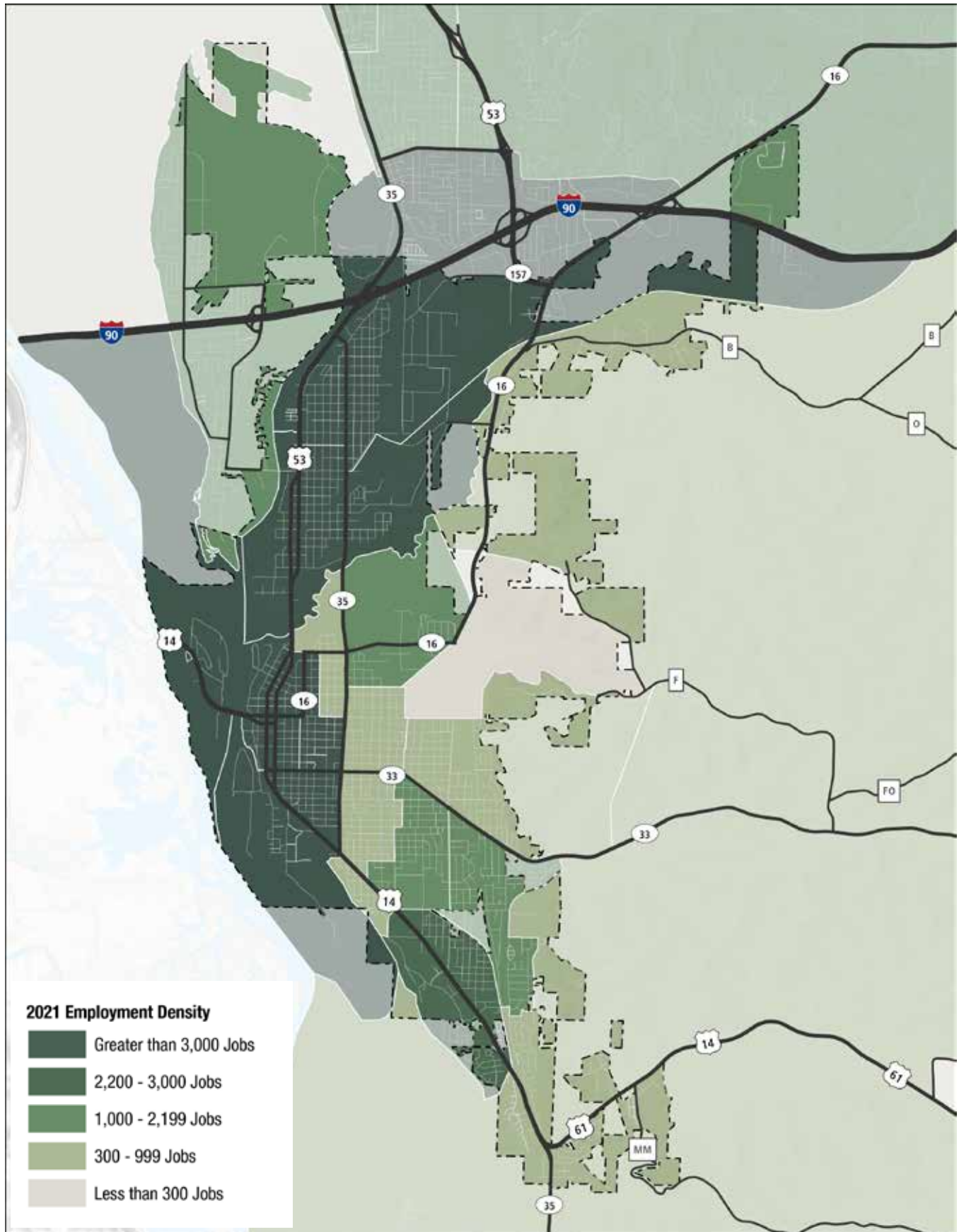
In retirement, which of these options appeals the most to you? (Check all that apply).



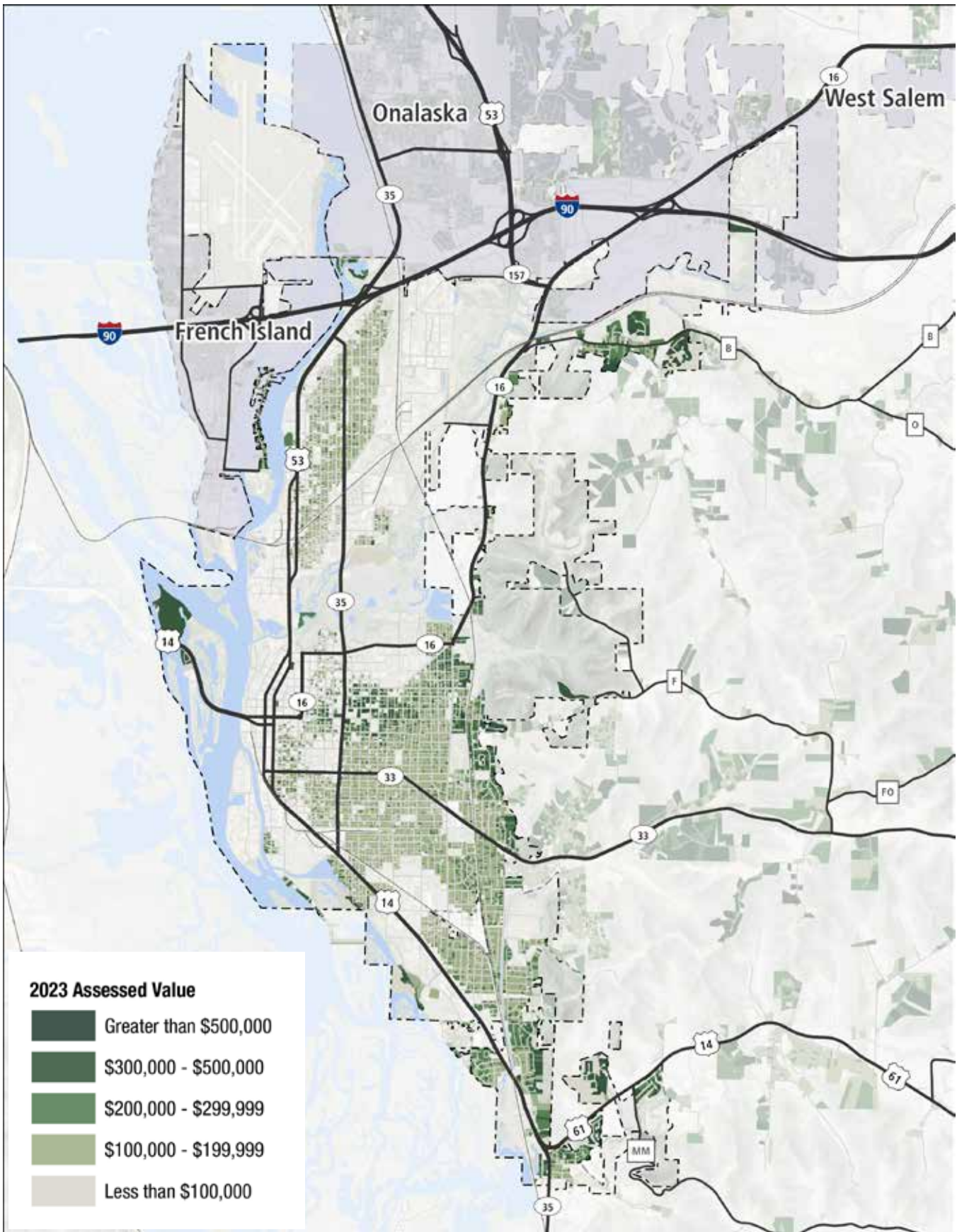
Supplemental Maps



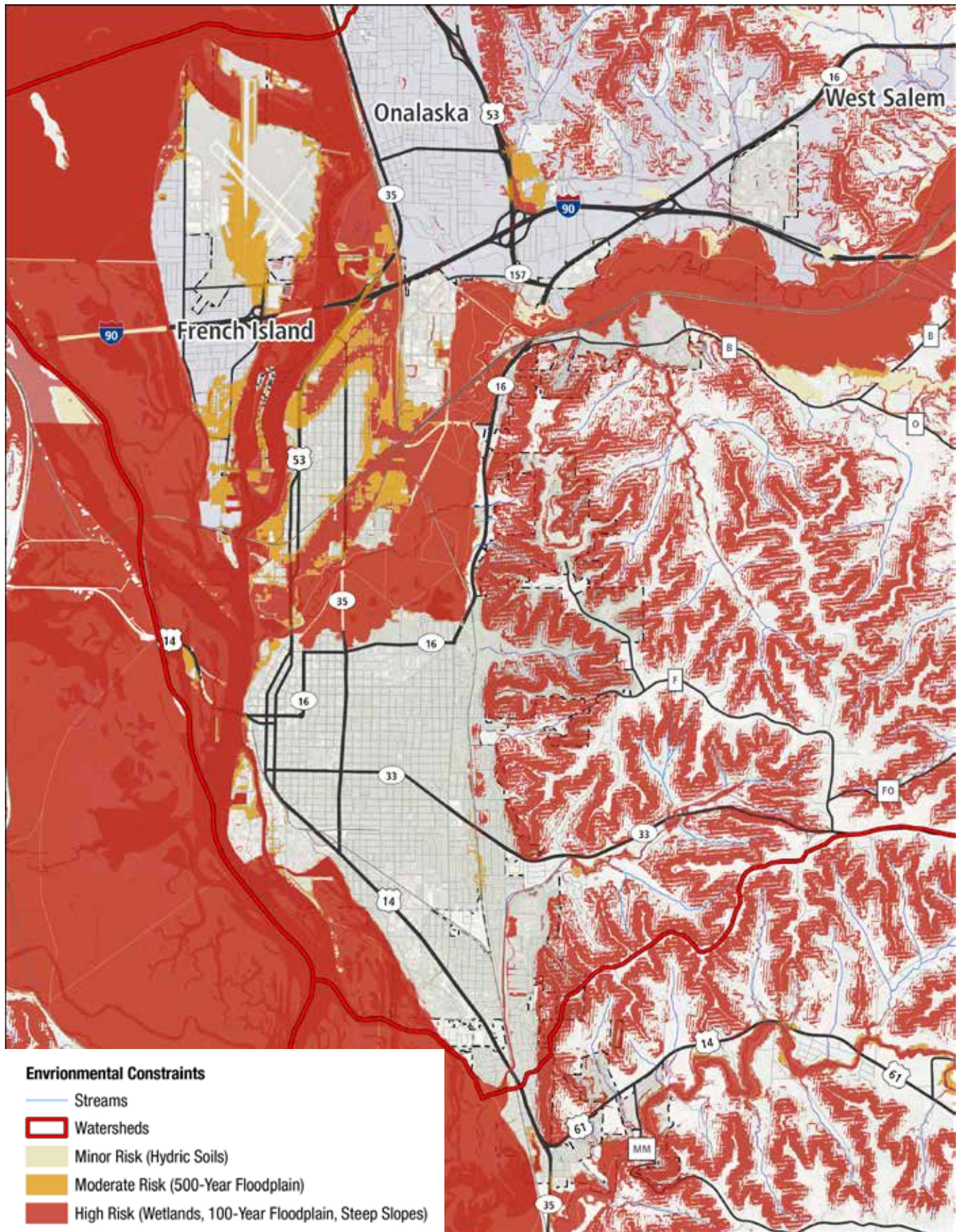
Supplemental Maps



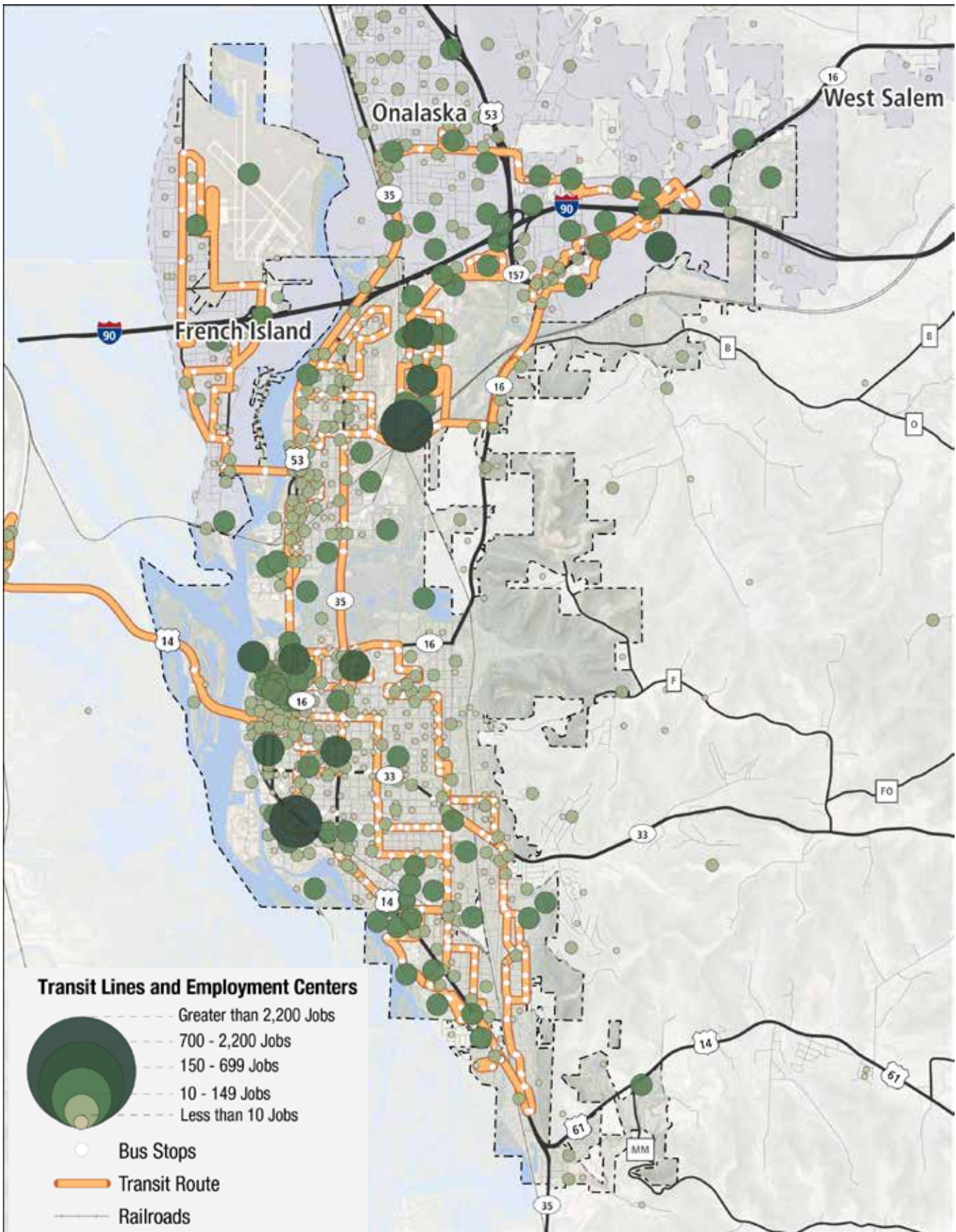
Supplemental Maps



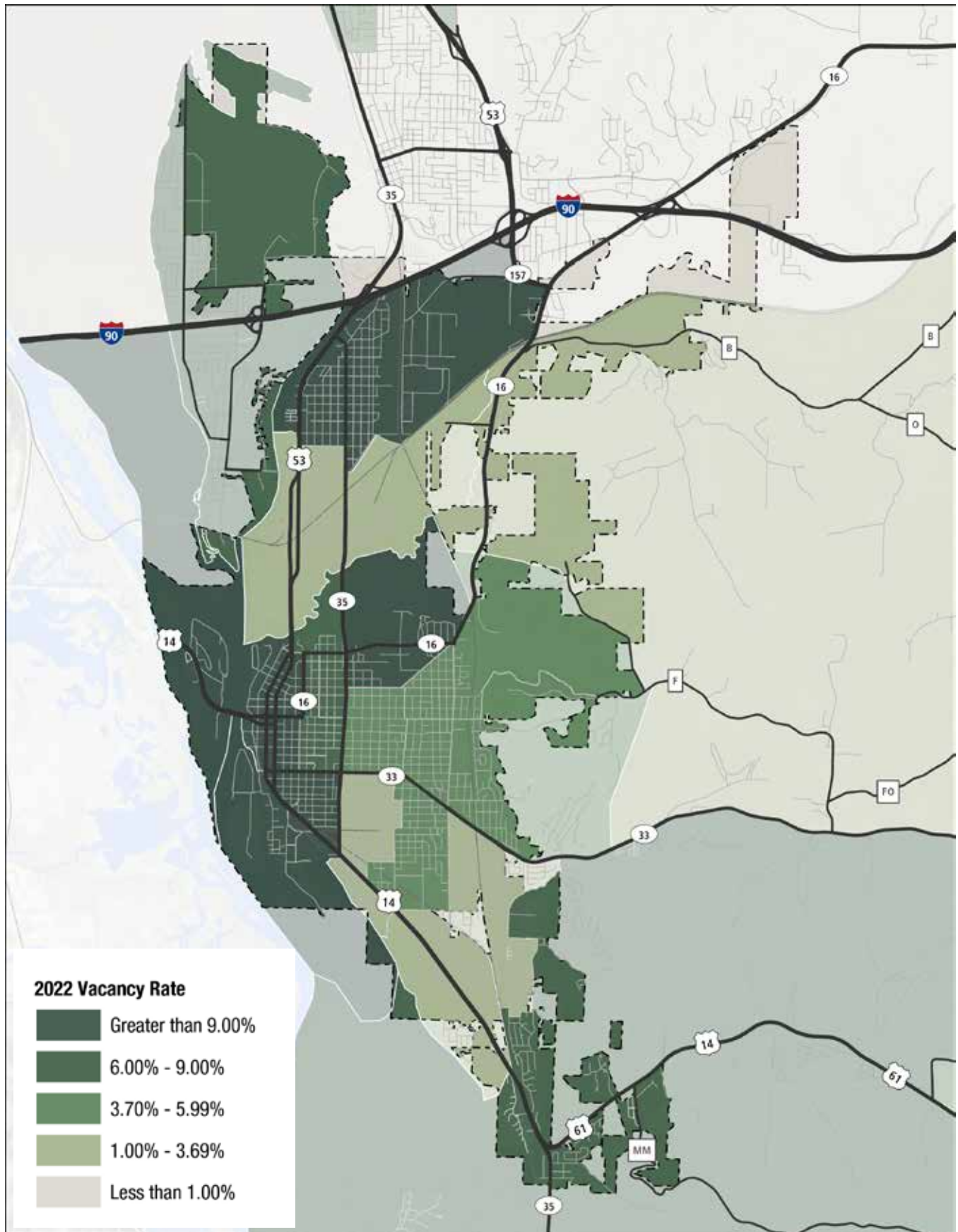
Supplemental Maps



Supplemental Maps



Supplemental Maps



Supplemental Maps

