

3. Issues and Opportunities

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I. Introduction

The character and identity of a city is crucial to the planning process. Those characteristics and factors that individuals associate with a given location provide a frame of reference for future planning and development. Characteristics and factors, as well as a vision of what the future should look like, are essential in order to provide a summary and analysis that addresses the issues and opportunities for the city.

Wisconsin's Smart Growth Comprehensive Planning Law requires that the Issues and Opportunities Element provide background information about the community, as well as, overall visions to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. This chapter presents the overall vision for Evansville, influenced by current conditions and public involvement in the planning process.

II. Community Profile

Evansville's demographic and economic statistics provide a window into how Evansville has changed over time, and how it will change over the next 20 years. Determining trends and projections for these changes are an important instrument to project Evansville's future.

This section provides a review of the demographic and economic statistics of Evansville's residents.

A. Demographic Profile

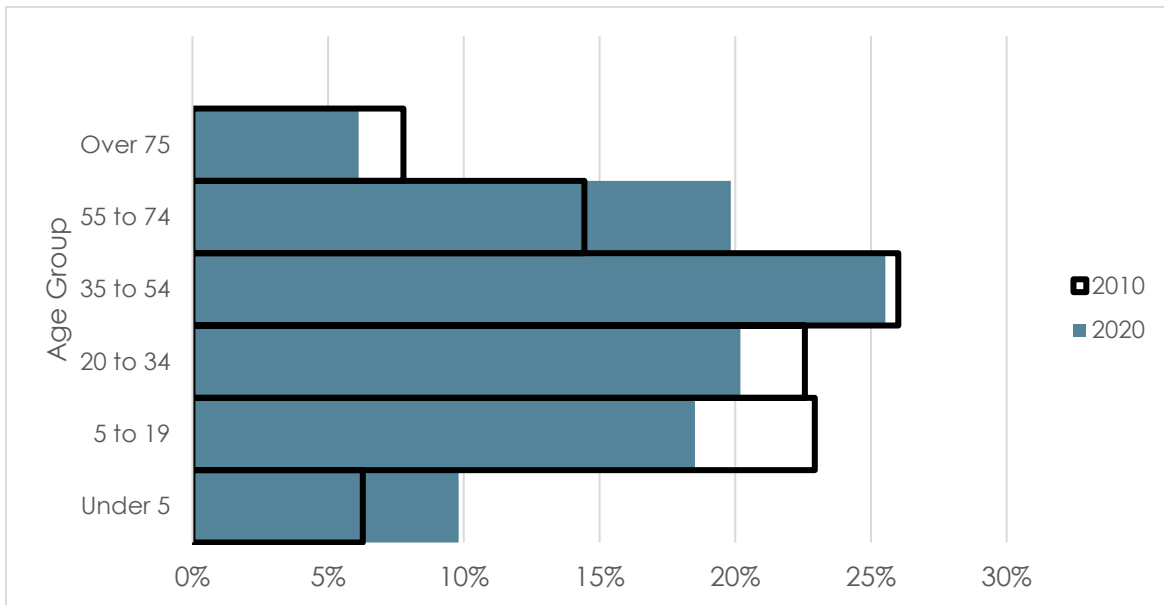
Table 3.1: Historic Population Trends

Location	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Change 2010-2020
City of Evansville	2,835	3,174	4,039	5,012	5,703	13.8%
Town of Union	1,329	1,537	1,860	2,099	2,104	0%
Town of Center	908	861	1,005	1,066	1,046	-2%
Town of Magnolia	746	717	854	767	742	-3%
Town of Porter	940	953	925	945	969	3%
City of Edgerton	4,335	4,254	4,891	5,364	5,945	11%
Rock County	139,420	139,510	152,307	160,331	163,687	2%
Village of Oregon	3,876	4,583	7,514	9,231	11,179	21%
City of Stoughton	7,589	8,786	12,354	12,611	13,173	4%
Village of Brooklyn	627	789	916	1,401	1,524	9%
Town of Rutland	1,393	1,584	1,887	1,966	1,977	1%
Dane County	323,545	367,085	426,526	488,073	561,504	15%
Wisconsin	4,705,767	4,891,769	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,873,718	3%

Source: 1980-2020 Census

Historic population figures for Evansville and the surrounding communities are provided in Table 3.1. Evansville has seen significant population growth since 1990. Since 2010, Evansville's population growth rate has been more like that of Dane County than of Rock. Within the whole of Rock County, along with the population in the towns bordering the Evansville area, population growth over the past 10 years reflects that of the State of Wisconsin.

Figure 3A: Change in Population by Age Group, 2010 to 2020



Source: Table DP05, 2010 and 2020 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates)

Over the past ten years, the population of Evansville has changed as well. Figure 3A compares how the City's population by age group has changed from 2010 to 2020. While the population increased, the proportion of how old City residents are changed as well. The blue bar represents the percentage of the population in that age group from 2020; the black outline represents the percentage of the population in 2010. The age cohort from 35 to 54 years old changed very little; in both time periods that group made up a little over 25% of Evansville residents.

The biggest increase came in the range of those ages 55 to 74, which rose from 14% to 20% of the population. This age group currently represents the Baby Boomer generation, which is now entering its empty-nester and retirement stage of life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the school-age population (ages 5 to 19) dropped from 23% to 19% over the ten year period.

A positive indicator of population change can be seen in the increase of children under the age of five. This suggests that younger households are starting their families here in Evansville.

Data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services indicate the birth rate in Rock County and Dane County has decreased over the past 10 years, dropping from 12.4 births per 1,000 people each to 11.7 and 10.5 births, respectively. For the State of Wisconsin, this figure has dropped from 12.0 births per 1,000 people to 10.4 births between 2010 and 2020. Calculating this for Evansville is trickier, given the City's smaller population. From year to year between 2010 and 2020, Evansville's birth rate fluctuated from 3.0 to 22.6, and averaged 14.9 births per year. This supports the observation from Figure 3.2 – Evansville appears to be attracting younger family households. Whether or not this trend will continue post COVID-19 remains to be seen.

Another fertility trend of note is that recent generations are starting their families later in life. This trend appears to be coming late to Evansville, but is now being observed. Table B13002 of the American Community Survey revealed that in most years, women who had a child in the previous year were between the ages of 20 to 34. In 2020, this shifted, and 20% of women who gave birth in that past year were between the ages of 35 to 50.

Table 3.2: Regional Population by Age Group, 2020

	City of Evansville	Rock County	Dane County
Under 5	10%	6%	6%
5 to 19	19%	20%	18%
20 to 34	20%	18%	26%
35 to 54	26%	25%	25%
55 to 74	20%	24%	20%
Over 75	6%	7%	5%
Median Age	35.7	39.8	35.2

Source: Table DP05, 2020 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates)

Table 3.2 compares the age of the population in Evansville to that of Rock County and Dane County. The median age reflects that of Dane County. The larger proportion of those under 5 years of age supports the theory that young families are choosing Evansville.

The proportion of age groups around the City look more like that of Rock County's, but more young children and fewer retirees/empty nesters means Evansville's median age is nearly 4 years younger than the Rock County median age.

Table 3.3: Population by Race, 2010 versus 2020

Race	2010	2020
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.3%	0.2%
Some Other Race alone	0.0%	0.2%
Black or African American alone	0.8%	0.9%
Asian alone	0.7%	0.9%
Population of two or more races	1.3%	3.3%
Hispanic/Latino	3.6%	5.0%
White alone	93.3%	89.3%

Source: Table P2, 2020 Decennial Census

Table 3.3 shows the change in race across Evansville's population. In short, the population of Evansville is diversifying. The largest changes in races other than white was an increase in those identifying as more than one race, followed by an increase in the Hispanic/Latino population.

Table 3.4: Household Size and Income, 2010 and 2020

Type of Household	2010			2020		
	Total	Household Median Income	Average Household Size	Total	Household Median Income	Average Household Size
Total Households	1,796	\$62,716	2.67	2,208	\$70,216	2.39
Homeowner Households	1,262	\$72,500	2.88	1,397	\$96,056	2.84
Renter Households	534	\$33,042	2.17	811	\$28,750	1.62
Family Households	1,199	\$72,009	3.20	1,424	\$94,000	3.03
With own children of householder under 18 years	692	\$72,411		817	\$86,680	
With no own children of householder under 18 years	507	\$67,083		607	\$99,934	
Non-Family Households	597	\$33,986		784	\$28,700	
Married-couple families	1,003	\$81,339		1,106	\$102,328	
Female Head of Household, no spouse	157	\$45,338		122	\$51,118	
Male Head of Household, no spouse	44	\$24,413		196	\$46,757	
Households with residents over 65	345	\$28,773		542	\$32,389	

Sources: Tables DP04, DP05, S1101, S1903, 2010 and 2020 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates)

Table 3.4 offers a wealth of information about households and household changes in Evansville between 2010 and 2020. As the population increased, so too did the number of households city-wide. While the number of households increased 23% over the ten-year period, the average household size decreased by 10%. Household median income for all households in the City rose 12% to \$70,216, a figure that was adjusted for inflation.

In 2010, the City's households were comprised of 70% homeowners, 30% renters. In 2020, this had shifted to 63% homeowners and 37% renters. This is in part due to a more varied housing stock, which includes more options for renting. There are stark differences between homeowner and renter households. The average size of a homeowner household was 2.88 people in 2020, relatively unchanged from 2010. Household median income for homeowners rose 32% to \$94,000, a figure more than \$26,000 over the City's overall median household income. By contrast, the average household size for renters dropped 25% over the same time period, and the median renter household income decreased 13%.

Family households tend to fare better than non-family households in the City. The average family household size dropped to 3.0 and median family household income rose nearly \$22,000. The number of family households with and without children increased, and each saw gains in median household income. Recall that in Figures 3.2 and 3.3, data suggested that there was a decrease in the school-age population coupled with a significant increase in the over 55 population. Family households without children under 18 years old are doing well in their empty-nester years.

Among family households, married-couple families fare better financially than single-parent families, with the obvious observation that married couple families often have more than one source of income. Single-parent households brought in roughly half as much in median household income. There was a significant uptick in the number of unmarried male head of household families.

The number of households with residents over the age of 65 increased 57% between 2010 and 2020. Those households also saw a modest increase in household median income. Household incomes for those over the age of 65 are likely supplemented by retirement income or Social Security benefits. Each of those sources contribute about \$17,000 per household among those who qualify, per the American Community Survey.

Only non-family and renter median household incomes have decreased since 2010. These two types of households have similar median incomes, which are far below the City's median household income. There is surely a significant overlap between family households and homeowner households, and likewise with renter households and non-family households.

WHAT IS A HOUSEHOLD?

A “**household**” can be described as a group of people living together in a single dwelling unit. This could include a family, a single person, or a group of unrelated individuals sharing a house or an apartment, but excluding those persons living in group quarters.

DIFFERENCES IN INCOME

- **Per capita income** is total income divided by the total number of residents, including children and other groups of individuals who do not actually earn income.
- **Median household income** is the middle point of household income reported in a community (households include families, married couple households and individual households).
- **Median family income** is the middle income reported by families in a community.

Figure 3B: Income (In 2020 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)

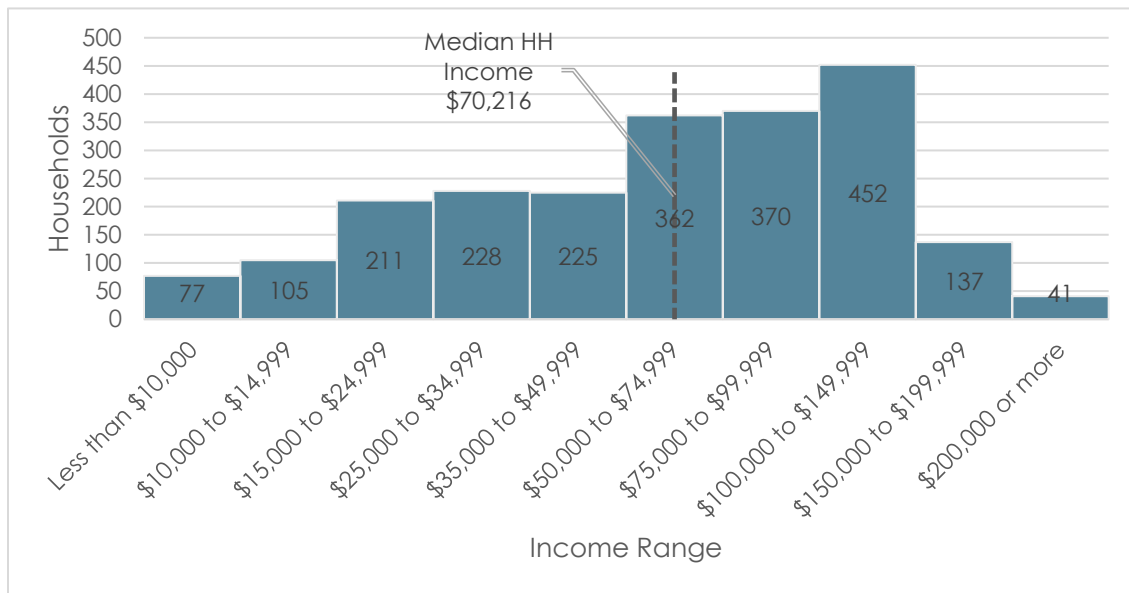


Figure 3B provides data at how household incomes range.

Poverty and Food Insecurity Status

Data in Table 3.5 compares the poverty status and food insecurity of Evansville residents against Dane and Rock counties, and Wisconsin as a whole.

The poverty level is a fluctuating scale based on household size and geography and is adjusted yearly. Eligibility for certain assistance programs is often based on a household's income as a percent of the poverty threshold. For instance, federal

advanced tax credits to obtain health insurance through the Marketplace (commonly known as Obamacare) are only available to those households earning less than 400% of the poverty level. For Wisconsin 2020, the annual poverty threshold was \$12,760 for a one person household, \$17,240 for a two person household, and \$21,720 for a three person household.

Table 3.5 Poverty and Food Insecurity Status, 2020

	City of Evansville	Rock County	Dane County	Wisconsin
Residents living at/below poverty level	6%	12%	11%	11%
Residents living below 200% of poverty level	15%	29%	22%	27%
Households Receiving SNAP/Food Stamps	14%	11%	6%	10%

Source: Tables S1701 and S2201, 2022 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimate)

Roughly 5.1% of Evansville's population lived below the poverty level in 2020. This is a decrease from what the last Comprehensive Plan reported, when in 2013 7.6% of the population lived under the poverty level. This is still less than the poverty rate seen at the county and state levels. Most households in Evansville living under the poverty level are non-family households.

The percent of the population living on incomes 200% or less of the poverty level is also included, as this often reflects the yearly income of households whose jobs pay around the minimum hourly wage. For Wisconsin in 2020, the 200% of the poverty threshold was \$25,520 for a one person household, \$34,480 for a two person household, and \$43,440 for a three person household. Evansville residents still fare better than the levels at either county or the state as a whole. In fact, it is worth noting the percentage of Evansville residents earning 200% of the poverty level was 23.4% in 2012. There are two possibilities for this drop: Evansville residents are earning more money; or, residents with low-paying jobs are being priced out of Evansville. The reality is likely somewhere between the two.

Another measure of economic hardship among residents is the level of usage of FoodShare, the State of Wisconsin's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps. In this matter, more Evansville households use FoodShare than households overall in Rock and Dane counties and Wisconsin as a whole. Notably, the rate of household food stamp usage was 7.9% in 2010. This is likely reflective of the proportion of young families living in the City.

While overall poverty in the City appears to have decreased, food insecurity levels indicate that there are still households feeling strapped for cash to cover basic needs.

Statewide Household Trends and Forecasts¹

Wisconsin's population growth has slowed greatly over the past few decades. Traditionally, the state has experienced healthy amounts of new residents moving from elsewhere (net migration) and a birth rate that exceeded the death rate (natural increase). The state is still gaining new residents through net migration, but in far fewer numbers than in the 1990s. Regarding natural increase, 2020 marked the first time the number of deaths exceeded the number of births statewide. COVID-19 may have magnified the ratio of deaths to births, although these rates were already poised to invert. Thus, the continued trends of slowed population growth, smaller household sizes and decreasing birth and fertility rates is expected to continue.

¹ This section summarizes conclusions from "Slowing Down: Wisconsin's Waning Population Growth", a 2021 study by Forward Analytics, a division of the Wisconsin Counties Association. "Slowing Down: Wisconsin's Waning Population Growth", a 2021 study by Forward Analytics, a division of the Wisconsin Counties Association.

In 2013, the Wisconsin Department of Administration provided population and household projections for every municipality and county throughout the State. These were based first from the population count of the 2010 Census. When tallied, the State is expected to release its new results based on the 2020 Census.

Table 3.6: Population Projections, 2015-2035

Location	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	% Change 2015-2035
City of Evansville	5,255	5,700	6,115	6,520	6,855	30.4%
Rock County	162,550	169,130	174,500	179,360	182,170	12.1%
Dane County	505,410	530,620	555,100	577,300	593,440	17.4%

Source: WI Department of Administration - Demographic Service Center, March 2013

As shown in Table 3.6, the State's population projection was very accurate for Evansville in 2020. For the surrounding counties, State projections were under for Dane County by about 30,000 people and under for Rock County by nearly 9,000.

The methodology for these projections was based solely on past trends for birth, death, age, and migration patterns. These projections do not reflect sudden growth propelled by housing or job growth. Factors that influence population change that are not considered by the DOA in its calculations: available lots for new construction, proximity to jobs, or school district desirability. **Therefore, future population growth is a choice for Evansville, not an inevitability.**

Figure 3C: Projected Household Size Trends

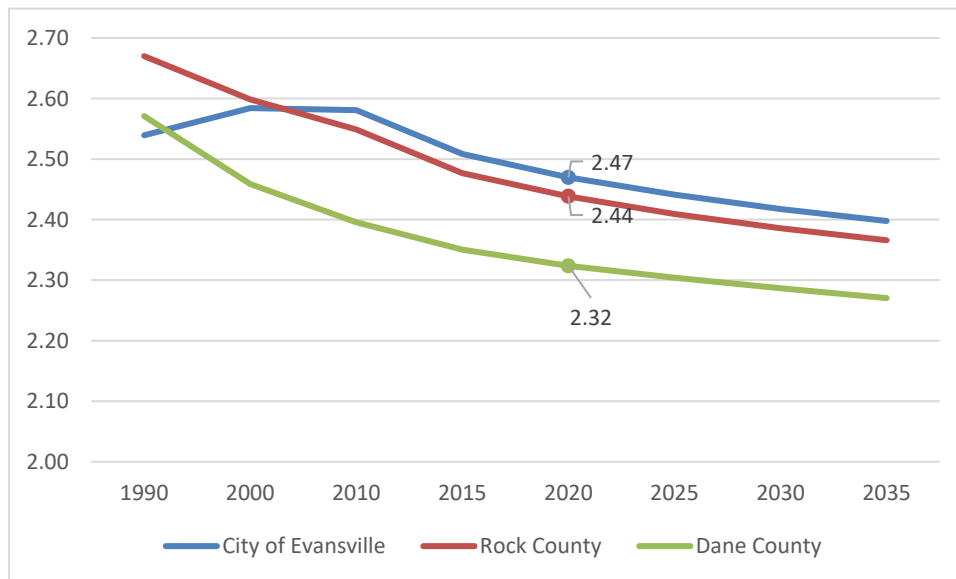


Figure 3C shows State projections for household size for Evansville, Rock, and Dane County that were made in 2013. As reported in Figure 3.5, Evansville's actual household size was 2.39 in 2020.

Declining household sizes is a trend observed statewide and nationally, and is likely to continue around Wisconsin as family household size decreases and the population ages. With a smaller average household size, more housing units will be needed to accommodate the population (even if it were to stay constant).

B. Economic and Labor Profile

Evansville is part of the Janesville-Beloit Metropolitan Statistical Area (Rock County) and the Madison-Janesville-Beloit Combined Statistical Area (Dane, Rock, Columbia, Sauk, and Iowa Counties). Economic conditions have a direct impact

on the housing, employment, and the infrastructure and services within a community. This section profiles Evansville's economic environment by examining factors, including income, poverty rate and unemployment rate. Additional economic information, including information on where Evansville residents work, is provided in the Economic Development Element of this plan.

Labor Force

The labor force is the sum of employed and unemployed persons who are 16 years of age and older, who are willing and actively seeking work. Institutionalized populations are not included in the labor force.

Table 3.7: Labor Force Comparison

	City of Evansville	Rock County	Dane County
Population 16 years and older	4,016	128,962	539,103
In Labor Force	2,939	83,965	383,450
Percent Employed	97.3%	95.5%	97.5%
Unemployment Rate	2.7%	4.8%	2.6%

Source: Table DP03, ACS 2020

Table 3.7 compares data on the labor force in Evansville to the two counties surrounding it. The unemployment rate has recovered from the disruption of COVID-19 and is at a historic low. At the time of writing, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the State of Wisconsin had an unemployment rate of 2.8%. For comparison of how low this figure is, consider that unemployment for the State was at 10.3% in 2009.

New Residents

Evansville gains many of its new residents through in-migration, or, people moving to the City. The American Community Survey provides some insight as to who is moving to Evansville and from where they originate.

Table 3.8: New Resident Origins and Demographics

Mobility, Tenure, and Age of Residents	Population	% of Population	Median Age	% Owner	% Renter
Didn't Move	4,955	94%	36.3	77%	23%
Of those who moved in 2019 or later...					
Moved; within same county	142	3%	26	78%	22%
Moved; from different county, same state	137	3%	50.1	23%	77%
Moved; from different state	37	1%	n/a	46%	54%

Source: Tables S0701, B07002, B07013, 2020 ACS

The majority of residents – 94% -- living in Evansville in 2020 did not move in the previous year. Approximately 316 new residents moved into the City. Evansville is attracting a fair number of residents from within Rock County. These workers appear to be younger than the City's median age by about 10 years. These workers also are likely to become homeowners starting families when they move. This may explain the increased birth rate and uptick in children ages 0-5 recently observed in the City.

Many other new residents are coming from other locations within Wisconsin. These new residents tend to be older and rent rather than own. This is perhaps an indication that empty-nesters or recent retirees are relocating here.

Major City Employers

The City of Evansville has a mix of businesses in the community. The largest industries in Evansville, by number of employees, include health care, education and social services, manufacturing, and retail. Unfortunately, more detailed industry data for Evansville is either unavailable or has an extremely high margin of error due to the small population and industry size of

the City, limiting its usefulness. A list of some major local employers is provided below. Information about other businesses is provided in the Economic Development Element Chapter.

- Baker Manufacturing
- Greenwood State Bank
- City of Evansville
- Evansville Community School District
- Evansville Manor
- Harvard Corporation
- Metal Culverts, Inc.
- Landmark Cooperative (dba Alcivia)
- BMO Harris Bank
- Nelson-Young Lumber Company
- Kopecky's Piggly Wiggly
- Stoughton Trailers
- State Bank of Cross Plains
- BlueScope Buildings

Educational Attainment

An indicator of the quality of life in a community is the educational attainment of its residents. High levels of educational attainment across different types of learning institutions can reflect a skilled population with higher earnings potential.

Table 3.9: Educational Attainment

	2010	2020		
	City of Evansville		Dane County	Rock County
Graduate or Professional Degree	6.6%	10.7%	21.1%	7.5%
Bachelor's Degree	20.6%	17.9%	31.3%	16.0%
Associate's Degree	8.0%	14.6%	9.8%	11.6%
Some College, No Degree	21.8%	23.6%	16.7%	22.0%
High School Graduate	35.2%	29.9%	17.3%	34.6%
No Diploma	7.7%	3.3%	3.8%	8.3%

Source: Table S1501, 2010 and 2020 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimate)

Evansville's level of educational attainment has shifted over the past ten years. There are proportionally more residents with a graduate or professional degree, fewer with a bachelor's degree, and an increase in those who have an associate's degree or some college under their belt. In this matter, Evansville residents reflect the educational attainment of Rock County as a whole versus Dane County. While Dane County may be influencing and attracting workers living in Evansville, the data in Table 3.9 suggests that Evansville is not entirely a bedroom community.

Population Density

More than 5,700 residents live in the City of Evansville, which covers approximately 3 square miles. As people continue to move into the City, additional areas will be annexed to accommodate growth. The City must take action to ensure that new residential development will include a variety of single-family homes and multiple family housing choices that respect the historic, small town feel of the community. The City must closely maintain its historic population density to ensure that development is compact enough to allow residents the opportunity to continue to comfortably walk to local shopping, parks, schools, library and other destination points, and to preserve surrounding farmland and natural resources.

C. Employment and Economic Forecasts²

Overall employment is expected to increase over the planning horizon of this document. As presented in Figure 3.10, the unemployment rate in Evansville and the Madison MSA are at historic lows. Nationally, the unemployment rate is estimated to be at 5.4 percent.

² This section summarizes information from "Understanding Wisconsin's Job Outlook: Industry and Occupation Professions, 2018-2028 in Brief" (July 2021), released by the Office of Economic Advisors in the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

Demographic factors continue to be a key driving force in these long-term projections. Baby boomers will continue to exit the labor force during this time period, and replacement by younger generations may not be able to keep up with demand for workers. With net migration trending downward and natural increase becoming natural decrease, the outlook for additional workers entering the workforce is looking dim.

Overall employment in the state is expected to increase 3.5% between 2018 and 2028. This is a slower rate of growth than in years past, which the state has anticipated. Industry employment growth is expected to be highest in education and health services, professional and business services, leisure and hospitality, and the construction industry. Evansville and the Madison and Janesville-Beloit MSAs already post strong employment in these industries.

III. Community Vision

The 2015 Comprehensive Plan update was guided by the Plan Commission, Economic Development Committee, Parks and Recreation Board, Historic Preservation Commission, and the Municipal Services Committee. Most of these bodies include both elected officials and citizen appointees. The visions expressed are informed by public participation and refined by the appropriate City Committee. Committee meetings occurred at least monthly and provided an opportunity for public input at each meeting. Public participation was guided by a public participation plan that was adopted by the Plan Commission.

The 2022 update focused on data updates and an overhaul of the economic development chapter of the Plan. This update was guided by the Plan Commission and Economic Development Committee. Public participation was guided by a public participation plan that was adopted by the Plan Commission.

The vision statement represents the broad interests of City residents, employees who work in the City, and business leaders. Supporting visions, goals, objectives and program initiatives are described for each element of the plan in subsequent chapters. The original vision statements were based, in large part, on the visions developed through the Strategic Planning Conference in August 2000 and the vision prepared at the 2001 Community Identity Conference. This vision has been refined and updated through additional public input throughout the 2014-2015 planning update process, which is described later.

A. Visioning Process

To define its vision in the 2015 Plan update, the City of Evansville utilized a process centered on a community survey, a visual preference survey, and public comments. These provided different types of activities at different times to allow for increased participation from people who live, work, and recreate in Evansville. In 2022, the update focused on the community survey and public comments garnered through that process. The following is a description of the activities and the major issues and opportunities identified through the planning process.

B. 2022 Community Survey

Description

In 2014, the City of Evansville worked with the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh to develop a broad survey that would inform the future vision for the City of Evansville. This Community Survey included general questions and questions related to planning and community development. In 2022, the survey was replicated in order to gauge how public opinion had changed over the course of eight years. The 2022 survey was conducted between mid-February to the end of April. The target audience was for City residents over the age of 18, or about 3,900 people.

The survey was made available on the City website and information was distributed through tear-off fliers distributed at local businesses, yard signs on City-owned properties, and in a utility bill insert, which had a reach of approximately 3,400 households. Fluctuating levels of COVID-19 transmission and a decrease in overall public events limited the ability of City staff to conduct outreach in person.

There were 439 responses, yielding a response rate of 11.3% and a margin of error around 4%. While this was a lower turnout than the 2014 survey, the 2022 survey is statistically valid.

Opinions on Existing Conditions

Almost 89% of respondents reported they are satisfied or very satisfied with Evansville as a place to live. This is a minor decrease compared to 2015.

Respondents felt that the three strongest aspects of Evansville are the low crime rate/safety, small city atmosphere, and quality of schools. The three weakest aspects were local employment options, transportation access, and property taxes. These are largely unchanged from opinions in 2014. Other aspects of Evansville that are viewed positively are park and recreational facilities, the geographic location, and the historic districts. Residents also value the locally owned utility and the Eager Free Public Library.

More residents report that they are engaged, even if just somewhat, in local government. 62% of respondents consider themselves not very engaged or not at all engaged with city government, which is a decrease from 70% in 2014.

Reasons for not participating or not being informed of city government have seen large fluctuations. 36% reported that they have too many person/business commitments to participate in local government, a **29% increase** from 2014. Troublingly, 32% believe no one will listen to them if they do participate, which is a 12% increase from 2014. 15% have no interest in city government. 19% are confident in the performance of city government without their involvement, which is little changed from 2014. During COVID-19, federal aid allowed the City to provide a virtual meeting option for public meetings. 21% of respondents expressed a desire for that option to continue post-pandemic.

Planning-related issues identified in the community survey include:

- Sidewalk access and conditions
- More retail and dining options
- Affordable housing

Growth and Development

Almost half of 2022 Community Survey respondents stated the City Government should encourage moderate growth in housing and population. 21% support the City maintaining its current rate of growth. 19% of respondents believed growth should be limited, and 13% supported rapid housing and population growth.

Table 3.10: Respondents' Future Vision for Evansville

Question	Response
Evansville should be a fairly diverse community with some commercial, job, and housing opportunities.	49%
Evansville should be a full-service City where nearly all working, shopping, service, housing, health care, and educational needs can be met.	38%
Evansville should be a “bedroom” community; that is, a primarily residential community with few industries and limited commercial services.	9%
Evansville should focus on being a manufacturing-based community.	3%
Source: 2022 Evansville Community Survey	

Housing

Respondents indicated widespread support for future development of affordable single-family homes (92%) and assisted living for seniors and people with disabilities (91%). The 2022 survey revealed more support for condominiums and townhomes (70%) and two family/ duplex homes (69%). There was equal support for upscale single-family homes and multi-family apartment buildings (about 62% each).

Many of the comments in the individual responses section emphasized a worry about rising housing costs, for either themselves, family, or friends, and a lack of inventory of available units in Evansville. 58% stated that housing opportunities were a weak or very weak aspect of moving to Evansville.

When responding about current levels of City services, at first glance it appears that more residents in 2022 are unwilling to pay more for those services. However, when compared to how they rate the current level of services, it is shown that many are satisfied with the current level of services offered. The only exception to this trend was for pothole patching and street maintenance; both of these were rated poorly, but support for increasing fees or taxes to improve services did not match their dissatisfaction.

Walking and Bicycling

- Over 74% of respondents support using tax revenues for walking and bicycling trails through and around Evansville.
- 80% reported that they feel they can easily and safely walk or bike around the City, but 57% disagreed that sidewalks and trails around the City are adequately lit at night.
- Over 70% of respondents believe it is very important that Evansville is a highly walkable community.
- Approximately 45% of respondents rated sidewalk access and conditions as fair or poor, and about 50% are willing to pay more for improved sidewalk access and conditions.

Transportation

- 81% of respondents indicate that transportation access is a weak or very weak aspect of Evansville.
- 20% of respondents work in Evansville, while 50% would like to.
- 25% of respondents indicated they would be likely to use a park and ride or commuter bus service if such an investment was made readily available.
- 76% of respondents reported that the City's pothole patching efforts were fair or poor, but only 48% voiced support for paying more for that service. Likewise, 64% found street maintenance to be fair or poor, but only 44% of respondents are willing to pay more to maintain the streets.
- A majority of respondents were satisfied with current levels of snow removal and street sweeping, and indicated they were not interested in paying more for those services.

Historic Preservation and Downtown Revitalization

- Compared to 2014, fewer respondents are willing to pay more for downtown revitalization and historic preservation. However, a majority of respondents reported that these aspects of City life were top notch or good.

Parks and Recreation

- Nearly 71% of respondents believed parks and recreation are a strong or very strong aspect of moving to Evansville. About 50% of respondents would be willing to pay more to improve parks and recreation facilities. Individual comments about park and recreational facilities expressed a desire for more programming, better maintenance of existing facilities, and more amenities appealing to a wider swath of users, from young to old.

Economic Development

- Over 50% of respondents would be interested in working in Evansville if comparable jobs were available.
- **56% of respondents** believed the greatest emphasis for economic development should be in encouraging new businesses by **nurturing entrepreneurship**, around 21% indicated the greatest emphasis should be on retaining and expanding existing businesses. Compared to 2014, there was less overall support for recruiting business from other municipalities.
- 57% of respondents believed more diversity of business options is the biggest factor that would make residents more likely to shop in Evansville.

C. Visual Preference Survey

Participants in the Visual Preference Survey viewed 50 images showing examples of public parks, commercial and mixed-use development, and housing, and ranked the images on a scale between -3 and 3. The survey was administered at public input sessions and distributed online.

Generally, survey respondents have a preference for pedestrian-oriented development. This includes mixed-use commercial areas oriented towards the street and housing pulled up to the street with elements such as front porches and landscaping.

Respondents identified images resembling Evansville's historic districts as highly positive. These were common elements among single family housing, multi-family housing, and commercial/mixed use images.

Some multi-family images received a high average rating, contrasting slightly with the 2014 Community Survey that showed less support for multifamily housing than most other housing choices. This indicates that it is the design of the housing that matters most to existing residents, rather than the type.

Results of the 2015 Visual Preference Survey help to clarify the 2014 Community Survey in a number of ways. The Visual Preference Survey suggests that respondents are concerned about the **character** of growth rather than growth itself.

Many respondents felt that the newer growth occurring in Evansville is out of character with the historic development and is threatening the character of the community. Average ratings and numerous comments left on the survey indicate that newer development in Evansville does not respect the historic, small-town character of the City. Comments centered on the positive effects of sidewalks on both sides of the street and other walkable features. Others commented on the positive community feeling and social aspects of traditional housing with front porches and pedestrian oriented facades. Imagery depicting a traditional neighborhood style of buildings was positively rated by respondents.

Nearly all images of public spaces received very high ratings. This indicates that public spaces are extremely important to the respondents and they are seen as an essential part of the City. An image of West Side Park, while still positive, was one of the lowest rated images of a public space. An image of Leonard-Leota Park was the highest rated public space. The primary difference between these two images was that Leonard-Leota has more trees, amenities and improvements in the park. Images that depicted usable public spaces in a commercial area were also rated very highly, indicating a need for a public space in the downtown.

There was also an image of a paved trail through a natural area, which received very high ratings. This result reinforces the 2014 Community Survey results that trails and paths for bicycling and walking are a priority of City residents.

The negatively rated images consisted of garage dominated single family, two family, and multi-family housing, single use commercial buildings or strip malls with large parking lots, and large roads with little to no pedestrian amenities.

The images in the survey can be used to inform and guide in the implementation of this comprehensive plan, including zoning and subdivision code analysis and revisions, and investments in infrastructure and facilities. The form of development can be influenced through the zoning code by using the positively rated images to update the zoning and subdivision code to reflect aspects such as lot sizes, use, setbacks, street widths and design and architectural features. Similarly, negative images can be limited using the same aspects of the zoning and subdivision code.

The combination of results from both types of surveys indicates that the form and character of growth likely makes a large difference in whether residents will support that growth.

D. Mapping Activity

Input was gathered at two mapping activities facilitated by Evansville community development staff in 2015. Participants were asked to circle areas in need of improvement in red, areas that were loved in green, and also leave comments. Below is a summary of comments and ideas that were shared during the mapping activity.

- Lake Leota, other parks, and the downtown are loved.
- Leonard-Leota Park should be expanded west to the other side of the lake. Camping area could be added to the expanded park.
- More bicycle infrastructure is desired.
- More trails through and connecting natural areas, including a trail along Allen Creek and around Lake Leota.
- More trees, greenscaping and furniture at West Side Park.
- The gateways to the City need to be improved, particularly the entrances at Highway C, Highway 14, and Highway 213.
- More recreational opportunities at Lake Leota, such as a beach, live music and a shared use path.
- Fill in missing sidewalk connections.
- Public gathering space/parks in downtown to facilitate community activities such as live music and arts.
- More restaurant and business choices are desired.
- The historic districts are valued.
- Residents would like an off leash dog area.
- Residents want more support for the arts.
- Residents want more activities in the City.



FIGURE 3D: MAPPING ACTIVITY AT EVANSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

IV. Summary

A. Issues

- Housing affordability and availability is an increasingly pressing issue.
- Safer conditions for bicycling and walking, especially at night, are desired by many.
- An increasing number of residents believe their voices aren't heard by City staff and elected officials. This does not indicate a lack of interest so much as a lack of communication. The sentiment may coincide with City staffing vacancies, coupled with City Hall closures due to COVID 19.
- More residents report having too many personal/business commitments that prevent them from being more engaged with city government.
- As of writing (2022), inflation and tax rates are pushing the limits of how much residents are willing to support financially, even if the services area is needed.

B. Opportunities

- Evansville's greatest marketing points for attracting new residents are low crime/safety, a small city atmosphere, and the quality of its schools and park/recreation facilities.
- Population trends indicate that younger residents are choosing to start their families in Evansville.
- Recreation is an important aspect of Evansville and more recreational opportunities are desired.
- Residents are aware that sidewalks and recreational trails are desirable amenities in neighborhoods and support continued expansion of this type of infrastructure.
- Most residents want moderate growth in Evansville, and the community is supportive of more diverse businesses, employment, and housing choices.