



Live
Ona!

2040

ONALASKA

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the City of Onalaska embarked on the creation of a new Comprehensive Plan that captures a community vision and roadmap for the Onalaska's physical, economic, and social development over the next fifteen years. Branded the **Live Ona 2040 Plan**, this Plan's voice and vision is the result of detailed analysis and study of the community's assets and existing conditions. These include a tight-knit small town feel, established single-family residential areas, a vibrant downtown located on the Black River, thriving commercial corridors, and a shared appreciation of outdoor recreation. The Plan is the result of strong local leadership and extensive collaboration, participation, and input from Onalaska residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process. Ultimately, the **Live Ona 2040 Onalaska Comprehensive Plan** will help the City capitalize on its existing strengths while addressing key community challenges and needs, ensuring Onalaska enjoys its strong quality of life moving into the future.



What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is an important tool for communities to articulate how they'll grow in a way that's consistent with best planning practices, local values, and geographic context. This Plan focuses on a range of core community issues related to land use, transportation, economic development, housing, community character, and sustainability. It will act as a guide for Onalaska to capitalize on its unique local assets as the City grows in a meaningful way that reflects its small town character.

Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Create a resource to inform **policy decisions**.
- Integrate existing plans and initiatives into a **cohesive vision** for Onalaska's future.
- Set **priorities and responsibilities** for strategic improvements and initiatives.
- Outline specific **goals and strategies** to achieve the plan's vision.
- Help City staff, leadership, and officials **initiate tasks and make decisions**.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Each of the five Community Pillars is divided into Focus Areas addressing parts of the community fabric that support the Pillar. Goals are identified for each Focus Area that define progress and growth aligning with the Plan's shared vision. Guidance is provided by Strategies for each Goal to make them realistic and achievable. Action Steps to accomplish the Strategies are identified in the Comprehensive Plan's Implementation section.



The overarching community-led direction for Onalaska 2040.

CASE STUDIES

Look out for case studies in each Pillar that share an example of a community in the nation working on similar initiatives. Click the link of the underlined title for additional resources!



Pillars

Key topic areas reflective of community values, formed through conversations with local stakeholders.



Goals

Aspirational statements of aim and purpose.



Strategies

Broad courses of action to achieve the goal and the statement of intent.



Actions

The steps and initiatives required to advance the strategies.

WISCONSIN SMART GROWTH REQUIREMENTS

The Wisconsin Smart Growth Planning law [s.66.1001 Wis. Stats.], adopted in 1999, requires that amendments to a community’s subdivision regulations, zoning ordinance, official maps, and shoreland regulations must be consistent with the local government’s Comprehensive Plan. The law further requires all Comprehensive Plans to include the following elements:

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

Sample Sidebar

The Wisconsin Smart Growth Planning Law allows flexibility in how these elements are addressed within local governments’ comprehensive plans. As a community-driven plan, the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan utilizes this flexibility and frames these required elements around a shared set of community values. This recognizes how these planning principles interact in different contexts to create a complex and vibrant community. Check for the Wisconsin Smart Growth Sidebar in each chapter for a summary on how the chapter addresses the elements.

SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities





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ONALASKA IN-DEPTH

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Onalaska, Wisconsin, lies nestled within the geologically distinct Driftless Area, situated in the western part of the state. This region's unique natural features have a profound influence on the City's character and way of life.

Located within La Crosse County, Onalaska is positioned just to the north of the region's largest city, La Crosse, and to the east of Minnesota. Its strategic placement within the regional transportation network is a notable advantage. Onalaska enjoys accessibility via major thoroughfares, including Interstate 90 and US 53, which facilitate convenient travel to neighboring cities and states. This accessibility not only benefits residents but also supports the growth of local businesses and industries.



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities

This regional setting offers both residents and visitors an enticing blend of attributes. It encompasses natural beauty that invites exploration and outdoor recreation, cultural heritage that tells the story of the area's past, economic vibrancy that fosters growth and opportunity, and access to a wide array of regional amenities. These factors combine to make Onalaska an immensely appealing place to call home, work, and enjoy leisure activities.



Great River Landing

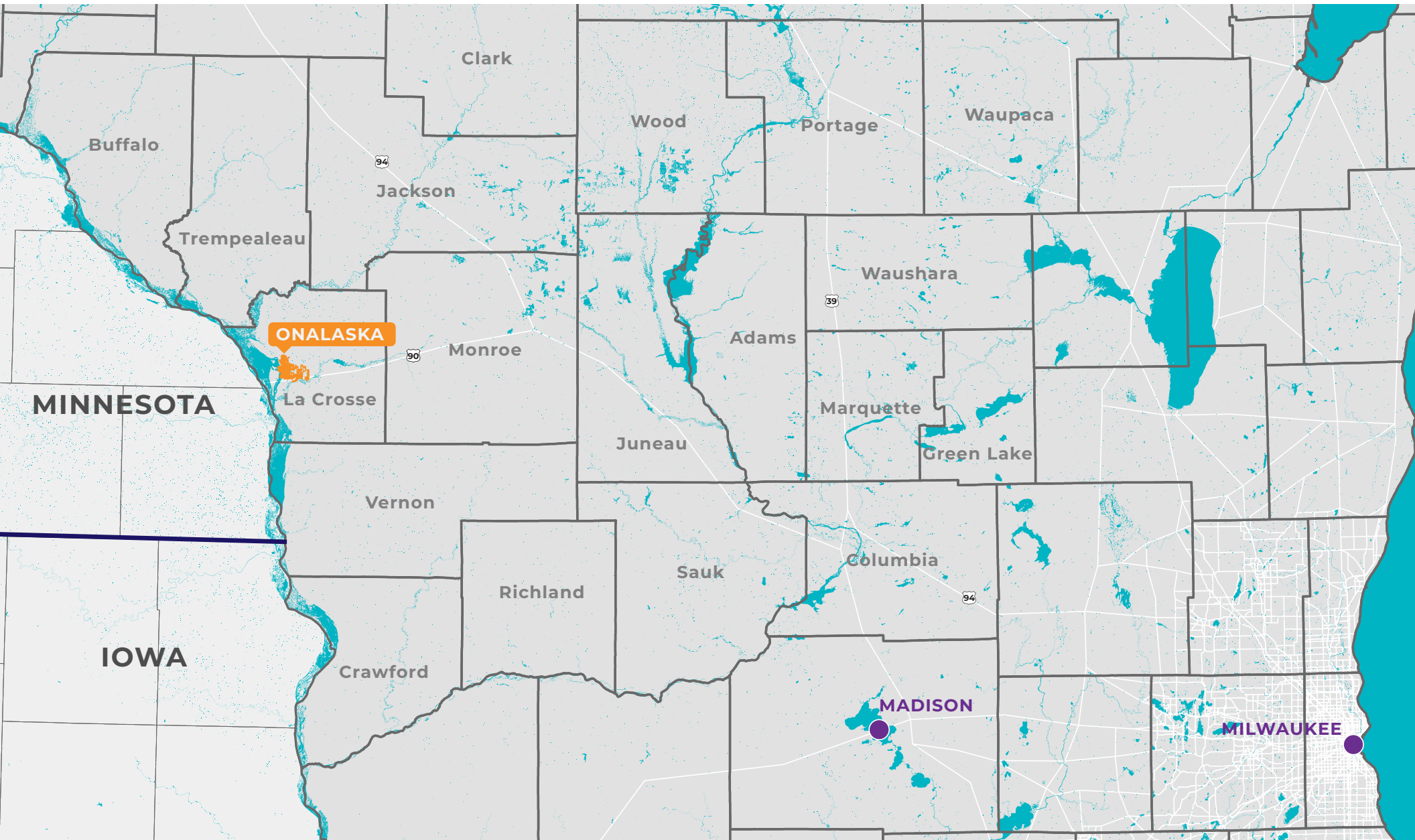


Figure 1: Regional Context Map

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Onalaska owes its unique topographical and historical character to the remarkable geological events of the Ice Age. During this era, immense glaciers bypassed Onalaska and created what is known as the "driftless region." This fortunate occurrence endowed Onalaska with its breathtaking natural scenery and distinctive topography, featuring steep rocky bluffs, meandering valleys, fertile riverbanks, and the expansive Mississippi River Basin, making the area highly attractive for human habitation.

As early as 8,000 BC, Native Americans began residing in small, nomadic family groups in the Onalaska region. Subsequently, the Oneota culture thrived, known for their advanced farming techniques and their utilization of the area for fishing and hunting. Indigenous tribes continued to thrive in the area, including the Ho-Chunk people who were encountered as early as the 17th century.

The formation of Onalaska can be credited to Thomas G. Rowe, a native of

New York, who arrived in 1851. Rowe's decision to establish the city in this location was driven by the area's greater potential for development compared to the sandy terrain of La Crosse. Under his stewardship, the town swiftly transformed into a bustling lumber hub. The choice of the name "Onalaska" was inspired by a line from the poem "The Pleasures of Hope" written by Scottish poet Thomas Campbell in 1799. Rowe was captivated by the phrase, "The wolf's long howl from Onalaska's shore," and decided to adapt it, albeit with a slight alteration in spelling. Onalaska was strategically situated on a ridge overlooking Lake Onalaska, the Black River, the mighty Mississippi River, and the distant Minnesota bluffs, a vantage point that contributed to its early appeal.

The advent of the lumber industry quickly propelled Onalaska into prominence, with numerous sawmills and thriving industrial activities. The allure of the lumber trade attracted immigrants from New England, Germany, and Norway, enriching the City's cultural fabric. However, with the peak

of lumbering in 1892, Onalaska began diversifying its economic endeavors. In 1901, a pickling and canning factory was established, processing crops from local farmers and providing employment opportunities for many residents of the town. This shift marked the City's resilience and adaptability as it evolved from a lumber town into a multifaceted community with a rich historical tapestry.

Improved transportation infrastructure such as bridges and roadways facilitated trade and connectivity in the region enhancing Onalaska's economy. As Onalaska grew through the 20th century, urban development became a prominent feature of the City's landscape. New residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and public infrastructure projects shaped the City's modern appearance. Today, the City continues to experience growth and development, becoming a modern suburban community with a strong economy, excellent schools, and a vibrant quality of life.

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The City of Onalaska and its affiliated bodies have dedicated time and resources to a number of previous planning efforts that provide a solid foundation for the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan:

City of Onalaska Comprehensive Plan (2015)

Building off the City's earlier Comprehensive Plan from 2005, a planning process created the new Plan approved in 2015. Framed solidly around Wisconsin's Smart Growth requirements for Comprehensive Plans, the document analyzed Onalaska's demographics, housing, transportation network, land use, and cultural resources. Goals and recommendations were summarized into strategies outlined in the Implementation chapter, which provided key partners and funding sources.

Downtown Redevelopment Study (2019)

An initiative by the City's Community Development Authority (CDA), this plan engaged residents for input on visions for Onalaska's downtown, analyzed the built form and transportation network, and evaluated the development potential of properties throughout the downtown area. Written to work within the City's Unified Development Ordinance (UDC), the Downtown Redevelopment Study recommends progressive zoning changes, shared parking alternatives, and urban design improvements.



Downtown Redevelopment Study, 2019

State Road 16 Corridor Study (2019)

Also an initiative by the CDA, this plan analyzed one of Onalaska's key commercial corridors. It evaluated access and circulation on Highway 16, the land use mix, and potential for redevelopment on specific properties within the corridor. The plan identified a lack of pedestrian access, which is a continuing issue, as well as dependence on private drives for access to many properties. The Plan identifies different scales of development for portions of the corridor and a list of opportunities for redevelopment, transportation, and open space.



State Road 16 Corridor Redevelopment Study, 2019

Housing Study (2022)

The City of Onalaska completed a comprehensive analysis of the community's housing inventory and demographics in 2022. Key issues identified in the study include the majority of single-family detached housing in the City, the aging population, and housing affordability.

Community Survey (2022)

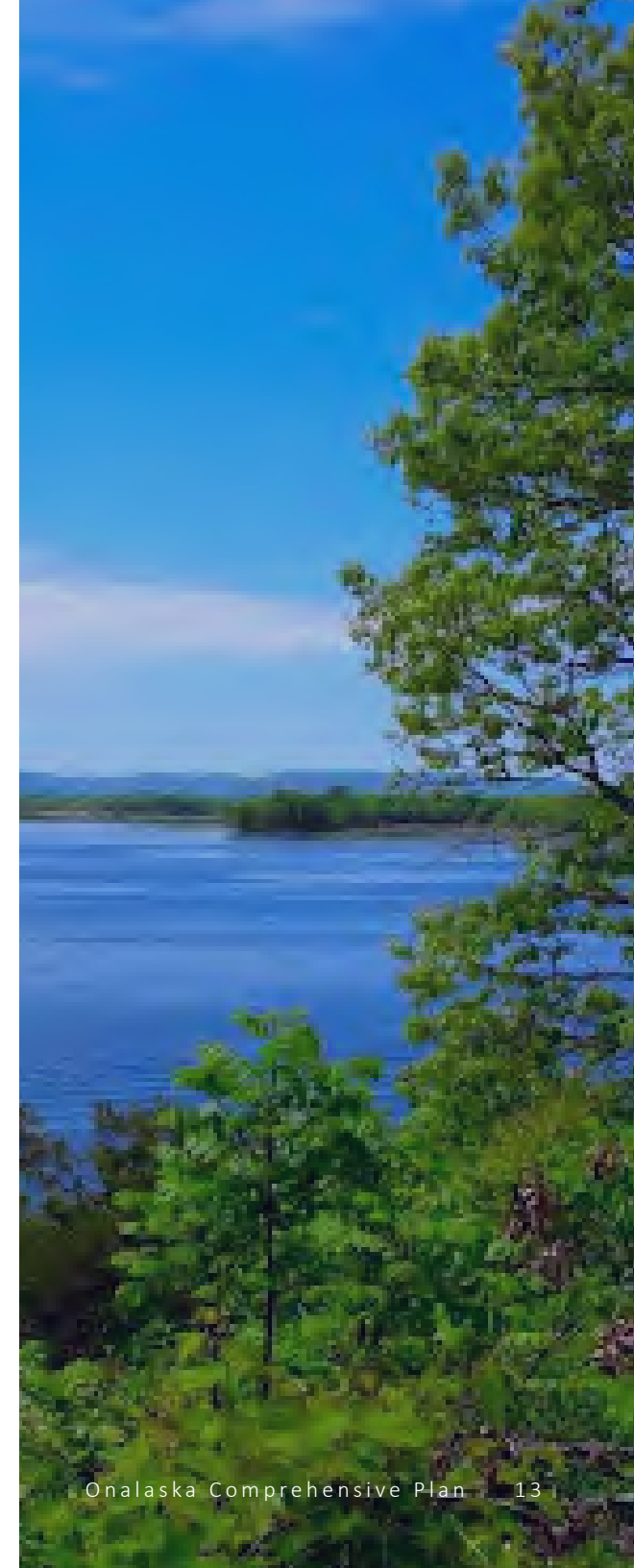
The City of Onalaska conducted a survey of residents in the Fall of 2022. Over 9,000 surveys were mailed out and data was collected from 1,145 responses. Important issues identified in the responses included maintaining a good school system, improving motorized and non-motorized transportation networks, and attracting new businesses. There was interest in seeing continued development of single-family and two-family homes in the community, as well as senior housing.

City of Onalaska Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) (2023)

This document provides a detailed survey of Onalaska's existing recreational facilities and recommendations for future improvements over the next five years. The 2023 CORP follows up on the City's 2017-2022 CORP and is required by the State of Wisconsin in order to qualify for outdoor recreation grant programs. A detailed implementation matrix identifies specific projects to focus on, as well as a range of potential partner organizations and funding mechanisms.



Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2023



DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Population

Onalaska’s population in 2023 is estimated at 19,280, a 2.5 percent increase from the 2020 Census count of 18,803. During the last 23 years, since the 2000 Census, the City’s population has grown by 23 percent. Onalaska’s growth far outpaced neighboring La Crosse City which grew only 2 percent during the same 23-year period and La Crosse County which grew by 13 percent. According to Esri 2023, Onalaska’s growth accounted for 29 percent of La Crosse County’s growth.

Population growth is one indication of Onalaska’s attractiveness as a place to live. While no single event or circumstance explains the rapid growth, several

factors are likely influential, including Onalaska’s good schools, proximity to jobs, quality and cost of housing, and quality of life. Population growth creates vitality, but it also creates pressures as it places new demands on schools, roads, neighborhoods, and infrastructure.

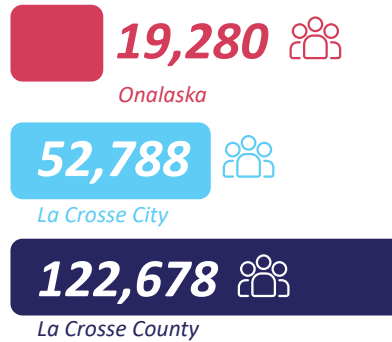


Figure 2: Population, Esri 2023

Table 1: Onalaska’s Population Growth Comparison

POPULATION	2000	2010	2020	2023
Onalaska	14,839	17,736	18,803	19,280
La Crosse City	51,818	51,320	52,680	52,788
La Crosse County	107,120	114,638	120,784	122,678

Households

Households offer one data point in understanding Onalaska’s population and economy. Households function as consumer units and are usually understood in the context of other factors, including age, income, presence of children, and other characteristics. According to American Community Survey, the number of households in Onalaska is estimated at 8,389 (2021) including family (related) and non-family (unrelated) units.

Onalaska’s average household size of 2.23 is slightly larger than La Crosse City and very close to the average for La Crosse County. For reference, the US average household size is larger, at 2.55.

Like the US overall, Onalaska’s household size has decreased incrementally in recent years as families have fewer children and the number of single-person households grows. In the 2020 Census, the average household size in Onalaska was 2.40.

Age

Onalaska’s median age is 39.6 years, slightly older than La Crosse County (38.2 years) and the US overall (38.1 years). Sorting Onalaska’s population by age bracket reveals subtler groupings within the population:

- Onalaska households have a relatively high number of children, with 21 percent of the population under 18 years old. That compares to 15 percent for La Crosse City and 19 percent for La Crosse County.
- The relatively small set of young adults identified in the demographic analysis (late teens to early 20s) suggests that this segment tends to leave the City, presumably for college. The contrast with La Crosse is notable, where the large number of young adults is likely attributable to the University of Wisconsin colleges and Viterbo University.

- Strength in the middle age brackets suggests that many people choose to live in Onalaska during their family formation years.
- The upper age brackets represent Onalaska’s older residents, who are likely empty nesters. About 21 percent of the City’s population is over 65.

Onalaska’s age distribution affects planning issues like school enrollment and the types of housing products suitable for individuals and families at different life stages.



Figure 3: Median Age, 2023

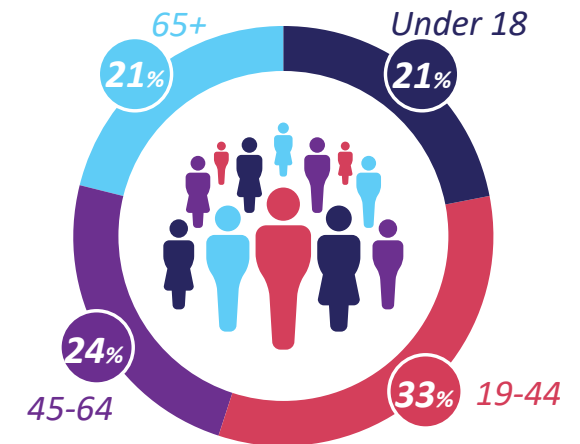


Figure 4: Population by Age, 2023

Income

The median household income for Onalaska in 2023 is estimated at \$86,167 higher than that of La Crosse County and La Crosse City. As a point of reference, the US median is \$74,580.

Onalaska’s largest concentration of households falls in the broad span of middle-income brackets, from about \$35,000 to \$150,000. Together, this range captures 64 percent of households. About 18 percent of households fall below \$35,000 and 18 percent earn more than \$150,000. By way of comparison, La Crosse City’s households are more concentrated in the lower income segments, as is reflected in the city’s lower median income.

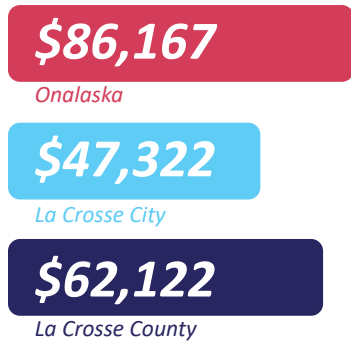


Figure 6: Median Household Income, 2023

Race and Ethnicity

Onalaska’s population has a relatively low level of diversity, though diversity has increased slightly since the 2010 Census. The largest non-white population is Asian, according to Esri 2023 data, which today is estimated at 8 percent. While the Hispanic population has inched higher, it remains very small. (Note that Census data reflects a trend for people of Hispanic origin increasingly to choose “Some other race” or “Two or more races” instead of “white”.)

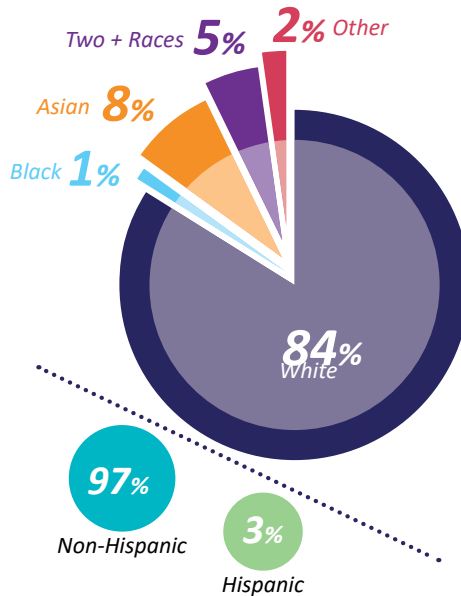


Figure 5: Race + Ethnicity Distribution, 2023

Education

Onalaska residents are highly educated, with 40 percent of the population having a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree, according to Esri 2023 data. This is higher than La Crosse City and County, and higher than the US overall. Even for those who do not have a bachelor’s degree, the number of residents who did not complete high school is exceedingly small.

Onalaska’s education levels indicate a highly employable workforce, especially for knowledge-based jobs. Higher education is also associated with higher levels of public participation and a tendency to make informed consumer choices. These factors influence several aspects of the planning process.

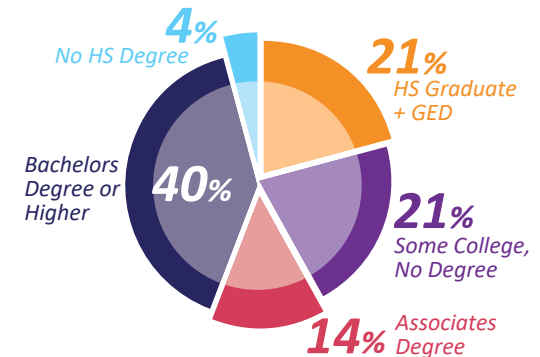


Figure 7: Educational Attainment for population over 25, Esri 2023

Employment

Of the population over 16 years old, 67 percent participates in the labor force. Onalaska has a very low unemployment rate of 2 percent. Another 2 percent of the population is in the labor force but not currently employed (ACS, 2021).

Healthcare and social assistance account for the largest number of primary jobs among Onalaska residents according to the 2020 Census, followed by manufacturing, retail trade, and educational services. This highlights the importance of healthcare services in the regional economy, particularly because healthcare jobs tend to pay higher salaries than most other sectors.

In terms of job location, 45 percent of the primary jobs for Onalaska residents are located in the City of La Crosse, followed by 18 percent of jobs in Onalaska itself. No other single job location exceeds 2 percent for Onalaska residents in the workforce. The large number of Onalaska residents' jobs based in La Crosse underscores the important economic connections between the two cities.

There is a reciprocal employment of La Crosse residents in Onalaska. Among La Crosse's residents, 2,093 jobs, or 11 percent of the La Crosse active workforce, are based in Onalaska according to Census 2020 data.

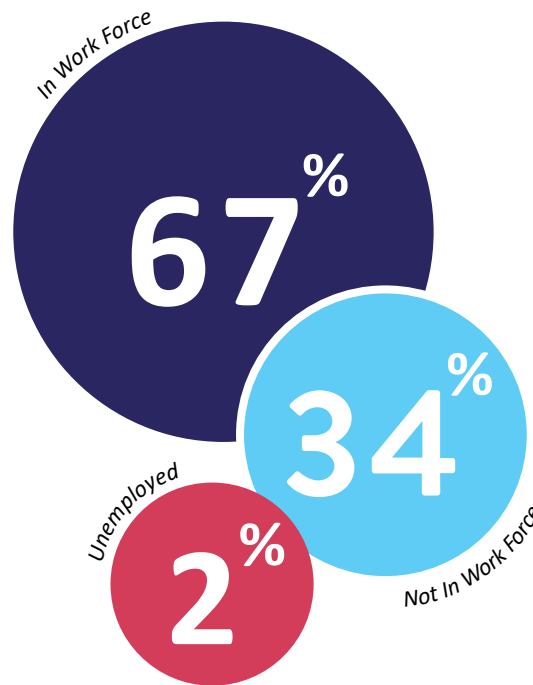


Figure 8: Civilian Labor Force, Population over 16, American Community Survey, 2021



Figure 9: Top Job Counts by NAICS Industry Sector, Residents' Primary Jobs, Census, 2020



Onalaska High School

LOCAL ECONOMY

Consumer Spending

Consumer spending is tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and reflects the amounts households spend on a variety of goods and services. Spending tracks with income in most categories, so higher-earning households tend to spend more. Other factors influence household spending as well, including education level and lifestyle characteristics.

Esri estimates household spending using data from the BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey. Esri also assigns households in a given geography a Spending Potential Index (SPI), a national scale that uses 100 as its midpoint. The SPI helps to illuminate areas where Onalaska households concentrate their spending compared to national averages.

Onalaska's households fall very close to the 100 SPI midpoint for most purchasing categories, meaning the City's residents represent an average market. Total available spending is a direct multiple of households, but remains modest.

While I-90 is a source of some nonresident customers for Onalaska businesses, the local market is relatively isolated, with major metro areas more than two hours' drive away. As a result, the total amount of supportable commercial activity in the area is limited by the regional population of Onalaska, La Crosse, Holmen, and nearby small cities.



Table 2: Onalaska’s Consumer Spending

RETAIL GOODS & SERVICES	AVG SPENDING PER HOUSEHOLD (\$)	TOTAL SPENDING (\$)	SPENDING POTENTIAL INDEX
Apparel & Services	\$2,095	\$17,145,905	95
Computer Hardware for Home Use	245	2,006,428	96
Entertainment & Recreation	3,639	29,786,242	96
Fees & Admissions	699	5,721,199	98
TV/Video/Audio	1,305	10,682,338	96
Pets	857	7,020,926	93
Toys/Games/Crafts/Hobbies	155	1,271,377	98
Sports/Recreation/Exercise Equipment	281	2,302,406	100
Food	10,000	81,836,523	95
Food at Home (Groceries)	6,448	52,772,491	95
Food Away from Home	3,551	29,064,032	95
Alcoholic Beverages	649	5,313,818	96
Furniture	805	6,589,563	98
Major Appliances	508	4,153,447	96
Housewares	105	856,262	97
Lawn & Garden	640	5,235,034	95
Personal Care Products	531	4,342,696	96
School Books & Supplies	130	1,060,163	97

Downtown, Retail Centers, and Commercial Corridors

The City of Onalaska contains 795 businesses, though the exact number fluctuates as new businesses open or existing businesses close. The total number of businesses is useful in understanding major sectors of the local economy, however the number of businesses does not capture the differences in relative size of the businesses.

Onalaska’s commercial centers can be broadly thought of as encompassing four areas:

- Downtown core. This is the area immediately around Main Street and 2nd Avenue South, including City Hall
- 2nd Avenue South / Highway 35 Corridor
- State Road / Highway 16 Corridor
- Crossing Meadows Shopping Center

These four commercial centers account for about 210 of Onalaska’s 795 businesses. Others appear in smaller corridors and other pockets of commerce around the community. While most local enterprises are small and distributed throughout the city, the State Routes contains most of the large-format retail, with several additional big box stores at Crossing Meadows.

Table 3: Onalaska’s Businesses

LOCATION	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES
All Onalaska Businesses	795
Downtown	29
2nd Avenue Hwy 35	32
State Rd Hwy 16	108
Crossing Meadows	41



330 Main Street

Downtown Core

The Downtown Core contains 29 businesses or institutional entities (for this analysis, City Hall is counted as one entity even though it has multiple departments). When sorted by North American Industrial Classification System codes, retail businesses, typically important traffic generators for a downtown, account for 17% of entities. However, of the handful of businesses classified as retail, only a few keep regular public opening hours. The largest category of downtown entities is “Other Services”, a broad sector that includes doctors and dentists, churches, auto repair, funeral home, and others. While on the immediate edge of the downtown core, City Hall (categorized as Public Administration) remains this area’s largest anchor.

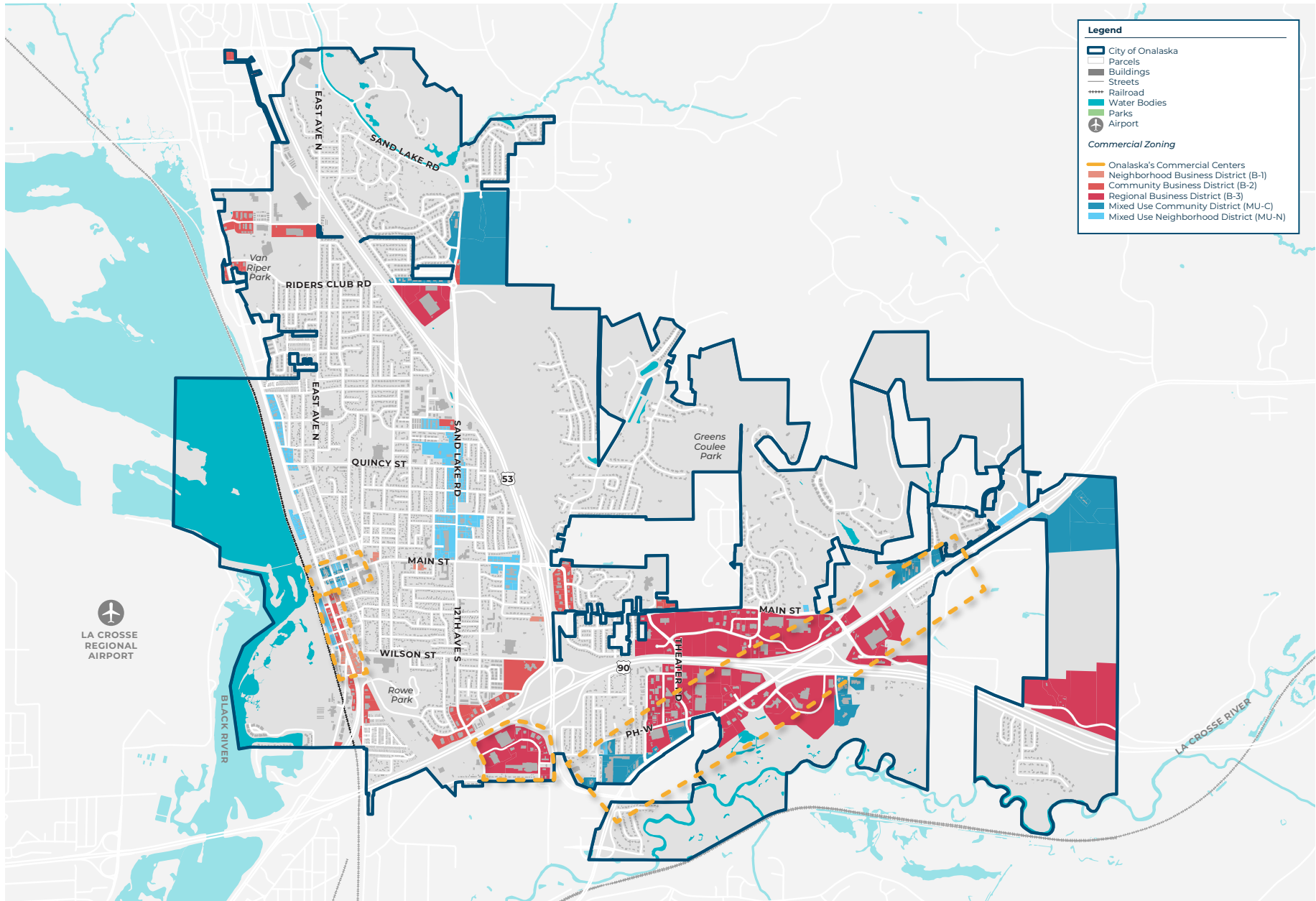


Figure 10: Commercial and Mixed Use Zoning in Onalaska

2nd Avenue South / Highway 35 Corridor

Second Avenue South can be thought of as an extension to the south of the downtown core, though the wider, faster street makes it less walkable.

Insurance and financial services dominate the business mix, along with food and accommodations. In total, there are about 32 businesses or institutional entities on this portion of the street, with a relatively low density of retail or service uses.

Highway 16 Corridor

Wisconsin State Highway 16, with an interchange at I-90, runs for about three miles in Onalaska, functioning as an auto-oriented retail and strip shopping corridor. It hosts the majority of Onalaska's big and medium box retailers as well as other commercial uses. The largest of the box stores include Walmart, Target, Kohl's, Home Depot, and Blain's Farm and Fleet. Many of Onalaska's chain restaurants (fast-food, fast-casual, and sit-down) are also located along the corridor. Several strip shopping centers have

maintained healthy occupancy, mostly by discount retailers and chain restaurants. Because Highway 16 bisects Onalaska and La Crosse at several points, with Valley View Mall being on the La Crosse side, the typical user is likely unaware when they are shopping in one city or the other.

Crossing Meadows Mall

Near State Road and immediately west on I-90 is Crossing Meadows Shopping Center, anchored by Sam's Club, Festival Foods, and Camping World and secondarily by Joann Fabrics, Party City, and smaller discount retailers and services.

Outside of these anchor centers and corridors, several other "neighborhood center" retail developments, such as Center 90 on Sand Lake Road, dot the city.



237 2nd Avenue - School District

Office

As a small city, office is a secondary use category in Onalaska. Most of the community's office space is in smaller, one to three-story commercial buildings and there is no central office core. The largest office users and the newest available office product are medical, particularly Gundersen Health. Most other office space serves smaller-scale users. With a weak office market nationally and no local nexus of office uses in Onalaska, this will likely continue to be a niche market.

Commercial Development

Reviewing the last ten years of commercial construction permits, commercial development saw a peak in 2019 and 2020. The City issued 16 new-building commercial permits in 2019 representing a total value of \$13.4 million, and six commercial permits in 2020 for a total value of \$12.7 million. In 2021, 10 smaller new commercial buildings were permitted for a total value of \$7.4 million. This suggests that the market for large projects – particularly retail and office – has cooled.

Table 4: Onalaska’s Consumer Spending

RETAIL GOODS & SERVICES	ALL ONALASKA BUSINESSES	DOWNTOWN	2ND AVENUE HWY 35	STATE RD HWY 16	CROSSING MEADOWS
Construction	6%	3%	9%	1%	
Manufacturing	2%		3%	1%	
Wholesale Trade	3%			2%	
Retail Trade	16%	17%	6%	25%	34%
Transportation and Warehousing	1%				
Information	2%			3%	
Finance and Insurance	10%	10%	19%	10%	5%
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	5%	3%	3%	4%	2%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7%	3%	13%	6%	12%
Management of Companies and Enterprises					
Admin and Support and Waste Management Svcs	2%			1%	
Educational Services	3%	3%	13%		
Health Care and Social Assistance	14%	14%	3%	13%	2%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2%	3%			2%
Accommodation and Food Services	9%	10%	19%	21%	22%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	11%	21%	13%	4%	15%
Public Administration	2%	3%	0%	5%	2%
Unclassified	4%	7%	0%	5%	2%

HOUSING MARKET

Like population, the number of housing units is always subject to fluctuation. Based on reporting from Esri, Onalaska had 8,680 housing units in 2023, with an occupancy rate of 94 percent (note that temporary vacancies are a normal component of the housing market). Owner occupancy in Onalaska is 65 percent, almost the same as the 66 percent homeownership rate for the US.

The median home value in Onalaska is \$266,565, which is 37 percent more than the median home value in the City of La Crosse of \$194,514. Esri's Housing Affordability Index, which reflects the relationship between housing values and area incomes, ranks Onalaska at 100, the exact midpoint of their affordability scale. Stated another way, a household with median income living in a median value home would spend 22 percent of monthly income on a mortgage, well within generally accepted guidelines for housing costs as a percentage of income.

Residential Development

Onalaska's residential development market remains very active. After a dip in 2019-2020, it had recovered by 2021. Permit applications have continued to be issued for new one- and two-family dwelling units. Based on permitting records, Onalaska added 15 one- and two-family homes in 2022 and 22 in 2023. This is a recovery from 2020 when only three single-family homes were added.

1. Over the ten-year period of 2011 to 2021, 2015 was the most intensive development year with 46 single-family home permits issued.
2. New subdivisions approved in 2021 created 70 new single-family lots available for development.

3. Townhome development has shrunk considerably from peaks in 2011 (30 units) and 2013 (22 units). Since 2016, only 10 new townhome units have been permitted according to Onalaska's Building Permit Data: Annual Report 2021.

Multi-family development varies more widely from year to year than single-family development. In 2021, the City permitted four multi-family apartment buildings containing a total of 214 units and representing a total value of \$18.8 million. That added to 389 apartment units permitted from 2018 to 2020, for a total of 603 units from 2018 to 2021. 208 new multi-family units were permitted in 2022 followed by 172 in 2023.

Condo development has essentially ceased in Onalaska since 2016, part of a national trend of developers and banks moving away from this product type. The last permit for condo development was issued in 2015 for 15 units.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Mississippi River Valley provides some of Onalaska’s most important natural resources. These include Lake Onalaska, the La Crosse and Black Rivers, floodplains available for recreational use, and blufflands around the area.

Floodplains can present obstacles to development in many communities, but with Onalaska’s topography, they are only in low-laying areas along Lake Onalaska and the Black River. Many of these areas are already dedicated to open space and recreational uses, like the La Crosse River Conservancy Area south of Highway 16.

Lake Onalaska is a key community asset bringing recreational tourism to the City every year. The 7,000-acre lake is shallow and hosts fishing tournaments with a national draw. Primary boat access is from French Island, which pulls people away from downtown Onalaska. Pedestrian access to Lake Onalaska and Black River is available downtown but is at a steep angle and has an at-grade railroad crossing over a busy rail line.

Improving waterfront access and the amenities available on the water together with continuing maintenance of the Black River will be key contributors to revitalizing the downtown experience.

The hills and bluffs around Onalaska are dense with trees and vegetative cover. While remaining an active suburban community, Onalaska contributes to this environment with an active urban forestry program. Designated a Tree City USA twenty-four years ago, the City maintains over 7,000 trees and plants more every year. The Public Works Department and the Parks and Recreation staff collaborate on tree maintenance and care, and residents can monitor progress with the detailed tree inventory available on Onalaska’s online GIS mapping platform.

Blufflands

Onalaska’s setting among the bluffs of the Mississippi River is one of the strengths of the community. To celebrate this heritage and natural resource, efforts are in place to preserve bluffland in and around the city. Onalaska was part of the 2016 “La Crosse Area Bluffland Plan” that identifies bluffland preservation efforts in the City and neighboring communities.



HISTORIC RESOURCES

Onalaska has a rich history beginning with indigenous populations thriving in the region for millennia. The town itself was founded in 1851 based on lumbering and timber in the surrounding hills. The town's identity has grown away from this industrial background, focusing more on recreation and fishing in recent decades. But the legacy of a lumber baron and some high-style architecture live on in some of the buildings in town.

In an effort to preserve these structures and formalize a historic preservation program, the City of Onalaska became a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 2001. Utilizing grant funding available for CLG's, the city commissioned a survey in 2015 to evaluate the architectural and historical resources within its borders. The following buildings were identified as having historic and/or architectural merit:

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

- 421 2nd Avenue North "Frank Eugene Nichols House" 1993

Eligible for Listing on the National Register of Historic Places

- 201 Main Street "Onalaska State Bank"

Local Landmark Designations

- 201 Main Street "Onalaska State Bank" (built 1884)
- 421 2nd Avenue "Frank Eugene Nichols House" (built 1888)
- 841 2nd Avenue "Onalaska Brewery / J.S. Gedney Pickle Co. / Onalaska Canning & Pickle Company" (built 1911)
- Irving & Alberta Pertzsch Family Residence, 229 2nd Avenue North. (built 1951)

All three local landmarks were designated in 2000 shortly after the adoption of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance. The last landmark designation occurred in 2017.

Archaeological Sites

As a site that was recognized for its beauty and natural resources by indigenous peoples, archaeological sites throughout the city have been identified by the Mississippi Valley Archaeological Center. It will remain important to be cognizant of these sites as new development projects are considered in town.

Historical Society

The Onalaska Area Historical Society has a local history museum in the public library and works with a volunteer staff to celebrate Onalaska's past. They sponsor regular events, have walking tours of historic sites, and are enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge, photographs, and resources with the community.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The City maintains a zoning district for Agriculture, but in practice it serves as a base district for open, undeveloped land more than a guiding policy for land use and development. Areas in the south part of Onalaska are zoned for agriculture, but lay within FEMA’s 100-year flood plain and are dedicated to use for public open space and recreation. A key opportunity site for development in Onalaska, referred to frequently as the “Mayo Clinic Property”, is zoned Agricultural until a development scheme is formalized in the future. Land use data identifies just 303 acres in agricultural use in the City.



421 2nd Avenue

PLANNING PROCESS

The process to create the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan began in the summer of 2023 and was completed over three separate phases:

Phase 1: State of the City. The goal of the first phase was to better understand existing conditions in the community. These included the overall character, demographics, land use mix, built environment, and transportation systems. Phase 1 concluded with the State of the City Report.

Phase 2: Community Visioning. This phase explored and tested a range of ideas, strategies and policies addressing key themes that arose during Phase 1, as well as concepts for physical improvements targeting opportunity areas in the City.

Phase 3: Plan & Implement. The final phase included the compilation of all the community dialogue, studies, and plans into this Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan. It provides a vision for developing several opportunity sites in a manner supporting community needs and goals, as well as a detailed implementation plan with steps to achieve the Plan's vision.



Phase 1: State of the City

The goal of the first phase was to better understand the existing character, demographics, land use, and transportation systems.



Phase 2: Community Visioning

The second phase explored and tested a range of ideas, strategies and policies for future physical improvements to key opportunity areas.

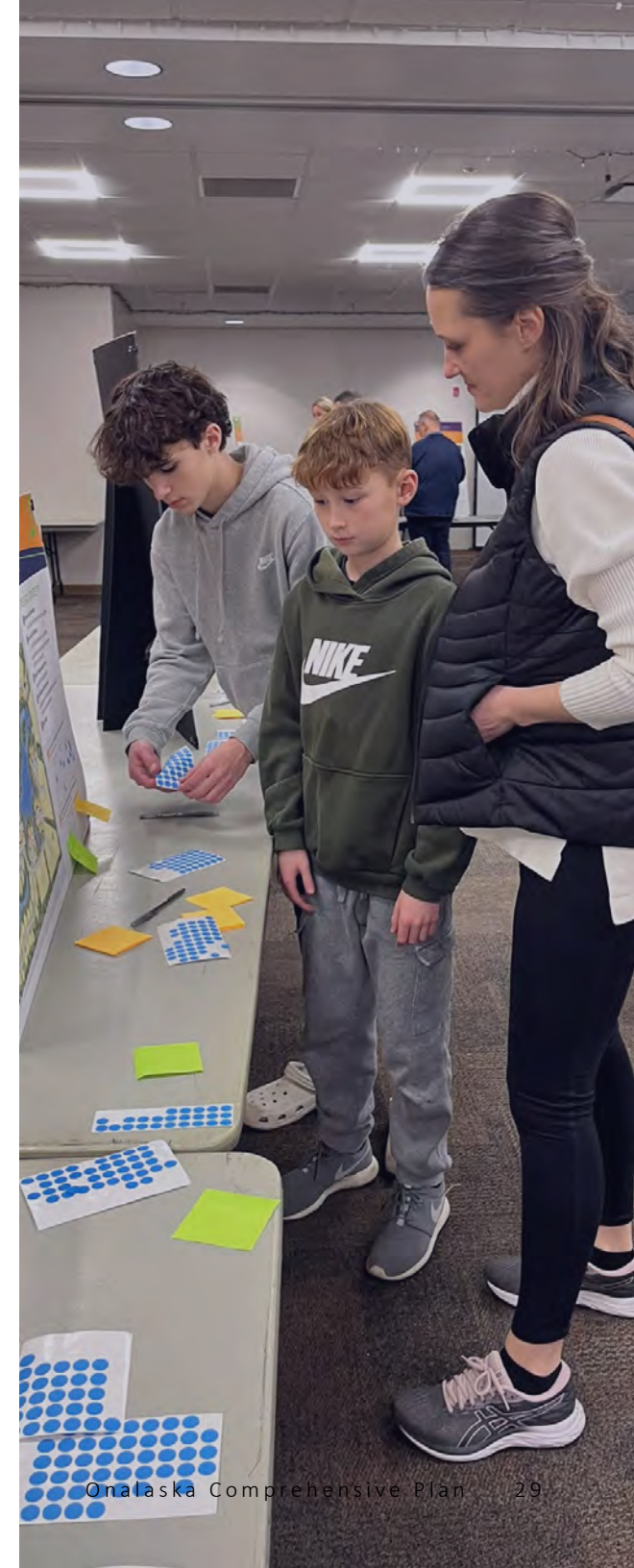


Phase 3: Plan & Implement

The final phase included the compilation of all the community dialogue, studies, and plans into the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan has been a community-driven document from the beginning. A detailed Public Participation Plan provided multiple opportunities for the community at large to share their thoughts in both traditional and non-traditional formats. Public participation included Onalaska residents, business owners, school district representatives, community leaders, and a myriad of others in the planning process. Digital engagement opportunities included a project website, online surveys, virtual workshops, and other innovative solutions to make the information accessible and inclusive. More traditional opportunities included stakeholder interviews and open houses.



Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC)

The City of Onalaska established the Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) as a steering committee to oversee the update of the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This committee played a crucial role in driving the planning and visioning process, serving as dedicated “Plan Champions.” The Committee brought together local leaders and City staff to ensure the Live Ona 2040 Plan benefits from a range of perspectives and expertise.

The committee played an active role in the planning process by meeting at key points along the way to review and refine Plan components. By doing so, it ensured the Live Ona 2040 Plan remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of the community and translates these aspirations into actionable strategies and goals. Their involvement meant the Plan was

developed in an open and participatory manner, guided by the best interests of the City and its residents.

Stakeholder Interviews

In September 2023, the Planning Team conducted a series of 10 interviews spanning two days, engaging with more than 50 stakeholders. These participants represented an array of perspectives, including local business proprietors, downtown advocates, government collaborators, representatives from the school district, members of cultural arts and civic organizations, residents, and professionals in the local real estate and development sector. These discussions were essential in gaining deeper insights into the City of Onalaska’s strengths and opportunities.



Community Open Houses & Surveys

The City of Onalaska hosted the first community open house in September 2023 at the Omni Center. Fifty community members came out to kick off the planning process and share their ideas for the future of Onalaska. The second workshop was held in March of 2024 at the Omni Center. Over 60 community members showed up for the second workshop. The event was a chance for the community to envision what growth could look like in Onalaska over the next 10 to 15 years, helping to set high-level goals and guide Onalaska toward a vibrant future. In an effort to expand outreach efforts, both events were turned into an online survey to solicit additional feedback and over 100 additional survey respondents shared their thoughts and ideas.



COMMUNITY THEMES

A number of themes arose through the conversations with various stakeholder groups and community members. This summary synthesizes their collective insights, capturing a comprehensive spectrum of residents' aspirations, concerns, and visions for Onalaska.

1: Holistic Regional Growth

Onalaska's transformative journey from 9,000 to 20,000 residents is more than just a testament to its growth—it's an emblem of its evolving significance in the tri-city fabric that interweaves La Crosse, Onalaska, and Holmen. For many years Onalaska was viewed as a bedroom community for La Crosse. Now it's a city experiencing reinvention that seeks to capitalize on its recreational assets. The desire to draw more people to its waterfront underscores the City's ambition to capitalize on its unique natural assets.

A key challenge for Onalaska is ensuring it doesn't lose its character—the friendly, close-knit community feel that residents value highly. As the City continues to grow and define its role in the region, preserving this character will be crucial while bringing change such as improved mobility and targeted residential development.

2: Defining Downtown Onalaska

Residents feel downtown Onalaska is at a crossroads. Compared to the bustling atmosphere of nearby La Crosse, Onalaska's downtown area seems undefined. However, recent investments in public projects like the Great River Landing and Dash-Park highlight the potential for revitalization. The momentum generated by these projects needs to be sustained and expanded.





Accessibility to natural assets such as the Black River and Lake Onalaska is a significant advantage for the downtown area. Tapping into the potential of water-based activities could not only boost tourism but also enhance the quality of life for residents.

One possible direction is to introduce a mix of uses and density in terms of housing and commercial establishments. The aim is to increase the footfall in downtown Onalaska. To achieve this, it's essential to focus on increasing housing density and ensuring affordability.

3: Onalaska's Quest for Distinctiveness

Every city has a story, and stakeholders feel Onalaska's tale is one of promise and potential. Onalaska finds itself at a crossroads in terms of city identity. Onalaska has moved from a bedroom-community mindset and is focused on creating a new identity. This identity could be rooted in its rich heritage, the remarkable natural resources, or the ambitions it holds for the future. But to truly establish this identity, tangible steps need to be taken. Implementing clear signage to mark its borders, establishing urban landmarks that resonate with the community, and fostering a vibrant arts and culture scene would help Onalaska distinguish itself.

4: Pedestrianizing Onalaska

Onalaska's streets need to serve as more than just routes for vehicular traffic. Residents felt they should mirror the community's vibrancy, energy, and aspirations, yet challenges hinder this potential. The City grapples with issues of speeding traffic, sporadic bike lanes that abruptly end, and points where failure to yield creates real hazards. The community's commendable emphasis on health and culture of bicycling add another dimension to this. While the City has a network of bike trails, they aren't universally accessible from community facilities, such as schools. This limitation impacts school initiatives like group bike rides and using bicycles as transportation for field trips.

Positive interventions have taken place, including the introduction of roundabouts for measurably improving safety and moderating traffic speed. Building on this momentum, Onalaska could further benefit from the addition of flashing lights, particularly in high-traffic zones, to calm traffic and prioritize pedestrian safety.

Incorporating such improvements and realigning the focus on pedestrians is not just about traffic management; it's about crafting streets that resonate with Onalaska's vision to create streets for all.

5: Harmonizing With Nature

Residents and stakeholders continually identify Onalaska's natural resources as a key asset. From its waterfront to the forested bluffs, the City's natural beauty is a defining character of the community. This connection with nature has always been central to Onalaska's history. Today there's increasing interest in reenergizing the City's connection to its natural resources, ensuring they remain central to the city's character and growth narrative.

Key improvements can include natural trails connecting preserved open space and neighboring communities, seamless waterfront access, and a continued focus on bluffland preservation. Such initiatives not only cater to the recreational needs of residents but also make Onalaska a destination for recreational opportunities.

The sustainability aspect is critical. Onalaska stakeholders emphasized the need to better integrate sustainable practices into its urban planning and development. While growth and development are paramount, they shouldn't come at the expense of the environment. Residents choose Onalaska for its natural offerings—the waterfront, the trails, and the serene landscapes. To ensure that this choice remains as compelling tomorrow as it is today, the City must consistently prioritize and protect its natural resources.





6: Redefining Onalaska's Housing Paradigm

In the City's evolving tapestry, a notable demographic shift is unfolding: an aging population, demand for housing from young professionals, and changing family dynamics. This transformation is not merely a statistical observation, but is tangibly influencing the City's cultural, economic, and urban needs. As Onalaska's demographic landscape changes, the housing needs of its residents are also seeing a marked shift. While the appeal of sprawling single-family homes remains for some, there's growing interest among residents for more varied and attainable living spaces.

At the heart of this change is the need for accessibility and convenience. Employees, especially young professionals, are increasingly seeking housing options that not only offer comfort but are also strategically located near workplaces and essential services. Onalaska has a dual challenge here: ensuring housing solutions attract and retain the workforce, and supporting the shared assets that make the community vibrant.

A pressing concern echoing across the City is the aging population, which has led to a stagnation in housing turnover. As older generations continue to reside in their family homes, it's vital for the City to rethink its housing strategy to attract new families and younger residents. This doesn't mean merely adding more single-family homes or oversized apartment complexes. The demand is leaning towards mixed-use developments, especially in the downtown area, where the urban action is the strongest. Stakeholders emphasized an interest in townhomes, a housing form that can strike a balance between individual space and community living.

Affordability is also a factor. While Onalaska has a lower percentage of cost-burdened renters (those paying more than 30% of their household income in rent) than La Crosse County, the current rental market in Onalaska is becoming more challenging with high costs creating obstacles for many potential residents. Young professionals indicated housing

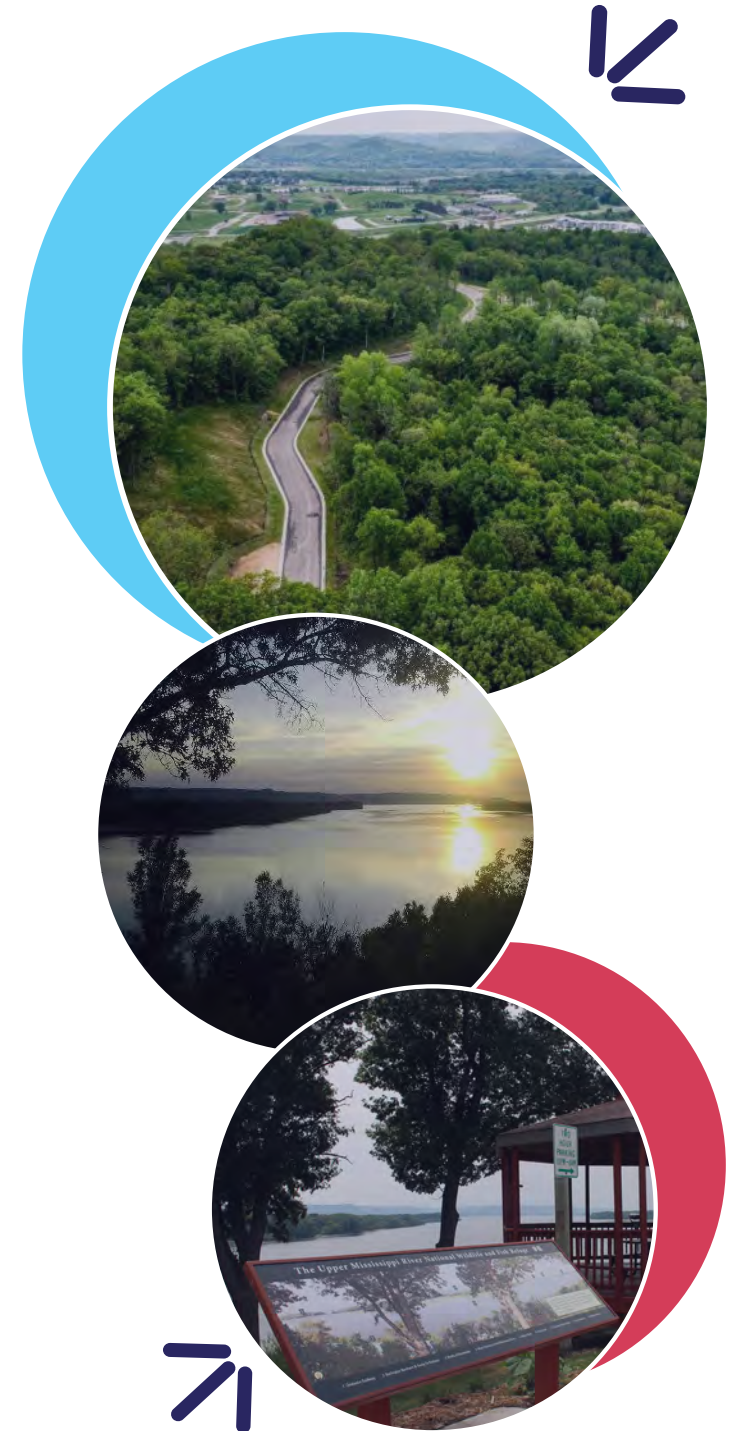
was difficult to find or out of their price range. The City’s housing market, as it stands, risks alienating a significant portion of its potential population. Impacts from limited housing options for young families are already seen in decreasing enrollment in local schools.

Given the City’s land-locked nature, it will be important to evaluate options like thinking vertically — building upwards instead of outwards. Further, by adopting a mixed-density approach and ensuring a range of housing types, residents believe that Onalaska can cater more effectively to diverse demographics, from baby boomers desiring the downtown’s vibrancy to young families seeking their first homes and an excellent school system.

7: Arts, Culture, and Community in Onalaska

Residents feel Onalaska has always held a distinct place in the region, though much of the cultural enrichment activities and amenities gravitate towards La Crosse. Onalaska High School showcases talent through its musicals, chorus, orchestra, and band performances. Beyond this, the City comes alive with Great River Sound at Dash Park, underscoring its love for music and community gatherings. Organizations like the Onalaska Art Keepers enrich the urban environment with aesthetic endeavors such as paintings on businesses and the notable seasonal displays on City Hall and other public properties. These initiatives, along with the beautification efforts by Centering Onalaska by the way of hanging flower baskets and seasonal displays at City Hall, contribute to creating an ambiance that is uniquely Onalaska.

One of the underlying themes from stakeholder feedback was the celebration and recognition of Onalaska’s rich history. The Historical Society, with its monthly meetings at the library, is an essential cog in this wheel. However, given that historical resources are dispersed throughout the City, there’s a challenge in presenting them in a consolidated manner. Past community events like the Sunfish Days hosted by the Onalaska Legion, resonated deeply with many stakeholders. Stakeholders recall a time where the community





came together frequently and there's strong interest in reviving these types of gatherings. Community Days, the current iteration of Sunfish days, is building the right kind of momentum. The Celebrate Onalaska event continues to grow each year at the Omni Center and the City's partnership with Festival Foods for a fireworks display adds to the event's success and the appetite for more is evident.

8: Unlocking Onalaska's Development Potential

Land scarcity is becoming a pressing issue for Onalaska. With limited space available for expansion, the emphasis now is on optimizing redevelopment opportunities. Key to this is a strategic approach that defines criteria for varied development types and desired densities. The downtown area is primed for such redevelopment, but it is not without its challenges.

Economically, the numbers don't currently add up for many developers. The cost structures, driven by factors like sale prices and rents, often don't justify the expense of demolishing old structures for new developments. Fees and logistics associated with development projects further exacerbate these economic challenges.

Addressing these financial barriers requires a combination of policy adjustments and innovative strategies. Infrastructure support could be part of the solution, reducing the upfront costs developers face. Exploring financial mechanisms, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), may provide the necessary incentives to kickstart development projects.

The overarching themes that came out of the public engagement were synthesized into a Vision Statement and five community pillars that represent the shared values, concerns, and aspirations for Onalaska's residents. These pillars form the framework of the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

VISION STATEMENT

In the year 2040, the City of Onalaska is a dynamic place to live with a downtown connected to the whole community and energized by an activated riverfront and recreational tourism, a mobility network that allows pedestrians and cyclists of all ages to travel safely around town, and development activity that creates diverse housing opportunities, fosters a sense of place, and strengthens the local economy. Onalaska's rich history is celebrated and protected, along with the natural resources that make it a destination on Lake Onalaska and the Black River. Above all, the City maintains its small town feel and high quality of life that make it a community of choice.

Additional Visionary Goals

Over the years, the City of Onalaska and committed stakeholders have worked together to accomplish the following:

- Downtown Onalaska remains the community's historic heart that provides experiences and an energy different from the City's other commercial areas. A riverfront improved with activities for all ages complements the Great River Landing and programming at Dash-Park. These new opportunities bring visitors downtown to support local businesses, restaurants and entertainment options in mixed-use developments — all showcased in an authentic, pedestrian-friendly downtown environment.
- The riverfront along the Black River is a popular destination for residents, sports and recreation enthusiasts, and tourists. Celebrating Onalaska's historic past and scenic location on the river, it provides a playground and activities for children, trails along the shoreline, recreational activities like canoe and kayak rentals, and a boardwalk for people of all ages to safely enjoy time by the river. Restaurants provide picnic lunches for visitors to enjoy in comfortable shelters on the riverfront, all within walking distance from downtown.

- Onalaska’s commercial corridors continue to thrive, providing the community and surrounding area with a wide variety of retail, restaurant, and service destinations. Highway 16 and east Main Street are bustling with big-box retail and national chains, while the Sand Lake Road corridor and surrounding streets provide neighborhood-scale commercial destinations. As automobile-oriented corridors, they meet different needs and provide different experiences than downtown Onalaska and enhance the community’s local economy and commercial diversity.
- Onalaska is a regional recreational destination capitalizing on Lake Onalaska and the Black River for water-related sports and the Omni Center for recreational activities for all ages. In collaboration with regional tourism organizations, the City embraces sporting events as opportunities to celebrate Onalaska’s charm and energy, engaging restaurants and residents to participate in indoor and outdoor activities concurrent with large events. Service-oriented land uses near the Omni Center and a new hotel allows visitors to stay in the heart of the City with easy access to downtown and restaurants and services in the area.
- Investment in a Complete Streets Policy and the City’s trail and sidewalk network has created a bike-friendly corridor along Main Street, connecting the community from east to west. Local trips and routes to school no longer require automobiles, as residents of all ages enjoy safe, protected access to non-motorized transportation routes around Onalaska.
- As a response to limited open land, Onalaska embraced the need to explore housing opportunities that provide density in locations that support economic centers and respond to the needs of the community.



COMMUNITY PILLARS

The Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan is organized into five community pillars representing foundational elements that make Onalaska special and capture the assets and values recognized as essential parts of the community. These pillars serve as a framework for structuring the Comprehensive Plan that illustrates how typical subject areas like Land Use, Economic Development, Housing, and Parks and Open Space are intertwined, each contributing to growth and quality of life in different ways and in different contexts.



Onalaska’s sense of community and small town feel are essential parts of the City’s character. This pillar identifies key elements that contribute to the sense of community and provides a path to grow and maintain them.



The City of Onalaska has a diverse local economy. Retail and service businesses thrive along intense auto-oriented commercial corridors, smaller neighborhood-scale corridors, and in a pedestrian-scale downtown. Pockets of light industrial land uses throughout the City provide a base of manufacturing jobs and a strong healthcare sector provides even more, together accounting for more than a third of the jobs in Onalaska. Supporting these assets and identifying new opportunities to build on them are essential parts of the City’s future.



Pillar 3
**Nature &
Recreation**

Onalaska’s location among the bluffs of the Mississippi River Valley and on the waterfront of the Black River and Lake Onalaska is a well-recognized asset in the community. The City invests in an expansive public park system, participates in bluffland preservation, and capitalizes on Lake Onalaska for year-round recreational and competitive events. Residents are passionate about bicycling and outdoor recreation and Onalaska is a key stakeholder in the regional bike trail network. Appreciation for nature and the outdoors is an essential part of Onalaska’s character.



Pillar 4 **Connectivity**

With its State Highways, Interstate 90, and an airport nearby, Onalaska is well-connected to the region. The adjacency to an established city like La Crosse and a high-growth community like Holmen means that strong connections and intergovernmental cooperation will remain an essential part of comprehensive planning. Connectivity within Onalaska itself is also important. Exploring opportunities to expand Onalaska’s non-motorized transportation network is a vital part of this plan and reflects the community’s culture of bicycling and outdoor recreation, as well as sustainability and environmental awareness.



Pillar 5
City Services

The City of Onalaska is committed to providing services that meet the needs of a growing, active community. From public utilities and the Police and Fire Departments to facilities like the Aquatic Center and the Omni Center, continued investment in these shared assets strengthens the City as a whole.



3

PILLAR 1: COMMUNITY

Onalaska's sense of community and small-town feel are essential parts of the City's character. This pillar identifies key elements that contribute to the sense of community and provides a path to grow and maintain them. The pillar statement, goals, and strategies capture these elements and the City's commitment to strengthening them.

PILLAR STATEMENT: *As a tight knit, family-focused community, we recognize the value in creating a sense of place and belonging in Onalaska. We support a range of housing choices to meet residents' needs, as well as the importance of preserving the City's existing housing stock. We are committed to fostering local pride by enhancing the City's identity, celebrating our shared history, and improving the built form.*



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Land Use
- Housing
- Cultural Resources

FOCUS AREAS

The focus areas capture core elements that strengthen the sense of community in Onalaska. They're what people mention first when asked what they love about the city, things they embrace and hope to see grow as part of Onalaska's story.



Community Identity & Sense of Place



Local Culture & Community Engagement



Neighborhoods & Housing



Historic Preservation & Celebration

COMMUNITY IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE

Establishing a sense of community identity tells residents and visitors alike they are in a special place. Tools like decorative gateway signs along roadways and community-building outdoor events develop a sense of pride in Onalaska. People driving through or attending a sporting event in town recognize the investment in defining the identity of the City and residents feel a shared energy in improving their community.

GOAL: Create a strong sense of identity in Onalaska for residents and visitors to the City.

STRATEGY 1: Install gateway signs at key entrance points into Onalaska.

While the classic green and white signs with the City's population on them are effective in identifying municipal borders, thoughtfully-designed decorative signs tell a different story at a glance. They signal pride in a community and investment in making it a special place to live. The regional highways in Onalaska present opportunities to locate these signs, as well as along the irregular border with the Town of Medary.

STRATEGY 2: Install light pole banners or other branding on public infrastructure along local streets.

Street signs and light poles are ubiquitous throughout the community and offer an opportunity to celebrate Onalaska events, history, and civic pride with banners or other decorations. Special street signs or poles can identify certain areas and build neighborhood pride.



Community Identifier

STRATEGY 3: Establish a Sister City relationship with Onalaska, WA and Onalaska, TX, celebrating a shared history in early America.

Onalaska, Wisconsin is the first town in the United States with this name. The cities in Washington and Texas were started afterward by people who'd experienced the Wisconsin community and found other locations that reminded them of the beauty here. A relationship with these other cities can build local pride and establish Onalaska, Wisconsin as a leader.



Onalaska, TX Signage

STRATEGY 4: Establish waterfront and City park clean-up day events.

Opportunities for public service can bring people together to achieve a common goal. When completed, there is satisfaction in working together to make Onalaska a better place. Organizing these events can take time, but do not require a lot of resources. Clean-up events can also bring attention to parts of the community some residents may not otherwise visit or can get people excited to keep returning to favorite locations like the waterfront.



Clean-Up Events



Signage & Branding in Onalaska



NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

The supply of detached single-family housing represents an asset for Onalaska and an important part of the community's identity. There is little room to expand this scale of housing, however, as opportunities to expand the City's boundary are limited. There has been a lot of intense, multi-family housing development in recent years, providing hundreds of new units for City residents. However, there is a scale of housing that is underrepresented in Onalaska: attached single family dwellings and smaller three- to eight-unit buildings. As the City looks to grow in population over the next ten to fifteen years, it will be essential to plan for this missing middle scale of housing. Not only will it provide housing for prospective new residents, but it will also facilitate filtration and allow aging residents to move out of their larger single-family homes. This will free up those houses for young families for whom smaller housing may not be appropriate.

GOAL 1: Support new housing opportunities that provide alternatives to single-family detached residential units.

STRATEGY 1: Expand the R-3 zoning district in areas connected to walkable amenities.

Onalaska's R-1 and R-2 zoning district is for single family detached housing, though the R-2 allows two-unit twindos and duplex housing options. The R-3 zoning district allows multi-unit buildings constructed at similar scale to single-family neighborhoods. It can provide much-needed housing at a scale desired

by the community. It is described in the Unified Development Code as follows:

"The purpose of the R-3 Medium-Density Residential District is to accommodate a mixture of single-household housing types, including single-household dwellings, two-household dwellings, zero-lot-line dwellings, and attached townhouses and row houses (up to eight units per parcel)."



Housing in Onalaska

STRATEGY 2: Monitor development in R-3 districts to determine if current bulk/setback requirements present obstacles to successful development projects.

As implementation of Strategy 2 progresses and neighborhoods or properties are rezoned into the R-3 zoning district, it will be important to monitor how developments are shaped by the current regulations. If the City is encountering repeated requests for similar variations from the district's requirements to make development feasible, amendments should be considered to ensure the R-3 zoning district remains a valuable tool to expand housing options in Onalaska.

STRATEGY 3: *Create a guidebook for ADU regulations in Onalaska, a “how-to” cheat sheet for property owners.*

There is interest among Onalaska residents in constructing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU), which can provide additional housing units on existing residential lots. The City’s Unified Development Code allows ADUs on single-family lots in the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts, but there are a number of requirements and restrictions in place that can be hard to understand.

Creating a brief guidebook on how to construct an ADU in Onalaska can break down barriers for members of the community. Beyond clarifying the requirements in the Code, a guidebook can provide preapproved styles or products available on the market to further ease the process.

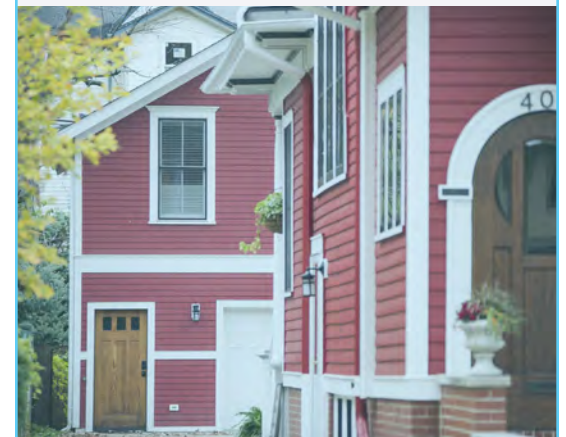
STRATEGY 4: *Evaluate and share Short Term Rental (STR) regulations to support tourism and the downtown.*

The need for a hotel near downtown Onalaska and the Omni Center came up frequently during the public outreach for the Live Ona 2040 Plan. While options for a hotel are evaluated, Short Term Rentals can play a role by providing rooms for visitors in proximity to key locations in town. The Unified Development Code allows STRs in most residential zoning districts, subject to certain standards. A strategy to clarify these standards and elaborate on how Onalaska residents can have STRs could provide valuable rental rooms in the City.

ADU GUIDELINES

OAK PARK, IL

To adapt to the changing needs of the community, the Village of Oak Park offers the option of adding an accessory dwelling unit, or ADU, to single-family residential properties. The Village pulled together an ADU guide to educate the community on the benefits of ADUs and help residents determine if the investment is right for their property. This lessened concerns in the community about ADUs and increased awareness of how they can blend into a community fabric.



GOAL 2: Provide support for the maintenance, upkeep, and improvement of aging single-family homes that are an important part of Onalaska's residential fabric.

Some residential neighborhoods, especially those closer to the downtown, are aging. They still represent an important part of the City's housing supply and many are built in post-war styles that contribute to the charming variety of houses in the community. In an effort to keep these structures intact, tools can be made available to homeowners that will encourage and incentivize upkeep and maintenance.

STRATEGY 1: Establish a Home Improvement Program to assist and incentivize property owners in upkeep, maintenance, and improvement of existing housing stock.

Home maintenance and repairs can be daunting for many homeowners. Cost can be a barrier, as well as age and inexperience with fixing things around the house. The City is in a perfect position

to provide resources to residents, whether its simply literature on small maintenance projects, links to local contractors, or financial assistance for certain projects. Reinvestment in existing homes is a sustainable approach that also preserves unique older homes of a scale and style that are rarely constructed new anymore.

STRATEGY 2: Partner with Federal, State, and County entities to pool resources addressing home maintenance and rehabilitation.

Resources are available from public agencies to assist with home repairs and maintenance. Most programs are intended to assist low-income households, though they are still good to be aware of and make available to Onalaska residents who may qualify.

STRATEGY 3: Provide educational materials and resources promoting climate-friendly home improvements.

With over 8,000 households in Onalaska, incremental improvements can have a genuine impact on the community's commitment to preserving natural

resources. Many residents may have interest in making small improvements or investments on their property, but need information and resources that show small changes make a big impact.

HOMEOWNER REHABILITATION PROGRAM

CITY OF APPLETON, WI

The Program seeks to maintain the existing housing stock and support community well-being. It offers financial and technical assistance to low to moderate income households for rehabilitating their owner-occupied homes or duplexes.



**HOMEOWNER REHABILITATION
LOAN PROGRAM**



GOAL 2: Increase mixed-use and multi-family housing options in and close to downtown.

Residents in Onalaska want the downtown area to become a hub of activity, a local gathering place with restaurants, boutique shops, and open spaces connected by pedestrian-friendly pathways and safe street crossings. This vision is achievable, but will be hampered unless residential density increases in this part of town. Although downtown is surrounded by established, vibrant single-family neighborhoods, this resource-intensive land use framework is not enough to support an active downtown atmosphere.

STRATEGY 1: Enable increased residential density in the downtown by rezoning neighborhoods along 3rd and 4th Avenues east of downtown into Onalaska's R-3 zoning district.

Expanding use of the R-3 zoning district is a strategy appearing elsewhere in this Live Ona 2040 Plan. Focusing on a small impactful area adjacent to

the downtown will achieve economic development objectives in supporting the downtown as well as housing objectives by providing more residential units. The neighborhoods along 3rd and 4th Avenues are within walking distance to the central business district, the waterfront, and recreational pathways and bike paths. This is an ideal location to begin expanding areas where multi-unit attached single-family buildings can be developed.

STRATEGY 2: Enable increased residential density in the downtown by expanding the MU-N zoning district to include additional properties in the 2nd Avenue corridor.

The strategy to increase multi-family density downtown was identified in the 2019 Downtown Redevelopment Study and it remains relevant as part of the Live Ona 2040 Plan. The MU-N zoning district, created as part of the Unified Development Code, facilitates this strategy and presents the opportunity for commercial land uses within new residential development.



HOUSING PROGRAMS

Housing programs provide resources for individuals and families to assist with finding, financing, and securing safe and decent housing. They can be a resource to local governments to assist with neighborhood improvement, housing renovations and rehabilitation, and other services that benefit the greater community. Onalaska does not currently offer housing programs or services to its residents, but partnering with the State of Wisconsin, La Crosse County, and other entities will help meet this need and will provide a foundation for future local programs.

State of Wisconsin

The State of Wisconsin offers several housing programs to assist local governments and homeowners with home buying, rehabilitation and renovation, neighborhood improvement, and cost reduction strategies. Below is a summary of these programs.

- **Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO):** A Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) is an official designation of selected private nonprofit housing development corporations that meet requirements set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at the time they apply for funding under the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME). The CHDO designation provides benefits to organizations that develop and/or operate housing. An organization

which is designated as a CHDO can qualify for special project funds, operating funds, and technical assistance support associated with a project funded under the State's HOME Program. Organizations may be eligible to retain project proceeds.

- **HOME Homebuyer and Rehabilitation Program (HHR):** The Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources (DEHCR) has identified homeownership and the conservation of quality owner-occupied housing as top priorities

for allocating federal and state housing resources. A program was established to provide essential home purchase assistance, necessary home rehabilitation, and other vital improvements for dwelling units occupied by low- and moderate-income households. The source of funds is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). The Wisconsin Department of Administration, DEHCR awards these funds to local units of government and local

housing organizations through a biennial funding cycle.

- **Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP):** The Neighborhood Stabilization Program aids in acquiring and redeveloping foreclosed properties that might otherwise become sources of abandonment and blight within their communities.
- **Housing Cost Reduction Initiative Program (HCRI):** The Housing Cost Reduction Initiative (HCRI) was created in 1989 by the Governor and the Wisconsin Legislature. The State set aside these funds to provide housing assistance to low- and moderate-income (LMI) households seeking to own decent, safe, affordable housing. The Wisconsin Department of Administration, Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources (DEHCR) awards these funds to eligible applicants through a biennial funding cycle.

- **HOME Rental Housing Development (RHD):** The Rental Housing Development (RHD) Program assists eligible housing organizations, including Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs), with funds to develop affordable rental housing. For-profit corporations may partner with the above-mentioned groups or apply directly for RHD funds. The funds must serve households at or below 60 percent of the County Median Income (CMI). Projects receiving HOME funds are subject to rent limitations for a specified period of time. Funds may be used for acquisition, rehabilitation, and new construction activities. The HOME RHD Application and Guide are available below. Application submission dates are June 1st and October 15th. There is a first-come, first-served set-aside for small developments specifically in rural locations with 20 or fewer total housing units. These applications may be submitted at any time

and will be considered as funding is available. Those applying as a CHDO must submit full certification documentation at the time of application.

Source: [State of Wisconsin, Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources](#)



LOCAL CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strategies in this focus area will strengthen the sense of community shared among Onalaska residents. As administrators of the public right-of-ways, open spaces, and parks, the City government is in a unique position to use these assets to bring people together. Communication is paramount, however, and engaging Onalaska residents in reliable and meaningful ways builds trust between municipal staff and leadership and the people who live in Onalaska.

GOAL 1: Foster community pride among residents of all ages living in Onalaska.

Beyond community identify and branding, there are strategies a municipal organization can employ to create excitement and a sense of pride and belonging in City residents.

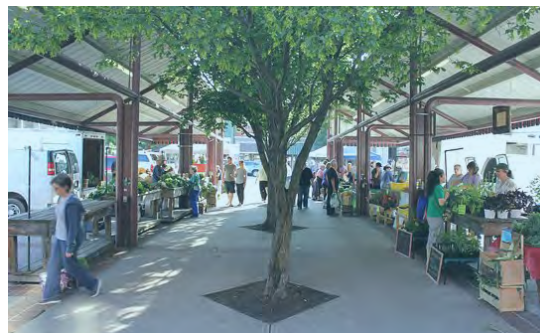
STRATEGY 1: Identify opportunities for new community celebrations and events based around shared assets.

The City is able to capitalize on Onalaska's publicly-managed assets like parks, the street system, and the waterfront to organize events that will bring the community together. Families are eager for activities where children

can participate and be active in a safe environment. Many residents would value the opportunity to experience a bonfire near the lake or bike around the City on busy streets, but don't have the chance to do it under normal circumstances. Working together, City Departments can coordinate events utilizing existing public property and infrastructure that contribute to the quality of life in Onalaska.



Bike to School Day - Village of DeForest, WI



Farmers Markets



Community Bonfire

GOAL 2: Improve local government communication and outreach.

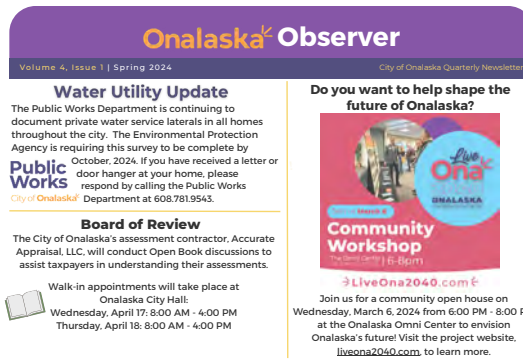
Onalaska residents agree the municipal government does a good job providing core services, but feel disconnected from the leadership and the organization. Efforts to improve communication will build trust, a stronger sense of community, and support for the City when projects are undertaken or difficult decisions need to be made.

STRATEGY 1: Schedule listening sessions every four to six months with members of the Common Council and Executive City Staff.

It is important that Onalaska residents, business owners, and property owners feel heard. While not every issue or concern has an immediate solution, the ability to share them with members of the local government has great value. While open listening sessions at public venues are an option, it can be easier to capitalize on existing civic and groups or other organizations that have scheduled meeting times throughout the year.

STRATEGY 2: Establish a bi-weekly or monthly City E-News email program.

A curated email newsletter is an easy way to break down communication barriers in the community. It can provide updates on City projects and events, Common Council and Board/Commission meeting dates, and notes from City leaders and officials. Sign-ups should be available on the front page of the website; many communities utilize a pop-up window so visitors can't miss the opportunity to register. The ability to receive agendas and packets for specific Board and Commission meetings can also help keep residents engaged in local government. Lastly, the existing "Onalaska Observer" newsletter can utilize the email tool for wider distribution.



Onalaska Observer

E-NEWS

HIGHLAND PARK, IL

The City of Highland Park recognizes that transparency and communication are a priority for the City. They established a Stay Connected e-news for residents, businesses, and Highland Park enthusiasts to sign up to date on news and alerts, bid opportunities, City Council and Commission updates, and by viewing City newsletters and City Meetings.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION & CELEBRATION

The history of a place is something that every resident shares. New young families or long-time Onalaska residents can embrace the community's past, which makes preserving and celebrating local history an ideal focus area for the Live Ona 2040 Plan.

GOAL: Cultivate an appreciation of Onalaska's architectural and cultural history.

STRATEGY 1: Elevate the role of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to champions of preservation awareness in the community.

Residents volunteering their time to serve on an HPC are vested in local historic preservation. However, many HPCs are relegated to administrative roles approving Certificates of Appropriateness or landmark nominations. They should instead be on the forefront of raising awareness of preservation efforts in the community by leading educational and engaging projects that share historic properties with the whole community.

This begins with establishing an annual

work plan with achievable goals and accountability for the Commission. This can be accompanied by increased resources from the City budget to support innovative programming and awareness-building initiatives.

STRATEGY 2: Document historic buildings in downtown Onalaska.

Onalaska residents recognize downtown as a special place with great potential. Knowing whether any of the structures are historic or architecturally significant will inform future placemaking and preservation efforts.

STRATEGY 3: Inform residents about the value of designating a structure as a historic landmark.

While Onalaska may not have a long list of historically or architecturally significant homes, it is important to have

information available about the process and benefits of designating a structure as a historic landmark. Landmark status is too often viewed as something bad, prohibiting any changes to a home and decreasing its value. Supporting a culture of celebrating local history means providing accurate information about the impacts and value of preservation tools.



Historic Onalaska Train Depot

STRATEGY 4: *Inform residents about the value of preserving older houses instead of demolishing them.*

Demolishing an old home is often viewed as the first and only option when infill development is discussed. The City can play a valuable role in starting conversations about preserving existing homes as a climate-friendly approach to home construction. The HPC's website is the perfect place to share valuable preservation-related materials with Onalaska residents, such as information and resources related to building materials, preservation organizations, and local efforts.



Housing in Onalaska



205 Main Street



4

PILLAR 2: **COMMERCE & DEVELOPMENT**

The City of Onalaska has a diverse local economy. Retail and service businesses thrive along intense auto-oriented commercial corridors, smaller neighborhood-scale corridors, and in a pedestrian-scale downtown. Pockets of light industrial land uses throughout the City provide a base of manufacturing jobs and a strong healthcare sector provides even more, together accounting for more than a third of the jobs in Onalaska. Supporting these assets and identifying new opportunities to build on them are essential parts of the City's future.

PILLAR STATEMENT: *We view the local economy as an asset for the whole community, providing residents and visitors with a wide range of goods, services, and employment opportunities. It is important that we review future land use, key commercial corridors, and commercial districts in the City to ensure the land use mix and regulatory framework that govern them reflect the community's evolving needs.*



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Land Use
- Economic Development

FOCUS AREAS

The focus areas acknowledge the different contexts of Onalaska’s commercial and industrial areas: the pedestrian-oriented downtown, intense automobile-oriented highways, and the concentrated pockets of light and heavy industrial land uses. They also recognize sites where new development can take place with transformative impacts on the community and the importance of a conscientious approach to new construction and the impact it has on the built environment.



Commercial Corridors



Downtown Onalaska



Opportunity Sites



Commercial Land Use Planning



Built Form & Design Review



COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Onalaska’s local economy is supported by a diverse range of commercial environments scattered throughout the City. Highway 16 and the retail centers in the southern part of town are largely automobile-oriented and the built form reflects this with large parking fields and limited bike and pedestrian accommodations. Sand Lake Road is also a car-focused corridor, but is less intense and has potential to transition to a mixed-use area serving non-motorized traffic. This Focus Area provides goals and strategies that capitalize on the strengths of these different commercial corridors in the community.

GOAL 1: Support Highway 16 as a destination for general retail for the local economy, while evolving into more mixed-use and lifestyle center uses where viable.

Highway 16 is the most extensive retail corridor in Onalaska, anchored primarily by big-box retailers. Diversifying the uses in this area could protect it from future threats while still attracting regular traffic. The national trend for retailers to contract their physical footprints has had harsh effects on occupancy levels at strip shopping centers across the country. Strategic recruitment of non-retail, customer-facing businesses could help to insulate Onalaska’s centers. Such tenants

might include: fitness centers, tutoring services, microbreweries, or activity-based bars.

The City completed the State Road 16 Corridor Redevelopment Study in 2019 that identified sites with development potential and a framework for incorporating mixed-use development in this area. The study also noted gaps in the pedestrian network and challenges with automobile access among properties along Highway 16.

The strategies below reflect recommendations and future land use strategies identified in the 2019 report, as well as additional approaches to guide the future of this key corridor that reflects the City’s overall vision.

SMASH BAR

WEST DES MOINES, IA

Smash Bar was founded in 2019 in West Des Moines, Iowa, as an experience-based sports bar and restaurant. They have since added three locations in Nebraska, Minnesota, and Ohio. They typically select suburban locations in box-store-type buildings. They offer a variety of activities like pickleball, mainly indoors and year-round, but the concept also includes biergarten-style outdoor spaces with seating and lawn games.

STRATEGY 1: *Improve the built environment within the corridor to facilitate redevelopment and increase the quality of new construction and design.*

While Highway 16 provides access to this commercial district, connectivity between properties is strained and utilizes informal pathways across private property for circulation.

The built form in the corridor features sprawling retail centers and strip malls. While functional, this type of construction may not align with the City’s vision of a vibrant mixed-use corridor. The quality of design can be elevated by establishing a regulatory framework that guides design early in the development process. The 2019 Redevelopment Study identifies this and other initiatives for the corridor.

STRATEGY 2: *Promote a business development strategy that incorporates experiential land uses (activity-based entertainment, etc.).*

The changing nature of retail from bricks and mortar stores to an online environment is well-documented. The need for people to leave home to shop is no longer a driver of commerce. For that reason it is important to develop experience-based land uses as part of the commercial / retail mix in this corridor. Examples include axe throwing businesses, rock climbing walls, and escape rooms. These are activities few people have available at home and attract people to the district.

STRATEGY 3: *Increase the identity of the Corridor as a community asset, a gateway to Onalaska, and an important contributor to the local economy.*

While innovative and experiential land uses will bring visitors to the Highway 16 corridor, retail will remain the primary driver of traffic. It will be important to hedge against further retraction of brick and mortar retail by creating a sense of identity for this district, making clear with signs, branding, and public improvements that it’s an important part of the Onalaska community.

STRATEGY 4: *Identify strategic public investments that can incentivize, over time, mixed-use redevelopment.*

The 2019 Redevelopment Study identifies a number of opportunities for improvements to public infrastructure in the Highway 16 corridor to facilitate its transition to a vibrant mixed-use commercial district.

KUMON MATH AND READING CENTERS

Kumon is an international tutoring business originally established in Japan. The organization has been building new centers across the US, often locating in shopping centers because of accessibility and convenient parking. The business type is well-suited for communities with young families and sufficient household income to support after-school enrichment.

GOAL 2: Improve the Sand Lake Road corridor to serve as a neighborhood-scale commercial destination in the heart of the City.

Located west of Highway 53 and among the single-family subdivisions in the heart of Onalaska, the Sand Lake Road corridor represents a key growth opportunity for the City. The underlying Mixed Use – Neighborhood (MU-N) zoning district allows multifamily development together with commercial uses to support commerce in the corridor and access from Main Street and Quincy Street provide connectivity to motorized and non-motorized traffic.

The strategies below are a framework to establish a sense of place and identity along Sand Lake Road, creating improvements and guiding land use to establish it as a destination serving future residents, pedestrians, cyclists, as well as automobiles.

STRATEGY 1: Evaluate the Center 90 shopping center property for opportunities to provide a destination for cyclists, pedestrians, and enhanced outdoor use.

The shopping center has been in place for decades and likely won't redevelop into an alternate land use in the lifetime of the Live Ona 2040 Plan. However, the site can be enhanced to provide impactful outdoor space and an attractive setting that departs from the outdated "sea of parking spaces" that accompanies many auto-oriented shopping centers of its era.

See the "Opportunity Sites" Focus Area appearing in this Community Pillar for a detailed concept drawing illustrating future land uses and urban design improvements for Center 90.



Public Space Integrated into a Shopping Center

STRATEGY 2: Install a dedicated bike pathway along Sand Lake Road with lane markings and a physical barrier.

Sand Lake Road is an important north/south corridor off Main Street with the potential for increased pedestrian-scale commercial development. A divided bike path along the roadway will encourage cyclists to travel on it, increasing connectivity throughout the community and bringing in customer traffic to local restaurants, coffee shops, and retailers. A well-constructed bike path here will also complement the open space concept identified in Strategy 1 above.



Protected Bike Lane

STRATEGY 3: *Develop a streetscaping plan to include in future rebuild / reconstruction work on Sand Lake Road.*

Streetscaping improvements are expensive, but can be made more approachable through economy of scale if included as part of broader plans to reconstruct City streets.

STRATEGY 4: *Work with commercial property owners to replace an off-street parking space with a bike corral on their site.*

When available, bicycle parking is often relegated to bike racks installed as an after-thought on private property. Automobile parking is ubiquitous along the Sand Lake Road corridor and presents an opportunity to provide safe, dedicated parking for bicycles. Converting a parking space to a bike corral eliminates a parking space for cars, so a regulatory approach may need to accompany this strategy to ensure it doesn't create conflicts or non-conformities with respect to off-street parking requirements.

STRATEGY 5: *Establish a brand and an identify for this key north/south commercial corridor.*

Amenities like outdoor dining spaces, dedicated bike paths, and streetscaping all contribute to a sense of place. But an established name and identity celebrated with gateway signs, light pole banners, unique street signs, or other tools create connections and a lasting impression on visitors, as well as property owners and business owners in the corridor.



Gateway Identifier





DOWNTOWN ONALASKA

Downtown Onalaska has a built form and a concentration of commercial land uses that are well-suited for pedestrian activity. It is widely acknowledged as a community asset and residents are eager to see continued investment building off the momentum created by the Great River Landing project. Residents' visions for the downtown include connectivity with the waterfront, boutique retail establishments, more restaurants, and outdoor spaces.

GOAL 1: Foster an environment in downtown Onalaska that supports entrepreneurship, investment, and redevelopment – and that differentiates downtown, economically and physically, from other commercial districts and corridors in the City.

***STRATEGY 1:** Establish a downtown management program, like a Main Street organization, that is dedicated to revitalizing the downtown area with marketing and events programming, visual and streetscape improvements, and business development.*

Elevating downtown Onalaska will require communication, outreach, organization, and resources. City governments and municipal planning departments are often stretched thin with myriad responsibilities and limited staff, whereas a dedicated management organization can be better positioned to focus efforts on downtown improvements.

Main Street is a program of Main Street America, which is affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In Wisconsin, communities may apply to Wisconsin Economic Development for designation as a Wisconsin Main Street city. Communities of Onalaska's population are required to have a full-time downtown manager to be eligible for the state designation. It is possible

for Onalaska to establish a revitalization organization and follow the Main Street model without being officially designated, but the statewide program brings the value of a recognized brand and training resources.

***STRATEGY 2:** Organize downtown's economic development around an outdoor sporting and recreation strategy, with a deliberate emphasis on retail and service businesses that connect to the river, bike trail, and other outdoor attractions.*

Downtown Onalaska already has the beginnings of an outdoor sporting and recreation strategy, with the adjacent river and trail system, self-serve kayak rental, and a bicycle shop on Main Street. Onalaska's scenic setting in the bluffs

of the Black River and Lake Onalaska together with access to regional bike trails are an ideal starting point to develop an economic development plan focusing on these recreational assets. The wide variety of activities available to visitors allow a broad target audience: boaters, artists, cyclists, joggers, walkers, hikers, and naturalists can all find things to celebrate in and around Onalaska. If leveraged effectively, enjoyment of the outdoors can be a significant local economic driver.

- Crafting a downtown brand that connects to sporting-related commerce
- Rounding out the cluster of sporting-related businesses, including both retail and micro manufacturing
- Offering guided bike trail adventures
- Installing bike racks
- Adding biking, kayaking, fishing, or other sport-related art downtown (e.g., murals, sculpture)

- Producing events and contests related to sporting and outdoor activities

STRATEGY 3: *Incentivize new business development by establishing a facade improvement grant program and/or a vanilla box grant to help make storefronts occupant-ready.*

Small investments on the part of the City can yield big results in the downtown business community. Knowing that financial support is available can push business owners to make improvements to their properties. As refreshed and revitalized facades appear in the downtown, other businesses often see the trend and follow suit. Eligibility requirements and expenditure limits ensure the incentives are reaching target areas and staying within budget.



Provide Connections to the River

LOCAL BUSINESS GRANTS

VILLAGE OF LIBERTYVILLE, IL

“The Village of Libertyville, IL (pop. 20,579) allocates about \$100,000 every year for two business support programs: a Business Resiliency Grant and a Façade & Property Maintenance Grant. The Business Resiliency Grant program is designed to encourage existing business growth, expansion and sustainability through matching grants of up to \$5,000. The Façade & Property Enhancement grant encourages improvement to dated or deteriorated existing facades or site conditions on commercial buildings with matching grants up to \$25,000.”



STRATEGY 4: *Design and install a new comprehensive wayfinding system that directs visitors to downtown from other parts of the City and helps them navigate within the downtown environment.*

Signs at key points around Onalaska identifying the downtown and directing visitors and residents to it raises the visibility of this important commercial district. Further, wayfinding signs around downtown raise awareness of the amenities and attractions nearby.

STRATEGY 5: *Establish an incubator space or Pop-Up Business Program to encourage entrepreneurship in the downtown.*

New and interesting retail experiences are among the things Onalaska residents would value in the downtown. However, many small businesses struggle with the logistics of finding a storefront to rent and committing to a long-term lease. Incubator spaces that facilitate pop-up businesses can help local entrepreneurs inexpensively launch their idea without locking themselves into a long-term lease. Pop-up spaces can also help to generate buzz downtown because they are

continually changing, providing reasons to return downtown. The incubator space will also activate a downtown vacancy. Graduates of the incubator program may ultimately become permanent brick-and-mortar additions to downtown.

An incubator and pop-up program, in addition to requiring an appropriate space, also requires careful management and screening of potential operators. Among the steps involved are:

- Identifying a location and negotiating an agreement
- Fitting out the storefront as a white box
- Establishing an application and approval process for potential tenants
- Ongoing management and technical assistance for tenants

With a familiarity of all the steps required to start a business and knowledge of the real estate landscape in the downtown, the City can facilitate an environment that welcomes entrepreneurs and risk-takers that can bring new ideas and businesses to downtown Onalaska.

POP-UP SHOP PROGRAM

GREENBAY, WI

The Green Bay Pop-Up Shop program in Wisconsin, offers retail space to entrepreneurs on a short-term basis, with the potential for long-term occupancy. “The ultimate goal of the Pop-Up Project is to create a vibrant Downtown that serves as a destination.” In coordination with Downtown Green Bay, Inc., private property owners offer low-cost short-term leases to qualified local entrepreneurs.



STRATEGY 6: *Consider incentives targeted at restaurant development to facilitate expansion of sit-down options.*

Alongside a market-based strategy celebrating outdoor recreation, downtown Onalaska would be enlivened by becoming a hub for restaurant dining. Chain restaurants have mostly located on Highway 16, making downtown the perfect alternative for creative, independent restaurant dining in the City. Nationally, dining and entertainment have supplanted retail uses in many historic downtowns; they also generate foot traffic later in the day.

The largest barrier to the development of independent restaurants is usually the cost of installing a commercial restaurant kitchen, if the space has not previously been fitted out for restaurant use. Commercial kitchens can cost several hundred thousand dollars. In order to strategically build a dining and entertainment cluster downtown, some communities offer grants and incentives geared specifically to restaurants.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

OTTUMWA, IA

The following grants are funded and administered by the Ottumwa's Department of Community Development.

- Façade Improvement Grants: 25% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Roof Replacement Assistance: 50% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Interest Buy-Down: Up to 7.25% interest on a five-year loan up to \$7,500
- Commercial Paint Program: 50% of cost, up to \$1,000
- White Box Program: 50% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Restaurant Equipment Program: Up to \$25,000 for permanent restaurant equipment



Ottumwa, IA

STRATEGY 7: Collaborate with large property owners near the downtown to utilize large parking lots for public events like an art fair, relocated / additional farmers market, or Taste of Onalaska event.

Onalaska has recurring events over the summer, such as the Farmers Market. However, these are conducted in other parts of the City outside of downtown. To capitalize on the attendance, energy, and attention these types of events generate, efforts should be made to find a location near downtown to host open-air gatherings.

STRATEGY 8: Repair / maintain rain garden tree planters on 2nd Street so they function as intended.

The tree planters along 2nd Street are a well-intended investment in green infrastructure. They represent an opportunity for the City to lead by example in sustainable, climate-friendly public improvements. If the planters function as rain gardens as intended, they can be a learning opportunity for residents, students, and visitors. Given their visibility on this busy pedestrian street, they represent a key opportunity for the City to put its “green foot” forward.

STRATEGY 9: Improve the aesthetics and upkeep of commercial properties downtown.

The “look” of a downtown makes a big impact on visitors and residents when they spend time there walking, shopping, and dining. Dovetailing with a strategy for a façade improvement program, an investment in pro-active code enforcement and communication with property owners can elevate the level of upkeep and maintenance on buildings in the downtown.



Farmers Market Event





COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL LAND USE PLANNING

Onalaska's Unified Development Code offers a flexible, progressive approach to land use management. However, underlying zoning districts remain a key determiner of the land use mix and play a large role in how residents' vision of the City will be approached.

GOAL 1: Foster an active, mixed-use Downtown and 2nd Avenue that provides a variety of shopping, dining, gathering, and living opportunities.

Downtowns thrive on activity beyond the nine-to-five Monday through Friday work day. While traditional businesses are essential and operate in that framework, an active land use mix means having shopping, dining, and experiential uses downtown as well.

STRATEGY 1: *Revisit the B-1 and B-2 zoning districts to determine how adequately they facilitate achieving the community's vision for the downtown.*

These zoning districts line both sides of 2nd Avenue and establish a built form with single-story buildings, parking-forward site design. Land uses in the buildings include hotels and restaurants, but also include professional offices, auto repair shops, and services. While the latter business types contribute to the local economy, they are not additive to the off-hours energy and vibrancy of the 2nd Street / Downtown commercial corridors. Existing buildings and businesses will remain in place for the foreseeable future, but the B-1 and B-2 zoning districts can be tailored to ensure future development meets the goal of this Focus Area.

STRATEGY 2: *Revisit the zoning districts controlling the downtown properties to ensure they align with goals identified in the 2019 Downtown Redevelopment Study.*

Related to Strategy 1, it is important that the zoning districts regulating development in the downtown reflect future land use goals identified in the 2019 Downtown Redevelopment Study. The entire 2nd Avenue corridor is envisioned for mixed-use development, which includes the areas currently zoned B-1 and B-2. Mixed use development is permitted in the B-2 Community Business district, but not in the B-1 Neighborhood Business zoning district.

GOAL 2: Support Onalaska's industrial districts.

Industrial land uses are an important part of a local economy, providing resiliency in times of economic change and opportunities for local job creation. Early planning efforts often placed industrial districts away from residential areas to avoid conflicts, but growth and expansion can bring residential development close to industrial areas and their associated noise and delivery traffic. Similarly, land on a shoreline or along railroad tracks once viewed as undesirable for residential development may now be seen as valuable and in-demand. These forces can put pressure on a community to reevaluate the need for industrial districts and rezone them for other uses. Once lost, these valuable areas are difficult to replace.

STRATEGY 1: *Maintain existing industrial districts, but identify locations where industrial uses could relocate in the City if interested.*

Interest could develop over time to convert land in industrial use to alternative land uses like residential or restaurant / retail. While this can be a positive for local economic development, efforts should be made to find opportunities to keep the industrial users in Onalaska.

STRATEGY 2: *Ensure buffering requirements are adequate to address potential conflicts between industrial areas and nearby residential land uses.*

Exterior storage, truck traffic, and noise are common nuisance characteristics associated with industrial land uses. Visual buffers can go a long way in mitigating these issues for residents living in proximity to these areas.

STRATEGY 3: *Enforce property maintenance requirements on site in industrial districts.*

A pro-active code enforcement program may be necessary to ensure conformance with Onalaska's property maintenance and exterior storage regulations. Open lines of communication with property owners and business groups are also effective in encouraging compliance.



2nd Avenue City Parking Lot

OPPORTUNITY SITES

With few impactful opportunities to expand through annexation, opportunities for growth and development in Onalaska focus on sites within the existing municipal border. While several of these sites are vacant, the Sand Lake Corridor is built out and redevelopment will be facilitated by having a community vision in place and a regulatory environment that supports it.

Concept drawings for these sites illustrate future land use, scale, and a site layout that reflects the community's interest in mixed-use development and housing at a scale between traditional detached single-family and dense, multi-story apartment buildings.

Key Opportunity Sites

1. Omni Center Hospitality
2. Mayo Clinic Property
3. Center 90 Shopping Mall
4. Waterfront
5. Nicolai Properties

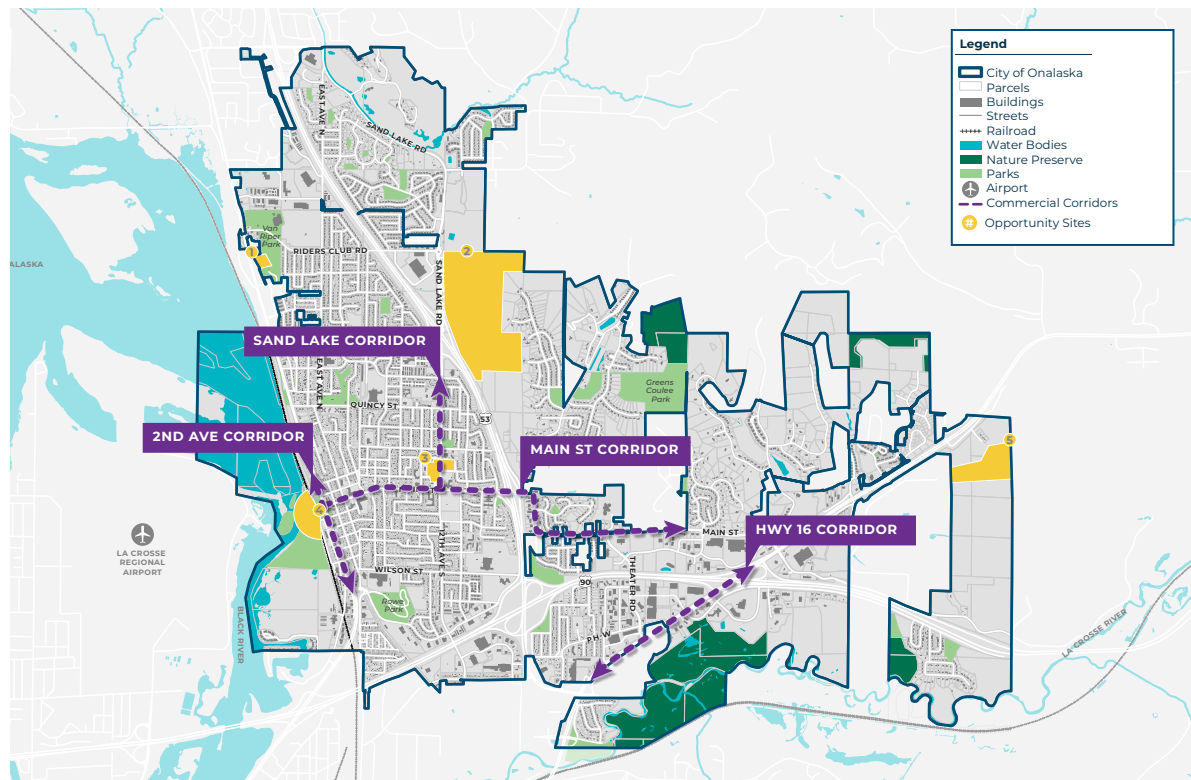


Figure 11: Opportunity Sites Map

GOAL 1: Explore opportunities to develop hotel and hospitality uses by the Omni Center.

The Omni Center represents a key asset for Onalaska, but there is a disconnect between it and the location of hotels, restaurants, and the City’s downtown. Land around the Center needs to be analyzed in detail for opportunities to develop hospitality assets like a hotel, retail/services, and restaurants.

The Omni Center is a community asset that draws visitors from around the country for athletic and recreational events. The community expressed an interest in having hospitality services close to the facility and nearer to the downtown. Obstacles to development near the Omni Center include limited properties available for redevelopment and unincorporated land nearby.

One site was identified and a concept plan prepared showing a four-story hotel with on site parking and a connection to Highway 35 and properties to the north.



Four-Story Hotel



Trail Connections



Dining

Opportunity Site 1

Omni Center Site

- 1** 4-Story Hotel
 - » 100-120 keys
 - » First floor amenity space, outdoor and indoor pool
 - » 115,000 GSF | 150 Parking Spaces
- 2** Detention Area
- 3** Access Point
- 4** Potential Secondary Access
- 5** Emergency Access



GOAL 2: Facilitate the redevelopment of the Mayo Clinic Site into a multi-use development that meets community needs.

This large parcel represents a key opportunity site in Onalaska. Though still in ownership by the Mayo Clinic, there is an understanding it may be sold if an impactful development concept is brought forward. The site remains in the City's base A-1 Agricultural zoning district and would be rezoned to the appropriate district related to future development plans.

This site on Sand Lake Road and nestled at the foot of the bluffs is a key opportunity to provide additional housing units for the community. The site plan has two points of entry from Sand Lake Road and direct access to the bluffland east of the development. The concept envisions a pocket of small-scale neighborhood-serving commercial land uses.

Opportunity Site 2

Mayo Clinic Site

- 1** Neighborhood Serving Commercial
 - » 1.7-acre retail lots with parking and rear-access
- 2** Rear-Loaded Townhomes & Duplexes
 - » 2.5- to 3-story townhomes with a 2-car garage
 - » Formed around open green spaces and trail connections to the bluffs.
- 3** Small-Lot Single-Family Parcels
 - » Surrounding a pocket park
- 4** Detention Ponds



GOAL 3: Facilitate the redevelopment of the Center 90 Shopping Center into a multi-use destination in the center of the City.

This site represents an opportunity to transition from an automobile-oriented corridor to a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use destination with new housing and commercial spaces at street level. The Mixed Use – Neighborhood (MU-N) zoning district in place along the corridor facilitates this scale of development.

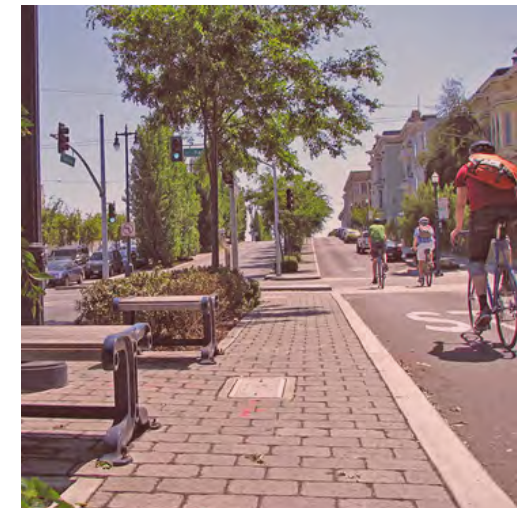
A key element is streetscaping along Sand Lake Road and a dedicated bike path to encourage use by cyclists. Sand Lake Road connects to Main Street, which is envisioned as a primary east/west connector for the City. The Sand Lake corridor can become a key growth area in the middle of town, anchoring the downtown to the west and commercial district to the east.



Mixed-Use Development



Landscape Buffering



Cycling Improvements

Opportunity Site 3

Sand Lake Road Site

- 1** Corner 4-Story Mixed-Use Development
 - » 40 residential units above first-floor covered parking and 2,500 SF of retail.
 - » Pocket park and community gathering space.
- 2** Corner 4-Story Mixed-Use Development
 - » 44 residential units above first-floor covered parking.
- 3** Parking Lot & Sand Lake Landscaping Enhancements
 - » New landscaping buffer, signage, marked crossings, and realignment of main entry.
- 4** Rear-Loaded Townhomes
 - » 2.5- to 3-story townhomes with a 2-car garage
- 5** Streetscape & Cycling Improvements



GOAL 4: Facilitate the redevelopment of the Nicolai properties to provide additional housing and commercial opportunities for the community.

Similar to the Mayo Clinic Property, the Nicolai Properties represent an opportunity to add new housing units in Onalaska at a scale that reflects the needs and values expressed by the community: traditional single-family detached units, attached townhomes, and duplexes. The site is disconnected from major roads and existing commercial districts, so residential development is a viable future land use.



Natural Features within Neighborhood Design



Single-Family Cluster Development



Small-Lot Single-Family

Opportunity Site 4

Nicolai Site

- 1** Rear-Loaded Townhomes
 - » 2.5- to 3-story townhomes with a 2-car garage
- 2** Rear-Loaded Duplexes
 - » 2.5- to 3-story duplex with a 2-car garage
 - » Formed around open green spaces and trail connections to the bluffs.
- 3** Small-Lot Single-Family Parcels
 - » Significant Tree Buffer Zones
- 4** Single-Family Cluster Housing
 - » 60'x60' pads for cluster single-family housing with public open space between
- 5** Great Pond



GOAL 5: Redevelop the City's waterfront into an impactful open space and gateway for the community to enjoy and appreciate the Black River.

Onalaska's location on the Black River and Lake Onalaska are continually identified as an asset for the community. Residents are eager for opportunities to enjoy the waterfront and capitalize on the City's proximity to these natural resources.

Access to the waterfront is an obstacle and the completion of Phase 2 of the Great River Landing project is identified as a high priority in the Live Ona 2040 Plan. Other strategies in the Plan offer approaches to activate and improve the land by the water. The area is in a floodplain, complicating planning efforts and limiting the permanent structures that can be constructed on the waterfront.



Yard Games



Play Opportunities



Community Gathering Spaces



Waterfront Activation

BUILT FORM & DESIGN REVIEW

Onalaska's Unified Development Code (UDC) establishes a series of design requirements for new development, including step backs for upper stories, façade transparency minimums, and guidance for site planning. These codified standards set a baseline for architectural design in the community and provide developers with clear direction before the application process begins. There are opportunities, however, to supplement these regulations with additional tools that will ensure new commercial and multifamily development is designed to a high level and contributes positively to Onalaska's built environment.

GOAL 1: Achieve a high level of innovative and impactful design in the downtown and along key corridors in Onalaska.

Buildings have a language of their own and the level of architecture and design in a city can say a lot about local pride and a commitment to maintaining a community's aesthetic. Establishing a framework to have meaningful discussions with the development and design community before and during the review process can help to facilitate this level of design.

STRATEGY 1: Develop a formalized design review process for new development.

Architectural review can be more effective if it goes beyond checking boxes to determine if new construction satisfies the standards in the UDC. Those standards are a great starting point and can inform a focused discussion on design conducted by a standalone Design Review Commission or as part of Plan Commission deliberations for projects that require a discretionary review process.

CORRIDOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

HOBART, IN

The City of Hobart, Indiana developed design guidelines for their main commercial corridors. The final design guidelines document illustrates the desired development character, site design, and public realm improvements.

SD.21: Buildings should frame a corner or enclose a "main street" type corridor.

- Orient a building's primary functional entry to face a street. Orienting a primary entrance to a public plaza or other prominent public space is also appropriate.
- If a building fronts two or more prominent public spaces or streets, orient to as many of them as is feasible.

APPLICABLE TO THE FOLLOWING LAND USES:
Multi-Family
Business
Institutional/Office Service

FIGURE SD.21: BUILDING ORIENTATION



The development in the top diagram engages the street corner with parking located behind the building, while the development in the bottom diagram has parking fronting the buildings of the corner.

STRATEGY 2: Create design standards or guidelines to establish community expectations for a high level of building and site design in Onalaska.

The look and feel of the built form can be refined in each of Onalaska’s commercial districts and corridors. Design guidelines for 2nd Avenue can prescribe pedestrian-oriented site improvements, while others can address landscaping, screening, or wayfinding in the auto-oriented portion of the Main Street and Highway 16 corridors.

STRATEGY 3: Update sign regulations so they allow impactful and effective signs that contribute positively to the public realm.

Signs are an essential form of communication and have a huge impact on the built environment. Onalaska’s Sign Code has detailed standards and requirements that allow a wide variety of sign options. These should be continually evaluated as signs are erected in the community to ensure the needs of the business community are met while not detracting from Onalaska’s look and feel.

STRATEGY 4: Require or incentivize green building technologies, techniques, and best practices in new development.

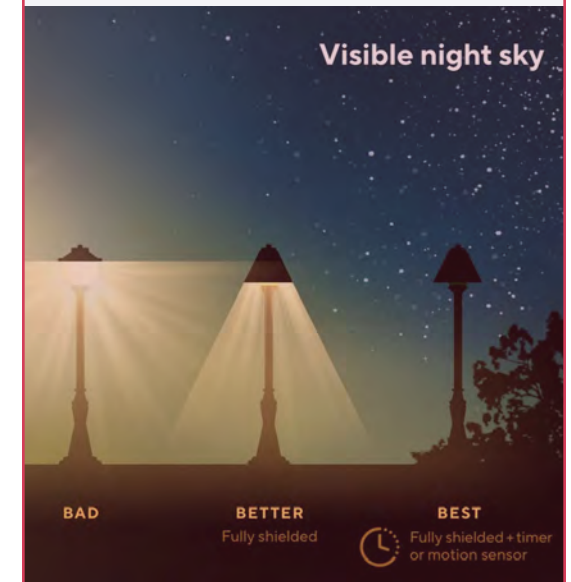
The community’s interest in sustainability can be incorporated into new development and contribute to the built form. Tools like permeable paving and native landscaping can reduce the need for on-site stormwater detention. LED lighting reduces power consumption and improve nighttime glare and “dark sky” impacts. If not required by ordinance, these can be discussed as part of the design review and zoning entitlement process.



Solar Panels

DARK SKY LIGHTING

Light pollution can disrupt wildlife, human sleep cycles, and make the night sky harder to enjoy. Basic regulations controlling glare, brightness, and LED light quality can make a difference and are easy and inexpensive to comply with.”



PARTNERS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following list of regional and State of Wisconsin resources is available to provide support and assistance to Onalaska in a range of economic development roles.

7 Rivers Alliance: The 7 Rivers Alliance is an economic development organization for the Upper Mississippi Region that is dedicated to economic development across geographic and state boundaries. Their mission statement is “The 7 Rivers Alliance is a regional leadership group that boosts economic growth by fostering collaboration in Southwest Wisconsin, Southeast Minnesota, and Northeast Iowa. We advocate for keeping communication open and we continue to develop regional networks through meetings and networking events. The 7 Rivers Alliance brings together public and private resources to forge entrepreneurial growth and serve as a clearing house of information to enhance quality of life in the region.”

La Crosse County Economic Development (LCED): This organization maintains information on development opportunities in the County and has business assistance and financial tools available. These include a revolving loan fund, grants for innovation and diversification, and an arts and culture grant program.

La Crosse Area Development Corporation (LADCO): LADCO is dedicated to fostering economic growth in the region by working with new businesses and encouraging existing businesses to expand or relocate into the region. They provide information on available sites for new and existing businesses and participate in workforce development programs to grow the employment pool in the area. They offer incentive packages and have been in operation since 1971.

Small Business Development Center (SBDC): The SBDC located at UW-La Crosse helps businesses with launching and managing successful small businesses. They do this through no-cost confidential consulting and business education to assist with startup planning, financing, sales/marketing, new products/services/markets, financial management, and operations. They are a part of the U.S. Small Business Administration and provide resources for Onalaska business owners and entrepreneurs.

UW-La Crosse County Extension Office: This office has a specialist available to provide information and technical assistance related to economic development in the County. They offer programming for local and rural entrepreneurship, as well as a design workshop focusing on community vitality and placemaking.

Xcel Energy Economic Development:

This energy company offers a range of services, including financial incentives and development siting for new and expanding businesses. Programs include clean energy and sustainability initiatives, promoting efficient equipment, and electric vehicle solutions.

Wisconsin Economic Development

Corporation (WEDC): This office is part of the Wisconsin State government and provides resources, operational support, and financial assistance to drive economic development. They partner with hundreds of smaller organizations around the State and offer a wide range programs that include:

- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Community Development Investment Grants
- Brownfield Grants
- Industrial Revenue Bonds to help cities support industrial development
- Business Development Tax Credits



5

PILLAR 3: **NATURE & RECREATION**

Onalaska's location among the bluffs of the Mississippi River Valley and on the waterfront of the Black River and Lake Onalaska is a well-recognized asset in the community. The City invests in an expansive public park system, participates in bluffland preservation, and capitalizes on Lake Onalaska for year-round recreational and competitive events. Residents are passionate about bicycling and outdoor recreation and Onalaska is a key stakeholder in the regional bike trail network. Appreciation for nature and the outdoors is an essential part of Onalaska's character.

PILLAR STATEMENT: *We are committed to keeping the park system vibrant, supporting efforts to preserve open natural areas, and fostering an active outdoor lifestyle. Open space and outdoor recreation are a big part of what makes Onalaska special and brings people together.*

SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Natural Resources

FOCUS AREAS

Celebrating the outdoors is part of Onalaska's local culture. The focus areas below represent core elements of Onalaska's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities in the community. The goals and strategies in this Pillar provide a framework for preserving and growing them.



Onalaska's Park System



Onalaska's Waterfront & Great River Landing



Regional Bike Trail Network



Bluffland Preservation

ONALASKA'S PARK SYSTEM

The City of Onalaska has a commitment to providing residents with parks, protected open spaces, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Onalaska's Parks & Recreation Department (OPR) oversees a system of 26 park facilities totaling over 400 acres in area. The City completed a Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) in January 2023 that provides a detailed inventory and analysis of Onalaska's parks, as well as an action plan for maintenance and growth of the park system. While a CORP is a benefit for every community, they are required by the State of Wisconsin in order to qualify for outdoor recreation grant programs. Key metrics associated with Onalaska's park and open space system are provided in the CORP and summarized below.

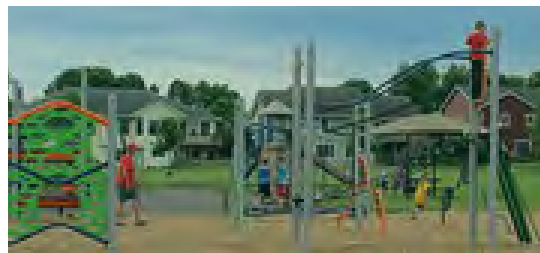
Park facilities in Onalaska can be categorized into three types: Mini Parks, Neighborhood Parks, and Community Parks.

Mini Parks

Mini parks are specialized spaces that serve a specific group with a service area of less than one-quarter mile radius. These parks are generally one acre or less in area. The focus on mini parks is an ideal way to provide public areas throughout the community with limited space.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are areas for recreational uses such as field and court games. They include a service area of one-quarter to one-half mile radius and a size of 3 to 10 acres. These parks are also likely to remain focused on Onalaska residents due to their locations.



Meier Farm Park

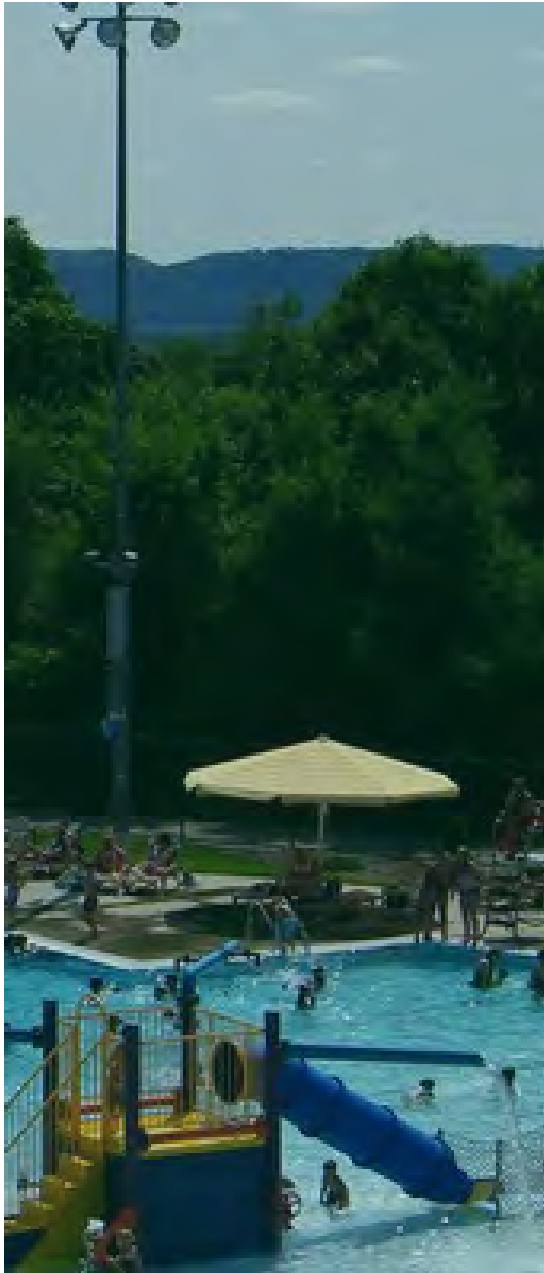
Community Parks

Community parks are areas of diverse environmental quality which may include athletic complexes. They include a service area of one to two-mile radius and are generally 10-acres or more in size. Many parks in the Community category can serve visitors from outside of Onalaska, supporting the four pillars and opening opportunities for outside investment, partnerships, and regional awareness. Some specific examples are Greens Coulee, Dash Park, Great River Landing and Waterfront, and the Highway 35 Waysides–Sunfish site.

Many of Onalaska's parks are nestled within residential neighborhoods, providing an open space amenity to homes in the immediate vicinity. The quantity of these sites and the maintenance they require can strain OPR resources. The larger community parks are a key asset for the community and are among things residents value highly.

Table 5: Onalaska's Parks

PARKS	ACREAGE	SERVICE AREA	NOTES
MINI PARKS			
Coachlite Greens	1.42	Up to .25 miles	Neighborhood pocket park
Elmwood Hills	2.70	Up to .25 miles	Secluded residential park
Hilltopper Heights	2.48	Up to .25 miles	Open space with good access
Oak Knoll	0.22	Up to .25 miles	Small pocket park
Oak Woods	0.88	Up to .25 miles	Located near high-traffic areas
Park Avenue	0.32	Up to .25 miles	Located on narrow remnant parcel
Oak Park #1	1.48	Up to .25 miles	Secluded pickleball facilities
Oak Park #4	0.99	Up to .25 miles	Secluded open space
Valleyview	5.07	Up to .25 miles	Unimproved area with potential
Thomas Farm	1.47	Up to .25 miles	Open space in residential area
Wellington Greens Park	3.89	Up to .25 miles	Large shared open space
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS			
Glenn Fox Park	3.77	.25 to .50 miles	Baseball diamond close to Hwy 53
Holiday Heights Park	20.07	.25 to .50 miles	Large site in the floodplain
Meir Farm Park	9.45	.25 to .50 miles	Treed park with exercise stations
Nathan Hills Park	0.29	.25 to .50 miles	Small pocket park in residential area
Parkridge Park	3.42	.25 to .50 miles	Tucked behind homes, pickleball courts
Pierce Park	5.50	.25 to .50 miles	Neighborhood park with good access
Robinson Park	5.69	.25 to .50 miles	Secluded park adjacent to I-90
Sandalwood Park	11.95	.25 to .50 miles	Large remnant parcel at I-90 and Hwy 53
COMMUNITY PARKS			
French Road Park	18.12	1 to 2 miles	Newly-acquired park land
Community Park	13.26	1 to 2 miles	Critical local recreation destination
Greens Coulee Park	153.61	1 to 2 miles	Large wilderness asset with bluff land
Rowe Park	25.00	1 to 2 miles	Adjacent to High School with skate park
Van Riper Park	40.14	1 to 2 miles	City's premier site by the Omni Center
Dash-Park	0.62	1 to 2 miles	Downtown gathering space
Great River Landing and Waterfront	54.22	1 to 2 miles	Upper and lower areas. Opportunities for improvement in lower area.
Highway 35 Waysides - Sunfish	4.49	1 to 2 miles	Waterfront viewsheds, scenic assets



Aquatic Center

Level of Service Analysis

The Level of Service Analysis (LOS) determines how well the City’s parks and open spaces are serving the community’s current and future needs. A valuable benchmark to evaluate LOS is the National Recreation and Park Association’s 2022 recommendation of one park per 750 residents of a city the size of Onalaska. Parkland is also measured to evaluate overall acreage in addition to the number of facilities.

Table 6 from the CORP indicates Onalaska is offering more parkland per resident than other communities of similar size.

The Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan accurately notes that these Level of Service statistics should be monitored closely as new residential units and dense multifamily developments occur in Onalaska to ensure benchmarks are still met.

Table 6: Onalaska’s Level of Service Analysis

PARKS	
Onalaska	1 park per 750 residents
NRPA Community (Less than 20,000 residents)	
Lower Quartile	1 park per 1,924 residents
Median	1 park per 1,233 residents
Upper Quartile	1 park per 761 residents
PARKLAND	
Onalaska	19 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents
NRPA Community (Less than 20,000 residents)	
Lower Quartile	5.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents
Median	12.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents
Upper Quartile	21.7 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents

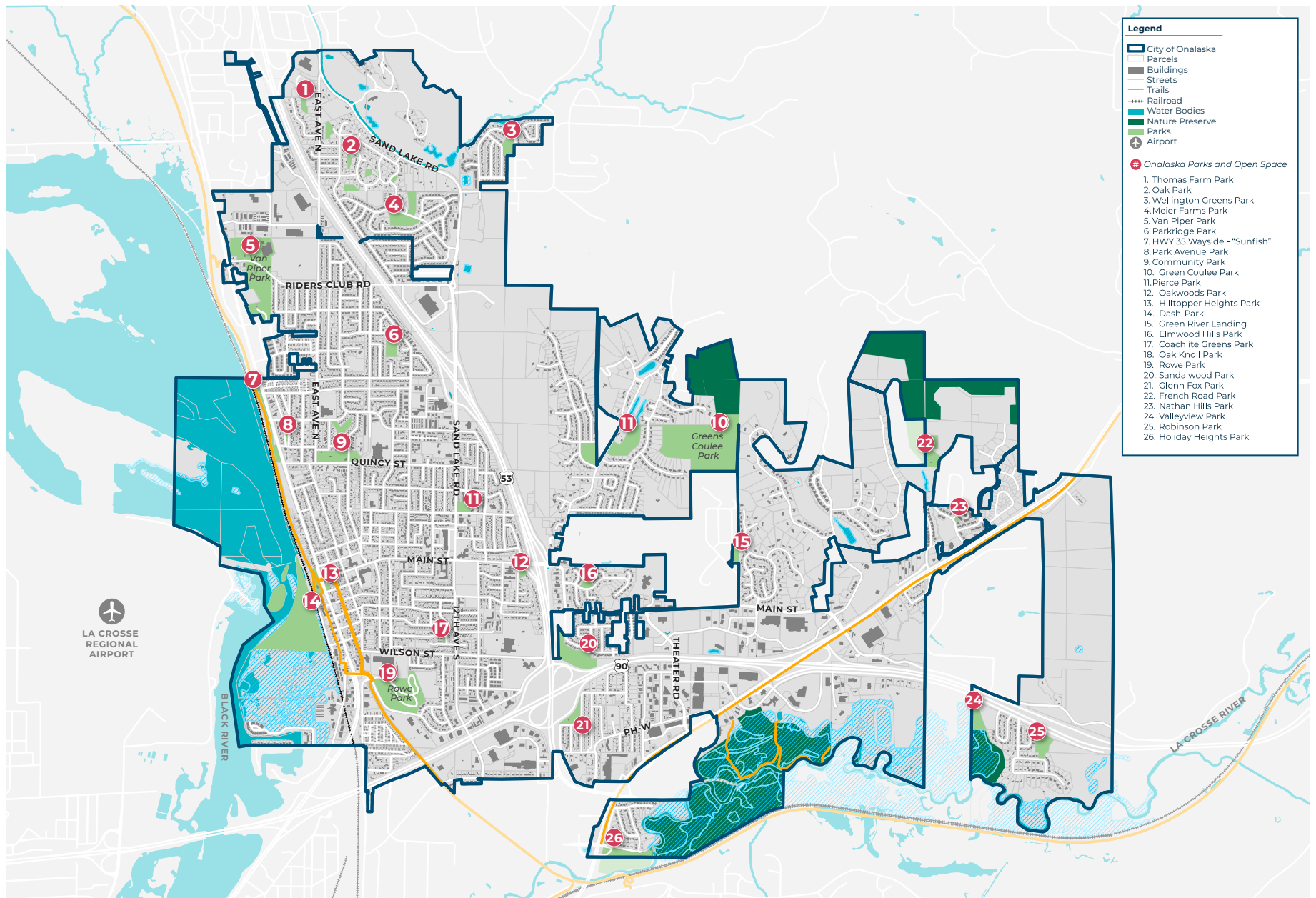


Figure 12: Parks, Natural Resources, and Open Space

GOAL 1: Maintain and improve Onalaska's network of City parks and recreation facilities.

Onalaska's public parks and open spaces are continually identified as a community asset. Given the size and quantity of park facilities, maintenance and upkeep is a constant challenge that requires investment in staffing and resources. The strategies below provide approaches to preserve these public amenities so they can continue to serve the residents into the future.

STRATEGY 1: Reinvest in the City's Adopt-a-Park program (Friends of the Park).

Onalaska has nearly a dozen "mini-parks" that are often tucked within residential neighborhoods and serve an established neighborhood living in close proximity. A program inviting nearby residents to help clean and maintain these parks can reduce demands on City Parks and Recreation Department staff and increase the sense of pride and ownership families feel for their local parks. Onalaska

operated a Friends of the Park program in the past. Ideally some mechanisms may still be in place that can be reactivated instead of created from scratch.

STRATEGY 2: Revisit public open space requirements associated with new single-family residential development and new subdivisions.

The Unified Development Code requires one acre of open space for every 40 units in a development with a minimum of two acres or payment of park development fees. While not all this land may be dedicated to a public park, a portion typically is and results in the patchwork of small neighborhood parks throughout the City. While these provide an amenity to residents in the vicinity, the myriad small parks also present challenges with regard to maintenance and upkeep. While the UDC establishes an option to pay a fee in lieu of parkland, these requirements should be revisited to determine whether they are still needed to provide additional parks for the community.

STRATEGY 3: Establish a native planting / prairie landscape, bee or butterfly habitat with interpretive signs with information and resources for property owners.

Utilizing public parkland to create native planting landscapes and habitats for wildlife serves several purposes. It reduces the level of maintenance required in portions of existing parks, advances the City's sustainable and climate-friendly practices, and provides an educational opportunity for park visitors. Areas in existing parks that have steep grades, lie near the waterline and are often wet or muddy, or other less-usable tracts make ideal candidates for these types of improvements.

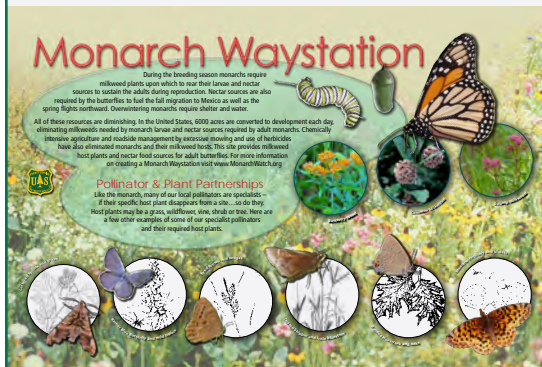


Educational Signage

MONARCH WAYSTATION INTERPRETIVE SIGN

US FOREST SERVICE

An area planted with native vegetation can look unkempt and neglected if visitors are unaware of what they're looking at. Signs like these provide information on native plants, their role in providing essential habitats for wildlife, and the birds and insects visitors should look for in the park.



STRATEGY 4: Pursue implementation of Onalaska's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP).

Onalaska's CORP was published in 2023 and identifies the following Planning Themes & Goals:

- Increase and maintain public awareness for parks and recreation through strong public relations, educational programming, and community events held at City parks and recreational spaces.
- Apply the principles of equity, sustainability, and resiliency in all future projects.
- Enhance existing partnerships with community organizations, while also identifying new partnership opportunities to better leverage resources for the implementation of shared parks and recreation assets.
- Increase accessibility to fresh foods throughout the City by utilizing community parks and recreation spaces.

- Diversify programming in the City's parks to welcome people of all backgrounds and abilities.
- Identify possible national and international programs that may be accommodated in the City's park system.
- Identify ways to obtain data about how residents use the City's system, such as installing trail use counters, developing a local parks app, and seeking feedback through social media.

The Plan identifies specific improvements and projects for many of the City's parks, as well as funding sources and partner organizations. Some projects are as simple as creating a community garden, while others like ADA improvements to improve accessibility require more planning and investment. Importantly, many of the initiatives identify the need for grant money, which prolongs the timeline associated with achieving them. Regardless, the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is a valuable partner document to the Live Ona 2040 Plan.



REGIONAL BIKE TRAIL NETWORK

There are myriad opportunities to enjoy Southwest Wisconsin by bicycle. From regional trails like the Elroy-Sparta State Trail to smaller trails within Onalaska, riders of every skill level can spend time experiencing the outdoors.

GOAL 1: Capitalize on the Great River Bike Trail's presence in the City.

Onalaska's location on the Great River State Trail represents a key opportunity for local placemaking, economic development, and regional recognition. The Great River Landing is a premier facility for visitors, providing a rest stop along the trail and bike maintenance equipment. Instead of leading visitors through the rest of downtown, however, the bike trail crosses the four-lane Highway 35, then meanders down 3rd Avenue before reconnecting to the La Crosse River State Trail further south. While signage allows users to navigate this on-street stretch of the state trail, the painted Bike Lane on 3rd Avenue doesn't provide any physical barrier between cyclists and car traffic. To capitalize on

the location along the Great River Bike Trail, cyclists should feel as welcome and safe in Onalaska as possible. Investing in this small portion of on-street bike lane could have a big return.

***STRATEGY 1:** Install pavement painting, lines, and physical barriers along the on-street portion of the Great River Bike Trail in Onalaska.*

Improving the on-street portion of the Great River Trail will demonstrate the value Onalaska places on providing safe non-motorized transportation options and on welcoming visitors to the community. It can also set an example of what can be achieved elsewhere in the City at a relatively low cost. Basic supplies like paint and thermoplastic markings will be sufficient to clearly identify the bicycle pathway along the street and celebrate Onalaska's presence along this regional

trail. Strategies appearing elsewhere in the Live Ona 2040 Plan can also support the Great River Trail, such as creating a bike parking corrals in several existing automobile parking spaces downtown.

***STRATEGY 2:** Expand signage for the bike trail throughout the City.*

The Great River State Bike Trail is a 24-mile pathway built on an abandoned railroad line in the upper Mississippi River Valley. Efforts to increase awareness of the trail can increase usage, support, and community pride in its presence. Signs providing directions to access points will guide users to it and interpretive signs can provide maps, details, and background on the trail. Available for year-round use, it provides a linkage to neighboring communities and a valuable way for residents to enjoy the outdoors in Onalaska.

STRATEGY 3: *Update and enhance the Self-Guided Bike Trail publication with colorful maps and destinations.*

The League of American Bicyclists awarded the City of Onalaska with a Bronze Level designation in 2017. The community has continued to embrace cycling and the trail and pathway network has continued to expand throughout the City. The City’s website provides valuable information on local and regional bicycle routes, including a worksheet with self-directed routes around town. This document is a powerful way to break down barriers for residents unfamiliar with Onalaska’s trail network but are looking for ways to enjoy it. However, the document is text-heavy and would benefit from helpful graphics, information on parking and starting points, and design elements to make it more approachable. When completed, it should feature prominently on the City’s website in summer months and be made available widely in the community in hard copy.



Trail Signage



Painted Bike Lanes



Separated Bike Lane



ONALASKA'S WATERFRONT & GREAT RIVER LANDING

The Great River Landing is a source of pride for Onalaska residents. Plans developed in 2015 established a phased approach to construct the main building (completed), a pedestrian bridge to the waterfront, a trail system, and many other improvements on the waterfront for recreation and relaxation. Costs associated with completing the Great River Landing are a significant barrier, however, and the project has not progressed past the first phase. Efforts have been made to secure funding to construct additional phases, including a grant application to the Wisconsin DNR to complete a boardwalk. Regardless of outside funding, any future work at Great River Landing will require a large investment by the City of Onalaska.

GOAL 1: Create an accessible waterfront that provides a recreational asset for the entire community.

Access to the waterfront is something that came up throughout the engagement of this process. While Lake Onalaska is a popular destination for fishing and boating, access is primarily gained from boat launches on French Island and Brice Prairie. For pedestrians, a steep winding trail approaches the waterfront at Great River Landing. Trails along the shore are typically rough and informal, creating barriers to accessibility for visitors.

STRATEGY 1: Pursue a waterfront study to identify the most viable location for waterfront access.

Boat launches vary in scale and intended use. Motorboats for fishing or recreation require grading, ramps, and parking areas for trailers. Launches for canoes or kayaks may only require a dock and secure walkways. It will be important to evaluate the land available to the City for a waterfront access point and what type of boat launch will be feasible. This strategy is consistent with recommendations in Onalaska's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

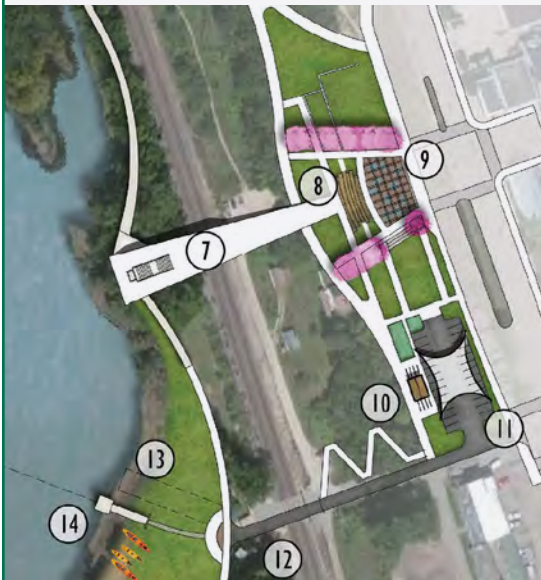
STRATEGY 2: Complete Phase 2: The Boardwalk and Spillway Link at Great River Landing.

The waterfront by downtown Onalaska opens to the Black River. Lake Onalaska is nearby and offers opportunities for fishing and enjoying nature. However, traversing from the waterfront to Lake Onalaska is challenged by the lack of a maintained trail. Installing a safe portage or walkway connecting to the spillway via the Black River will transform the way residents are able to engage with the City's location on the water.

GREAT RIVER LANDING RIVERWALK

ONALASKA, WI

The City of Onalaska applied for a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 2021 to complete a new trail connection linking existing river access at Irving Street to the spillway at the north end of the waterfront. This video details the project and provides visuals of the proposed riverwalk trail.



GOAL 2: Transform the waterfront area into an open space attraction for the whole community.

Residents are eager for a way to enjoy being by the water. Amenities at the waterfront are limited, but impactful activities and improvements can be coordinated without requiring significant resources.

STRATEGY 1: Install public amenities on the waterfront.

The waterfront area is in a floodplain, which limits the type of structures that can be installed. However, there are shelters, benches, and equipment that are appropriate for these settings.



Splashpad Feature



Steel Picnic Shelter

BLUFFLAND PRESERVATION

Onalaska's setting among the bluffs of the Mississippi River is one of the strengths of the community. To celebrate this heritage and natural resource, efforts are in place to preserve bluffland in and around the city. Onalaska is part of the Blufflands Coalition established as part of the 2016 "Blufflands Regional Plan." This document pooled representatives from La Crosse-area communities to create a shared framework for preserving blufflands and capitalizing on them to create trails and recreational opportunities.

GOAL: Expand the amount of protected natural area and bluffland in and around Onalaska.

Existing efforts are in place to expand the open space and bluffland around Onalaska. Strategies below will support and supplement these initiatives to create and preserve the unique natural resources in the community.

STRATEGY 1: *Collaborate with the Blufflands Coalition on preservation efforts.*

The 2016 Blufflands Regional Plan establishes a solid framework for the Blufflands Coalition and roles and responsibilities for key members. These

include collaborating on opportunities to acquire new land, facilitate easements to ensure continuing access and preservation, cooperation on trail networks, and wayfinding signage. The Plan is an important partner document to the Live Ona 2040 Plan and identifies the following organizations as Charter Members of the Blufflands Coalition:

- City of La Crosse
- City of Onalaska
- La Crosse County
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- Town of Shelby
- Town of Medary
- City of La Crescent



Greens Coulee Park Trail

STRATEGY 2: *Connect pieces of City-owned blufflands to create a more expansive and complete preservation area.*

It has become possible to add large tracts of bluffland around Onalaska to the City's network of open spaces available for the public to enjoy. Some areas are non-contiguous, however, and access between them will rely on access easements and other agreements between the City and other land owners.



Friends of the Bluffland



Onalaska Blufflands



6

PILLAR 4: **CONNECTIVITY**

With its State Highways, Interstate 90, and an airport nearby, Onalaska is well-connected to the region. The adjacency to an established city like La Crosse and a growing community like Holmen means that strong regional connections and intergovernmental cooperation will remain an important part of comprehensive planning. Connectivity within Onalaska itself is also important. Exploring opportunities to expand Onalaska's non-motorized transportation network is an important part of this plan and reflects the community's culture of bicycling and outdoor recreation, as well as sustainability and environmental awareness.

PILLAR STATEMENT: *Connectivity within Onalaska is important and we will utilize the City's strong grid street network as a building block to establish pathways to all parts of town for non-motorized transportation. Regional connectivity is also a big part of Onalaska's future. The City's location among active, growing communities on the Mississippi River requires a strong connection through communication and cooperation among government agencies.*



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Transportation
- Intergovernmental Cooperation

FOCUS AREAS

The focus areas below capture what connectivity means in Onalaska: the established street network and its potential for motorized and non-motorized use, the east/west linkage that Main Street represents for the City, Onalaska's place in the region, and forward-thinking initiatives that will position the City for flexibility and resiliency in the future.



Streets for All



Routes to Success



Main Street Corridor



Regional Connectivity/ Intergovernmental Cooperation



STREETS FOR ALL

Strategies in this Focus Area explore approaches to expand the street network so it reflects the needs of all users. The street system in Onalaska is well-developed with adequate capacity to serve residential and commercial areas. Highway 53 separates the network east from west, with a historic grid network on one side (west) and a more curvilinear suburban street pattern to the east. The grid pattern lends itself to safer multi-modal and pedestrian connectivity with its smaller scale and slower traffic.

Enhanced connectivity requires planning for a variety of user types beyond drivers. With residential neighborhoods, schools, commercial areas, parks, and recreational centers distributed throughout the City, Onalaska's street network should feel safe, comfortable, and user-friendly for all. Improvements to the City's existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, the addition of key connections between existing routes, and the implementation of readily accessible wayfinding resources will help to connect the people of Onalaska, locals and visitors alike, to the City's many destinations while promoting active lifestyles and facilitating the use of sustainable transportation options.

GOAL 1: Strengthen Onalaska's network of bike- friendly routes, on-street bike lanes, and bike trails.

STRATEGY 1: Fill gaps in the sidewalk network.

Notable gaps within the community exist at:

- North of Wilson St, south of Well St, West of 12th Ave S, east of 9th Ave S

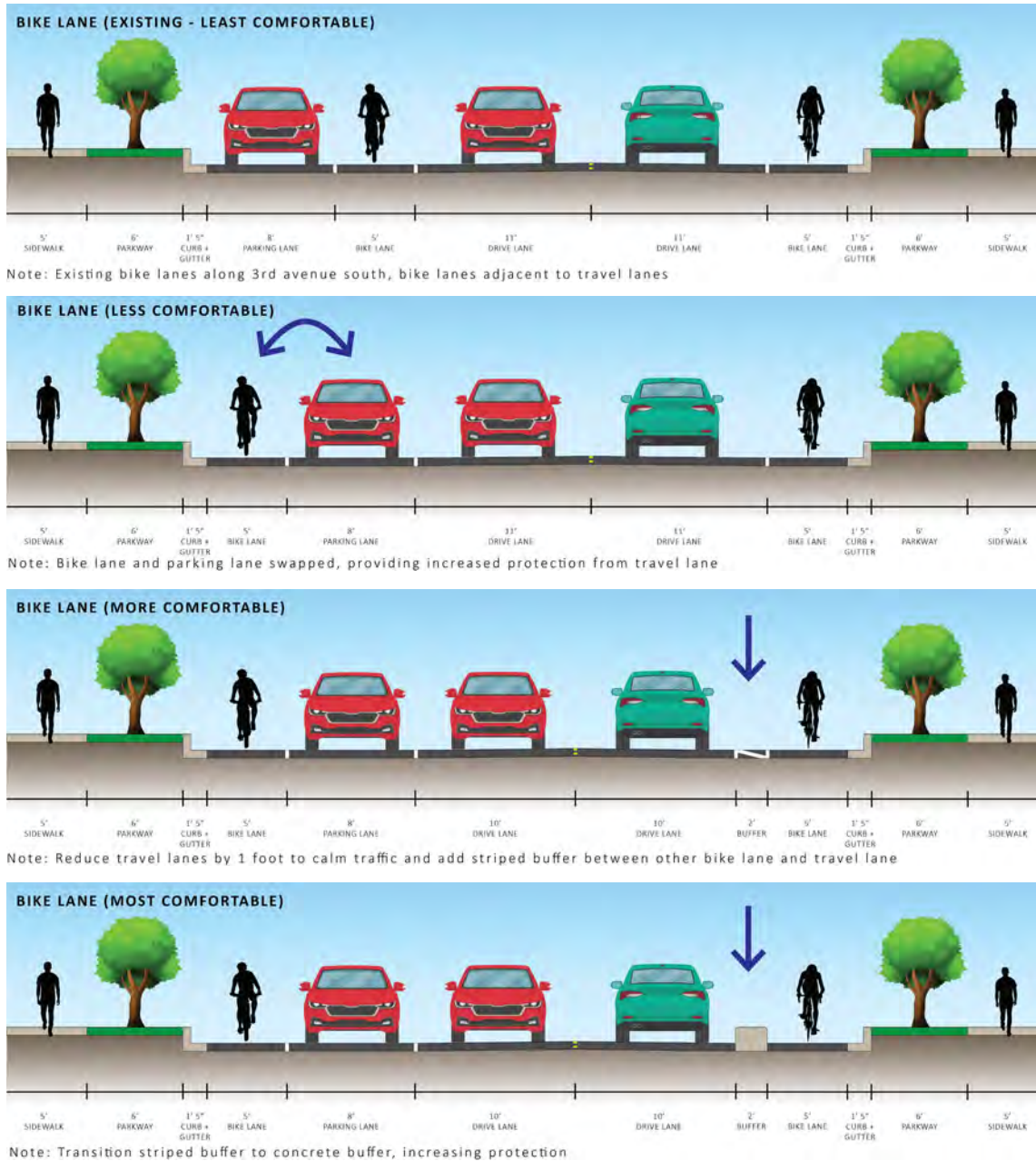
- North of Quincy St, south of Troy St, east of WIS 35, west of East Ave N
- Neighborhood East of East Ave N, south of Sand Lake Rd
- Neighborhood north of CTH PH, west of Braund St, as well as neighborhood east of WIS 16 at Medary Ln

COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

MILWAUKEE, WI

The City of Milwaukee's Complete Streets Policy consistently ranks among one of the top policies nation-wide and could be used as a model. It should also be noted that WisDOT has design guides for pedestrian and bicycle best practices.

Figure 13: Complete Streets Redesign Options



URBAN STREET DESIGN GUIDE

NACTO

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) maintains an Urban Street Design Guide that provides street design elements and considerations of real-world examples that can be employed to further the goals of the Complete Streets Policy, such as increase bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, increased safety, and traffic calming.



STRATEGY 2: Revisit and refine the City's Complete Streets Policy.

STRATEGY 3: Ensure a high level of pedestrian safety and comfort at key intersections.

Straightforward tools like curb bump-outs and lengthened pedestrian crossing intervals at stoplights can go a long way to increasing comfort levels of pedestrians at busy intersections.

STRATEGY 4: Explore tactical mobility enhancements.

There are many low-cost options to increase pedestrian and bike safety on Onalaska's street network. Pavement markings and bright orange plastic bollards are effective in guiding vehicular traffic and delineating pathways and trails. These improvements can help to increase bicycle and pedestrian mobility and should be installed in areas of most need first, such as near schools, institutions, parks and trails, and along commercial corridors.

SMART GROWTH AMERICA

NCSA

The National Complete Streets Coalition, which is a program of Smart Growth America, provides resources and case studies on complete streets policies, designs, and their impact across the Country. Most importantly, they provide a policy framework as a resource.

Best Complete Streets Policies 2023



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

National Complete Streets Coalition

GOAL 2: Guide visitors and residents to key destinations.

The Omni Center brings visitors to Onalaska from around the region and the country for a range of athletic and competitive events. The downtown and Great River Landing are important parts of the community and make Onalaska a special place to live. Highway 16 is envisioned as a vibrant mixed-use commercial corridor that will benefit from its own branding and identity in the future. Destinations like these are important to the City and directing visitors to them will raise their visibility.



Milwaukee, WI

STRATEGY 1: Establish a community wayfinding sign program.

A series of signs with a shared design language can be placed at key intersections and roadways around Onalaska to create a recurring brand that celebrates local assets like the downtown, Main Street, the Omni Center, Great River Landing, and the Great River State Trail. This raises awareness and appreciation of these destinations among residents and helps guide visitors to them.

STRATEGY 2: Update the Bicycle-Friendly Routes Map

The City's map of bike routes in the community is simple and effective for experienced cyclists who are comfortable navigating on-street bike paths. It would benefit from more detail, however, clarifying the type of bike path each route identifies. Younger or less-experienced cyclists may want to stay on off-street or divided bike paths and the map could show those routes.

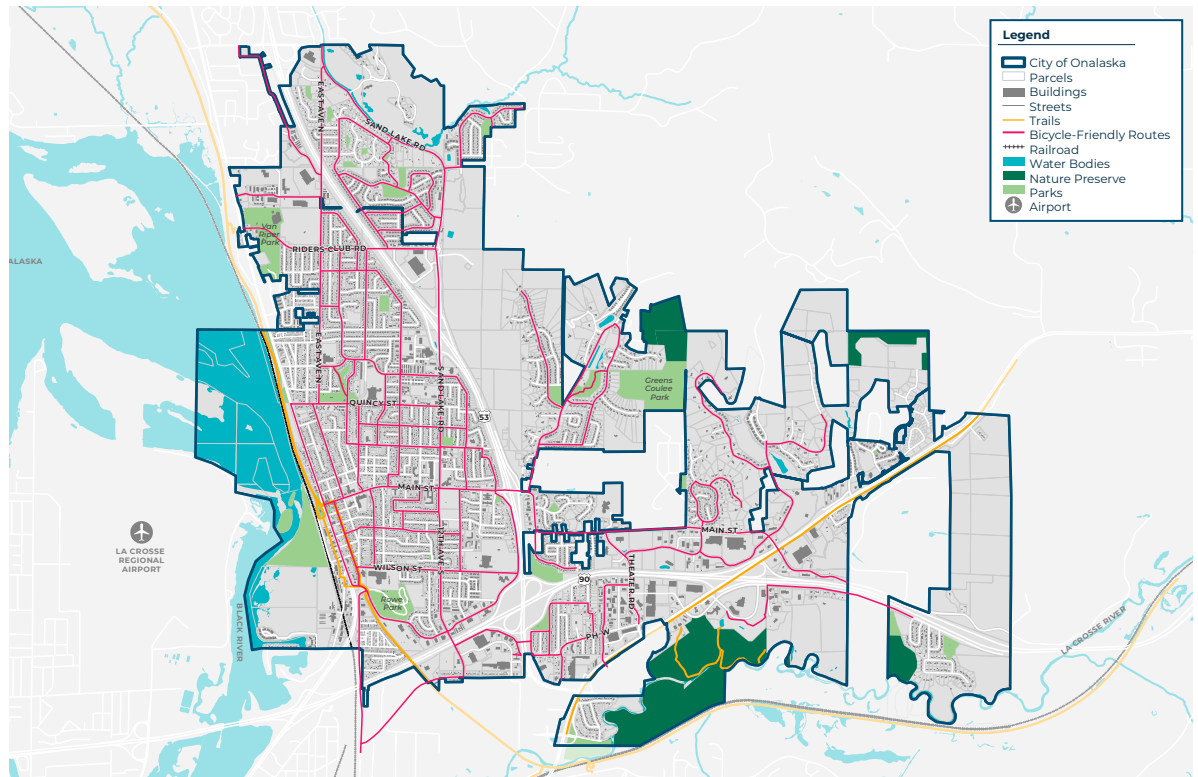


Figure 14: Bike Friendly Routes Map



Fort Collins, CO - Remington Bikeway Corridor Signage



Directional Wayfinding Signage

MAIN STREET CORRIDOR

In Onalaska, Main Street serves as a community anchor and reference point for residents and visitors. This corridor represents an opportunity to leverage transportation in ways that support broader community goals and objectives including improved economic development through efficient access and circulation for all modes of transportation, providing safe and comfortable pedestrian spaces for residents and visiting shoppers, and public realm improvements that make sidewalks, paths, and plazas places to gather and connect with others. These strategies also support increased safety, particularly for vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists, youth, and seniors and stronger efforts towards sustainability and improving overall quality of life.

GOAL 1: Enhance Main Street to further establish this key east/west linkage through Onalaska.

STRATEGY 1: Leverage the upcoming improvements planned by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) along Main Street between 5th Avenue S and US 53 to make impactful design improvements on the roadway.

Preliminary discussions with WisDOT about improvements to Main Street needs to include the City's vision for pedestrian-friendly intersections. Improvements may include:

- Reconfigure intersections to be more pedestrian friendly.
- Install additional curb bump outs to reduce pedestrian crossing distance, thereby making it easier to cross the street, and increase visibility for drivers and pedestrian at the intersection before crossing the street.
- Increase pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.



Road Diet

ROAD DIET

FHWA

A road diet for a four-lane roadway cross-section, involves reducing the number of travel lanes in each direction and adding a two-way left-turn lane (TWLTL). The regained space should be utilized to install a concrete protected bike lane. Road diets have a variety of benefits for all types of users, including traffic calming and enhanced safety.



STRATEGY 2: *Coordinate with La Crosse Municipal Transit (MTU) to install bus shelters at high-ridership transit stops.*

Route 9 of the MTU runs through Onalaska on weekdays and hits major shopping destinations. A common barrier to ridership is the discomfort of waiting in an exposed area for the bus to arrive. Shelters and signage with links to mobile apps to track buses and pay fares digitally can help break down barriers to support existing riders and expand overall use of the MTU transit system.

STRATEGY 3: *Provide enhanced pedestrian accommodations, such as high-visibility continental-style crosswalk striping and rectangular rapid flashing beacons to enhance safety and comfort.*

High-visibility signage like flashing beacons provide advanced notice to drivers that pedestrians are crossing and are more effective at warning drivers and increase the probability they will stop than with just signage.

STRATEGY 4: *Study the feasibility of burying the electrical utility lines and installing ornamental street lighting east of 6th Avenue N to match what is existing to the west.*

STRATEGY 5: *Establish a protected bike lane along Main Street between Highway 53 and Highway 35 / Great River Road.*

Main Street is a four-lane roadway between Highway 53 and Sand Lake Road. Thereafter traffic is reduced to two lanes and the outer lanes are used for on-street parking. The roadway is identified as a Bike Friendly Route, but cyclists are relegated to the sidewalk unless they choose to navigate vehicular traffic and parked cars. Redesigning the Main Street right-of-way to include a protected, separated bike lane would create a safe and impactful route for non-motorized traffic through the heart of Onalaska. As additional bike routes are established on important north/south roadways like Sand Lake Road, the City's network of paths becomes more practical for commuting and for safe routes to school.



Separated Bike Path - Nashville, TN

ROUTES TO SUCCESS

Strategies throughout the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan support the expansion of options for non-motorized transportation in the City. However, single-occupancy vehicles are likely to remain the primary mode of transportation for the foreseeable future. With this in mind, the strategies below provide approaches to reduce the impact they'll have on the community and the environment.

GOAL 1: Manage parking assets and establish new parking policy and design guidelines to support the success of businesses while right-sizing supply.

***STRATEGY 1:** Update Onalaska's off-street parking regulations to align with best practices and respond to realistic parking demands.*

Onalaska is a land-constrained community. Several opportunity sites have been identified where future residential development can take place, but there are limited opportunities to grow through annexation. For this reason it will be important to maximize the development potential of available properties and not consume

it unnecessarily with storage space for automobiles. Parking is also an obstacle to residential development in downtown Onalaska. Newer approaches to parking requirements can address these challenges while still allowing successful development to take place.

***STRATEGY 2:** Allow flexibility in parking lot design to use available land efficiently.*

Many zoning codes include design requirements for parking lots based on old, outdated design ideas. Smaller parking spaces, narrower drive aisles, and other modified standards can result in parking lots that occupy less land, create less impervious surface, and accommodate more vehicles while still providing safe parking and navigation in the lot.

***STRATEGY 3:** Implement bicycle parking requirements for new development.*

Bicycle parking is often an after-thought in a new development. Safer, more useful bicycle storage can be established in Onalaska if the development community is asked to provide for it early in the design process.



Bicycle Parking

GOAL 2: Prepare for future mobility options.

STRATEGY 1: Draft an Electric Vehicle (EV) and Alternative Fuel Readiness Plan for the City.

The need for community/public EV charging and alternative fuel infrastructure is important to ensure electric and alternative fuel vehicles are a practical and reliable source of personal transportation to all Onalaska residents. Waiting for new developments to install EV charging stations or existing businesses to request them can result in a disorganized network around town. Establishing a plan for locating these facilities will facilitate an even and equitable distribution around Onalaska.

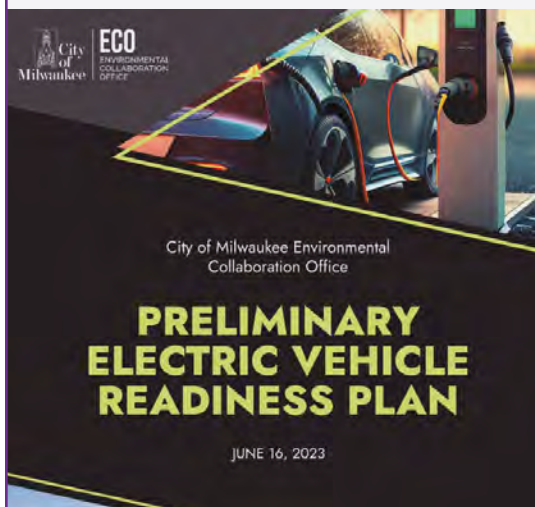


EV Charging Station - 531 Theater Rd

E/V READINESS PLAN

MILWAUKEE, WI

“The City of Milwaukee adopted an E/V Readiness Plan as part of its Climate and Equity Plan. The E/V Readiness Plan identifies 53 sites across the city and neighboring communities where charging and refueling infrastructure can be placed for the “Vehicle Recharging Options of Milwaukee (VROOM!) Project. The network is completed as funding becomes available through public grants and private investment.”



EV Charging Station - 2614 Midwest Dr

REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY & INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Onalaska is a built-out City surrounded by active communities. Communication and cooperation with these governmental partners will be important as growth issues, border concerns, and collaborative opportunities arise. Other agencies at the County, regional, and State levels are also important to consider as policies and programs under their purview can benefit and impact Onalaska.

GOAL 1: Onalaska's plans for growth and development will complement plans in neighboring municipalities and the broader region.

Common issues across the region include housing that meets residents' needs, transportation and connectivity, and stewardship of natural resources. As Onalaska evaluates growth and transportation-related initiatives, it will be important to maintain lines of communication with partner governmental agencies.

STRATEGY 1: Revisit border agreements to ensure they address ongoing growth and capacity issues.

Development opportunities near the borders of neighboring communities may necessitate revisiting border agreements. These agreements should remain fresh in stakeholders' minds and revisited as conditions evolve.



Neighboring Village of Holmen

STRATEGY 2: Discuss EV and alternative fuel infrastructure planning with adjacent municipalities to create a continuous network.

A unified approach to creating a corridor-wide alternative fuel infrastructure can yield better results than smaller one-off installations dotting the region. Discussing initiatives in neighboring communities will help determine what opportunities exist for collaboration.



EV Charging Station - 2845 Midwest Dr

GOAL 2: Pursue partnerships with neighboring municipalities and agencies to increase multi-modal mobility and transit accessibility throughout the region.

Onalaska can play a valuable role in supporting existing initiatives to expand transit and mobility options in the region.

STRATEGY 1: Coordinate with the La Crosse Area Planning Committee to update the 2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan adopted in 2010.

Onalaska was part of the team that created the 2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan in 2010. This detailed plan took a regional approach to expanding non-motorized transportation options with recommendations that included developing a Complete Streets Policy and model ordinance language that supported bicycle transportation. Progress should be evaluated locally in Onalaska and efforts made to re-engage with the LAPC to update the plan.

STRATEGY 2: Partner with the La Crosse MTU to study the feasibility of increasing the frequency of Route 9 – Onalaska.

Ridership on public transit wanes with limited availability of buses. Then the availability of buses decreases due to limited ridership. Communication, education, and outreach can break this cycle to provide reliable, meaningful public transportation options for Onalaska residents.



Route 9 - Onalaska



INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERS

Local Units of Government

Town of Onalaska: Bordering the City of Onalaska to the north, this unincorporated area has about 6,000 residents and 2,100 housing units. The Town of Onalaska surrounds the Village of Holmen and Town of Holland, which are both growing communities. While parts of the Town are directly adjacent and intertwined with City of Onalaska properties, a border agreement is in place to regulate growth and annexation.

Town of Medary: The Town of Medary covers about 11 square miles and is largely south of the City of Onalaska, though portions of the Town are enclosed within the City's borders. This leads to confusion as visitors don't realize they've exited the City of Onalaska. Per the State of Wisconsin's Department of Administration, population is likely to increase to 1,604 residents by 2025.

Village of Holmen: Holmen is one of the fastest-growing communities in the region with land available for new single-family residential subdivisions. It abuts Onalaska to the north and its population was 10,661 people in 2020 with 4,382 households. A border agreement is in place with the City of Onalaska, limiting opportunities for growth or annexation.

City of La Crosse: With a permanent population of 52,000 people and 20,000 students attending one of three colleges or universities, the City of La Crosse is a major presence in the region. The size and scale of La Crosse stands in sharp contrast to the small-town feel of Onalaska, providing the positives and negatives associated with a bigger city in close proximity. Land use decisions in the north part of La Crosse can impact development in the south part of

Onalaska, especially on the Highway 16 corridor. The City of La Crosse's Municipal Transit Utility provides service to limited destinations in Onalaska.

County of La Crosse: Onalaska is located in La Crosse County, which provides support services to the residents of Onalaska and the region including health services, economic and workforce education, business development, and senior housing services. The County Board of Supervisors consists of 30 county board supervisors each representing a geographic area within the county. The City of Onalaska is located in supervisory districts 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

Regional Governing Bodies

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC): Based in the City of La Crosse, the MRRPC is one of eight regional planning commissions in the State of Wisconsin. They provide planning services, economic development assistance, transportation planning, and GIS services to communities in the following counties: Pierce, Pepin, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon, Crawford.

La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC): The LAPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization performing transportation planning activities for the La Crosse and La Crescent area. The main objectives of the LAPC are to develop and maintain a long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan and a short-range Transportation Improvement Program, as well as other regionally significant projects.

State of Wisconsin Agencies

Department of Natural Resources (WDNR): The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is dedicated to working with Wisconsin communities to preserve and enhance the natural resources of Wisconsin. In partnership with individuals and organizations, DNR staff manage fish, wildlife, forests, parks, and air and water resources while promoting a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities.

Department of Transportation (WisDOT): The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) is responsible for transportation planning throughout the State and is the primary agency for planning and managing Federal and State highways, including Highway 35 (an alternate route for Interstate 90) and Highway 53.

Department of Administration (DOA): The Department of Administration (DOA) has several key functions including helping the governor develop and implement the state budget, supporting other state agencies and their programs, and offering services such as centralized purchasing and financial management. The ultimate goal of their programs is to offer Wisconsin residents the most efficient state government services possible. They offer procurement, construction, real estate, and business development services and are a resource for Onalaska.



Small Business Development Center

(SBDC): The SBDC located at UW-La Crosse helps businesses with launching and managing successful small businesses. They do this through no-cost confidential consulting and business education to assist with startup planning, financing, sales/marketing, new products/services/markets, financial management, and operations. They are a part of the U.S. Small Business Administration and provide resources for Onalaska business owners and entrepreneurs.

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA):

WHEDA works with developers to finance affordable rental housing and support economic development through its small business programming.

Nongovernmental Partners

Explore La Crosse: This program by the La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau “builds awareness of the Upper Mississippi Valley region as a global tourism destination” and has already partnered with the City in promoting the Great River Landing and Great River State Trail. They are important partners in raising awareness of recreational opportunities in Onalaska.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy: This land trust organization works with property owners who choose to permanently protect their land through conservation easements or through acquisition by the trust. Serving Wisconsin counties throughout the Driftless Region, they also restore native habitats through volunteer efforts and coordinate educational and outdoor programming throughout the year. The Conservancy has been and continue to be a partner in preserving

open space around Onalaska.

Bluffland Coalition: This collaborative effort was brought together by the La Crosse Area Planning Committee and included communities throughout the region to create the Bluffland Regional Plan in 2015. The shared resources and dedication of this coalition will be an important partner in preserving blufflands in and around Onalaska.

Outdoor Recreation Alliance Trail

Network: This La Crosse-based non-profit organization focuses on celebrating the outdoors and bringing area residents and visitors in contact with nature through outdoor programming and advocacy. They can be partners in expanding Onalaska’s trail network and creating connections to existing trail networks in the region. Their maps of regional trails are a resource that all Onalaska residents should be aware of.



7



PILLAR 5: **CITY SERVICES**

The City of Onalaska is committed to providing services that meet the needs of a growing, active community. From public utilities and the Police and Fire Departments to facilities like the Aquatic Center and the Omni Center, continued investment in these shared assets strengthens the City as a whole.

PILLAR STATEMENT: *Onalaska maintains a strong culture of service for City residents. The provision of high-quality utilities, public safety, fire protection, and emergency medical services are continually identified as community assets. City facilities like the Omni Center and Aquatic Center also contribute to the quality of life in Onalaska. We recognize that continued support and investment in City Services represent a key pillar of the community's growth and success.*



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Utilities
- Community Facilities

FOCUS AREAS

The focus areas represent the core services the City of Onalaska provides for residents. While continually operating at a high level, there are opportunities for growth and expansion to meet the evolving needs of the community.



Public Utilities



Community Facilities



Public Safety



PUBLIC UTILITIES

The City of Onalaska recognizes that providing basic utilities to residents is a core function of local government and invests in maintaining and improving municipal infrastructure.

Public Works: The Public Works Department promotes safety and public welfare of the community through installation and maintenance of water and sanitary sewer infrastructure, street maintenance, urban forestry maintenance, fleet maintenance, and operation and maintenance of the City's cemetery. The Department operates out of the Public Works Facility at 252 Mason Street.

Water Services: Onalaska's water utility is recognized as a key community asset. Water service within Onalaska is provided by several types of infrastructure, including four wells, water mains, and water service lines. Groundwater is sourced from a shallow sand and gravel aquifer from wells on the west side of the City between 150' and 200' deep. Several areas in the east side of town require

booster pump stations to maintain water pressure due to topography and higher elevations.

Sanitary Sewer Services: There are about 87 miles of sanitary mains in Onalaska. These and the 1,900 manholes that provide access to them are maintained by the Department of Public Works. 19 lift stations are required to move wastewater from lower to higher elevations. There is no sanitary sewer treatment facility in Onalaska, so wastewater is sent to the Isle La Plume treatment plant in La Crosse. Available data suggests there remains capacity for growth in the Isle La Plume's 20 million gallons per day (MGD) facility capacity.

Storm Sewer: Onalaska approved a Stormwater Utility Ordinance in 2010 to provide funding for maintenance of the City's storm sewer system. The system is comprised of about 54 miles of storm sewer lines that drain into 22 detention / retention basins, rivers, streams, and wetlands. Through the Ordinance, The City assess each single family residential property one ERU (equivalent Residential Unit) that is billed on their utility bill. Remaining properties are charged one ERU for every 3,888 square feet of impervious area on their property.

Broadband Services: Access to broadband internet remains an issue in some (typically rural) parts of Wisconsin. Onalaska, however, is well-equipped to provide residents with consistent broadband internet availability with many telecommunications companies providing service.

GOAL: Public utility infrastructure will have the capacity to serve potential growth areas in Onalaska.

Onalaska’s public utilities are equipped to serve existing residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. As growth and development occurs, however, planning is needed to ensure the City remains well-positioned to continue high levels of service into the future.

STRATEGY: Evaluate sewer and water capacity connecting residential growth areas to the City’s utility network.

Growth in Onalaska over the next ten to fifteen years is anticipated to focus on several opportunity sites identified in the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan. A variety of housing types are envisioned, including attached and detached single-family residences, as well as neighborhood-scale commercial land uses. It will be important to review the capacity of existing infrastructure to ensure it provides adequate service to these sites.

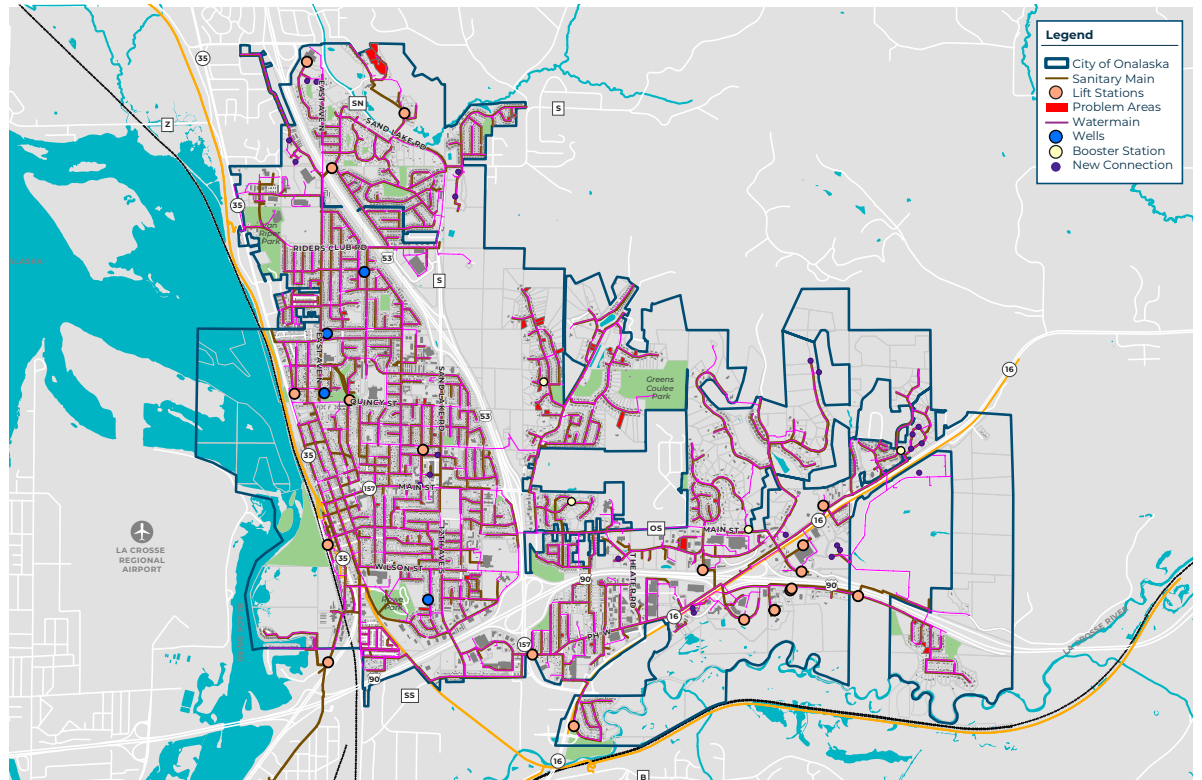


Figure 15: Water and Sanitary Sewer Map



Onalaska Main Street



Highway 53

PUBLIC SAFETY

The City of Onalaska operates under a council/mayor form of government, with an elected mayor and six alderpersons who govern three districts. Most City services operate out of City Hall at 415 Main Street in the downtown, including City Clerk, City Attorney, Engineering, Finance, Fire, Human Resources, Municipal Court, Inspection, Planning/Zoning, Police, Public Works, Parks Department, and City Assessor.

Fire Department: The Onalaska Fire Department (OFD) operates from City Hall and serves the City of Onalaska as well as the Town of Onalaska as of 2022; this coverage area includes over 25,000 residents and 48 square miles. The OFD’s 20 full-time and 12 part-time staff members offer fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention, technical rescue, and community risk reduction programs to the community. In 2023, the EMS responded to 1,576 calls and Fire responded to 446 calls.



Fire Department

Police Department: The Onalaska Police Department operates from City Hall and seeks “to build community partnerships and provide service-oriented policing to maintain a safe environment and enhance the quality of life.” The 31 sworn police officers and 2 full-time and 3 part-time civilians staffing the police department offer various programs alongside protection that educate the youth and encourage a strong community.



Police Department

GOAL 1: Public safety departments will have adequate staffing and resources to serve the population over the next 10-15 years.

Municipal budgets are finite and allocating resources is an ongoing challenge for all governmental organizations. As part of this balancing act, it will be important to maintain open lines of communication with the City’s public safety departments to ensure resources are available to maintain a high level of service as Onalaska’s population increases and more residential units are constructed in town.

STRATEGY 1: Monitor the Onalaska Fire Department’s annual call volume to ensure staffing levels are meeting community needs.

The Onalaska Fire Department provides fire and EMS services for the City of Onalaska and the Town of Onalaska through a shared services contract. They are also active in outreach and educational initiatives in the community. Annual call volumes are likely to increase with growth and development in the area, so staff levels should be evaluated regularly based on annual reports provided by the OFD.

STRATEGY 2: Identify a location for a second fire station in Onalaska.

The OFD’s response times to emergency calls in the City and Town of Onalaska remain largely within a three-minute window. There are locations, however, that are consistently more difficult to reach within this essential timeframe. For this reason the City should continue to evaluate opportunities to construct a second fire station.

STRATEGY 3: Allocate funding for equipment, training, and personnel for the Onalaska Police Department that ensures a high level of efficiency and effectiveness.

Police departments are called upon to serve in a lot of different roles, especially in a smaller community like Onalaska. Equipment needs evolve as technology improves and budgeting discussions should reflect this, as well as requirements for sufficient personnel and support from the community. Importantly, the Police Department cannot operate in a silo, so annual reporting and strong lines of communication are essential.

“Our mission is to build community partnerships and provide service oriented Policing to maintain a safe environment and enhance the quality of life.”

- ONALASKA POLICE DEPARTMENT



Onalaska Fire Department

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Onalaska has facilities beyond City Hall, the Fire Station, and Police Station that contribute to the community fabric and make it a special place to live and raise a family. The Omni Center and the Onalaska Community Center are two City-owned buildings providing a wide range of services for residents and visitors. Both are valued within the community, but require resources for continuing maintenance, improvements, and staffing.

GOAL: City-owned facilities will be maintained and upgraded to provide a high level of service to Onalaska residents over the next 10-15 years.

STRATEGY 1: Establish the Onalaska Community Center as a multi-generational asset for the community.

Continued investment in the Community Center will be important as the needs and preferences of users evolve. It serves as a gathering place for Onalaska's senior citizens and can also meet the needs of younger residents with athletic facilities and youth-oriented programming.

STRATEGY 2: Invest in the Omni Center to meet the needs of the community and to serve as a regional venue for athletic events and gatherings.

The Omni Center is a regional destination that offers event and athletic space. The facility located at 255 Riders Club Road includes two large arenas, a large conference room that can be separated into two smaller meeting rooms, a board room, and an indoor/outdoor multi use space for private and public events. While the Omni Center is a great amenity for the community, opportunities exist to strengthen its regional attraction by offering hotel and commercial uses in close proximity in a walkable urban environment. Currently the closest hotels are along US-53 a drive away from the venue.

The Omni Center is the first thing many visitors and residents mention when they think about Onalaska. Myriad events are hosted there, from national fishing and hockey tournaments to bingo nights that attract residents from Onalaska and neighboring towns. Under City ownership and management, the facility represents an important community asset that requires ongoing maintenance and support.



Omni Center

STRATEGY 3: *Implement green infrastructure at City facilities to establish an identity of sustainability and educate residents and visitors on the importance of sustainable practices.*

As the owner of multiple buildings and facilities throughout Onalaska, the City government is in a position to lead by example in the use of “green” infrastructure that reduces resource consumption, reduces waste, and supports native landscapes and wildlife habitats.



Omni Center



Native Landscaping



Proposal for New Community Center



9

IMPLEMENTATION

Achieving the vision for Live Ona 2040 Plan requires a sustained commitment by the City through an ongoing implementation process. Collaboration between key partners will be an important part of this commitment. These include City departments, local businesses and service organizations, utility and transportation agencies, La Crosse County, and other local stakeholders. Moving forward, important Live Ona 2040 Plan implementation actions will need to be identified and prioritized.

The Implementation Matrix is intended to provide a roadmap for the success of the Comprehensive Plan. It is a guidebook for City staff to use in developing work plans for City staff, Boards, Commissions, and the Common Council. The Implementation Matrix should be a part of Capital Improvement planning and annual budget discussions to ensure these align with the community's vision for improvements, investments, and the growth and vitality of Onalaska.



SMART GROWTH IN WISCONSIN

As required by Wisconsin State Statute s.66.1001, the Comprehensive Planning Law, contents in this chapter address the following elements:

- Land Use
- Implementation
- Intergovernmental Cooperation

PARTNERSHIPS

The City cannot achieve the goals in the Live Ona 2040 Plan alone. Partners are a necessity to help the City take on and implement the actions identified. Planning issues and implementation are complex and require support and cooperation from many departments, organizations, and partner governmental agencies.

City Departments

City departments, including Inspection, Planning and Zoning, Engineering, Public Works, Parks, Fire, City Attorney, and Finance, among others will need to take leadership roles and responsibilities in Comprehensive Plan implementation.

“
Achieving the vision for Live Ona 2040 requires a sustained commitment by the City through an ongoing implementation process.
”

City of La Crosse

With its close proximity, communication with the City of La Crosse will be important as the Live Ona 2040 Plan is implemented. Improvements in the Highway 16 corridor are impacted by economic development work in northern La Crosse, and connectivity to bike paths and trails will improve the quality of life in both Onalaska and La Crosse.

La Crosse County

There may be opportunities to partner with the County on economic development initiatives, as well as regional trail connectivity and natural resource preservation. It will be important to maintain an active list of contacts with that organization so lines of communication can remain strong.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

(WisDOT)

Communication and coordination with WisDOT for the planning, design, and construction initiatives related to roadways under their jurisdiction will be critical to ensure compatibility for future planning and between transportation plans.



WI Driftless Area

FUNDING SOURCES

Identifying and securing funding sources will be one of most significant aspects of implementing the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan and is critical to the City's goal of economic sustainability. A number of actions recommend the City seek additional funding for projects and improvements when the opportunity is available, such as completing the Great River Landing project. While grant money may become available, a commitment must be made to dedicate significant local funds to the endeavor. Currently, the City considers funding from sources such as the City's general fund and grant programs. The City may have to consider other funding sources such as levy options. These strategies would require thorough research and planning to determine viability by the Common Council.

USING THE LIVE ONA 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Going forward, the City should integrate Live Ona 2040 Plan goals, Strategies, and actions into everyday decision-making. The City should regularly assess implementation progress and determine when updates to the Plan are necessary to address new planning issues and challenges in Onalaska. The following are recommendations for effective Plan implementation and stewardship. Successful stewardship will require ongoing communication and coordination between different City departments and commissions, from elected leaders, other governmental agencies, and from private sector partners, organizations, and entities.

- **Use the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan in preparing annual departmental work plans and budgets:** Many communities use their comprehensive plans to prepare annual departmental work plans and budgets. These can include statements on how

departmental projects and budgets reflect, impact, or achieve comprehensive plan priorities. In that regard, the City should consider documentation, metrics and/or performance measures through a departments mission statement, annual work plan, and budget documents about how departments can direct their work consistently with the Live Ona 2040 Plan goals, policies, and actions.

- **Use the Comprehensive Plan in preparing future Capital Improvement Plans (CIP):** As with other department work plans and planning documents, CIP's should consider and align with the goals, policies, and actions of the Live Ona 2040 Plan, especially urban design, natural resource and mobility initiatives, and infrastructure upgrades needed to facilitate development activity.

- **Publicize actions and initiatives that implement the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan:** Initiatives that implement the Plan should be routinely publicized through the City's press releases and website so that Onalaska residents are aware of local success and progress.



ZONING

Implementation of the land use goals of the Live Ona 2040 Plan will require the use of zoning tools. Onalaska is well-positioned with the Unified Development Code and its progressive approach to land use controls and design standards. However, several planning strategies proposed in the Plan, especially for the Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, are identified on the Future Land Use map and will require changes to existing zoning districts.

Zoning Ordinance and Map Amendments

Implementation of the Plan will require amendments to the zoning map to achieve consistency with the Plan. This is especially true for the opportunity sites identified as key growth areas in the City, but also the case for the downtown commercial corridor and nearby

residential neighborhoods. Similarly, strategies include ongoing evaluation of how existing zoning regulations support progressive housing policy. Amendments to current regulations may be needed in the future.



304 Main Street



EXISTING LAND USE

Onalaska is a little over 10.5 square miles in area, or about 6,918 acres. The predominant land use is single-family detached housing, representing 36 percent of the City’s land area. Wetlands and forest represent 22 percent of the land in Onalaska’s municipal boundary. The remaining land uses are shown in Figure 16.

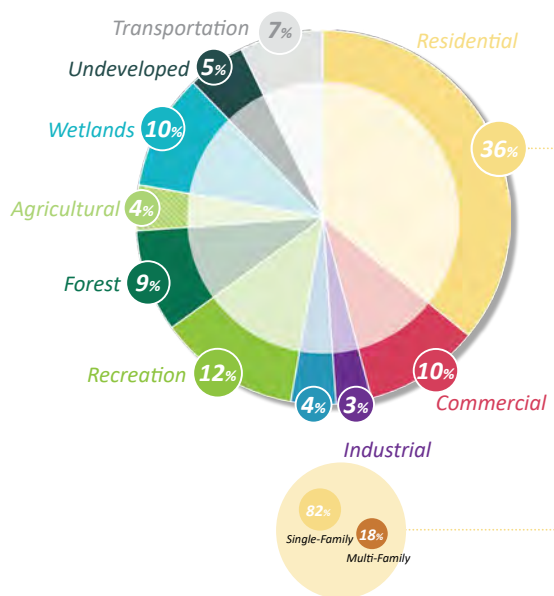


Figure 16: Land Uses by Category

Land Use Patterns

Onalaska’s strategic location along the Black River and Lake Onalaska and its economic beginnings as a lumber town define the land use patterns visible today: a downtown core near the water and residential development radiating outward from it. State highways, Interstate 90, and the City of La Crosse impacted land use patterns throughout the 20th century, creating commercial nodes and corridors elsewhere in town. While single-family houses are the largest residential land use in the City (89%), multifamily and manufactured housing are still prevalent. Significant multifamily development in the early 2020’s took place around Onalaska’s periphery, though multifamily construction took place downtown following progressive zoning changes.

Onalaska’s commitment to open space and recreation is reflected in land use patterns with significant areas dedicated to parks, natural areas, and community

facilities. Manufacturing and light industrial land uses exist in pockets around the City, including a concentrated area on the waterfront.

Residential Neighborhoods

Comprising over a third of the land area in Onalaska, residential land uses are an important element of the City’s urban fabric, values, and identity. Single-family detached homes represent nearly 90 percent of the City’s housing stock. Neighborhoods are close-knit and defined by residential subdivisions and local elementary schools that bring the community together. While two- and three-family buildings exist in Onalaska, multifamily development is most frequently larger-scale multi-story projects. The R-3 zoning district facilitates a housing scale between single-family detached and dense multifamily housing, but it is not heavily utilized at this point.

Single-family neighborhoods developed adjacent to commercial areas, which can

limit growth and expansion of areas like the downtown.

Multifamily Developments

New developments on Highway 16, Abbey Road, Century Place, and The Fields project on Sand Lake Road add hundreds of new housing units to the local supply. These provide valuable housing in Onalaska and are located along major transportation routes but are distanced from the community core and the downtown hindering their impact of making walkable and dense neighborhoods. Existing older multifamily buildings are in the City's R-4 zoning district located throughout the community.

Commercial Districts & Corridors

Onalaska's commercial districts are principally located along major transportation routes. The Highway 16 corridor is the City's most intense automobile-oriented commercial district with a wide variety of retail, restaurant, and other non-residential uses. Additional commercial and light industrial development is west of this

district but remains close to Interstate 90. Highway 35, an alternate route for I-90, runs through downtown Onalaska as 2nd Avenue and has less-intense commercial development than the larger corridors. While Highway 35 is a busy road, the downtown lends itself to pedestrian-scale commercial activity. The Sand Lake Road corridor is a mix of the two with a shopping mall and walkable destinations in proximity to it.

While major commercial districts and corridors represent focused areas of commercial land uses, Onalaska is fortunate to have a diverse mix of commercial land uses dotted throughout the community. These are visible along Sand Lake Road north of Center 90 Shopping Center and Main Street east of Highway 53.

Light Industry

Industrial areas represent 2% of the overall land use mix. This is an asset for the City, as this economic diversity lends resiliency to the local economy, as well as opportunities for local employment and business incubator spaces. There is an area along the waterfront south

of the downtown where industrial uses have clustered. While being cognizant of the importance of having areas reserved for industrial uses, this part of Onalaska could represent a redevelopment opportunity to support the growth of the downtown, provide commercial services, and add residences along the Black River.

Recreation & Open Space

Over 1,500 acres, or 23% of land in Onalaska is open space or in recreational use. This includes land in the floodplain, bluffland, and unmaintained open areas, as well as the City's 26 parks. Recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors is consistently identified as a key community asset by Onalaska residents and the amount of land dedicated to it demonstrates the City's commitment to providing recreational opportunities.

Transportation Routes

Federal, State, and County highways intersect Onalaska and provide broad access to the region. The rights-of-way for these transportation routes take up 7% of the acreage in Onalaska.

Anticipated Growth

It is valuable to review Onalaska’s growth projections to ensure the Land Use Strategy aligns with anticipated increases in population and households. The summary below relies on data from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) and the United States Census Bureau. It’s worth noting the DOA’s projections still refer to the 2010 Decennial Census because analysis based on the 2020 Census will not be complete before this plan is adopted. For this reason, the more current 2020 Census

findings are added to the summary. Trends in La Crosse County are added for additional context.

Two trends stand out: the population is projected to increase by several thousand residents over the lifespan of this Live Ona 2040 Plan, and household size is anticipated to decrease. This reinforces the need to add housing units in the community that serve smaller households. The recent increase in multifamily development responds

to this, as well as the future land use strategy outlined below identifying opportunities to add mixed-use development and middle-scale housing to the City’s housing supply.



Dash Park

Table 7: Projections by Decade

LOCATION	2010	2020	2020 US CENSUS	2030	2040
POPULATION					
Onalaska	17,793	19,860	18,803	21,950	23,570
La Crosse County	114,638	122,100	120,784	128,120	131,500
HOUSEHOLDS					
Onalaska	7,331	8,432	8,435	9,449	10,260
La Crosse County	49,137	50,388	51,449	53,262	54,930
HOUSEHOLD SIZE					
Onalaska	2.40	2.34	2.85*	2.30	2.28
La Crosse County	2.37	2.32	2.90*	2.29	2.27

* These figures reflect a different methodology employed by the US Census Bureau vs. the Wisconsin Department of Administration in calculating Household Size, which explains the disparity between the projection estimates and this higher figure.

Sources: State of Wisconsin Department of Administration, US Census Bureau

FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

The Future Land Use Strategy is the Live Ona 2040 Comprehensive Plan's guiding document identifying how and where the City will grow over the next 10 to 15 years. It can help shape public and private investment by providing a level of certainty and predictability in future decision making.

Much of the land use in Onalaska is not susceptible to change over the time frame of this Plan. This includes the patterns of single-family detached housing, established commercial areas, and open space preserved as forests, wetlands / floodplains, and recreational areas.

Several sites in Onalaska, however, present opportunities for transitions in land use that will support the City's vision for growth. For this reason, the strategy will focus primarily on defining how these sites will be used in the future. Separate studies were adopted for two districts: Downtown Onalaska and the Highway 16

Corridor. Each study establishes a vision for future land use in the district, and these visions have been incorporated into the future land use strategy for the whole community.

All land within Onalaska's municipal boundary is placed into a dedicated category for future land use. While zoning districts broadly identify how land will be used, they provide a different level of regulation and multiple zoning districts may apply to only a single type of land use. For this reason, future land use categories often encompass several established zoning districts.

Traditional Low Density Residential (TLDR)

Traditional Low Density Residential neighborhoods consist of detached residential homes in walkable neighborhoods that are designed to

conventional subdivision attributes featuring larger lots, longer blocks, gridded streets, and access to nearby parks and open spaces. Single-family detached residential developments represent nearly 90 percent of Onalaska's housing stock. The majority of houses are west of Highway 53 along a grid street pattern and newer subdivisions east of the highway are along curvilinear streets among the bluffs.

This land use designation is principally represented by the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts. It is characterized by medium to large detached single-family residential lots, yet allowing institutional and open space uses, as well as occasional 2-4 unit residential buildings appearing in established single-family neighborhoods.



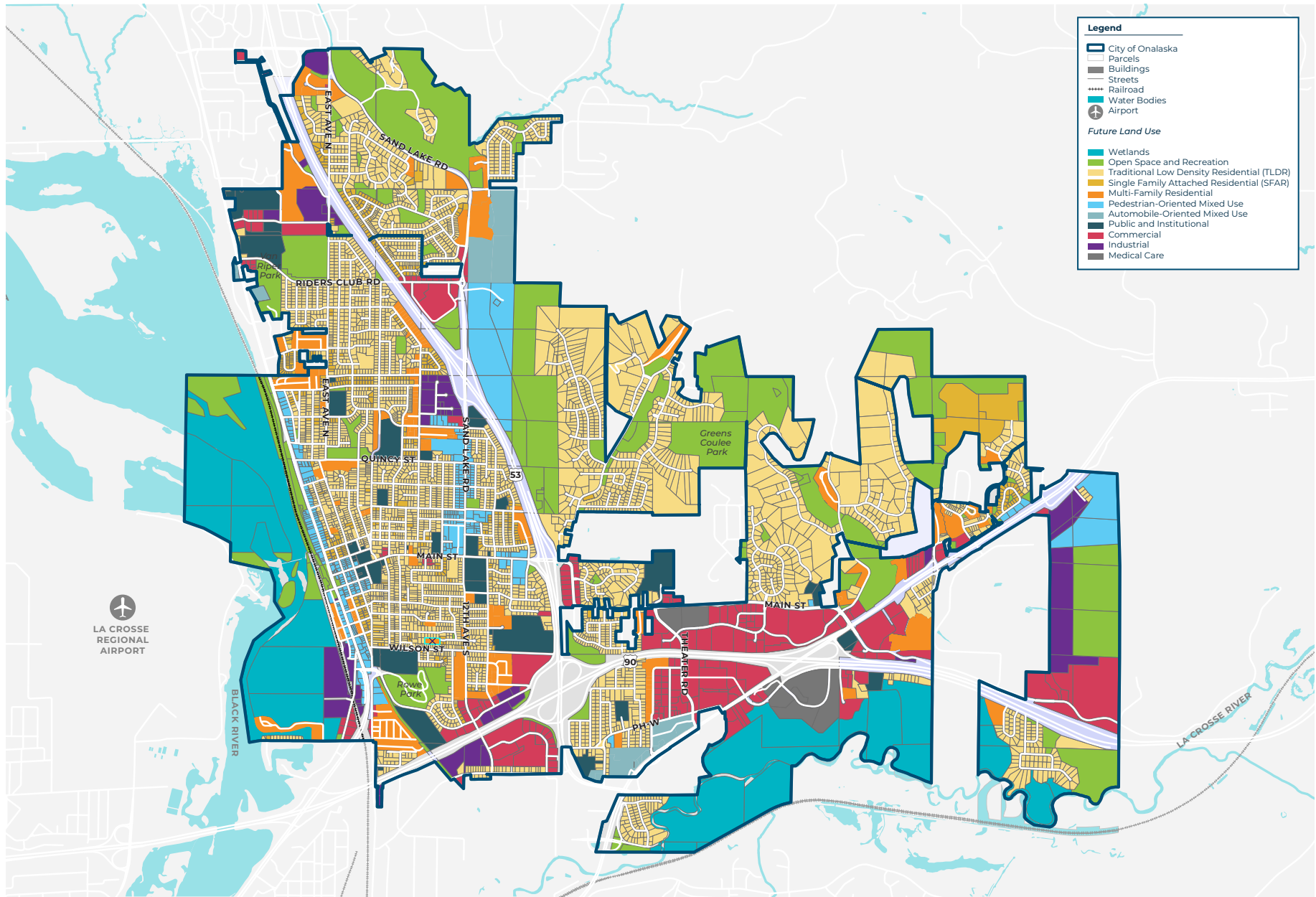


Figure 18: Future Land Use Map

Single Family Attached Residential (SFAR) / Middle-Scale Housing

This category represents a key growth area for Onalaska: the middle scale of housing between detached single-family and large-scale multifamily development. Duplexes, condos, smaller-scale multifamily buildings up to eight units, and other attached single-family buildings are present in the community, but not at a level responding to the needs of current and future residents.

The City's R-3 zoning district facilitates this land use and the future land use strategy identifies locations where it can be impactful in increasing density around downtown while keeping the building scale consistent with existing neighborhoods.

Single-family detached homes can appear in areas designated SFAR in the Future Land Use Map, as they can add to the variety of housing options available in key growth areas. Similarly, Open Space and Institutional facilities appear in this category because they are complementary and provide diversity and activity among adjacent land uses. Onalaska's manufactured housing parks have been included in this land use category as well because they represent a scale of housing different from the single-family detached form.



Multi-Family Residential

This land use category includes multi-family buildings of nine or more units and represents the large-scale multifamily developments that add hundreds of units to the City's housing supply. Residential zoning district R-2 and up can appear in this district as they can add variety in housing options to these key areas.

Many older and more traditional multifamily sites are zoned for High Density Residential uses (R-4), while others are in the newer Mixed Use – Commercial (MU-C) district that allows commercial activity.



Pedestrian-Oriented Mixed Use

This land use designation focuses on mixed use development where residential density is desired, but within a commercial context intended for non-motorized access and enjoyment. It corresponds with many areas zoned Mixed Use – Neighborhood (MU-N). With limited area for growth outward, facilitating new residential density within Onalaska’s existing boundary is essential. Mixed use development providing residential units and commercial opportunities is an ideal approach in the City’s downtown core and commercial corridors because they are accessible by residents and visitors in ways distinct from other commercial districts in the City.



Automobile-Oriented Mixed Use

Mixed use development and its associated residential density are envisioned in areas outside Onalaska’s residential core west of Highway 53. These areas are located along major roadways, more accessible by automobile, and less connected by bike paths and the street grid. This land use designation identifies these parts of Onalaska where mixed use development is desired, but located within an automobile-centric commercial context. It corresponds with areas zoned Mixed Use – Commercial (MU-C) and B-3 Regional Business.



Commercial

Uses in the Commercial land use category are typically automobile-oriented. The built form is largely single-story serving a wide variety of commercial and service uses. Strip center development, big box stores, grocery stores, auto dealerships, and chain restaurants are typical establishments in this land use category. While an essential part of a community’s local economy and urban fabric, these areas remain dependent on automobiles and are often less suitable for residential development although residential may be feasible in the next 15-20 year timeframe. It corresponds largely with areas zoned B-3 Regional Business.



Industrial

Onalaska has well-established industrial land uses. 10 percent of the City's businesses are in construction, warehousing, wholesale trade, or manufacturing. Located in the I-1 and I-2 zoning districts, these areas provide employment centers and represent an important part of the local economy. They are located along highways on sites intended for truck traffic and access to the regional transportation network.



Public & Institutional

The Public and Institutional designation classifies public uses such as municipal facilities, schools, the Omni Center, and other public and institutional uses. As additional municipal facilities are developed over the life of this Plan, like a new fire station or city storage facility, they should be reflected on the Future Land Use Map as a Public and Institutional land use.



Open Space and Recreation

This designation includes Onalaska's parks, forests, and the 236 acres identified in agricultural use (3 percent of the City's land area). Additional parcels of bluffland and open space may come into the City's ownership or oversight with future acquisitions and improved access, but this will not impact the overall land use in these parts of town. Wetlands and floodplains are identified as a separate future land use because, with their sensitivity to seasonal rainfall and accessibility, they often play a different role in a community's open space and recreational framework.



Wetlands and Floodplain

The La Crosse River Conservation Area, along with about 140 acres of land along the Black River, are designated as wetland or floodplain. They provide valuable open space and recreational opportunities at times but are identified in a separate future land use category because of their unique nature and unlikeliness to change in the timeline of this Plan.



Medical Care

Medical facilities play an important role in a community, both as drivers of local employment and breaking down barriers for residents to age in place. Identifying Medical Care as an established land use in the Future Land Use Map recognizes them as a local asset and signals the City's commitment to keep these facilities in the community. Both the Mayo Clinic facility and the Gunderson Health Care facility are reflected on the map.





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